HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. John Major, MP, July 1995)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. John Major, MP
First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister—The Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP
Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mackay of Clashfern
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke, QC, MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. Michael Howard, QC, MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind, QC, MP
President of the Board of Trade (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)—The Rt. Hon. Ian Lang, MP
Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Tony Newton, OBE, MP
Secretary of State for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. John Gummer, MP
Secretary of State for Social Security—The Rt. Hon. Peter Lilley, MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. William Waldegrave, MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew, QC, MP
Secretary of State for National Heritage—The Rt. Hon. Virginia Bottomley, MP
Secretary of State for Education and Employment—The Rt. Hon. Gillian Shephard, MP
Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. Michael Portillo, MP
Minister without portfolio—The Rt. Hon. Dr. Brian Mawhinney, MP
Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Dorrell, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Cecil of Essendon
Secretary of State for Transport—The Rt. Hon. Sir George Young, MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—The Rt. Hon. Douglas Hogg, QC, MP
Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Michael Forsyth, MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. Roger Freeman, MP
Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. William Hague, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—
  Minister—The Rt. Hon. Douglas Hogg, QC, MP
  Minister of State—Tony Baldry, Esq, MP
  Parliamentary Secretaries—
    Tim Boswell, Esq, MP (Minister for Rural Affairs)
    Mrs. Angela Browning, MP (Minister for Food)

Defence—
  Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Michael Portillo, MP
  Minister of State for the Armed Forces—The Hon. Nicholas Soames, MP
  Minister of State for Defence Procurement—James Arbuthnot, Esq, MP
  Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—The Earl Howe

Education and Employment—
  Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Gillian Shephard, MP
  Ministers of State—
    Eric Forth, Esq, MP
    The Lord Henley
  Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
    Robin Squire, Esq, MP
    James Paice, Esq, MP
    Mrs. Cheryl Gillan, MP

Environment—
  Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. John Gummer, MP
  Ministers of State—
    Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration—David Curry, Esq, MP
    Minister for the Environment and Countryside—The Rt. Hon. The Earl Ferrers
    Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency—Robert B. Jones, Esq, MP
  Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
    Sir Paul Beresford, MP
    James Clappison, Esq, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—

Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind, QC, MP
Ministers of State—
  Minister for Overseas Development—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Chalker of Wallasey
  The Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hanley, MP
  Sir Nicholas Bonsor, MP
  David Davis, Esq, MP

Health—

Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Stephen Dorrell, MP
Minister of State—
  Minister for Health—Gerald Malone, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
  John Horam, Esq, MP
  John Bowis, Esq, OBE, MP
  The Baroness Cumberlege, CBE

Home Office—

Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. Michael Howard, QC, MP
Ministers of State—
  Miss Ann Widdecombe, MP
  The Rt. Hon. David Maclean, MP
  The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Blatch, CBE
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
  Timothy Kirkhope, Esq, MP
  The Hon. Tom Sackville, MP

Law Officers' Department —

Attorney-General—The Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Lyell, QC, MP
Solicitor-General—Sir Derek Spencer, QC, MP

Lord Advocate's Department—

Lord Advocate—Donald MacKay, Esq, QC
Solicitor-General for Scotland—Paul Cullen, Esq, QC

Lord Chancellor's Department—

Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mackay of Clashfern
Parliamentary Secretary—Jonathan Evans, Esq, MP

National Heritage—

Secretary of State for National Heritage—The Rt. Hon. Virginia Bottomley, MP
Minister of State—Iain Sproat, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—The Lord Inglewood

Northern Ireland Office—

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew, QC, MP
Ministers of State—
  Michael Ancram, Esq, MP
  The Rt. Hon. Sir John Wheeler, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
  The Baroness Denton of Wakefield, CBE
  Malcolm Moss, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—

Paymaster General—David Heathcoat-Amory, Esq, MP

Privy Council Office—

Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Tony Newton, OBE, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Cecil of Essenden

Public Service, Office of—

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. Roger Freeman, MP
Parliamentary Secretary—David Willetts, Esq, MP

Scottish Office—

Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Michael Forsyth, MP
Minister of State—Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
George Kynoch, Esq, MP
Raymond S. Robertson, Esq, MP
The Earl of Lindsay

Social Security—

Secretary of State for Social Security—The Rt. Hon. Peter Lilley, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Social Security and Disabled People—Alistair Burt, Esq, MP
The Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Roger Evans, Esq, MP
Andrew Mitchell, Esq, MP
Oliver Heald, Esq, MP

Trade and Industry—

President of the Board of Trade (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)—The Rt. Hon. Ian Lang, MP
Ministers of State—
The Rt. Hon. The Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, QC
Minister for Trade—Anthony Nelson, Esq, MP
Minister for Industry and Energy—The Rt. Hon. Tim Eggar, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
John M. Taylor, Esq, MP (Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs)
Richard Page, Esq, MP (Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy)
Ian Taylor, Esq, MBE, MP (Minister for Science and Technology)
The Hon. Phillip Oppenheim, MP

Transport—

Secretary of State for Transport—The Rt. Hon. Sir George Young, MP
Minister of State—
Minister for Railways and Roads—John Watts, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Steve Norris, Esq, MP (Minister for Transport in London)
The Viscount Goschen (Minister for Aviation and Shipping)

Treasury—

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. John Major, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke, QC, MP
Chief Secretary—The Rt. Hon. William Waldegrave, MP
Financial Secretary—Michael Jack, Esq, MP
Paymaster General—David Heathcoat-Amory, Esq, MP
Economic Secretary—Mrs. Angela Knight, MP
Parliamentary Secretary—The Rt. Hon. Alastair Goodlad, MP
Lords Commissioners—
Derek Conway, Esq, MP
Bowen Wells, Esq, MP
Simon Burns, Esq, MP
Michael Bates, Esq, MP
Dr. Liam Fox, MP
Assistant Whips—
Patrick McLoughlin, Esq, MP
Roger Knapman, Esq, MP
Gary Streeter, Esq, MP
Richard Ottaway, Esq, MP
Gyles Brandreth, Esq, MP

Welsh Office—

Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. William Hague, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Rod Richards, Esq, MP
Gwilym Jones, Esq, MP

Her Majesty's Household—

Lord Chamberlain—The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Airlie, KT, GCVO
Lord Steward—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD
Master of the Horse—The Lord Somerleyton, KCVO
Treasurer—The Rt. Hon. Greg Knight, MP
Comptroller—Timothy Wood, Esq, MP
Vice-Chamberlain—Andrew Mackay, Esq, MP
Captain of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms— The Rt. Hon. The Lord Strathclyde
Captain of the Queen's Bodyguard of the Yeoman of the Guard—The Lord Chesham
Lords in Waiting—The Viscount Long, CBE, The Lord Lucas, The Earl of Courtown
Baronesses in Waiting—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Trumpington, The Baroness Miller, MBE

Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners—The Rt. Hon. Michael Alison, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

The Speaker—The Rt. Hon. Betty Boothroyd, MP

Chairman of Ways and Means—The Rt. Hon. Michael Morris, MP

First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means—Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse, MP

Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means—Dame Janet Fookes, MP

Chairmen's Panel—
Donald Anderson, Esq, MP, Roland Boyes, Esq, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Sir Patrick Cormack, MP, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP, Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP, Robert Hicks, Esq, MP, James Hill, Esq, MP, Norman Hogg, Esq, MP, Roy Hughes, Esq, MP, Sir John Hunt, MP, Barry Jones, Esq, MP, Sir David Knox, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, Michael J. Martin, Esq, MP, John Maxton, Esq, MP, Iain Mills, Esq, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Sir Giles Shaw, MP, Sir Michael Shersby, MP, Roger Sims, Esq, MP, Patrick Thompson, Esq, MP, Mrs. Ann Winterton, MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

House of Commons Commission—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Alan Beith, MP, The Rt. Hon. Paul Channon, MP, John Garrett, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Tony Newton, OBE, MP, Mrs. Ann Taylor, MP

Secretary of the Commission—M. R. Jack, PhD

Board of Management—
D. W. Limon, CB, (Chairman) (Clerk of the House of Commons), P. N. W. Jennings (Serjeant at Arms), Miss J. B. Tanfield (Librarian), J. Rodda, FCA (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

Secretary of the Board of Management—B. A. Wilson (Head of the Establishments Office)

Speaker's Secretary—N. Bevan, CB

Speaker's Counsel—J. S. Mason, CB, T. J. G. Pratt, CB

Speaker's Chaplain—Rev. Canon D. C. Gray, TD, PhD

Parliamentary Commissioner For Standards—Sir Gordon Downey, KCB

4 December 1995

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 268**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96

House of Commons

Monday 4 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Campbell Soups

1. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what approaches he has received from the Campbell Soups company about location in Wales. [1856]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): None.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I suggest to the Minister that, if Campbell Soups does knock on his door, he should avoid the company like the plague? Will he reflect on the fact that it paid £58.6 million for a highly profitable top-class company that was making an excellent product in my constituency and, within 11 weeks, announced the closure of the factory? Will he join me in calling on the people of Wales to boycott the products of the company, and in particular Campbell's soups? When they walk into a supermarket and see the product on the shelf, they must turn away and say, "That product is not for me." Customers should boycott it until the decision affecting Maryport in my constituency is reviewed.

Mr. Jones: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if Campbell Soups was to make an application for financial assistance to the Welsh Office, we would look carefully at it, as we do any such application.

Government Support

2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of per capita support is paid to Wales from central Government; what were the figures in May 1979 in current prices; and if he will make a statement. [1857]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): In 1993-94, the latest year for which figures are available, identifiable general Government expenditure in Wales was estimated to be £3,913 per head. Directly comparable figures are not available for 1979 because of changes in the definition and coverage of identifiable territorial public expenditure. However, on the basis of the best available data, the figure for 1979-80 is estimated to be £2,791 per head at 1993-94 prices.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures are remarkable? The Conservative Government have brought not only great material benefit to the people of Wales, but political and spiritual benefit. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Wales would be very unwise to overturn this Conservative Government?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is as perceptive and right as ever. On the best available data, which I gave a few moments ago, spending per head in Wales is 40 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979 and 13 per cent. higher per head than in England. Opposition Members sometimes call for still higher expenditure, but they had better think about how such calls fit with the 10p tax rate called for by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Ray Powell: Will the Secretary of State tell the House and the nation whether the figures he has just given to the House include the £2.5 billion that would come to Wales from the Treasury in normal circumstances—under the Barnett rules introduced in 1970?

Mr. Hague: Yes. The figures include the money provided under the long-established formula that has most recently been called the Barnett formula. The amount of money dealt with by the formula stands at 6.02 per cent. of spending elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and that continues to be the case.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the figures he has given today fully justify Wales having a Secretary of State at Westminster battling in the interests of Wales, rather than a useless assembly based in Cardiff?

Mr. Hague: Yes. My hon. Friend underlines the importance of strong representation for Wales in this House and within the Government. It would certainly be undermined by the roomful of hot air that Opposition Members want to establish in Cardiff.

Mr. Ron Davies: We would love to have a Secretary of State battling for Wales in Westminster—the trouble is that we do not.

Will the Secretary of State confirm the figures in last week's Welsh Office press release that said that spending on his programmes in Wales for the coming financial year is to be cut by £100 million in real terms? Is it not also the case that the problems caused by the cuts are compounded by the inability of the Welsh Office to maximise support from the European Union? Is he aware that there is a massive backlog of applications to the objective 2 and objective 5b programmes and that millions of pounds of investment is being prejudiced by delays in his Department? Instead of wandering about Wales looking for photo opportunities, should not the Secretary of State spend more time sorting out the deficiencies in his Department?

Mr. Hague: To deal with the point about objective 5b first, the coverage in the press today is misleading. There is no question of Wales losing in terms of resources provided through the European Community and there are no unnecessary delays within my Department. Next year, public expenditure in Wales overall will reach its highest level ever. There will not be a real cut of £100 million, because the proceeds from Housing for Wales will be £65 million, as the hon. Gentleman is aware. If he is dissatisfied with the proposed level of expenditure, it is incumbent on him to say what he thinks the level of expenditure should be. He is reticent on that, which would be understandable if it were not so unusual. It is time for him to tell the House how much he thinks should be spent in Wales next year.

Inward Investment

3. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the chief executive of Invest in Britain to discuss his policy towards attracting inward investment into Wales. [1858]

Mr. Hague: None at present, but my officials and the Welsh Development Agency are in regular contact with the Invest in Britain Bureau. I have been assured by the bureau that it does all it can to attract inward investment to Wales.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the number of new jobs provided, and existing jobs safeguarded, by inward investment in Wales dropped from 11.8 per cent. of the United Kingdom figure in 1992 to 5.6 per cent. in the last year for which figures are available? In those circumstances, does it not appear that something is going wrong with the miracle that was happening in inward investment in Wales? Those working at the coal face, if I may use that term, feed back that Invest in Britain is increasingly becoming invest in England. Will he take a hard line with that body to ensure that we are not missing out by virtue of our successful propaganda 10 years ago?

Mr. Hague: I am certainly aware that the figures for the past year or two have not been as good as those in previous years, although the figure that the hon. Gentleman quoted is the lowest possible figure that could be obtained by calculating the number of jobs safeguarded or created in different statistical ways. There is a more competitive environment in inward investment. That makes it all the more important for us to renew our efforts. I have been doing that during the past few months. I acknowledge the efforts that the hon. Gentleman made during his recent trip to the United States. I shall do my utmost to ensure that the Invest in Britain Bureau works for the whole of Britain, but I have no reason at the moment to think that it does not.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's record on inward investment in Wales since 1979 is absolutely first class, thanks to the Invest in Britain Bureau, Welsh Development International and others? Will he give us an assurance that he will continue to give top priority to inward investment rather than to any distractions caused by the devolutionary diversions of the Labour party?

Mr. Hague: Yes, I can give my right hon. Friend that assurance. Those devolutionary distractions would be damaging to the prospects for inward investment were they to be brought to fruition. As my right hon. Friend says, the bureau has done a great deal to encourage inward investment in the past—as has he, as have my predecessors and as has the position of the United Kingdom as an economy with lower taxes on companies and employment and less regulation than other European economies.

Mr. Alan Williams: Will the Secretary of State bear it in mind that the imbalance is not only between England and Wales but within Wales? Will he talk to the Welsh Development Agency about the gross failure to bring much of the inward investment beyond Bridgend? Does he recognise that there is an astonishing imbalance in the amount of money and resources that come into my part of Wales, which can be rectified only by structural changes? Will he now consider reintroducing development area status for parts of south-west Wales?

Mr. Hague: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's question. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) is smiling about the success of Bridgend, but I should like to encourage the WDA and others to ensure that development takes place wherever we can encourage it—away from the M4 and A55 corridors as well as in those areas, where it has already been well established. That is one of our stated policies. We shall continue to try to attract inward investment to all parts of Wales, but I cannot give a commitment that the Government will review assisted area status generally in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Bearing it in mind that inward investment into the United Kingdom as a proportion of that into the European Union is way ahead of what it should be in view of our population, is it not significant [illegible] within the United Kingdom, Wales is way ahead? In both cases, is not that due to the conditions laid down by the Conservative Government?

Mr. Hague: Yes. My hon. Friend is right. Since 1980, more than £7 billion of inward investment has come to Wales. The United Kingdom as a whole continues to be an international magnet for investment—because of the policies that the Government have pursued, and they are precisely the policies on tax, regulation and other matters which Opposition Members would be likely to change.

Mr. Ron Davies: In reply to my previous supplementary question, the Secretary of State referred to a report in this morning's *Western Mail* about the delay in processing European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund—FEOGA—applications. That was not the question that I asked, although I am grateful for the answer. If the Secretary of State shares my concern about the need to get inward investment to rural Wales and to improve the economy of rural Wales, will he undertake to examine the further delays in his Department's processing of FEOGA applications? Will he confirm that Wales has been denied some £56 million of expenditure from the programme because of his personal failure to make available matching funding? Given that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food makes the payments in England, and that the right hon. Gentleman's constituents in Richmond are therefore eligible for them, what justification does he have for denying them to my constituents in Wales?

Mr. Hague: As I mentioned earlier, press coverage on the point is misleading. There is no question of Wales losing out on these resources. The overwhelming majority of applications in the first round, which were spoken of in the press, have secured the necessary public sector funding. I recognise, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, that the programme is a valuable opportunity for Wales and I am aware of the arrangements that operate elsewhere in the UK. If I think that any additional action is necessary to ensure that the most can be made of the resources, I shall make an announcement on Wednesday.

Civil Service

4. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to increase the number of civil service jobs in Wales. [1859]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of civil service jobs in Wales, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, will be that necessary for the effective and efficient discharge of the relevant functions.

Mr. Flynn: Why do Welsh Office Ministers constantly chant the comforting mantra, "inward investment" but never mention the taboo words, "outward divestment of jobs", which is a daily threat to the 30,000 civil service jobs that are being market tested and contractorised at the moment? The Welsh Office does not even measure outward divestment of jobs. What sense is there in allowing jobs that cost tens of millions of pounds to be brought to Wales as a result of regional aid to be put up for grabs so that they can be exported to elsewhere in the United Kingdom, to Dusseldorf or to Taiwan, to make cheese-paring savings? Will the Minister give a guarantee that the turmoil of market testing in the civil service will not result in the loss of a single job to Wales?

Mr. Jones: I just do not see why we should not be, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, proud of what we have achieved [illegible] securing inward investment for Wales. Year after year, we continue to punch above our weight—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said—just as the United Kingdom outranks its competitors in Europe. I would take the hon. Gentleman's concerns on the subject more seriously if he did not so blindly adhere to job-destroying policies such as the European social chapter, to which he would quickly sign up.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Did my hon. Friend slightly mishear the question of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn)? Was not the hon. Gentleman trying to say that he congratulates the Government on the 10 per cent. fall in unemployment in his constituency in the past year?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is even more perceptive than I am. The hon. Gentleman was trying to point out that, in the past year, unemployment in the Newport travel-to-work area has fallen at a greater rate than it has the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The de-concentration of Whitehall jobs, such as happened with the creation of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in my constituency, is one of the few instruments that the Government have at their direct disposal. Have we not reached the point where the privatisation proposals have as their only certain feature—as with Welsh Water and South Wales Electricity—the destruction of jobs, just as there has been a swathe of destruction through civil service jobs in Wales?

Mr. Jones: I stand by my comment earlier that I would take the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues rather more seriously if they were not such blind adherents to the European social chapter and to a Welsh Assembly that would impose extra taxation on the people of Wales and put up a no-entry sign to more welcome inward investment. How many present inward investors would start to change their minds about being in Wales because of those policies?

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

5. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the proposed level of hill livestock compensatory allowance payments to farmers in Wales. [1860]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Against the background of the need to restrain public expenditure, which is of course paid for by the taxpayer, our decision to maintain the HLCA payments at their present rates demonstrates very firmly the Government's dedication to and support for the continuation of extensive farming in the hills and uplands of Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that—I suppose it was an answer. Does not the Minister realise that there was an 18 per cent. cut last year in the HLCA payments? Bearing in mind the dramatic increase in fodder prices and wintering, does he not realise that, on the

Government's own methodology, there is a clear case for an increase in this financial year? Will the Government reconsider the matter and, more importantly, stop treating the people of rural Wales with such contempt?

Mr. Jones: I could point out to the hon. Gentleman that it is agreed that net farm income is expected to increase by 13 per cent. in the less-favoured areas during the current financial year. The issue that he will never have to face is the fact that, if one increases spending in any other area, one has to put up taxes or cut spending elsewhere. Which taxes would he increase and which services would he cut—the health service or other services?

Mr. Alex Carlile: Bearing in mind the depth of disappointment over the reduction in real terms in HLCAs and also the concern about the future of livestock quotas, will the Minister remind the House of the most recent initiative taken by the Welsh Office specifically to assist the industry in hill farming areas?

Mr. Jones: Perhaps I should remind the hon. and learned Gentleman about my right hon. Friend's decision to publish a rural White Paper about which we have been consulting extensively in Wales. We hope to come forward shortly with something that the hon. and learned Gentleman will welcome.

Neath Hospital

6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has about obstetric services at Neath hospital. [1861]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): In addition to the meeting he and his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon(Mr. Morris) had with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself, eight.

Mr. Hain: Is the Minister aware that people in Neath are desperately worried and angry about the way in which our hospital is being run down? We have lost the accident and emergency department, and now maternity is under threat. Can he reassure us all by giving a public commitment that he will back the health authority's recent decision to maintain fully fledged maternity and obstetric facilities at Neath? Why should mothers who, for generations, have been able to have their babies in Neath be forced to travel—in some cases over 20 miles—to Singleton hospital, itself at bursting point, as are all the hospitals in south-west Wales?

Mr. Richards: I understand that no decision has yet been made on the development of maternity services at Neath general hospital. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong in what he said about the hospital being run down. Very recently, seven new consultants have been appointed, five of whom are anaesthetists.

Unemployment

7. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the figure for male unemployment in Wales at the latest available date; and what is this figure expressed in percentage terms. [1862]

Mr. Hague: In October 1995, the seasonally adjusted number of males on the claimant unemployment count in Wales was 82,700; or 11.1 per cent. of the male work force.

Mr. Hughes: Do the Government recognise the damage that their policies are doing to Newport and Gwent? For instance, the Secretary of State has recently vetoed the Newport barrage scheme, which could have done so much good for Newport and the surrounding area. At the same time as he has the audacity to talk about accountability, I understand that he is mindful to grant a licence to the obnoxious Browning Ferris waste disposal plant. If he did, he would be flying in the face of the wishes of the people of Newport. That is not accountability at all; it is totalitarianism.

Mr. Hague: Unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has decreased by 12.7 per cent. in the past year; unemployment in Gwent has decreased by 2,000, or 11 per cent., in the past year and unemployment in Wales has decreased by 7,300, or 6.6 per cent., in the past year. I would therefore differ from the hon. Gentleman in his belief that policies that the Government have pursued are destroying jobs.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the level of unemployment in Wales is affected by the level of inward investment? Does he believe that the level of inward investment would be encouraged by a tax-raising Welsh assembly or by the adoption of a national minimum wage?

Mr. Hague: No, I do not. We have succeeded in reducing unemployment in recent years because we have encouraged investment, because we have had lower taxes on employment than other countries in Europe and because we have had no truck with job-destroying measures such as a minimum wage or the social chapter.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his predecessor volunteered a specific initiative on male unemployment, especially in view of the serious amount of male economic inactivity? The initiative never came into being. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to make a specific set of proposals to cope with that very serious problem in our communities?

Mr. Hague: My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), initiated the programme for the valleys, which has been followed by substantial reductions in unemployment in the valleys area. I am always very willing to discuss additional initiatives that might reduce unemployment, provided that they fit the overall framework that has been so successful in reducing unemployment recently.

Mr. Dafis: Has the Secretary of State considered what the effect would be on unemployment in Wales if the rumours that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury proposes to close certain Welsh quangos and merge them with English ones were ever to come to fruition? Does he accept that, if there were any such proposals in relation to Tai Cymru, the Higher and Further Education Funding Council for Wales or the Countryside Council for Wales, there would be a furious reaction in Wales? Will he give us an assurance that he will ensure that any such move is blocked?

Mr. Hague: I have no proposals to make at the moment about the future of any of the organisations that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and I am not aware of any intentions on the part of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Morgan: Has the Secretary of State read the Press Association report of this morning's press conference by

Welsh Water, following its takeover of Swalec, that 1,000 jobs are at risk from the merger? Will the Secretary of State therefore give the House an assurance that, in order to pay back the £700 million cash that Welsh Water will borrow to finance the takeover of Swalec, it will not resort to mass sackings of 1,000 of its own staff and electricity staff, or rape the Welsh environment by cutting its capital expenditure on new sewerage works or on meeting its legal statutory requirements to give Wales 50 European blue flag beaches by 2000, as previously agreed? Will the Secretary of State agree to ask the President of the Board of Trade to refer that bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

Mr. Hague: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Director General of Fair Trading will consider that matter with the Director General of Electricity Supply and the Director General of Water Services, and will then give advice to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade as to whether the bid should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I shall ensure that all the opinions that are given to me are passed on to the Director General of Fair Trading.

CD-ROM Technology

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in the development of CD-ROM technology in Wales. [1863]

Mr. Richards: As was evident at the recent multi-media conference in Cardiff, Wales has the potential to develop a very significant multi-media industry and I am sure that that will include CD-ROM technology.

Mr. Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that Nimbus Technology and Engineering, whose plant at Cwmbran the Secretary of State for Wales recently visited, is one of the leading developers of CD-ROM technology in Europe? To what extent does he believe that his office can help the development of CD-ROM technology by the sponsorship of CD-ROM in schools in Wales?

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State takes a close interest in multi-media and was impressed by what he saw, particularly the new hologram technology that prevents the copying of CDs. My hon. Friend is right: the Department offered £3 million for all primary schools in Wales to be kitted out with multi-media equipment. I am pleased to say that there has been a 100 per cent. take-up.

Regional Affairs

9. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to represent his Department in the European Union's Council of Ministers to discuss regional affairs. [1864]

Mr. Hague: When I consider that it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Jones: Is it true that no Secretary of State for Wales has ever visited the Council of Ministers to discuss regional funds for Wales? We have lost out to the tune of about £1 billion owing to our failure to achieve objective 1 status for parts of Wales when such matters were last discussed. Why does the Secretary of State—like successive Secretaries of State—allow the Department of Trade and Industry to take the lead on such issues? Why does he not stand up for Wales's interests rather than allow the DTI to ride roughshod over our interests every time such matters are discussed?

Next time such issues are discussed, will he insist that he, not the President of the Board of Trade, sits at the top table in Brussels—or will we have to wait until there is a Welsh Parliament to be properly represented in Europe?

Mr. Hague: I shall, of course, consider attending meetings where there is a topic of special or exclusive interest to Wales. Ministers at Council meetings represent the whole of the United Kingdom, including Wales. The hon. Gentleman can see that I am not reluctant to go to Brussels and argue the Welsh position or the United Kingdom position. When there was a recent difficulty with the European Commission and £15 million of funds were blocked, I went to Brussels and discussed the matter. Two weeks later, the funds were unblocked. The hon. Gentleman will not find me backward in going to Brussels and arguing our case.

National Health Service (Administrators)

10. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further proposals he has for reducing the number of administrators in the NHS in Wales. [1865]

Mr. Richards: There are measures already in place to reduce management costs, and the number of administrators in authorities, hospitals and community health services has stopped increasing. There will be a reduction of about one third in the number of core staff, who are mainly administrators, in the new health authorities over the next three years. The Government aim to reduce paperwork generally in the NHS, and expect that there will be a continuing decline in the number of administrators in health authorities and trusts.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful and encouraging reply, which shows his commitment to reducing administration and red tape. Will he also confirm that the health authorities have taken the hint and reduced their staffing levels by 11 per cent.—120 people? That is good news for patients because it means that there is more money for front-line hospital use.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is correct. The figures that she gave relate to a relatively short period—between 31 January 1994 and 31 October 1995. Those improvements have come about because, in 1994, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) introduced a programme to produce savings of £12.5 million over three years—£6 million in the first year, £3.25 million in the second year and £3.25 million in the third year. In addition, the reorganisation of the health authorities in Wales will lead to recurring savings of £8 million or £9 million.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister consider not just the number of administrators in the national health service, but Health Promotions in Wales and the misleading advice that it is giving parents regarding the possible health problems to children of the measles/rubella vaccination, which was given in November last year? That advice has caused considerable problems for children and parents such as my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Gregory.

Government's own methodology, there is a clear case for an increase in this financial year? Will the Government reconsider the matter and, more importantly, stop treating the people of rural Wales with such contempt?

Mr. Jones: I could point out to the hon. Gentleman that it is agreed that net farm income is expected to increase by 13 per cent. in the less-favoured areas during the current financial year. The issue that he will never have to face is the fact that, if one increases spending in any other area, one has to put up taxes or cut spending elsewhere. Which taxes would he increase and which services would he cut—the health service or other services?

Mr. Alex Carlile: Bearing in mind the depth of disappointment over the reduction in real terms in HLCAs and also the concern about the future of livestock quotas, will the Minister remind the House of the most recent initiative taken by the Welsh Office specifically to assist the industry in hill farming areas?

Mr. Jones: Perhaps I should remind the hon. and learned Gentleman about my right hon. Friend's decision to publish a rural White Paper about which we have been consulting extensively in Wales. We hope to come forward shortly with something that the hon. and learned Gentleman will welcome.

Neath Hospital

6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has about obstetric services at Neath hospital. [1861]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): In addition to the meeting he and his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon(Mr. Morris) had with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself, eight.

Mr. Hain: Is the Minister aware that people in Neath are desperately worried and angry about the way in which our hospital is being run down? We have lost the accident and emergency department, and now maternity is under threat. Can he reassure us all by giving a public commitment that he will back the health authority's recent decision to maintain fully fledged maternity and obstetric facilities at Neath? Why should mothers who, for generations, have been able to have their babies in Neath be forced to travel—in some cases over 20 miles—to Singleton hospital, itself at bursting point, as are all the hospitals in south-west Wales?

Mr. Richards: I understand that no decision has yet been made on the development of maternity services at Neath general hospital. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong in what he said about the hospital being run down. Very recently, seven new consultants have been appointed, five of whom are anaesthetists.

Unemployment

7. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the figure for male unemployment in Wales at the latest available date; and what is this figure expressed in percentage terms. [1862]

Mr. Hague: In October 1995, the seasonally adjusted number of males on the claimant unemployment count in Wales was 82,700; or 11.1 per cent. of the male work force.

Mr. Hughes: Do the Government recognise the damage that their policies are doing to Newport and Gwent? For instance, the Secretary of State has recently vetoed the Newport barrage scheme, which could have done so much good for Newport and the surrounding area. At the same time as he has the audacity to talk about accountability, I understand that he is mindful to grant a licence to the obnoxious Browning Ferris waste disposal plant. If he did, he would be flying in the face of the wishes of the people of Newport. That is not accountability at all; it is totalitarianism.

Mr. Hague: Unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has decreased by 12.7 per cent. in the past year; unemployment in Gwent has decreased by 2,000, or 11 per cent., in the past year and unemployment in Wales has decreased by 7,300, or 6.6 per cent., in the past year. I would therefore differ from the hon. Gentleman in his belief that policies that the Government have pursued are destroying jobs.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the level of unemployment in Wales is affected by the level of inward investment? Does he believe that the level of inward investment would be encouraged by a tax-raising Welsh assembly or by the adoption of a national minimum wage?

Mr. Hague: No, I do not. We have succeeded in reducing unemployment in recent years because we have encouraged investment, because we have had lower taxes on employment than other countries in Europe and because we have had no truck with job-destroying measures such as a minimum wage or the social chapter.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his predecessor volunteered a specific initiative on male unemployment, especially in view of the serious amount of male economic inactivity? The initiative never came into being. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to make a specific set of proposals to cope with that very serious problem in our communities?

Mr. Hague: My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), initiated the programme for the valleys, which has been followed by substantial reductions in unemployment in the valleys area. I am always very willing to discuss additional initiatives that might reduce unemployment, provided that they fit the overall framework that has been so successful in reducing unemployment recently.

Mr. Dafis: Has the Secretary of State considered what the effect would be on unemployment in Wales if the rumours that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury proposes to close certain Welsh quangos and merge them with English ones were ever to come to fruition? Does he accept that, if there were any such proposals in relation to Tai Cymru, the Higher and Further Education Funding Council for Wales or the Countryside Council for Wales, there would be a furious reaction in Wales? Will he give us an assurance that he will ensure that any such move is blocked?

Mr. Hague: I have no proposals to make at the moment about the future of any of the organisations that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and I am not aware of any intentions on the part of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary.

Mr. Morgan: Has the Secretary of State read the Press Association report of this morning's press conference by

Welsh Water, following its takeover of Swalec, that 1,000 jobs are at risk from the merger? Will the Secretary of State therefore give the House an assurance that, in order to pay back the £700 million cash that Welsh Water will borrow to finance the takeover of Swalec, it will not resort to mass sackings of 1,000 of its own staff and electricity staff, or rape the Welsh environment by cutting its capital expenditure on new sewerage works or on meeting its legal statutory requirements to give Wales 50 European blue flag beaches by 2000, as previously agreed? Will the Secretary of State agree to ask the President of the Board of Trade to refer that bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

Mr. Hague: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Director General of Fair Trading will consider that matter with the Director General of Electricity Supply and the Director General of Water Services, and will then give advice to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade as to whether the bid should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I shall ensure that all the opinions that are given to me are passed on to the Director General of Fair Trading.

CD-ROM Technology

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in the development of CD-ROM technology in Wales. [1863]

Mr. Richards: As was evident at the recent multi-media conference in Cardiff, Wales has the potential to develop a very significant multi-media industry and I am sure that that will include CD-ROM technology.

Mr. Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that Nimbus Technology and Engineering, whose plant at Cwmbran the Secretary of State for Wales recently visited, is one of the leading developers of CD-ROM technology in Europe? To what extent does he believe that his office can help the development of CD-ROM technology by the sponsorship of CD-ROM in schools in Wales?

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State takes a close interest in multi-media and was impressed by what he saw, particularly the new hologram technology that prevents the copying of CDs. My hon. Friend is right: the Department offered £3 million for all primary schools in Wales to be kitted out with multi-media equipment. I am pleased to say that there has been a 100 per cent. take-up.

Regional Affairs

9. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to represent his Department in the European Union's Council of Ministers to discuss regional affairs. [1864]

Mr. Hague: When I consider that it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Jones: Is it true that no Secretary of State for Wales has ever visited the Council of Ministers to discuss regional funds for Wales? We have lost out to the tune of about £1 billion owing to our failure to achieve objective 1 status for parts of Wales when such matters were last discussed. Why does the Secretary of State—like successive Secretaries of State—allow the Department of Trade and Industry to take the lead on such issues? Why does he not stand up for Wales's interests rather than allow the DTI to ride roughshod over our interests every time such matters are discussed?

Next time such issues are discussed, will he insist that he, not the President of the Board of Trade, sits at the top table in Brussels—or will we have to wait until there is a Welsh Parliament to be properly represented in Europe?

Mr. Hague: I shall, of course, consider attending meetings where there is a topic of special or exclusive interest to Wales. Ministers at Council meetings represent the whole of the United Kingdom, including Wales. The hon. Gentleman can see that I am not reluctant to go to Brussels and argue the Welsh position or the United Kingdom position. When there was a recent difficulty with the European Commission and £15 million of funds were blocked, I went to Brussels and discussed the matter. Two weeks later, the funds were unblocked. The hon. Gentleman will not find me backward in going to Brussels and arguing our case.

National Health Service (Administrators)

10. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further proposals he has for reducing the number of administrators in the NHS in Wales. [1865]

Mr. Richards: There are measures already in place to reduce management costs, and the number of administrators in authorities, hospitals and community health services has stopped increasing. There will be a reduction of about one third in the number of core staff, who are mainly administrators, in the new health authorities over the next three years. The Government aim to reduce paperwork generally in the NHS, and expect that there will be a continuing decline in the number of administrators in health authorities and trusts.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful and encouraging reply, which shows his commitment to reducing administration and red tape. Will he also confirm that the health authorities have taken the hint and reduced their staffing levels by 11 per cent.—120 people? That is good news for patients because it means that there is more money for front-line hospital use.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is correct. The figures that she gave relate to a relatively short period—between 31 January 1994 and 31 October 1995. Those improvements have come about because, in 1994, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) introduced a programme to produce savings of £12.5 million over three years—£6 million in the first year, £3.25 million in the second year and £3.25 million in the third year. In addition, the reorganisation of the health authorities in Wales will lead to recurring savings of £8 million or £9 million.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister consider not just the number of administrators in the national health service, but Health Promotions in Wales and the misleading advice that it is giving parents regarding the possible health problems to children of the measles/rubella vaccination, which was given in November last year? That advice has caused considerable problems for children and parents such as my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Gregory.

Mr. Richards: I am sorry to hear about Mr. and Mrs. Gregory's case, but the Government are satisfied with the advice that we have been given based on extensive research. Such a vaccination programme has the potential to save tens of thousands of children from becoming very unwell.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We appreciate the reduction in the number of administrators in Wales. Can the Minister confirm that under Government policy for the national health service we can look forward to that reduction spreading throughout the nation and that the money saved will definitely go towards patient care?

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, during his brilliant speech at the party conference in Blackpool, said that savings would be made in the rest of the national health service.

Breast Cancer

11. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the incidence of breast cancer in Wales. [1866]

Mr. Richards: Breast cancer rates in Wales have for many years been higher than those in England, though I am pleased to say that overall mortality from the disease fell by nearly 10 per cent. in Wales between 1988 and 1994. International studies suggest that differences in the rates between countries and regions are due to a combination of social, environmental and genetic factors.

Mrs. Clwyd: That is not a sufficiently good explanation for the women in Wales who will die of breast cancer. We want to know why more women are dying of breast cancer in Wales than in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and why the disease is on the increase in Wales and on the decrease in the other parts of the United Kingdom. Does not the Minister realise that women are angry about the lottery of care and the quality of care, and because the Government appear not to care?

Mr. Richards: Considerable research has been undertaken into the causes of the disease. It is unlikely that its increased incidence in Wales is being influenced by a new factor, undetected in previous studies. For that reason, we do not consider that research into incidence in particular areas would be of benefit. I remind the hon. Lady that the Government spent £3.8 million on breast cancer research in 1993-94. I am appalled that she should complain about the quality of care in our hospitals. That is an outrageous accusation.

Mr. Merchant: While I accept that the increased incidence of breast cancer in Wales is a serious problem that needs addressing, will my hon. Friend nevertheless confirm that it is recognised in the higher spending on health per capita in Wales, which also takes into account other additional health problems in Wales.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We spend some 9 per cent. of GDP in Wales on health care. In addition to the £3.8 million that I quoted a moment ago, United Kingdom health departments are currently funding four studies into screening costing £5 million over five years. In 1992-93, health departments and the Government-funded Medical Research Council spent £21.5 million on cancer research.

Fire Service

12. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations have been made to him concerning the reorganisation of the fire service in Wales. [1867]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Various.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that he deludes himself if he considers that the proposals are acceptable either to the people who work in the fire services in Wales or to those who run them. Will he reconsider his proposals, even at this late stage? If they do not carry the confidence of the vast majority of Welsh people, they are surely doomed.

Mr. Jones: The matter has been very long and fully considered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured to learn that the final decision was not made until all the professional advice had been secured that it was the best way forward. In particular, we received advice from the president of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association.

Opt-out Schools

13. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with local education authorities and the Churches concerning the proposed fast track for schools opting out. [1868]

Mr. Richards: A bilingual consultation paper on grant-maintained status for voluntary aided schools was published on 31 October. Responses are currently being considered.

Mr. Touhig: I heartily congratulate the Minister, and do so genuinely, on an achievement of some significance. His proposal that a fast track should be established for Church schools wishing to go grant-maintained has united the Christian Churches in Wales in a way that has not happened since the Reformation. The Minister knows full well that the Churches are united in opposition to his proposals. Having said that, and bearing in mind that the word "choice" drips daily from the lips of Conservative Members, can the Minister assure the House that no school in Wales will go grant-maintained without a ballot in which parents can exercise their right to choose?

Mr. Richards: It is interesting that, according to the hon. Gentleman, the Churches are united against grant-maintained status. Is the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) opposed to a fast track for schools opting out? The right hon. Member for Sedgefield ensured a fast track out of Islington, for his own son to attend a grant-maintained school, yet the same right hon. Gentleman pursues policies that would replace Essex man with Islington luvvies.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should answer the question, rather than make attacks on another Member of Parliament.

Mr. Duncan: Disgraceful. Since when were attacks forbidden?

Madam Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have anything to say? If so, he should say it now.

Mr. Richards: As I said in my original reply, the matter is out for consultation and currently being considered.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the Minister confirm that, given the Government's decision not to mention the fast track process for voluntary aided schools in the Queen's Speech, he has no intention of allowing any school of any description in Wales to opt out before parents have a chance to ballot?

Mr. Richards: As I have twice made clear, the matter went out for consultation and we are considering the responses. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait because we have not decided precisely what we intend to do. As to the announcement, if the hon. Gentleman had heard the magnificent speech by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at our party conference, he would have heard my right hon. Friend commit the Government to further legislation on grant-maintained schools.

Welsh Farmers

14. **Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to improve standards of service to Welsh farmers with the processing of grants and subsidy claims. [1869]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Earlier this year the charter standard for farmers in Wales was published. That document sets out how the Welsh Office intends to continue to help farmers in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I welcome the publication of the charter. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the target time for dealing with grants and subsidies are the same for Wales as for England? Will he try to reduce the number of forms to which farmers are subjected and ensure that whatever forms remain are published in Welsh and English?

Mr. Jones: I can reassure my right hon. Friend on all the points he raised. Our targets under the charter standard for Wales are the same as for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in England. This is the first year of the scheme, and we will publish all the figures at the end of it. My great hope is that we will be able to hold our heads up high in any comparison. If not, we will carefully learn how to make further improvements.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

15. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from local authorities in Wales supporting the proposed nursery voucher scheme. [1870]

Mr. Hague: None, but parents will see the considerable benefit of expanded provision and choice. I have received a large number of constructive suggestions on the options for implementation, which I am now considering.

Mr. Ainger: The Secretary of State is honourable enough to accept that nobody in Wales supports him on that issue. Does he also accept that every new unitary authority that has looked at the case for vouchers has rejected it, as has every existing local education authority in Wales and every parents association? If the Secretary of State is really interested in the opinion of Wales, why does he not accept it and withdraw that ludicrous scheme?

Mr. Hague: I believe in extending choice as well as in putting more money into the system. The purpose of the consultation is to seek views on the scheme's detailed implementation. I am grateful to everyone who has responded—even those who say that they are against the scheme—because we are now able to take account of useful suggestions. I do not understand why Opposition Members are frightened of vouchers. They will bring choice and more money into the system. Is it that Opposition Members are more hostile to choice than they recently tried to pretend?

Tir Cymen Scheme

16. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his intentions in relation to the expansion of the Tir Cymen scheme. [1871]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Tir Cymen is a five-year experimental scheme which started in 1992. A review of the scheme will be undertaken towards the end of the experimental period, and decisions on its future will be made in the light of that review.

Mr. Dafis: I am grateful for that answer. Does the Minister accept that the work of the Development Board for Rural Wales is acknowledged to be far less effective west of the hills, especially in Ceredigion, in attracting manufacturing industry? It is also now well established that Tir Cymen generates significant employment opportunities in the truly rural areas; so will the Minister consider extending the scheme to Ceredigion, whose position is anomalous—with Meirionnydd to the north and Dynevor to the east? Does the Minister see this as a useful first step towards an integrated agri-environmental scheme for the whole of Wales?

Mr. Jones: As I have said, there will be a review at the end of the period. We are already planning to take into account in the review all the socio-economic conditions that the hon. Gentleman has outlined. Meanwhile I believe that the Countryside Council for Wales can carry forward the work. During the current financial year, it has been given about £1,150,000 to assist its activities.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Work

31. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Attorney-General what new proposals he has to improve the work of his Department. [1886]

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Current initiatives in my Department include the implementation of team work in the Crown Prosecution Service and the introduction of an information technology system, known as SCOPE, for CPS case management.

Mr. Flynn: Does the work of the Department currently include the study of three documents published by district auditor John Magill, proving that, in March 1987, Westminster council was well aware that flats on the Elgin estate were unfit for habitation? What action will the Department take to protect these and future families? Will the Attorney-General and the Department act to prosecute the people involved, including the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg)? Will action be taken to strip Lady Porter of the honours bestowed on her?

The Attorney-General: To the best of my knowledge, the answer to that is no. If I discover that the answer is in any way different, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Allason: Has my right hon. and learned Friend taken any initiatives with respect to public interest immunity certificates? Is he aware that there is widespread concern about how such certificates are presented to Ministers, and about the arguments made to Ministers before they sign? Is he going to wait for Lord Justice Scott, or is he already taking some initiatives in this area?

The Attorney-General: If my hon. Friend has followed the case law in the matter, he will appreciate that public interest immunity certificates play an important role in the administration of justice, in civil cases and—where necessary—criminal cases. Guidance on the matter was given by the House of Lords about 18 months ago in ex parte Wiley. If my hon. Friend reads the case he will find it profitable and see that such certificates have a real role to play.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Attorney-General consider introducing a set of national standards to ensure that in appropriate cases the present condition and views of victims of crime are brought to the attention of the sentencing judge in every circumstance?

The Attorney-General: No, I cannot promise the hon. and learned Gentleman that, but I can tell him that the CPS makes a great deal of effort, with the assistance of the police, to know the views of victims, to understand their position and to try to cherish them so that they understand the nature of the proceedings. Moreover, when their views are relevant to the proper presentation of a case, they are looked at objectively to ensure that they are brought before the court.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Would it perhaps represent an improvement if the CPS considered cases such as that of a constituent of mine who is in deadly fear of an attacker who has been charged with grievous bodily harm, yet who has been released on bail? Under the Bail (Amendment) Act 1993, is not the Crown Prosecution Service able to help constituents like mine to overcome their real personal fear?

The Attorney-General: I shall certainly ask the director to have someone look at the case my hon. Friend mentions. He is right to say that, under the Bail (Amendment) Act, there are in certain circumstances—they are not very common—opportunities for the CPS to reopen the question of bail.

Mr. John Morris: May I welcome the Attorney-General's recent statement that he will have discussions with colleagues following the case of Regina *v.* West at Winchester about the considerable disquiet expressed about pre-trial agreements between witnesses and newspapers? Will he give us some idea of how long the discussions will take and whether he is contemplating legislation, if necessary? Will he widen the discussions to ensure that they cover circumstances in which trials are aborted because of newspaper publicity, thereby making it impossible to have a fair trial, as in a recent case at Harrow?

The Attorney-General: I shall take first the second part of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question. If a trial is aborted because of publicity, I shall almost certainly consider the matter under the Contempt of Court Act 1981 to ascertain whether any publicity has given rise to a substantial risk of serious prejudice within the time when the proceedings are active. If I so consider, having given the newspaper an opportunity to comment, I normally bring criminal proceedings for contempt.

I welcome what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said about cheque-book journalism. I can assure him that we are examining the matter most carefully. I shall be examining it with colleagues. I have already received a report from counsel in the case of West. I cannot speak for the Government now, but I see no reason why the matter should not be dealt with expeditiously. When we have considered it carefully, we can come to a conclusion, including a decision on whether legislation is appropriate.

Serious Fraud Office (Convictions)

32. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Attorney-General in what proportion of cases in the past 12 months the Serious Fraud Office achieved the conviction of the principal offender named in the indictment. [1888]

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): The principal offender named in the indictment was convicted in 89 per cent. of the cases prosecuted by the Serious Fraud Office in the past 12 months.

Mr. Rowe: That is something of a reassuring surprise given the media coverage of the Serious Fraud Office. Will my hon. and learned Friend consider passing on congratulations to the SFO on the outcome of the latest Guinness appeal? Will he tell the House what more can be done to give the SFO a more justified reputation in the media?

The Solicitor-General: The answer to my hon. Friend's second question is that that will happen only if people tell the truth about the SFO's record instead of spreading half truths and selective truths. The SFO has an extremely good record. Since it started its work, it has obtained convictions in 62 per cent. of all cases that by definition were serious and complex. In at least 75 per cent. of the trials in which it has been involved, one defendant—usually the principal defendant—has been convicted.

Mr. MacShane: The Serious Fraud Office can now rest easy that Nick Leeson will spend six-and-a-half years in some rat-infested malaria hole in Changi prison. Is the Solicitor-General able to assure us that, if the Singapore authorities applied for the extradition of Mr. Peter Norris and others who were responsible for the Barings cover-up in London, the Government would put no obstacles in the path of such an application?

The Solicitor-General: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman seems to be carrying a brief for Mr. Leeson. Most people would compliment the SFO's director in the attitude he took, which enabled Mr. Leeson to be brought to justice in the most appropriate jurisdiction.

The investigation of the position of senior Barings executives continues. It is an operational matter for the SFO. It is not in the interests of justice that I say anything more about it in public now.

Crown Prosecution Service (Liaison)

33. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Attorney-General what measures the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to ensure good liaison between it and the police. [1889]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service and the police are working closely together on a number of initiatives, including reducing the volume of paper in prosecution files, greater use of information technology and co-ordinated training.

Mr. Congdon: May I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's answer, especially the part which referred to reducing paperwork? Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend will say to what extent he sees the new SCOPE system having an effect on reducing paperwork and improving communications between the Crown Prosecution Service and the police?

The Attorney-General: SCOPE will be extremely effective in improving case tracking and case management. I look forward to the time—one is looking ahead now—when SCOPE will be able to work in harmony with police and court IT systems. It is extremely important that all sections of the criminal justice system, while they each have their independent functions, should be able to work closely and effectively together, and IT has an important part to play in that.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I hope that the Minister will understand nevertheless that for many people involved in cases as witnesses there is a real gap between their understanding of the attitude of the Crown Prosecution Service, which may have a sensible legal basis, and their reaction to being approached by the police to act as a witness in a difficult case. If people involved in very fraught cases are given insufficient information from the CPS and the police, there will be a real misunderstanding of the workings of the justice system.

The Attorney-General: I entirely agree with what the hon. Lady says, and think that every police officer and Crown prosecutor would also agree. Close working relationships between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service are the essence of the fair and efficient prosecution of cases and are essential in order that a witness and a victim may know what is going on, understand the reasons for it and thus have greater confidence in the administration of justice.

Mr. Sykes: In view of what my right hon. and learned Friend has just said, might it possibly improve things if certain CPS lawyers were relocated to police stations?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend raises an interesting and important point. The idea of placing Crown prosecutors in police stations or what are known as admin support units—the crime support units of police stations—so that they can work closely with the police in the preparation of cases is something that we are thinking about very seriously indeed. We have not reached full agreement but we hope to conduct pilot schemes to explore that possibility. I think that that would do good to both services.

Serious Fraud Office (Actions)

34. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the success rate resulting from actions taken by the Serious Fraud Office. [1891]

The Solicitor-General: Since its inception, more than three quarters of the cases prosecuted by the Serious Fraud Office have resulted in the conviction of at least one defendant, usually the principal offender. The conviction rate for all defendants over that period is 62 per cent.

If that sounds very familiar, it is merely what I said a few minutes ago, and it bears repetition.

Mr. Cunningham: Yes, but does the Minister not accept that there may well be a case, and so what proposals does he have for it, for better co-ordination between the regulatory bodies of the City and the SFO?

The Solicitor-General: The Director of the SFO has negotiated guidelines that govern the conduct of cases between himself and the regulators. If cases are of high-level public concern and display serious dishonesty on the part of individuals, they will be prosecuted, make no mistake about that. Regulatory action may be appropriate if the offences are technical or where urgent action is needed and it can best be taken by the regulator.

Mr. John Marshall: Impressive as those figures are, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that in his 62 per cent. he should include Mr. Levitt, who got off with a rather light sentence? Does he not agree that some of the cases have shown that serious fraud is too serious, too complex and too complicated to be dealt with by juries, and that the Government should follow the recommendations of the Roskill inquiry?

The Solicitor-General: I believe that there is still much to be done to perfect our systems of trial, with new and improved information technology, which is currently being used in some cases, before we are driven to the stage of saying that such cases cannot be tried by jury and that they must be tried, as Roskill recommended, by some other tribunal. So far as the Levitt case is concerned, without dealing with any particular case, my right hon. and learned Friend now has power in appropriate cases to refer unduly lenient sentences in serious or complex frauds to the Court of Appeal for review.

Establishment

35. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the establishment of his office for the efficient conduct of its business. [1892]

The Attorney-General: The establishment of my office is kept under review. I am satisfied that it is adequate.

Mr. Mackinlay: In view of the Attorney-General's reply, can he explain why there is an inordinate delay in his considering whether there should be contempt proceedings against those involved in the Harrow case, which was referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) a few moments ago? Is it because the Attorney-General is not on top of his brief or is it that his Department is inadequately resourced? On 30 October, he told the House that he was considering contempt proceedings and he has said the same thing today. When will he get round to making a decision?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman is wrong; there is not inordinate delay. The matter is under close consideration. As I have explained to the House before and as bears repetition, before I bring such proceedings, I give newspaper editors and journalists the opportunity to make representations about points that they think I should take into account before taking my decision. I have given them that opportunity and most of them have made representations. I am now considering my decision and I shall make it once I am ready.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has, on several occasions, raised the issue of the transfer of questions tabled to the Deputy Prime Minister. I say to him and to the whole House that, however frustrating for hon. Members it is when questions are transferred, it is the long established principle, as "Erskine May" states on page 286 and as my predecessors and I have said many times, that

> "decisions on the transfer of questions rest with Ministers and it is not a matter in which the Chair seeks to intervene."

I make it clear now that I have no authority to change that principle, nor do I intend to do so, although I fully recognise how disappointing it can be to secure a high place for oral questions, only to find that the question is then transferred.

The hon. Member for Workington also invited me on 27 November to consider intervening during Question Time to stop a Minister replying in a way that took him beyond his ministerial responsibility. The House would not, I believe, expect its Speaker to interfere with Ministers' freedom to interpret their ministerial responsibilities in their own way. I make it clear now that I have no intention of intervening at Question Time in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggested I should.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you will be aware, I have been fortunate enough to secure the first place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. I have said that my intention is to introduce a Bill dealing with British summer time. That proposal has generated a huge amount of correspondence; it is arriving at my Commons office by the sackload. I am pleased to say that the correspondents are about 5:1 in favour, but that is not the point that I wish to raise with you.

My difficulty is that I am so inundated by this correspondence that it is beyond the normal resources of my office to deal with it. That would not normally be a problem, because, as you may be aware, Madam Speaker, 130 organisations are backing the campaign for daylight extra—organisations as diverse as Age Concern and the Police Federation—and they would be happy to provide me with secretarial assistance. Under normal circumstances, I would be happy to accept that assistance, and to declare it in the Register of Members' Interests.

The difficulty on which I seek your guidance is that, if I accepted that assistance, having accepted money's worth, I could then be seen as advocating a cause, in which case I would be caught by the Nolan rules. I have been to see Sir Gordon Downey on the issue. Until he gets further guidance from the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life, he is unable to advise me what I can do. If I stood up to promote my Bill, would you, Madam Speaker, feel able to call me, or would I be caught under the new advocacy rules?

Madam Speaker: I have listened with some interest to what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I have a great deal of sympathy with what appears to be his dilemma. However, there is little, as Speaker, that I can do to help him in the matter.

Any change in the amount available to an hon. Member for obtaining assistance in drafting a private Member's Bill would be a matter, in the first instance, for the Leader of the House. Secondly, the potential conflict of interest is one of the many matters that seem certain to be considered by the new Select Committee on Standards and Privileges when it eventually gets down to its work. Therefore, it would be wrong of me in any way to appear to pre-empt that Committee's consideration of the problem.

Mr. Butterfill: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Of course I appreciate that the House voted funds for the drafting of a Bill some years ago—in 1971. The sum, I think, was £200, which has not been changed since that date. In any event, that would not assist me in my predicament, because it is purely for the narrow purpose of drafting a Bill, and that does not present a problem. I gather that, if I receive external assistance with that sum, so long as I declare it, it does not affect the rule of advocacy because it cannot be deemed to be of personal benefit to me in any way. It is the question of secretarial assistance on which I need some guidance.

Madam Speaker: I have just answered the hon. Gentleman's point. Regretfully, it is a matter for the new Committee when it is established. The matter must be referred to it. Meanwhile, he must attempt in every way possible to proceed with his private Member's Bill, as he has every right to do, and I shall ensure as best as I can that he is safeguarded.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Your ruling was perfectly clear, and obviously I would accept it. You have made the position absolutely clear: you are not in a position to intervene where the Deputy Prime Minister answers questions that go wider than the remit set in the Table Office.

In so far as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure has made it absolutely clear, in a letter that I understand you have seen, that he believes that the Deputy Prime Minister is going beyond that remit, how can we proceed if you and the Chairman of the Procedure Committee cannot deal with the matter? It is clear that we are dealing with a precedent—Deputy Prime Minister is, I understand, a position that we have never had before. How are we to proceed to deal with this especially important difficulty?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman said at the beginning of his comments, I have made the position absolutely clear. I have no authority, and there is no way in which I would seek to reinterpret or interfere with ministerial responses to questions. It is Ministers' responsibility to interpret those questions as they think fit, and to reply to the House accordingly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. There is a simple way for the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) to resolve his problems. If he cannot find time to answer all those letters he is getting, he should pack up those moonlighting jobs he has got.

Madam Speaker: I hardly think that that is a solution to a serious problem.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I completely accept what you said in your earlier ruling, but, at the same time, I have been here 11 years and, in the past few months, I have noticed a growing practice by Ministers, once questions have appeared on the Order Paper, to transfer them somewhere else.

Originally, I was No. 2 on the Order Paper for questions to the Attorney-General today. It was a question that in my view—I have argued with the Clerks and with the Table Office over it—was a perfectly legitimate question for him to answer. However, he transferred it to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

A few weeks ago, I tabled a question to the Deputy Prime Minister asking how he intended to promote equal treatment for men and women in the Departments for which he is responsible—again, a perfectly legitimate question to him. That was transferred to the Department for Education and Employment. It is therefore a growing practice and someone, somewhere, should be able to do something about it.

Madam Speaker: I fully recognise the real annoyance of the hon. Lady, who I know secured a high place on the Order Paper for questions to the Attorney-General today. I believe that she also recognises that, had her question perhaps been framed a little differently, it would not have been open to the Attorney-General to transfer it. Despite that, I understand her real annoyance and that of other hon. Members when questions that are high on the Order Paper are transferred.

I hope that those on the Government Front Bench will pay serious attention to the exchanges that have taken place today. When Members secure a high place on the Order Paper, it is disappointing that their questions are transferred to other Departments, so that they often do not have an opportunity for a supplementary question, which is the all-important question on many occasions.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I hope that it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Marshall: Yes, Madam Speaker—it is a genuine one. At Question Time, the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) used his question to the Attorney-General to mount an attack upon my hon. Friend the Member for Milton, Keynes South-West (Mr. Legg). Did the hon. Gentleman inform my hon. Friend in advance?

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I am not at all clear. Would the hon. Member like to say yes or no, and then I shall respond?

Mr. Flynn: I wrote to the hon. Member, and there was a phone call from my office to his before the start of Question Time.

Madam Speaker: There we have the answer. But let me be quite clear about these matters. Of course it is important that, when Members are to be mentioned, notice should be given. However, I daily attend many public functions and many functions at weekends at which there are hundreds of people. Many people tell me how disappointed they are with our legislators who find little better to do than mention individual names, often abusively, and attack personalities on all sides across the Floor of the House.

The people of this country are looking for exchanges on policy and on the governance of this country and not for attacks on the 650 Members of the House. I hope that my thoughts will go home with all hon. Members, and not just with those who are in the Chamber. People are sick and tired of personal attacks in the House, and I hope that in future we shall concentrate on policies, not personalities.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8273/95, relating to the implementation of the Third Medium-Term Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 1991-95; endorses the Government view that any Community action in this field should have clear priorities and well-defined activities which can be evaluated effectively; takes note of European Community Document No. 9284/95, relating to the Fourth Medium-Term Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 1996-2000; shares the Government view that the programme should conform to the principles of subsidiarity; agrees with the Government that the legislative framework to ensure the principle of equality between women and men in the Community is now in place and further legislation is not justified at this time; and agrees with the Government that Member States should have an active role in the management of the programme.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming debate on Question [28 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation otherwise than by—

(i) zero-rating or exempting supplies of goods which are, or are to be, subjected to a fiscal or other warehousing regime; or

(ii) zero-rating or exempting supplies of services on or in relation to such goods;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax otherwise than to persons constructing or converting buildings in cases where the construction or conversion is not in the course or furtherance of a business;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

3.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The year 1996 will be an important milestone for the national health service. It will be the 20th anniversary of the last occasion on which a Government presented spending plans that delivered a sharp, real-terms reduction in the national health service budget. I am pleased to tell the House that this year I do not need to make a similar announcement. Indeed, we are able to continue the real-terms growth of the NHS that has gone on in every year since that announcement in 1976 for the year 1977-78.

Last week, I was able to set out plans for the continued growth of the health service. First, I was able to report that, overall, real-terms growth in patient care in the NHS next year will be 1.6 per cent. In real pounds, after correcting for inflation, that is £500 million of growth in patient care—£1.3 billion of cash growth for patient care as a result of the Budget that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced last week. That is a substantial continued investment, and it allows us to develop a number of different and important priorities within the health service.

First, it allows us to provide for the continued and fast real-terms growth of primary care in the NHS. Within that total of 1.6 per cent. real-terms growth, I am allocating 3.9 per cent. real-terms growth to support the continued development of family health services, and particularly the family doctor service and GP-provided health care. That is building on a substantial record of success within the health service that was built up over a long time, and particularly reinforced over the past few years by the fundholding scheme. We still look forward to hearing from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) whether Labour supports that scheme.

The continued development of family health services is an important element of this year's Budget settlement for the NHS. The second important element is continued real-terms growth of services that are secured by health authorities.

The average real-terms growth of health authority budgets next year will be 1.1 per cent. Virtually every health authority gets 0.5 per cent. real-terms growth, the rest being directed at those health authorities in which funding is below target, measured on the weighted capitation formula. The Government have repeatedly reasserted their commitment to bringing all health authorities into line on that weighted capitation formula, and I am pleased to say that the allocations to health authorities which I announced on Thursday reflect considerable progress towards that objective.

That is good news for the people of South Essex, who will see a 4.2 per cent. growth in real terms in their health authority spending next year, and for the people of North Essex, who will see a 3.5 per cent. real-terms growth in expenditure. In Bedfordshire, the figure is 3.2 per cent., and Oxfordshire, East Sussex, West Kent and Bromley will all receive more than 2.5 per cent. real-terms growth in their health authority expenditure next year as a result of the Government's commitment to equitable funding within the NHS, as demonstrated by our commitment to the weighted capitation formula. Those two priorities have been safeguarded within this year's settlement.

The third priority is our commitment to continue to develop the future of the health service, through investment both in training and in research. I have been able to allocate a total of £68 million of new money to develop the education and training commitment of the NHS. We are investing in the most precious resource of all within the NHS—the skilled and professional work force who deliver health care.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Secretary of State say a little about the 17 per cent. cut in capital investment for the NHS? Some of us are extremely worried that the private finance initiative will not fill that gap, and that we may face a quite severe problem with capital investment in the future.

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Lady will contain herself and be patient, I shall certainly come to the private finance initiative and its role in the future of the NHS, and I shall be reflecting upon the sharp change in position that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has undertaken in the past week. It appears that the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) has not quite caught up with her hon. Friend's change of position, and I can understand that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): If I am called to speak later, I shall challenge some of the Secretary of State's macro-economic figures on spend. According to a press release from the right hon. Gentleman's Department, the net increase in Government spending next year is 0.6 per cent, not 1.6 per cent. Thereafter, the figures are 0.1 per cent. for the two subsequent years. The Government's manifesto commitment to real-terms increases every year is just being achieved in the two years following the coming year, but only by 0.1 per cent. in each of those years.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman reads out the figures correctly, but overlooks the fact that the restructuring of the health budget allows me to deliver more than 1.5 per cent. growth in patient care in the NHS next year on those figures. There will be an increase in the real resources available for patient care next year. Labour's Front-Bench Members have argued—spasmodically, uncertainly, but reasonably consistently—for public-private partnerships to expand the resources available to the health service for the past 12 months. I am delivering that, and I am able to increase the volume of money committed to current patient care within the health service.

Not only are we spending money on expanding today's services: we are also ensuring that we are committing money to support tomorrow's services through the development of education and training programmes, and through the development of the research programme of the health service. When my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary was doing my job, he quite rightly committed the health service to develop that programme.

It is extraordinary that it took 40 years for a science-based service—as the health service should be—to appoint its first director of research and development. We now have that function, and we are committing real resources to making certain that we have available to the health service a proper research function to ensure that clinical practice within the NHS reflects the latest understanding of the people operating at the leading edge of clinical services. That is why I am committing an extra £27 million of new money to the research function of the health service next year—an amount which represents a real-terms growth rate in the commitment to research of nearly 4 per cent.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The Secretary of State referred to a director of science and research. On a point of information, is that science and research based on clinical, scientific analysis of treatment, or on the management and structure of the national health service?

Mr. Dorrell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman, as someone who has previously been interested in the health service, would want me to answer to that question, "Both." That is what it is. Those who are interested in the development of efficient health care within the health service should surely consider every aspect of the functioning of the health service to ensure that the care that is delivered reflects an efficient use of resources within the health service. That is what we have committed resources to doing.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not dissent from what the Secretary of State has said, but I want everyone to be absolutely clear. In the years after next year, the resources that come from the public purse will be increased by 0.1 per cent. The increase in other resources will come entirely from the private sector, which the Secretary of State will deal with. The substantial increase will come from the private sector, not the public purse.

Mr. Dorrell: I have already answered the hon. Gentleman's question. He reads out numbers which he says are from the press release. If he wants to look for a more learned version of the same numbers, he can look in the Red Book. We are using public money as efficiently as possible to deliver growing services to patients. That is why I am placing stress on the real resource that is available to support the activities of health authorities in different parts of the country.

I have referred so far to the development of primary care, research and development and education and training. The next priority that I want to talk about for a moment is the mental health services of the NHS.

Everyone who follows the health debate knows that mental health services have been a subject of concern both inside the House and outside it for some time. I am able to announce in the context of this year's Budget settlement a real commitment to an improved delivery of mental health services throughout the country.

I believe that there is now a broad measure of agreement about what a modern mental health service should look like. It is often characterised as care in the community. In the sense that it is no longer a model of care that relies solely on the old-fashioned hospitals, that is true. However, it is not true to suggest that a modern mental health service should be based only on community-based provision. There is now broad agreement that it should deliver a spectrum of care, including acute hospital care for those who need acute mental illness services and sheltered accommodation for those whose dependency needs are greater as well as a properly developed range of community services.

That is the spectrum of care that people expect to see in a modern mental health service. People expect, furthermore, to see such a service reinforced by properly developed links between the NHS and social services departments.

[Mr. Dorrell]

The debate about mental health services is less about precisely what the model of care should be, and more about the effectiveness of delivery of that service in different parts of the country. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister for Health wrote to each health authority in August asking them to deliver a quick assessment of their progress in the delivery of that type of mental health service. The replies were due in on 30 November. I inform the House this afternoon that I intend to publish the conclusions of that process early in the new year.

I also draw it to the attention of the House that the Budget carries forward the process that I have described by allowing us in two important respects to provide growing resources for the development of mental health services within the NHS. First, within the central budgets of the health service, I have set aside £10 million which will be available to above-target health authorities to allow them to develop their mental health services. I shall expect any health authority which bids for that money at least to match from its own resources the money that it claims from that central budget. I expect that to deliver at least £20 million of extra resources committed to mental health services within the NHS.

The second element of the programme for the development of mental health services reflects the growth of the resources that I have set aside for the mental illness specific grant for local authorities.

There will be £11 million of extra money next year, followed by a further £9 million the following year, to continue to operate the scheme that was established when I was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, under my right hon. and learned Friend the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the development of mental illness services in local authorities. Those rules provide that the mental illness specific grant finances a maximum of 70 per cent. of an individual local authority's spending programme, so the extra money that I am announcing today will deliver a total of £30 million of new money for the development of mental health services through local authorities.

There is £20 million from the NHS and £30 million through social services departments—a £50 million total enhancement of new money available for the development of mental health services. I hope and believe that that will be well received, both in the House and outside, as reflecting the serious commitment of the Government to seeing mental health services continue to develop.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The Secretary of State is aware that any additional resources for community care for the mentally ill will be extremely welcome. He is aware that the problem is not only with the budget of the Department of Health but with the treatment of the policies of the Department of Social Security and the Department for Education and Employment. Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether there will be matching developments in those fields?

Mr. Dorrell: I am not going to speak for my right hon. Friends who are in charge of other Departments. I am speaking for the two programmes for which I am directly responsible in different ways: the national health service central Government budget, and the social service departments for which I am the sponsoring Minister. Those two elements of the welfare state will provide improving provision for mental health services, based both on better management and on the extra resources that I have announced following the Budget of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

Social services departments have a key part to play in the development of mental health services, as I have described. They are also increasingly important in delivering services for the elderly. That is why I was pleased to be able to announce last week a total of 4 per cent. real-terms growth in the provision for personal social services by local authorities. That reflects the continuing growth of the commitment of social service departments to delivering community care for elderly people. It is important to recognise the rate at which that programme has been expanding over the past 15 years.

The hon. Member for Peckham is prone on occasion to draw attention to the fact that there has been a small reduction in the number of beds available for elderly.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): Small?

Mr. Dorrell: The figure is small. There has been a total reduction of beds available for the elderly of 18,000.

The hon. Lady always overlooks the fact that, at the same time, in the private sector there has been a growth of 130,000 residential care beds, and a further 130,000 nursing home beds—a total increase of 260,000 beds in the residential and nursing home sector, which rather more than offsets the 18,000 reduction to which the hon. Lady is so fond of drawing attention. That service has developed dramatically over the past 15 years. I am pleased to say that the 4 per cent. real-terms growth that we are voting to social service departments this year will allow that continuing and developing service to continue to grow.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am sure that the Secretary of State will accept that the growth in the private sector has meant that thousands of elderly people have been institutionalised when they might not have been had the money been spent somewhere else.

While we are on topic of long-term care, has the right hon. Gentleman studied carefully the first report of the Health Select Committee, in which witness after witness, including a Minister, expressed concern that too many long-term care beds had been closed in the NHS? Will he please put a moratorium on any more closures? Is he aware that, in my constituency, a purpose-built, long-stay hospital for the mentally ill and elderly is closing with the loss of 300 beds? We cannot afford to lose any more beds in the NHS. Will he admit that the beds in the private sector are often means-tested?

Mr. Dorrell: I wonder whether the hon. Lady visited the same NHS continuing care beds in geriatric hospitals that I visited at the beginning of the 1980s. The reality is—

Mrs. Mahon: I worked for the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: I know that the hon. Lady has taken a consistent interest in the subject, but NHS geriatric beds—

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend used to work in the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: In that case, she knows this better than I.

NHS geriatric beds too often fell far short of the standards that any of us would want, either for ourselves or for our elderly and dependent relatives.

I agree with the hon. Lady that there has too often been a tendency to put elderly people into residential care when they and their families would have preferred domiciliary support so that they could continue to live in the community. Residential care homes may be convenient, but they may not be the best way of meeting elderly people's needs; that is why the Government introduced the community care reforms. We introduced the reforms in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 to allow services to be delivered more flexibly to meet the needs of dependent elderly people.

Mrs. Mahon: The Secretary of State is right to say that I worked for a long time in long-term care in the NHS. The care provided by the NHS for people who desperately needed hospitalisation was considerably better than much of the care that I have seen in the private sector. If the Secretary of State wants to stop institutionalisation, why does he not allow local authorities to spend money as they want, instead of making them spend 85 per cent. of the transitional grant in the private sector? If local authorities did not have to do that, perhaps some good packages of domiciliary care could be provided.

Mr. Dorrell: The 85 per cent. figure does not apply to the core expenditure from social services departments' own resources. I encourage every social services department to consider the value for money it gets from its homes compared to that from private sector homes, and to operate a level playing field between the two sectors. When I am convinced that that is the position in every social services department, I might agree with the hon. Lady about withdrawing the rule. Until I am convinced that there is a level playing field, I shall remain a strong supporter of the principles that have hitherto operated.

Ms Eagle: Will the Secretary of State admit that, because of the movement into the private sector, local authority homes tend to have been left with the most dependent, and therefore the most expensive, patients, who require the most care? Does he therefore agree that it is often not meaningful to compare costs of the sectors, because of the kind of patients they now look after?

Mr. Dorrell: I do not agree with the hon. Member. Local authority homes are often more expensive, but I do not accept the assertion that that is because people in them are more dependent. The equation is more complex than that.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor not only provided extra real-terms growth for personal social services departments, but confirmed that the Government do not believe that the social care of the elderly is solely a matter for the state. That is why I welcome the steps that he announced in the Budget to encourage individuals to provide for their own social care needs in the longer term.

We must ensure that we provide domiciliary support, in the way that the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) mentioned, to allow carers to look after elderly people before they need to go into residential care. The Government will also encourage individuals to set aside resources to meet their own long-term care needs.

My right and learned hon. Friend announced a consultation on partnership schemes, which will be an important incentive for improved provision by each of us for our own old age. He also announced a change in the tax rules on long-term care insurance, and an important change in the rules governing the assets that are disregarded for the assessment of means-tested benefits.

Those are all important steps towards encouraging people to set aside resources to meet their own social care needs, and they are part of a total package, including real-terms increases in public expenditure, to ensure that we provide a proper deal for care of the elderly.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will my right hon. Friend take credit for the measures that he has taken to enable a number of people with disabilities to use public finance at their discretion to make arrangements for their own care? That is cost-effective, as has been shown in a number of experiments, and gives the freedom of choice that I believe the Government are all about.

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with my hon. Friend. He is drawing attention to the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill, which was announced in the Queen's Speech. That will be an important step forward in making the system more flexible so that it can respond to the wishes of individual recipients of care, and it will also ensure that the money spent delivers better value.

Therefore, an important theme of the Budget is the Government's commitment to continue to deliver on public expenditure priorities—more than 1.5 per cent. real-terms growth in NHS current expenditure and 4 per cent. real-terms growth in personal social service expenditure.

The hon. Member for Wallasey has already drawn attention to another key theme in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget—the improvement in the management of the Government's capital programme through the private finance initiative.

The principle of the private finance initiative is extremely straightforward. In the national health service, it means that NHS trusts continue to deliver free health care to NHS patients, and they continue, in the overwhelming majority of cases, to employ the clinicians and the clinical support workers who deliver that care. That has been made absolutely clear in all the support documentation about the private finance initiative.

We are also encouraging NHS trusts to form public-private partnerships to ensure that those dedicated professional people who work in the national health service, delivering free NHS care, will have available to them better, more modern facilities than have ever been available in the history of the NHS.

Access by the NHS to private sector capital always used to be governed—I am tempted to say "obstructed"—by what used to be called the Ryrie rules. They were an especially abstruse bit of Treasury orthodoxy. I am pleased to say that, under the enlightened chancellorship of my right hon. and learned Friend, those rules have been abolished.

There is a certain irony about hearing the Ryrie rules quoted with approval by some members of the Labour party, because Labour Members used to hold barely printable opinions about Sir William Ryrie and his rules before they were changed. We have abolished rules that, in their lifetime, found no support outside a narrow group of Treasury theologians, and we have encouraged the development of a public-private partnership between the NHS and the private sector.

[Mr. Dorrell]

That causes problems for the hon. Member for Peckham. I shall take the House through the problems in their most recent manifestations.

I appeared on the "Today" radio programme on 28 November, in which the hon. Lady and I were interviewed by Sue MacGregor. Sue MacGregor interviewed me first, and I said exactly what I have just said to the House, whereupon she turned to the hon. Lady and said:

> "You heard Stephen Dorrell say this is a new way of building hospitals—it's not a new way of providing health care. You can't object to that, can you?"—

to which the hon. Lady replied:

> "We certainly do, because, under this Government, this is a new trick to privatise the health service."

That was the hon. Lady—*[Interruption.]* That was the hon. Lady's answer. The problem was that she was slapped down very soon after that from the Dispatch Box by her right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party. Less than 12 hours after the hon. Lady had addressed the nation with those words, he came to the Dispatch Box and said:

> "The PFI is right in principle. We have supported it, and in many ways we have been advocating it"—

whereupon *Hansard*, I am sure accurately, reports the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) as saying:

> "We initiated it."—*[Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

There may be a few paternity disputes about that claim, but the division between the hon. Lady on the radio programme at 7 o'clock in the morning and her leader in the House at 5 o'clock in the afternoon could not have been starker and clearer.

However, no one has ever accused the hon. Lady of not being quick on her feet. In less than a week, she has issued a press release, saying that the accusation against me is no longer that I am doing too much about the PFI or that I am in danger of privatising the health service; now, the accusation is that I am doing too little about the PFI. Having stood accused of introducing a dangerous new theory that would change the nature of health care, I am now accused of not doing enough, and building, in the words of the title of her press release, "castles in the air."

The hon. Lady does not have a particularly good record on forecasts in the health service. She is the same health spokesperson who, when we introduced general practice fundholding, said that there was no support for it in the health service.

Ms Harman *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady indicates that she was right; but she was not quite right, because more than half the doctors in the health service have now applied for fundholding status. If she is concerned to see the quick, successful and effective development of the private finance initiative—I believe that her leader is, and I sincerely hope that she is—we can make common cause. But in terms of her forecast, I say, "Watch this space."

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Two years ago in my constituency, we were about to set forth on the new stage of Cumberland infirmary, which was stopped because of the PFI. That is a reflection of what has happened throughout the country: hospital building has come to a standstill because of the PFI. Now, only one company is interested in that contract. Does there have to be competition, or will the contract be given to that one company?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give the House the response that I always give to such questions in the House: any spending programme that I approve must first pass the value-for-money test. I shall be anxious to ensure that the hospital mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, and any other projects that come up under the PFI, pass the value-for-money test.

On the subject of delay, I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at the programme that we approved under the PFI last week at Amersham hospital. It was a replacement programme for a succession of single-storey, corrugated iron huts that were erected in 1940 as a temporary measure to deliver health care to the victims of the blitz. Those huts are still delivering health care today.

That is not something of which any Government, Conservative or Labour—they have both been in power while those temporary buildings have continued to deliver health care—should be particularly proud. I am proud to have been the Secretary of State for Health responsible for changing the rules that imposed that sort of delay, not just on Amersham hospital but on hospitals all around the country.

Anyone who has looked at the history of the health service knows that it is littered with capital projects that have been stopped by the short-term actions of Chancellors of all political persuasions because of Treasury capital planning processes. We have abolished that policy, and ensured that viable projects for which there is a need within their communities can be financed and built on time. That is an important, fundamental change, which I hope the hon. Gentleman will endorse and support.

Mr. Martlew: The hospital that the right hon. Gentleman has just mentioned was built in the 1940s; the hospital that I mentioned was to replace a Victorian workhouse. Will the Secretary of State give an assurance to the House that, if the PFI fails, public money will be made available immediately to build the Cumberland infirmary?

Mr. Dorrell: I have made it clear that there remains a public capital programme as well. I hope and believe that viable projects for the development of the capital stock in the health service can be carried out in the context of public-private partnerships, which are an important source of new capital as well as new expertise in the development of the health service.

One of the key issues—indeed, the key issue—that underlies every Budget involves the choices that every society has to make about taxation and expenditure. Some people have been tempted to suggest that the present structure of our public services is insupportable. I am regularly told that the pressures on the NHS are irreconcilable—that has been a continuing story in the history of the NHS since the day it was founded. The first royal commission into the irreconcilable pressures on the NHS was set up in the early 1950s, and the theme has recurred through the history of the health service.

We have also been told that our welfare state provision—our social security expenditure provision—is too generous and, as a result, public finances are unsustainable. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that the subject has been examined, not by a Government spokesman or a friendly force that can be relied on to produce a convenient set of statistics for us, but by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

In its report of June this year, the OECD examined exactly that issue—the services most often held responsible for the instability of public finances. Its finding was not that public finances in Britain were unstable, but quite the contrary. It reached a clear, decisive conclusion that the United Kingdom was alone among G7 countries in running a consistent financial surplus beyond 1995.

Over the period that it examined—up to 2030, a third of the way through the next century—it found that the United Kingdom and Canada were the only two G7 countries that would not only be paying off public debt, but would have paid off their entire national debts by 2030 if the continuing trends of taxation policies were followed through. Those who argue that the present balance of public expenditure is unstable and insupportable have to explain why the OECD—an independent body examining precisely that proposition—reached precisely the opposite conclusion.

That analysis is extremely good news for Britain, for two reasons. First, it gives us the assurance that the public expenditure plan set out in the Red Book this year can be followed through without a funding crisis, which was so often the experience of Labour Governments. Secondly, and more importantly, it allows to us continue doing what we did this year—making choices at the margin about how much we want to tax and how much we want to spend.

There is, of course, a precise and inevitable connection between taxation and expenditure, and this year my right hon. and learned Friend showed that, by reducing the Government's spending plans by £3 billion, he was able to take £3 billion off our tax burden. That emphasises another important conclusion that can be drawn from the Budget: stable public finances are essential, but they are not the complete answer to the questions that politicians are asked about public finance.

People are interested first to ensure that our public finances are stable, then they want to know what level of taxation, and therefore expenditure, we choose to operate. That is an important political issue, as it affects the society in which we live, but it is a more important economic issue, as high public spending means high taxes, and high taxes, even in a closed economy, blunt incentives.

It is simply wrong to look at the total share of national income accounted for by taxation and say that it does not matter that, over the past 15 years, we have cut the marginal rates of income tax from 98 per cent. to 40 per cent. and the marginal rates of corporation tax from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent.

There is no more eloquent commentary of the change in Britain in the past 15 years than the fact that when the Government came to power in 1979, a 15 per cent. additional rate of tax was imposed on savings income. This year, for the first time, my right hon. and learned Friend has introduced a special low rate of tax for savings income, reflecting the importance that we place on encouraging people to provide for themselves and invest in their own and society's future.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): At the bottom end of the scale, people on benefit lose £1 in benefit for every £1 they earn. That is a marginal tax rate of 100 per cent. Do the Government have any plans for addressing that?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. Since the reforms introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) in the late 1980s, the replacement ratio no longer exceeds 100 per cent., although it is still quite high.

I am focusing on the incentive to save. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is not interested in the incentive to save as an important part of free and functioning democracy and economy. I welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has able to substitute a lower rate of tax on savings income, whereas, under Labour, savings income used to be called "unearned income", and attracted a special rate of tax.

That is only to look at the effect of marginal tax rates in a closed economy. Our economy is not closed. I am pleased to say that it is one of the most open economies in the world. The tax rates charged by the British Government are part of the burden that any business bears if it chooses to establish or remain in the United Kingdom. It has been of significant advantage to this country that, through the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, we maintained the lowest corporation tax rate of any industrialised nation—a key factor in attracting foreign investment to this country.

The Government are committed to applying that precedent across the whole tax system—not simply to corporation tax—to seek to lead the tax burden imposed by market economies down, to attract investment and activity to this country. That is the significance of the declining trend in terms of the share of national income taken by public expenditure that is set out in the Red Book.

Page 142 presents one of the most dramatic tables included in a Red Book for many a year—five years of public expenditure freeze while at the same time safeguarding the Government's key spending priorities, to allow us to ensure that tax rates in Britain are among the most competitive in the world. The Labour party fails to understand that proposition.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has made himself a laughing stock. On one day, he promises lower tax on investment in business through capital allowances. The next day, he promises lower tax on small businesses through value added tax relief. The day after, he promises a personal tax rate of 10 or 15 per cent. He comes in exactly on cue, but cannot quite work out which it will be. Nevertheless, there will be a personal rate of 10 or 15 per cent. at the same time as capital allowances and VAT relief.

The one thing that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East does seem set on is a special new tax on enterprises that have had a profitable experience. The hon. Gentleman has made himself a laughing stock, particularly as he has been doing that at the same time as Labour's health spokesman, the hon. Member for Peckham, and education

[Mr. Dorrell]

spokesman are hinting at more spending, and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)—making his first appearance on the Front Bench last week to respond to a social security statement—opposed the measures being taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to control social security spending.

If Labour is remotely serious about the interest it affects to show in controlling the growth of the tax burden and bringing it down, it cannot conceivably follow through the commitment announced by its party leader to abstain on this Budget, which starts to show how controlling public expenditure delivers control of the tax burden.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Before the right hon. Gentleman goes so far in condemning incentives in taxation, he should remember that there are certain disincentives. I refer particularly to capital allowances, which are not an incentive but a disincentive. One pays more as a result of capital taxation of allowances than one would with the actual depreciation of the product itself. If one examines the matter sensibly, one sees that the figure is 25 per cent., but that the depreciation is more than that. There is a capital disincentive, and that is a serious matter.

Mr. Dorrell: The right hon. Gentleman appears to be arguing a case with which I entirely agree—that there is a choice to be made between tax shelters for specific activities and high marginal tax rates, and no tax shelters and low marginal tax rates. The Government choose no tax shelters and low marginal tax rates. Labour Front Benchers consistently choose specific tax allowances that must mean high tax rates. The right hon. Gentleman appears to be taking the Government side, and I warmly welcome him in this argument.

The Budget clearly sets out the Government's priorities. We have safeguarded priorities that are important not just to the Government but to the people of this country. We have set aside growth money for health and education, and to allow us to provide a proper but maintainable welfare safety net. We have set aside growth money for the police, and for proper development of our defence forces.

It addresses all these priorities within a public expenditure total which is frozen for five years. It does so at the same time as delivering tax cuts to the hard pressed taxpayers among the British people. The question for the Labour party is whether its members are for or against that strategy. The people of Britain will be watching.

4.24 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): As the practical operation of the rules recently endorsed by the House is still being defined, I think it right to say that I get some help with research costs from Unison.

This Budget fails to deal with the fundamental problems of the British economy. It fails to ensure the investment, the jobs and the fairness that the British people want and the economy needs. The Budget continues the failure and deception that the British people have come to expect from the Tories on health. We believe that the national health service is the best, the most cost-effective and the fairest way for this nation to provide health care for its people. We have set out in our policy document "Renewing the NHS" how this should be done.

The background to this debate are the arguments of the right-wing ideologues, now increasingly setting the pace in the Tory party, who believe that the NHS is a problem that should be got rid of. In his article in the *Sunday Times* a couple of weeks ago, Roy Lilley called the NHS

> "the problem child of the public sector—the rump of the remaining nationalised industries and an overburdened bureaucracy."

But most of those who want to get rid of the NHS are not prepared to speak in such clear terms, because they know what enormous public support the health service commands. Although there are some who will openly argue against the NHS, most of the arguments against it come in code.

The anti-NHS tendency has spawned its own language for this coded message, and no doubt we shall hear some of it from Conservative Members today. We hear it continually from the Government, who talk about the bottomless pit, the infinite demand for health care, the impossible burden of the growing number of elderly people and the greedy demands of new technological developments.

The argument that there is a bottomless pit of demand for health care aims to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, so that people will come to believe that the NHS cannot cope and will thus begin to accept the inevitability of a shrinking national health service and a growing private sector. The anti-NHS brigade want the service cut back to a safety net service, used only by people who cannot afford to go private.

Mr. Dorrell: I should not like the hon. Lady to miss this opportunity to answer the arguments that have been made in this debate. I have answered all her arguments and I agree with her that they are all wrong. What I am interested to know is what she thinks about a Budget which demonstrates that the Government believe those arguments to be wrong and believe in developing the health service within a frozen public expenditure total. That is the question with which she should be dealing—not the views of Mr. Roy Lilley, who, so far as I know, has never sat on the Government Bench.

Ms Harman: The point that the Secretary of State is missing is that there are those who will argue out in the open against the NHS, and there are others, including the right hon. Gentleman, who will implement policies which undermine the NHS. That is what the Secretary of State is doing.

There is no evidence to back up the apocalyptic pronouncements that the NHS cannot cope. It has always worked against a background of steadily rising numbers of elderly people. There has been a 75 per cent. increase in the number of over-75s since 1948. Over the next 20 years, however, the number of elderly will increase by only half the rate of the past 20 years' increase. While some medical advances cost more, some cost less. New techniques can get cheaper over time. We therefore wholly reject the assumption that the NHS is doomed and cannot cope into the next century with the health care needs of the nation.

The Government are pursuing their attack on the NHS in two ways. First, they are privatising its services and blurring the distinction between the NHS and the private sector. On the other hand, they are reducing the scope of the NHS so that more people are forced to go private for more care.

I turn first to the privatisation of the supply side. The latest tool that the Government are using is the privatisation initiative—what they call the NHS private finance initiative. As with so much that they do with the NHS, the Government's position is a web of deception.

Last Tuesday—on the morning of Budget day—the Secretary of State was tearing to television and radio studios to announce the good news of huge new hospital building programmes, to be paid for with private money. During the same day, however, it became clear that that was a smokescreen to obscure the fact that there would be not more hospital building but less. Last year, the Government predicted a 1.4 per cent. cut in the NHS capital programme, but last Tuesday they announced a devastating 17 per cent. cut, with more cuts the following year and the year after that.

Mr. Dorrell *indicated dissent.*

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State shakes his head. I am sure that he is not disagreeing about a 17 per cent. cut. In effect, the Secretary of State said, "Don't worry—private money will fill the gap."

Mr. Dorrell: I disagree with the hon. Lady's characterisation of what has been happening. She asserts that there will be a 17 per cent. cut in the hospital building programme. There is certainly a reallocation of NHS money to patient care, but I do not accept that there will be a cut in the building programme. I believe that the effect of the private finance initiative—I understand that the Leader of the Opposition also believes this—will be to deliver growth in the hospital capital programme.

Ms Harman: We shall come on to what the Secretary of State believes might possibly happen—I am talking about what has actually happened. In the Budget, the NHS capital building programme—our vital hospital building programme—was cut in just one year by 17 per cent. There will be more cuts in the following year and there will be more cuts during the year after that. Those are the practical facts, which the Secretary of State cannot deny.

The Secretary of State says, "Don't worry—everything will be all right because private money will come rushing in to fill the gap." Even if we see the fantastic 242 per cent. increase in private money that the Government are predicting will be available in just one year, it will amount to less than half of NHS capital cuts. We were told last year that private money would top up the NHS capital budget. We find now that that money is to replace public investment, not supplement it. The NHS capital budget is to be stripped out and replaced by private finance.

How real is the prospect of a 242 per cent. increase in private capital for the NHS in just one year? I have read the private finance panel's list of NHS initiatives, which was published by the Treasury last week. It tells a different story from what the Secretary of State would have us believe. Of the 53 NHS projects listed by the panel, only one has reached the financial close stage. The list makes it clear that 80 per cent. have not yet even reached bids in or negotiation stages. Six projects have not been formally announced to the private sector as partnership projects.

The Secretary of State is able to make announcements that he is not about to produce money to compensate for the cuts that the Government have made. If the previous so-called success rate of NHS PFI projects is maintained, we shall see not a 242 per cent. increase in private finance but one of 15 per cent. That means that the announcements made last Tuesday will spell a £303 million cut in the hospital building programme in just one year.

The Tory promises of new building are merely castles in the air. They will not lead to the building of hospitals. Indeed, the private finance panel has revealed that there is an A list of projects and a B list. The B list includes projects such as an extension at the Royal Brompton hospital. Also in the B list is a new hospital for the Hereford NHS trust. Also on the B list is a new hospital at Dartford and Gravesham. That is not a prioritisation which reflects the projects that the Government think are most important or most needed in the public interest.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Ms Harman: It is simply the private finance panel putting on the A list the projects to which it will devote most attention because they are more likely to attract private capital. It is quite wrong for the Government, who seem unable to say what their priorities are for capital building in the NHS—they are unable to answer that question—to abdicate their responsibility for deciding priorities in the private sector. That is what has happened, and all the hospitals which desperately need capital work but are on the B list will want to know why.

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Ms Harman: That highlights another problem for the NHS, because, with the capital budget slashed, the only place to which hospitals can turn for money is the private sector, and the private sector will be able to dictate the terms. We have always argued that, where private capital can serve the public interest in public services, it should do so, but we have always made it clear that the NHS must not be privatised. It is totally unacceptable that the Government are going down the path whereby not only will the private sector own the land and the buildings but it will run the hospital and employ the staff.

The Secretary of State has said—he makes this conditional, of course—that in the overwhelming majority of cases he will stop short of privatising clinical services, but that is all code and a smokescreen because he refuses to say what he means by "clinical services". It is a moving boundary. He has already made it clear that he does not think that anaesthesia, radiography, chiropody and pathology are clinical services, because he is already putting them out to market testing. In Scotland, the Stonehaven hospital contract is to include the private sector running the hospital and employing the staff.

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: Those who work in our hospitals know, as we do, that the health care team needs to work together as a team. When a patient arriving at hospital finds that the receptionist, admissions officer, radiographer and blood-testing pathologist are all employed by, for example, a Swiss company and not the NHS, the Secretary of State

[Ms Harman]

will have destroyed the ethos of the NHS. Even where the doctor and nurse are still employed by the NHS, they will be like strangers in a private hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady said that I did not define what I meant by clinical and clinical support services. I happily concede that all the services that she describes are clinical and clinical support services. I have made that clear many times before. I hope that the hon. Lady will also make it clear that the documents on market testing underline the fact that those services can be secured other than from NHS employees only where there is clinical support for such a change. That was set out clearly in the market testing documents and it is set out equally clearly in all the documents surrounding the private finance initiative.

Ms Harman: When patients arrive at the hospital and find that the receptionist, the admissions clerk and the pathologist are all employed by a private company, they will know that this is not the NHS as they want it to be or as it used to be, and that it will have been privatised. The Secretary of State constantly tries to define conditions that he can then meet so as to justify his creeping privatisation, but people in this country know precisely what he is up to, and they are not in the least fooled by it. They know that with this fragmentation, the NHS health care team will be destroyed.

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: Let me make it absolutely clear that there is no difference in the position that I am taking and the one taken by my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor or my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. Under the Tories, private finance is intended not to top up the public purse but to replace it. It is not a public-private partnership but a private takeover. It is not a private finance initiative, but a privatisation initiative. The Tories are not only privatising the supply side of the NHS—

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) may find it frustrating, but it is clear that the hon. Lady is not giving way to him.

Ms Harman: I would have expected the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) to intervene during the speech by the Secretary of State and to ask why his hospital's private finance project was on the B list. He probably did not even know about it. The B list is secret and the hon. Gentleman will have some explaining to do.

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: Not only are the Tories privatising the supply side of the NHS—

Mr. Arnold: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady referred earlier to my hospital and she has now referred to it again, yet she does not have the courage to give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Ms Harman: If the hon. Member for Gravesham catches your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that he can stick up for his hospital and for the patients in his constituency, his constituents will be delighted and astonished. It would certainly make a change.

The Tories are not only privatising the supply side of the NHS but pushing more and more people out of the NHS into the private sector. We have already seen what happened to NHS dentistry. First, charges were pushed up so high that one could not tell whether one was on the NHS or going private; secondly, there were fewer and fewer dentists doing NHS work so one had to go private. It has been the same story with long-term care.

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene to ask me about his hospital, I will give way and then tell him about it.

Mr. Arnold: The hon. Lady referred to the replacement hospital for the Dartford and Gravesham area which is on the list for the PFI. Is she aware that four major consortiums are bidding to build that hospital? Does she support the PFI for that purpose? If not, does she have a commitment from the shadow Chancellor to put up £100 million to build the hospital in one phase, which is what all the consortiums want to do? What is more, they would build the hospital in the correct place—Darenth park—which the NHS would not have done.

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to have understood what has happened in the Budget. He talks about his hopes for his hospital, but I can tell him two things today. First, the chances of any hospital getting capital work done on it are reduced as a result of the Budget and the cuts in NHS capital funding. Secondly, although the hon. Gentleman's hospital is on the private finance panel's list of NHS-PFI projects, it is not on the A list but on the B list, which means lower priority. The hon. Gentleman should complain to the Secretary of State about the fact that his hospital is on the B list in the endless search for private finance.

It has been the same story with long-term care, as my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) mentioned. The Budget announcement on long-term care is an inadequate response which is designed to hide the Government's betrayal of a generation of elderly people. The Budget announcement will not stop elderly people having to sell their homes to pay for long-term residential care. Even the Secretary of State has not been able to claim that. The announcement is a quick short-term reaction to a long-term problem which the Government have helped to create and which they have failed to address.

With the average house worth £67,000, the new £16,000 capital disregard will not safeguard the homes of elderly people who believed that they had been promised care from the cradle to the grave. It will not remove elderly people's fear of losing almost everything that they have worked for a lifetime to build up and which the Prime Minister told them they could pass on to their children.

Ms Eagle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Back Bencher, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), to consult the civil servants' Box, presumably about his hospital?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair has no knowledge of what any hon. Member is consulting anybody about. Such consultation is, however, unusual.

Ms Harman: The hon. Member for Gravesham is trying to find out why his hospital is on the B list and why he was never told about that. I will tell him why his hospital is on the B list. The priorities are dictated not by the Government in the public interest, but by the private finance panel according to where it can most quickly find private sector money. The hon. Gentleman can save himself asking the civil servants in the Box about the Government; he should go to the private finance panel and ask it. That panel is, of course, not here.

Without clear national guidelines—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gravesham is clearly in some difficulty; he does not know what is going on and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not told him. I undertake to talk to the hon. Gentleman afterwards and to explain fully what the private finance panel is doing with his hospital. I realise that he is a desperate man, and rightly so, but he is not so desperate as his constituents, who see him supporting a Government who have let them down.

Without clear national guidelines—

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would desist.

Without clear national guidelines, people with assets above the new threshold will still pay for care which may be free in other parts of the country. Under the Conservatives, where one lives determines the care that one gets and the price that one pays.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The hon. Lady has just said that the doubling of the disregard for contributions to residential care is inadequate. To what level would the Opposition raise the disregard and how much would that cost?

Ms Harman: I am grateful that the Chancellor is asking me for advice; he has at least learnt something. The question on his Budget that he has to answer is how many of the elderly people who fear that the lifetime savings that they have accumulated and invested in their homes will disappear because they have to go into residential care will no longer have to worry about that. The answer is that his Budget at least recognised that there was a problem, but it failed to address it and that is what we charge the Chancellor with today. If he is asking us to produce a Budget, let him call a general election, after which we shall sit on the other side of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) will deliver our Budget.

Mr. Clarke: I have made it clear what we would do; it is what we have done. We have doubled the disregard at considerable public expense. I stand condemned by the hon. Lady, who says that the disregard is not good enough and does not satisfy her or elderly people. It follows perfectly logically that if we had a credible Opposition the hon. Lady would say what the disregard should be. She would have calculated how much it would cost and she would have got the permission of the shadow Chancellor, who is sitting alongside her, to say how much it would cost. It is clear that the hon. Lady has no more idea than the shadow Chancellor as to what the Opposition's policy is on this or on anything else.

Ms Harman: The Chancellor is trying to make—

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With reference to the previous point of order, the House should note that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has received a paper from the civil servants' Box. Surely that is an abuse of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Fortunately, this Deputy Speaker does not have eyes in the back of his head.

Ms Harman: The Chancellor has recognised that there is anger and concern throughout the country about elderly people who would previously have got long-term residential care without having to sell their homes to pay for it. The Prime Minister promised that there would be a cascade of wealth down the generations, but that promise has been broken. The Chancellor said that he would address that problem in his Budget. I am here at the Dispatch Box today to say that he has not done so and that the Government have failed to keep their promise to address the problems that they helped to create.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I understand the hon. Lady's point about seeking more resources for community care and for hospital building, but in that case why will she and her colleagues not vote tomorrow against the Government's proposal to cut the rate of basic tax by a penny in the pound?

Ms Harman: We shall vote against the Budget because it has no vision, no direction and no strategy. We have tabled an amendment, and the hon. Gentleman is welcome to vote for it. Our proposals would deliver investment, jobs and fairness. On the cut of one penny in the pound, we are saying that people have suffered enough. One of the things that they have suffered is broken promises.

The next great engine of privatisation is rationing in the national health service. When people cannot obtain what they need on the NHS, they have to go without that treatment or they are forced to pay for it and go private. It is no good protesting, as many Conservatives do, about the word "rationing", because some local health authorities are calling it that. Rationing varies from authority to authority. That is why Sandy Macara, chairman of the British Medical Association, has said that access to treatment is becoming a national lottery.

What one can get on the NHS increasingly depends on where one lives. Rationing—that is, excluding treatment under the NHS—is taking hold at local level so that one now has to be careful where one gets ill. Do not get the menopause in west Kent, as there are to be no specialist menopause services there. Do not get brittle bones in west Dorset, as there is to be no osteoporosis screening there. Do not get infected wisdom teeth in Hertfordshire or Kingston and Richmond. Do not get glue ear in the Isle of Wight, because it has declared itself a grommet-free zone.

The NHS is becoming a lottery, but there is a pattern. Rationing starts with those operations which are the most controversial, such as gender transformation, sterilisation reversal and abortion, but that is just the thin end of the wedge. The Government seek to establish the rationing process with the less popular procedures. Having gained acceptability for the inevitability of the rationing process, they can then swiftly move on to other treatments. Yesterday it was grommets and fertility treatment; today it is varicose veins and osteoporosis screening; tomorrow it will be hernias and hip replacements.

Mr. Rowe: I have often heard the hon. Lady say that what treatment one receives depends on where one lives, but most of the other members of her party's Front Bench

[Mr. Rowe]

team are hell bent on achieving local government reorganisation and devolution in varying ways, which presupposes that the various units will be allowed to choose their priorities. Therefore, in almost every other element of service, whether it be social services or whatever, the hon. Lady supports a policy that will lead to differences of provision depending on where one lives.

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman is muddling two distinct things. We are saying that it is wrong for managers, area by area, to issue edicts which simply chop different national health service treatments off the list of what they provide locally. When the Secretary of State defends rationing, he often tries to imply, as he did again in the House today, that the removal of treatments from the NHS is part of the drive for clinical effectiveness. It is nothing of the sort.

Of course medical practice changes and the pace of change is accelerating. That means that we must have evaluation of treatments and dissemination of information, agreeing best practice, ensuring that clinicians are properly trained and kept up to date using new technology, and monitoring practice, doctor by doctor and hospital by hospital. But the prime reason for ensuring best practice is because it is in the interests of the patients.

That is the key issue. We are arguing for best practice in the interests of patients; the Government are using the argument of clinical effectiveness as a smokescreen behind which they allow managers at local level to chop services altogether.

Sir David Mitchell (North-West Hampshire): Is the hon. Lady not aware that fundholding doctors can choose where to send their patients, so if certain services are restricted in one region and available in another, fundholding doctors can make use of that to send their patients to such regions for their benefit?

Ms Harman: Before the Government introduced the internal market, all general practitioners were able to refer their patients to whichever hospital they thought was most convenient or would provide the treatment best suited to the patient's condition. Since the Government introduced the internal market and contract system, only GP fundholders have that freedom for referral.

On bureaucracy, it is ironic that rationing and assertions about what the national health service can no longer afford to do should come at a time when there seems to be a bottomless pit, an infinite demand for spending on bureaucracy. Earlier, the Secretary of State took some time talking about extra resources, but look where the money is going: it is going into the bottomless pit of NHS bureaucracy that the Government have created.

Three more things are driving the engine of bureaucracy into the national health service. First, if more GPs become fundholders, that is an extra £80,000 per practice on administration and every hospital will have to do more administration to deal with dozens of different purchases. Secondly, if local pay bargaining becomes a reality, as the Government wish, there will have to be new and enlarged personnel departments in every NHS trust to deal with that. Thirdly, having been told that there is no longer any money left in the NHS capital budget, NHS managers will have to spend thousands of hours trooping around different private consortia trying to obtain private money for capital projects.

The cost of the internal market is already an extra £1.5 billion per year on administration. When people see the Government pouring billions of pounds into national health service bureaucracy, why should anyone accept that the NHS cannot afford to give them the treatment that their doctor says they need?

The Secretary of State's recent conversion to what he describes as bureau-scepticism is a sham. I understand that he has announced a new efficiency scrutiny team, which I believe is a sort of quangoette. Even if he were to achieve cuts of 5 per cent. in bureaucracy, that would not even take bureaucracy spending back to where it was in 1992-93. There are more people to count the cost of treatment and fewer people to provide it. That is one of the reasons why we opposed the introduction of the internal market and why we remain committed to ending it.

Any discussion of what the NHS can or cannot afford must not proceed without being accompanied by discussion of the social and economic costs of the alternatives to the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady just said that she was committed to ending the internal market. The document that her party issued in June made it abundantly clear, first, that the purchaser-provider split would be maintained and, secondly, that purchasers would be free to choose where their supply arrangements were placed. Those are the key characteristics of the internal market. If the hon. Lady is throwing that policy document over, she had better announce what she intends to put in its place.

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State is being entirely misleading. Before the internal market was introduced, it was always the case that people had freedom of referral. We have said that there needs to be autonomy for local hospitals and a planning process, but he fails to understand that we are against the internal market not only because of its unfairness, with one purchaser having advantage over another, but because of the huge transaction costs.

Mr. Dorrell: This is an important point. That document says that we should maintain separate purchasers and providers and leave in the hands of purchasers the freedom to place their supply arrangements where they think the advantage of their local communities lies. That is what an internal market is. Is the hon. Lady for or against that?

Ms Harman: That document makes it clear—the right hon. Gentleman can buy another copy as he has not read the first one sensibly—that different roles are necessary. One is the planning role; another is running the hospital and prioritising need, patient by patient, as it arises. We are in no confusion about what we are proposing and neither are the British people, who have always been against the commercialisation and fragmentation of the NHS as they have dealt with it. Those people want us to renew it according to our plans.

The Secretary of State is having difficulty understanding our plans. Let me tell him that the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing and a host of other organisations not only understand what is in those plans, but see completely the difference between the position now and our proposals. They welcome our proposals.

On the alternative to the NHS, many Tory right-wing ideologues propose that we cannot afford the NHS and that we must have more and more going into the private sector, but we are not saying that we cannot afford the NHS. On the contrary, we cannot afford to let the NHS dwindle. That would impose a massive burden on business as the demand for private health care gave rise to a demand on employers for private health insurance. If the engine of exclusion of treatments and limiting of the NHS goes ahead, employers will have to provide private health insurance and bit by bit responsibility for health care provision will pass from the state not to individuals but to employers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: That is why we are providing more money.

Ms Harman: The Chancellor is heckling again. He says that that is why the Government are providing more money, but that money is going straight into a bottomless pit because the Government's internal market has created an incessant and infinite demand for bureaucracy, which they are feeding.

There has been a significant increase in private provision. Over the past 15 years the number of private hospital beds has increased by 66 per cent. while over the same period the number of NHS acute hospital beds has fallen by 28 per cent. The Secretary of State has a simple defence to our charge of privatisation: he buries his head in the sand and when there is anything dreadful happening he says that he does not know about it. I am compiling a list of things that the Secretary of State does not know and I invite my hon. Friends to mention those that I have missed.

I asked the Secretary of State what clinical services he plans to protect from privatisation under the private finance initiative. He does not know, although he coined the dividing line for the PFI in the NHS. He does not know, or will not say, what is or is not a clinical service. I asked him how many NHS chief executives earn more than £100,000. He does not know, although he has said that he intends to cut spending on bureaucracy. I asked him why people waiting for hip replacements in the constituency of his Minister of State have to wait longer if their GP is not a fundholder, but he did not know that that was the case. Apparently it came to him as a complete surprise.

I asked the Secretary of State what NHS services are being rationed in each area, but he did not know anything about that either. He says that he does not know what the NHS is or is not providing. That will continue in future as the relentless engine of privatisation and cuts rolls on and as the Tory right bays for the blood of the NHS. The Secretary of State has a perfect defence: he does not know—he sees no evil and he hears no evil. But all the while the language is being groomed. I have a secret Department of Health memo from the London briefing unit which says that, in the context of Bart's hospital, some "presentational nuances" need to be addressed. It reminds everyone in the Department of Health:

> "The Minister of Health does not wish to see references to the closure of Bart's . . . maintaining that Ministers have never said that Bart's will close."

It is the site that is to close. It turns out that there is a Government plan to close Bart's but that no one is to refer to it.

The Minister refuses to answer questions and to deal honestly with the issues because he fears to face the British people and admit what he is up to. We must never forget where the British people stand on these issues. The Government's agenda for change has failed because it lacks the legitimacy afforded by public support. People support the drive for clinical effectiveness, for prioritising urgent cases on waiting lists, and for planning to anticipate local demand for health care, but they do not like what the Tories are up to in the NHS and they do not trust them.

A Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph* last month showed that 84 per cent. of voters are concerned that under the Government the NHS might no longer be a good service freely available to all. A *British Medical Journal* survey of patients said that, when patients were asked to rank treatments in order of priority:

> "No interviewee was fully persuaded that the process of rationing . . . should happen at all."

Put simply, that means that people believe that the argument about rationing is a trap. They do not want to collude in an exercise that will result in health care need not being met.

The BMJ survey also states:

> "In general, interviewees were more comfortable justifying their opinions on the basis of the needs of others."

That highlights one of the most important aspects of the NHS in our society. It is one of the few things in this divided Tory Britain that we all still share. After a decade and a half of Tory rule, there is precious little in our society representing our shared values and concerns for one another. The NHS is a unique and extraordinary institution. Over the past 16 years the Tories have plotted to undermine it. It has not been safe in Tory hands, but it has been safe in the hands of the British people and it will remain so until Labour gets into government to renew it.

5.5 pm

Sir David Mitchell (North-West Hampshire): The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) appears to be unable to see the benefits of the Government's reforms of the national health service. For patients these have meant that the average waiting time for non-urgent operations has come down from nine months to five months. There have been substantial benefits for my constituents and those of other hon. Members.

Front-Bench spokesmen have dealt with the health aspects of the Budget, but the Budget's provisions go much wider than that and I wish to address those wider issues. The House will know that my family includes my hon. and filial Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Andrew Mitchell). But this is not the first father and son sequence in Parliament in my family. My twice great grandfather represented South Northumberland from 1837 to 1841 and his son represented Newcastle from 1852 to 1856. On 25 April 1853 he spoke in the Budget debate, which at that time was sensibly held in the spring. The *Hansard* record states:

> "His constituents also regretted the postponement of the period when they might look forward to an abatement of the income tax, and especially for some alleviation of the severity with which that tax pressed upon precarious incomes."

[Sir David Mitchell]

At that time, income tax was 7p in the pound for those with incomes of more than £150. If my predecessor were here today he would join me in thanking my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for doing just what he asked—bringing relief to those on low incomes. That brings me to my first major point in the debate—the Budget's effect on motivation.

I calculate that about 200,000 more people will now not pay income tax as a result of the Budget. That is important to an enormous number of people who are hesitating between drawing benefit and taking employment. I am grateful to the Chancellor for taking a decisive step that will make it worth while for people to seek employment. How much will a married man with no children be able to earn before he pays income tax?

In the context of motivation, 6 million people will now pay income tax at only 20 per cent. According to my calculations that is a quarter of all taxpayers. That is a substantial achievement for which the country is greatly indebted to the Chancellor. Of course all taxpayers are also better off by 1p in the pound.

According to the media, some of my hon. Friends have fallen for leading questions asking for bigger cuts. The Chancellor was absolutely right not to go for large and startling decreases in income tax because of the effect that such cuts would have on sterling. Sterling is important for its effect on the cost of our imports. An increase in import prices is inflationary. Imports of semi-finished goods, which are completed in this country and then re-exported, are affected by a fall in sterling, making our exports less competitive.

Had my right hon. and learned Friend gone along that road of dramatic tax reductions, the weakness of sterling would have inhibited him from being able to make reductions in interest rates. Nothing is more important for small businesses at present than the Chancellor having the scope and opportunity to ease interest rates in the coming months. A reduction of 1 per cent. in interest rates would mean that a house owner with a £60,000 mortgage would save £600 a year, but that is not the point that I want to make. I wish to refer instead to small businesses.

Small and new businesses are the greatest job creators of the decade. In the past four years, some 500,000 new jobs have been created in this country. Those jobs have been created overwhelmingly by small and new businesses, not by existing large companies. More of our people in this country are in work than in any other major EC country. That is partly due to our small businesses, and I wish to cover three points of importance to such businesses.

First, the motivation for someone to start a business is that he wants to be able to a make success of it. When he has made a success of the business, he will be concerned with whether the Government are going to take away in tax an inordinate amount of his profits, and thus reduce his motivation.

Secondly, one cannot expand a business without internal finance, and I therefore welcome the reductions in corporation tax as it applies to small businesses. The reductions bring us to a point where we have the lowest corporation tax on small firms of any country in the EC.

Even more important is that we have low inflation, a point which many hon. Members have not fully appreciated. High inflation erodes the resources within a business, and I shall give one example to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. If inflation is at 20 per cent., a modest-sized engineering factory with £100,000-worth of work in progress has to pay the first £20,000 of its profits at the end of the year simply and solely to provide for the same volume of work in progress in the ensuing year. What are the company's competitors doing in countries with lower rates of inflation? They are putting that money into research, development, modernisation, expansion and investment in business and growth.

It is very important for the small business community—indeed, for the whole business community—that inflation levels do not pre-empt the money that a business has available for the useless purpose of simply providing for the same volume of stock. Low inflation enables firms to expand, and we are now seeing the effect of the best run for 50 years in terms of keeping inflation down to reasonable levels.

We should recognise the debilitating effect of inflation, which reached 26.9 per cent. during the period in office of the previous Government. The effect on the business community of that was horrific, and firms were unable to expand. We are now seeing the growth of firms, and an increase in employment which follows from that. After motivation, the second vital need for small businesses is the available resources within a business for expansion. Hence, I welcome the reduction in corporation tax.

The third thing that small businesses need is a reduction in the cost of complying with regulations. I welcome the announcement in the Budget that tax law is to be rewritten in plain English, and I look forward to seeing the benefits of that. I wish my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor good fortune in seeking to carry out that task. It would certainly be a valuable move. There are far too many burdens on small businesses and far too many regulations with which businesses must comply. Far too much is also churned out by Brussels, and the compliance costs for small businesses have been under-recognised.

I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has been able to permit the Newbury bypass to go ahead unscathed on the edge of my constituency. I am sure that, if the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) were in the Chamber, he would join me in welcoming that decision.

I welcome the measures on police expenditure, which will provide for 5,000 extra officers, and I was delighted that the Chancellor referred to closed circuit television in terms of security. The House may be interested to know that in the City of London—which has a significant number of closed circuit television surveillance cameras—there has been a 37 per cent. fall in the level of crime. I was particularly delighted that the Chancellor announced that the number of closed circuit television surveillance cameras elsewhere would be increased by 10,000 in the coming year.

I note with pleasure that some 50 per cent. more in real terms over and above the level of inflation has been spent on education per child since the Conservative Government came to office. Hampshire county council ought to be well pleased with the Budget in that respect, since it is to receive a £22 million increase in its standard spending assessment for education during the coming year. I notice that the council will get some £30 million extra from the business rate and from the revenue support grant. That should go a long way towards finding the £22 million for education that it needs.

On health, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health referred this afternoon to the £1 billion more funding available. However, I have a serious point that I want to put to my right hon. Friend about the effects of the national lottery. The Chancellor has recognised that the lottery has some side effects, and he made some concessions to those in the gambling industry who have been adversely affected. But my right hon. and learned Friend has not recognised the effect that the lottery is having on people-caring charities, whose income has been reduced—according to a recent survey—by one third since the lottery was introduced.

The survey reports that, although there are about 800 people-caring charities, only four grants have been made by the national lottery to such charities. That leaves some 796 charities worse off. That is a very important factor in terms of health care, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to interest himself in the matter, which has serious implications. The voluntary aspect of NHS activities—including mental health services and a range of other activities—is backed, sustained and supported by charities, particularly smaller people-caring charities. I urge my right hon. Friend to take a close interest in the matter. When the Finance Bill is brought forward, my right hon. and learned Friend might perhaps consider an amendment to try to deal with the problem in a practical way.

Finally, I wish to refer to the help to be provided in the Bills dealing with residential and nursing homes. I understand that everyone with less than £10,000 of savings will be cared for by the state, but we have an aging population and we must ask ourselves how long we can afford to do that. There is also a problem that those who have savings of just over £10,000 may seek to blow their savings before they get to the age at which they need nursing care. I was delighted to see the proposal to exempt from tax benefits on insurance policies for long-term care. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to consider more generous state provision for those who have undertaken insurance cover to look after themselves with nursing care for three years.

If people who have undertaken that provision happen to live longer, it might be appropriate for the Government to come in with support. Such people have demonstrated by paying into an insurance policy their determination to do something for themselves. The Government could support them for the balance of their lifetime.

I support the Budget because it improves motivation throughout the economy, helps the birth and growth of small businesses and new businesses, holds inflation down with the prospect of some cuts in interest rates, and gives the right priorities to spending on education, health and the police.

May I whimsically quote my forebear from *Hansard* in 1853. The record says:

> "Taking the Budget as a whole, he had no hesitation in saying that it was beneficial and satisfactory . . . and with regard to his own constituents, he believed they were almost prepared to say"—

as I am—

> "The Budget, the whole Budget, and nothing but the Budget.'"

5.20 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): I cannot greet the Budget with quite the enthusiasm that the hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell) expressed. Before the Secretary of State leaves, I should like, as chairman of the all-party mental health group, to thank him for what he said about community care for the mentally ill. Obviously, the publication of the report on the health authorities is awaited with great interest. The Secretary of State will be aware that the Government will be examined, first, for the realism with which they describe the present situation, which is still inadequate, and, secondly, for the adequacy of the actions that they propose to take. It is against those factors that his announcement of increased resources will be judged.

As the Secretary of State said in response to my intervention, many other problems affecting the mentally ill do not fall within his departmental responsibility. I hope that we can rely on the co-operation of the Department of Health, with other Departments, to determine what overall developments are needed in the service.

I should like to examine two tasks at the extremes of the Budget debate. The first is coping with structural changes in employment, and the supply, of and demand for skills. The current levels of unemployment are intolerable. A test of any Budget is what it does about jobs. The second task is keeping the economy stable on a path of sustainable growth. Party rhetoric from both Government and Opposition suggests that doing so, is merely a matter of will, but it is a difficult task. The success that we have achieved and that is achievable is limited. Avoidable mistakes have undoubtedly been made. I should like to suggest how the likelihood of such mistakes could be reduced.

On jobs, it is not possible to shift from a situation in which only 3 per cent. of the population go to university to one in which 30 per cent. do so without a huge change in the nature of the work done by people with different types of qualifications. If the skilled operator of a most sophisticated new piece of equipment—say, a computerised DNA sequencing machine in a pharmaceutical industrial research department or a local authority public health department—requires only a four-week training course, the pattern of training for the future will not recognise the old-fashioned segmentation into craft, technician and professional grades.

It is a cop-out simply to say that those huge changes in the labour market can be taken care of by market mechanisms. We are all in the job market. Perhaps some hon. Members will return to it sooner than they would wish. As market operators, we want to know what to do. Union bashing is irrelevant—indeed, counter-productive. The unions can be and have been at times most helpful agents in assisting their members to find the information they need to become qualified and the jobs for which they are suited.

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

It is equally a cop-out simply to say that public money should be made available to provide the resources needed to meet palpable needs, without seeing whether that strategy and the particular measures proposed take us into still more acute imbalances in local economies, in particular skills or in the wider economy. My plea is that we should look at the labour market to determine the actual demands and the resources needed to meet them.

One can take almost any source. The job advertisement section of the *New Scientist* this week discussed

> "the structural changes which are taking place—flatter organisations, the need to manage one's own career and perhaps pay for one's own training."

The lead-in article says:

> "The certainty that a career will not be spent with one single employer or even in a single area of work, makes it essential for employees to adapt continuously to change throughout their careers. There is an increasing probability that people will be self-employed at some time. Self reliance is the key which will enable people to cope with such situations. Skills which will be paramount in the future include self-confidence and self-promotion, action planning, networking, negotiation, political awareness and coping with uncertainty. The top five skills listed by employers as in short supply among graduates were business awareness, communication skills, leadership, teamwork and problem solving. These were followed by conceptual ability, knowledge and competence in an academic discipline, foreign languages and numeracy."

That is scarcely the order in which the trainers and educators of the world would rank their priorities. Perhaps that quotation is just so much management consultants' waffle, but versions of it appear in, for example, the recent observations of the Select Committee on Science and Technology when looking into human genetics and its immense impact on the future of the health service and many other matters. We noticed that the difference in the speed with which services would develop in biotechnology depended on the speed of start-up of new enterprises. That in turn is influenced by the different attitudes to entrepreneurship among biotechnologists in California and Britain.

The organisation of actual work on the ground in the construction is rapidly changing. The skills listed in the *New Scientist* are needed not only in supervisors but in a high proportion of labour-only contracting craftsmen, who nowadays have to manage their activity on the building site.

All that the Budget has done is adjust some of the parameters around the edges of the labour market. It has not taken the point that if the main body of the labour market functioned better, there would be fewer problems around the edge. The Chancellor proposes 100 per cent. inheritance tax relief for unquoted shares in trading companies—good for the family firm, no doubt—more favourable treatment of employee share schemes, private insurance of health and mortgage protection and workfare schemes.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): The hon. Gentleman is a fair-minded and thoughtful Member. Does he accept that he perhaps seeks to attach to any Budget more weight than it can bear—that the answers to some of the important questions that he asks about the labour market require supply-side policy changes at the micro-economic level?

Dr. Bray: Indeed they do. They require supply-side changes, but in a wider sense than is customarily used by the Government and their supporters. The Government identify the supply side merely with paying more to the wealthy and less to the poor. Income distribution is not the end of supply-side measures. We see the supply side as practical investment in education and training, plant and machinery, the physical infrastructure, and so on. That is the supply side, and it certainly needs attention. A great deal of the Government's budgetary argument was directed at that. There was practically nothing about the macro-economy.

I was about to welcome the limited measures acting on the labour market in general that the Chancellor announced. On the main body of the Budget, however, the reduction in employer's national insurance contributions and tax relief for vocational training for trainees over 30 are welcome but do not begin to tackle the wider problem.

A coherent labour market strategy would consider the transitions and frictions of job and skill changes and find where the tax, benefit and grants systems need to be adjusted at points before people lose their jobs. Neither the Government nor the Opposition are opposed to such an approach in principle, but it has to be tackled more systemically if unemployment is to be reduced from its present intolerable levels and the overall productivity and competitiveness of the economy are to be raised.

I put first the argument for supply-side measures, indeed, for structural measures, to make the point that I do not believe that simply pulling the macro-economic levers of fiscal and monetary policy is sufficient as an economic policy. Nevertheless, the levers are important, and the quality of debate in the House on macro-economic policy has become quite abysmal. We heard virtually nothing of it from the Chancellor. In his Budget statement, he had nothing to say about the exchange rate. The words were not even mentioned in his statement—I checked that carefully this morning. He had nothing to say about the relationships between borrowing, debt, income and inflation, about which we used to hear so much in the 1980s from successive Conservative Chancellors.

If I may try to repair some of the omissions from the Chancellor's speech, I observe that we may or may not enter the economic and monetary union in 1999, 2002 or whenever. That is probably the most important economic question that the Government will face in the next year. The Chancellor had nothing at all to say about it, and we can guess why—because it would be acutely embarrassing to his hon. Friends on the Back Benches and to the Prime Minister. Whatever happens, and whatever are the views of hon. Members about the appropriate policy to adopt at the intergovernmental conference, we have to conduct our own monetary and fiscal policy in an international context. We have to pursue objectives on inflation, borrowing and debt and we cannot ignore the exchange rate.

As for the EMU, satisfactory convergence is not simply a matter of hitting the targets by a qualifying date or even of establishing satisfactory progress on convergence in the real economy; it is a matter of demonstrating that we can prosper under a set of rules by which policy will respond to shocks coming from within the European economy or from outside. Whether we enter the EMU or not, we have to formulate some such rules. The Chancellor is operating with a transitional set of rules which were adopted the day after black Wednesday, and they have not been significantly developed or explained since. We remain totally vulnerable to the next major crisis and need a system to warn of the onset of such a crisis.

The recent first report of the European Monetary Institute focuses attention on the issue. On page 72, in discussing the lines of a monetary policy strategy for stage 3 of economic and monetary union, it states:

> "An inflation targeting strategy has been adopted by a number of EU countries in recent years . . . the approach is to focus directly on expected future inflation. This involves the use of a wide range of available indicators to arrive at a projection of inflation in the future. Monetary policy is then set so as to be consistent with the achievement of price stability as defined by the target."

That statement clearly bears the mark of a UK draftsman, because there is a similar passage on page 16 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" describing the Government's inflation targeting policy. Whether one asks the Government or the European Monetary Institute, one has to ask how those projections of the expected rate of inflation are to be made and how they are to be responded to. One then gets into rather difficult territory.

When people talk about numbers, they use models of some sort. Of course, the full range of argument will be used, from chicken livers, through the backs of envelopes and the learned writings of the economic pundits in the press, to the full-blown national economy models supported by the Economic and Social Research Council. One fairly firm conclusion that emerges from the most careful studies of the latter is that there is a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability about the process, and that the limits of the extent to which it is possible to stabilise economies are rather wide. Within those limits, severe mistakes have been made in the past which could have been avoided by better analysis and by paying more attention to the analyses that were made.

Perhaps the most important mistake made in recent years was the response of Government policy to the stock exchange crash in 1987, from which the Government and the country are still suffering—they are suffering not from the crash but from the Government's mistaken response in over-inflating the economy in the run-up to the general election.

At present, inside or outside the Treasury and the Bank of England, there is no systematic, sustained representation of fiscal or monetary policy strategies or regimes. I repeat: there is no sustained picture anywhere in the country of the monetary strategy that is pursued, yet such a description is well within the capacity of the current state of the art and of current technology. Even the exploration of possible regimes is intermittent, episodic, ad hoc, haphazard and either superficial or laborious to carry out, so the month-to-month briefings required, whether for the Chancellor's meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England, for meetings of the European Council of Ministers or for meetings elsewhere, cannot have the support of up-to-date, comprehensive analysis.

This is true in respect of UK policy instruments on their own and still more so in respect of the international game, with objectives differing between different agents, such as between central banks and Finance Ministries or between Government and the labour market—even within a country, never mind between countries.

Of all the countries in the European Union, the UK is the best equipped technically to carry such work, because of its long tradition of economic research, going back hundreds of years in Britain, which has been kept up to date by the continuing efforts of British economists. Despite the much-maligned work of those economists in their attempts to design and monitor strategies, their work has not been organised by the consortium of the ESRC, the Treasury and the Bank of England in such a way as to come up with coherent answers.

Despite the recent funding round 4 of the consortium, under which the Economic and Social Research Council, with the support of the Treasury and the Bank of England, renewed its support for the national economy models, the work is still not organised to produce coherent economic strategies of the sort needed to design and appraise—let alone implement and monitor—the policies needed as we explore the next stages of development of the European Union. That work is well within the capacity of the state of the art and the scope of available technology using the resources that the Government have already committed to the consortium directly from the Treasury and the Bank and indirectly from the ESRC.

There is an a urgent need to review the programme. That is made easier by the fact that there has been a large departure of staff from the forecasting teams. Staff are having to reappraise their work and their priorities. That turnover is not necessarily bad in itself, because that kind of economic research is a young person's game. It is hard work and technically very demanding, so a high turnover is only natural. The ESRC should be examined and organised, so that the urgent priorities of policy that underlie our economic strategies can be better addressed.

We have not made things easier by the way in which, as political workmen, we have blamed our tools. We would do better to put some effort into understanding the arguments and into debating them in the House. We should realise that uncertain forecasts are the beginning, and not the end, of an intelligent design of economic strategy. Under a good strategy, policy evolves with the passage of time in response to changing needs and circumstances. This theme is not new for me in Budget debates, nor is it one on which there has been no movement in the past, but the benefits of further movement would be great.

5.40 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I shall begin as I think will become customary in such debates—by declaring my interests as they appear in the Register of Members' Interests. For the avoidance of doubt, they are the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Salomon Brothers International plc and HFC Bank plc.

The debate has been notable, apart from the opening speeches, for how low-key it has become. It is becoming so low-key that it is almost off the keyboard. I wondered whether to start with a joke, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) did recently, before his elevation to the Front Bench, to liven things up. I heard a joke the other day that I shall share with the House; it might amuse the Gallery.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Gentleman allowed to refer to the Strangers' Gallery?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Technically, probably not, but if that is the worst crime that is committed in the Chamber, I shall not be unhappy.

Mr. Forman: I am grateful for your generous protection, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that my

[Mr. Forman]

joke might amuse the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes). The riddle is this—what is the difference between O J Simpson, Rosemary West and the Leader of the Opposition? The answer is that only Rosemary West has convictions. *[Interruption.]* It was worth a try.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) essentially made several points in his interesting speech. He felt that the Budget did not have sufficient leverage over the labour market, and he wished to see unemployment falling further and faster to the levels that we were used to in the 1950s and 1960s. I understood that point, but the labour market is becoming more competitive and flexible, and more open to global market forces. It is important, therefore, for any Government to concentrate on a wide definition of supply side policies.

I agree with the hon. Member for Motherwell, South that, in order for those policies to be properly and successfully implemented, they have to be defined broadly to include many of the elements that he mentioned. He was rather scathing about the lack of light that was thrown on monetary policy in the Budget statement and elsewhere. I merely refer him to paragraphs 2.05 to 2.11 of the Red Book, which, though succinct, set out the Government's monetary policy clearly.

The hon. Member will know that the arrangements on monetary policy are now far more transparent than ever before. The minutes of the monthly meetings between the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor are published six weeks later. The hon. Member and others who take an intelligent and close interest in those matters are now much better served with useful information to make a sensible analysis of the progress of Government monetary policy.

Dr. Bray: The hon. Member is fair in saying that I would like greater transparency, but one consequence of that greater transparency is that we see the holes in the argument. There are some very big holes that could quite easily be filled.

Mr. Forman: If the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a subsequent economic debate, he will want to develop those thoughts. I shall not follow that line now.

I regret slightly that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has left the Chamber. I sought to intervene in her speech, but I was unsuccessful. She made some remarkably prejudiced and old-fashioned statements about the health service. The House will be aware that the Government have had a commitment, which they have meticulously honoured, to increase NHS spending in real terms year on year.

Will the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who used to shadow health matters, give a similar commitment on behalf of the Opposition? If she is not prepared to do so, many of the Opposition's criticisms of our attitude to and behaviour on the health service remain rather hollow. Would she like to clarify the matter?

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Get on with it.

Mr. Forman: The Opposition are not prepared to put their money where their mouth is.

There was something very dated about what the hon. Member for Peckham said about the health service when she tried to argue that it was being eroded at the edges, disintegrating and collapsing—whatever her verb was. She seemed to base her whole view on the assumption that public services must be provided by public sector employees in order to be real public services. That is clearly not true, in this country or any other.

The hon. Lady also seemed to feel that capital expenditure projects in the public sector should always be magically provided by public sector employees and firms. That is obviously not true, because for years private sector firms have been responsible for tendering for public sector projects, and have done a very good job. The private finance initiative is merely a logical and sensible outgrowth of that, and is nothing more sinister.

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) meant that she was worried that the private finance initiative would not fill the gap caused by the huge cuts in public investment announced in the Budget. Is the hon. Member confident that the private finance initiative will not only fulfil all the capital programmes that would have been initiated without the cuts, but will do better? That is how we will judge the success of the PFI.

Mr. Forman: One never knows—this is true of all public expenditure planning—whether projects pencilled in for years two and three in any public expenditure planning exercise will actually materialise. If the hon. Lady cares to look at chart 6.5 in the Red Book, she will see that the private finance initiative has delivered rising sums of money for capital projects in the health service; £170 million in 1996-97; £200 million in 1997-98; and £300 million in 1998-99. The projections are best estimates, but they are made on the basis of commitments and indications already given. I believe that they will probably turn out to be an underestimate rather than an overestimate of what is achieved.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): The hon. Gentleman has made the point that those figures are just estimates. Does he not agree that the Government are using the private finance initiative scheme as a form of deferred payments? They are cutting capital expenditure because they know that it takes a couple of years for the hospitals or other buildings to be built. Only then will the public purse have to pay for the rents of those buildings. The PFI is a deferred payment scheme to get the Government through to the next general election.

Mr. Forman: I do not agree.

I was just about to mention something that is relevant to what the hon. Gentleman said. If he cares to look at table 6.4 of the Red Book, which he may have in front of him, he will see that the outturn figures for total public sector capital expenditure have increased—that is in the past tense—from £17.6 billion to £20.9 billion. The Government's record over the latest period for which we have figures shows that such expenditure has increased and that the Government are committed to public sector capital expenditure. The Government merely want to supplement it, and they want the private finance initiative to play a new and growing role.

I have allowed myself to be slightly distracted by some interventions, Madam Deputy Speaker, partly in the hope of enlivening the debate for you and other people so that we may have a more interesting time. However, I wanted to focus my remarks on an important quotation from the Chancellor's Budget statement, which sets the tone for the whole of his speech and his approach to budgetary policy. He said:

> "In the rapidly changing world of technological advance and a more flexible labour market"—

already mentioned by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South—

> "the British people need to be prepared and equipped to embrace change in a flexible way. They will be more willing to do that if they know that high-quality schools, health care and a safety net for the unemployed, the disabled and the old are there if and when they need them."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1058.]

That quotation accurately sums up the attitude of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. In my opinion, he struck a good balance between the need to cut taxes when it is prudent and sensible to do so and to increase public expenditure on the priority sectors—the sectors about which the public really care, such as education, health and the police.

I fondly hope, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell), who spoke earlier, that the responsibility of the Budget will make possible further interest rate cuts in the not too distant future, especially if growth next year turns out to be as subdued as many independent forecasters believe that it will be—in other words, if, as is likely, the official Red Book forecast of 3 per cent. growth does not materialise.

The Chancellor is to be commended for what he did not do in the Budget as well as for what he did. Chancellors are always lobbied, and sometimes it is sensible for them to learn the gentle art of saying no. My right hon. and learned Friend did not give in to the cry for a windfall tax on utilities, which would have been all wrong and would have penalised success and profit.

My right hon. and learned Friend did not give in to hard lobbying for a package to help the housing and construction market. As he rightly said, a great deal more good can be done for that market by a low-interest-rate, low-inflation policy than can be done by any special package of measures, which is usually distorting and ends up in the price of the assets concerned. I commend him for that.

It is worth the House recalling, if it does not already know, that half a point off base rates is worth the equivalent of a five-point increase in mortgage tax relief to home owners, so half a point off base rates—which I confidently believe may be possible, perhaps in the first quarter of next year—will do every bit as much good for the housing sector as five points more on mortgage interest tax relief and, furthermore, will help the rest of the economy. If all business people are confident that interest rates are low and are likely to get even slightly lower, it is healthy for investment and helps to breed confidence.

My right hon. and learned Friend chose the right major objectives. I remind the House—I know that last Tuesday seems a long time ago—what they were.

The first objective was security for the elderly, especially in relation to long-term care. The second objective was a boost to capital ownership. I am especially pleased about the measures taken in the Budget on employee share ownership. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary for his considerable efforts in that regard. I know that he is sympathetic to that good cause.

The third objective was the encouragement of enterprise and especially of small businesses, which are vital creators of seedcorn in our economy. Finally, there was a return to our long-run objective of a tax-cutting policy, taking 1p off the standard rate as something on account—something in earnest of our intentions and something that differentiates us from both Opposition parties.

One Opposition party, in the shape of the hon. Member for Bristol, South, dare not say yes and dare not say no, it appears, to any specific tax-cutting proposition, and it does not appear to know its own mind. The other party is the minor Liberal party, to which I pay at least the tribute that it is prepared to come clean and say exactly where it stands and to go in for a bit more honest financing. I wish that Liberal Democrat Members would apply the same principle to other sectors of public expenditure as they apply to education, because, if I remember rightly, they have often made favourable nods in the direction of different categories of public expenditure, but I understand that they have given a specific tax pledge only to cover education spending.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If I am called to speak later, I shall discuss that matter, but I will send the hon. Gentleman a full and costed alternative Budget, which, unlike the Labour party, we have prepared this year, as previously.

Mr. Forman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that. I look forward to reading it.

I wish to devote the rest of my remarks to two aspects of the Budget that are especially significant and which I especially liked.

The first aspect is the range of measures that will help the elderly. I like the idea of a new, lower tax rate of 20p in the pound on savings income. That is long overdue and an excellent idea, especially bearing in mind the fact that an increasing number of people come into the category who would benefit from that measure.

I like the idea of widening the 20 per cent. lower rate band by £700, with the result that one quarter of all income tax payers will pay income tax only at 20 per cent. and no other level in 1996-97. Linked to that, I like the improved personal allowances for those over 65 and over 75. I do not yet have to declare an interest in this matter because I am still just on the right side of those numbers, but this is a good thing, because it is important that people who are living longer should retain more of the income that they have painstakingly built up as a result of their efforts over the years.

The result of all these measures in the sphere of savings and helping the elderly is that 14 million taxpayers will pay less income tax on their savings, and that will be worth on average about £75 a year to the over-65s. Nine out of 10 taxpayers will have a marginal rate of only 20p in the pound on their savings. That is all to the good.

My only caveat about this aspect of my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget is that about one third of all households pay no income tax, as Opposition Members know. I should have liked—I make an early Budget representation for next year to my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Forman]

Financial Secretary—the Chancellor to afford a well-focused boost to the state pension for those over 75. Those over 75 have some of the greatest financial commitments, as we all know with the natural forces of longevity, and are least likely to have the benefit of occupational pensions or personal pensions or any other add-ons that younger pensioners have.

I argued strongly for that this year. I was unlucky this year, but I very much hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will recognise the strength of the argument for next year and will consider a focused relief which, if included in a Budget in November 1996, would give a special boost to all those born before 28 November 1921, if my arithmetic is correct, to ensure that we help the cohort of people who would be 75 and over at that time.

Aside from that, the measures to help the elderly, including measures to help the financing of long-term residential care, are excellent and go a long way to giving people greater security in their old age.

The second aspect that I wanted to discuss is support for businesses—especially for small businesses. I am sure that in your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, as in mine, small businesses play a vital wealth-creating and job-creating role. It is especially important, therefore, that the Chancellor should help that sector of the economy in every Budget.

It is excellent that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has cut the rate of corporation tax for small businesses from 25p in the pound to 24p in the pound, which, as I understand it, will help more than 300,000 companies—indeed, more than 85 per cent. of companies that pay the tax. It is also good that the cut in the basic rate of income tax to 24p in the pound will reduce the tax burden on unincorporated businesses.

The small business men in my constituency will be pleased by the proposed cut in employers' national insurance contributions from April 1997, which will reduce their costs and make it a little easier to take on new workers. I have asked the question before: why must we wait until April 1997 for the introduction of that worthy and worthwhile change? I imagine that it has something to do with computerisation. I was always told that computerisation was supposed to speed things up, but I have an awful feeling that in this case it may slow them down.

I welcome the new, tighter limit on the growth of business rates, which will alleviate the rate bills on 870,000 smaller business properties. There are a number of such properties in my constituency and I know that the business men involved will be pleased.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire in welcoming the aspiration of introducing plainer English into the tax legislation, in which the Institute of Chartered Accountants—to which I have already declared my paid connection—has a strong interest and for which it has lobbied over some time.

The package of measures for small businesses is excellent, as is the new lower qualifying age for capital gains tax retirement relief, which has been dropped from 55 to 50. I would not, however, give that measure the prominence that some of the other provisions deserve, not least because I want successful small business men to stay in business, not simply retire and enjoy their well-earned gains elsewhere. All those measures come on top of provisions in previous Budgets that testify to the Government's determination to ensure that the small business sector is nurtured and helped to grow.

I end as I began in my intervention on the hon. Member for Motherwell, South—on the subject of the diminishing role of any national Budget in the modern global economy, of which hon. Members from both sides of the House are perhaps more aware now than they used to be. The fiscal adjustment in the Budget is the equivalent of 1 per cent. of total public expenditure and less than 0.5 per cent. of GDP. It is hard to see how one can move mountains with fiscal adjustments of that size.

I know that it was done in order to deliver the responsible Budget of which I have spoken, but the monetary adjustment for which the Budget may have paved the way is arguably more significant to the health of the economy, the working of the labour market and the creation of jobs. If the introduction of a cautious and responsible Budget has made that aim achievable, the Budget will have done an excellent job.

As I said to the hon. Member for Motherwell, South, the most important aspects of all modern economic policy are supply-side measures to enhance competitiveness and improve the flexibility of the economy. If we cannot achieve those ends, the other aspects are marginal by comparison. I commend the Government for the efforts that they have made under the general heading of competitiveness, and I urge them to do more, as that in itself will probably achieve more than any national Budget in a global economy.

6.2 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who sits behind me, and I were agreeing that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) had made a thoughtful contribution that tackled relevant issues, which cannot always be said about contributions to this or any other debate.

I shall pray in aid his arguments when I next meet the Secretary of State for Social Security. When I suggested considering increasing resources for the older pensioner, the Secretary of State told me that the Government were not minded to do so, as, unlike the Liberal Democrats, they had no wish to throw money around like confetti. There is a strong case for looking again at the gradation of state help for the older citizen, for the very reasons given by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. The token 25p for those over 80 years old is insulting to them, and they think so—it is nonsense.

I have another introductory comment which I do not make as a joke, although it is slightly amusing. When the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington mentioned the difference between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats on Budget matters, I undertook to give him a copy of our costed Budget, which I shall do. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South suggested that it was important that my civil servant, sitting under the Gallery, should take a note of my commitment for future reference.

Unfortunately, when I last looked, the position was unchanged from that of five minutes earlier, when I received a pager message from the aforesaid researcher telling me that he needed to go home to let in the plumber, and hoped to be back for my speech. My researcher was therefore not present to hear my undertaking. However, I have given my pledge on the record, and can assure the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington that we are committed to it—and also before the next general election.

I wish to comment on the place of the NHS budget in the Budget as a whole. I am sorry that the Secretary of State for Health is not present, as the debate began last week, continued on lunchtime television with the "Jonathan Dimbleby programme" yesterday, and the right hon. Gentleman sought to tackle the subject in his speech today.

There is now a strong body of argument, not just from party political opponents of the Government, that the Government's Budget claims, particularly in relation to the police, education and the health service, are little short of a con. The Government are certainly playing with mirrors. On closer examination, the Budget figures do not bear out the claims made for them.

If one takes a careful look, one sees that money being directed to the Home Office for anti-crime measures and the police is less, not more. The money being put towards education, which is allegedly additional money, is in fact only the money that is needed if the Government want to ensure that next year's allocation is the same as this year's—the money makes up what was projected and allocated as the reduction. The additional money will have to come from local authorities, whose allocated money, as confirmed last Thursday, has been cut, not increased. The health service budget from public finances is effectively being frozen, not increased.

On examination, we find that a large amount of the £3 billion, which is allegedly the tax cut that is to be handed back in one form or another—primarily by the 1p reduction in income tax, which amounts to £2 billion—is being clawed back by the Chancellor. Some £1 billion of that money will be clawed back next year, when the tax increases on petrol and tobacco that he announced last year have worked through. Nearly £1 billion—£900 million—will be added to people's bills by the council tax addition which was suggested in Thursday's announcement. Other factors, such as the reduction of £150 million to the amount directed to the Post Office, will no doubt be clawed back by extra charges on stamps.

It is not a giveaway Budget, as people will come to realise. Next year, few people will have benefited from it. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington said, there will doubtless have to be considerably more giveaways before people notice the giveaway factor at all—or think they do. The cycle of the past decade shows that that is not the case for most people.

Mr. Forman: That is not quite the point that I was making. I was saying that, in a responsible Budget, the degree of fiscal adjustment will necessarily be small. I was putting that in context. As I have the Floor, does the hon. Gentleman regard as a reality the fact that the Liberal-controlled London borough of Sutton has gained the provision of an extra 5.2 per cent. in education for 1996-97 compared with 1995-96? I should have thought that that was a generous increase.

Mr. Hughes: I do not know, because I do not hold the figures for every authority in my head, but, if the hon. Gentleman is right, the figure is welcome. The Liberal Democrat-run borough of Sutton has been shown to have the highest satisfaction rate in opinion polls conducted independently for any local authority in the country. I pay tribute to the authority for that, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) are glad that they have such a well-run Liberal Democrat local council.

On the subject of health service figures, the hon. Gentleman said—the Secretary of State made the same point in answer to a question from me—that the Conservative party manifesto commitment in 1992 was explicit. It stated:

> "We will, year by year, increase the level of real resources committed to the NHS."

That has happened. For the second and third years of the figures projected by the Chancellor, it will be true by the thinnest of margins statistically possible: 0.1 of 1 per cent. in each of the two years. The commitment exists, but the figures have clearly been arranged so that they are just the right side of the line. I hope to show that it is, however, a delusion for other reasons, which relate to the method of calculating real increases in spending and inflation in the health service.

In his Budget statement last week, the Chancellor made another extremely partial and illusory statement. He said:

> "since 1979 spending on the NHS has increased by more than 70 per cent. in real terms".

That is extremely questionable, and the proper indicators demonstrate that it is far from the truth. He continued:

> "We are continuing to deliver our commitment to increase spending on the NHS in real terms . . . Public spending on the national health service will increase by over £1 billion pounds next year."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1058.]

The press release from the Department of Health and the Red Book show that that is only partially true.

The press release, which is a summary of the key issues, includes three tables. The first relates to the NHS current net spending total for England. It shows an increase of 1.6 per cent., or £1 billion, on the revised figure for 1995-96 to the projected figure for 1996-97. However, capital spending should also be taken into account, and that is set out in the second table. As mentioned earlier in the debate, the revised total for this year is £2,120 million, so the planned figure of £2,038 million for 1996-97 represents a reduction of 6.5 per cent. in real terms. Although the total estimated outturn for 1995-96 and the spending plans for 1996-97 reveal a cash increase of £1 billion, which the Department of Health press release describes as a real-terms increase at 1994-95 prices of £190 million, that represents growth of only 0.6 per cent. in real terms. The table shows the projected increase for the following two years as 0.1 per cent., giving the lie to the Government's claim that there is a £1 billion extra money. There is £1 billion extra spending in next year's budget, but it is matched by a reduction in capital spending, so the net increase is very small. Anyone who looks at the Red Book will accept what the Secretary of State for Health implied—he is more honest in that respect than other commentators—that a fixed and frozen amount of public money has been allocated for next year and every year for the foreseeable future.

The figures are clear. Table 6A on page 142 of the Red Book shows estimated outturn in the health service this year to be £32 billion, of which the NHS has £31.1 billion,

[Mr. Hughes]

and estimated health outturn for the coming year as £32 billion—the same figure—with the NHS proportion rising by only £2 million to £31.3 billion. Thereafter, the figure drops to £31.6 billion, with the NHS figure frozen at £31.3 billion for the first year and £31.4 billion for the following year.

In terms of growth, expansion and development, that means that the NHS will begin a period of greater squeeze, greater pressure and greater relative contraction than at any time in its history, excluding only the years 1975-76 and 1979-80, when there was a world oil crisis. In the next three years, the NHS is about to experience a more significant reduction in Government funding than ever before. That is unusual. Normally, in the run-up to general elections, even under Tory Governments, more money goes into the health service.

Members who take part in health service debates know that the real costs of the health service are measured not only by the GDP deflator but by two other figures that the Government accept, recognise and publish. The Government produce a specific NHS deflator figure as well as estimates of hospital and community health services inflation. When those are taken into account, the picture is extremely different and much more alarming.

If the NHS deflator is applied to the other published figures for the NHS, it is clear that, since 1979, the increase of 57 per cent. that the Government claim is actually only 27 per cent. in real terms. I would argue that that is a more accurate reflection of what people feel than any belief that there has been a massive increase of more than 50 per cent. in spending on the NHS.

If those figures are applied to the years covered by the Budget, they show that there will be a cut in resources of 2.2 per cent. over the next three years.

Mr. Forman: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the debate in which he is indulging is conducted in input figures, chiefly cash? I was guilty of that too, but surely it is just as important—probably more important, these days—to consider outputs, which include waiting times.

Mr. Hughes: Of course I accept that, but there are always two sides to such debates—how much we raise and how much we spend.

We should also consider the percentage of our national wealth that we spend on the health service, and the global pattern of expenditure. If the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington recollects the figures, which are attested to be true, he will agree with me that our expenditure is increasing as a percentage of GDP, and has reached about 7 per cent. That is still significantly below the European Union average, and the figure is considerably higher in other countries.

I accept that the balance includes private as well as public expenditure, but health expenditure is increasing as a proportion of total national budgets. That appears to be the trend, for the obvious reason that there are more elderly people living longer, and older people, however fit they are, consume more resources in the health service. The real tests are not simply how much money is put in, but also how much the service is improved at the receiving end.

I have three more important and relevant statistics. I welcome the projected reduction in administrative costs in years to come. That is certainly necessary, because the NHS administration budget grew by more than 50 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1993-94. The number of administrative and clerical staff rose from about 110,000 to about 132,000 betweem 1986 and 1993—an increase of 20 per cent.

In the same period, the number of nursing staff was slashed from about 402,000 to 366,000—a decrease of 9 per cent.—and the number of maintenance and work staff has dropped from about 25,000 to about 17,000—a reduction of a third. The almost incredible figure is that the number of general and senior managers has gone up from 500 in 1986 to 20,000 in 1993. Just for the record, that represents a increase of 3,900 per cent. which must beat all other records.

I know that the caveat is that certain jobs have been redesignated, but experience on the ground in the health service is that many more people are pen pushing, because the health service is a more complex, split operation.

The Chancellor said in his Budget statement that 70 per cent. more has been committed to the health service since 1979. That is not the case when one takes into account the aging population and the real increased costs of the health service.

I calculated that figure. More accurately, people who work with me did so, but I went through that calculation with them carefully and have the tables, which I willingly offer the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington and others who take an interest. The real increase since 1979 is 10.3 per cent.—about 0.5 per cent. a year. A figure of 10.3 per cent. is hugely different from 70 per cent., and the public know it.

As to the private finance initiative, neither I nor my party is opposed to using the private sector and private wealth to improve public services, because that is clearly sensible. If the private sector is willing to put money in the kitty, let us use it. However, the Government's action this year is not only unwise but unjustified.

It is unwise because the Government appear to be putting all their faith in the PFI. Although the percentage of the capital budget that is PFI is not yet equal to the public capital budget, it is intended to go in that direction fast. Paragraph 6.57 of the Red Book makes it clear that there had been £100 million of private finance by April 1995 and that there are schemes in the pipeline worth £250 million for the current year. By the end of next year

> "it is expected that projects worth £1 billion will have come forward for approval."

Ms Eagle: They will never do it.

Mr. Hughes: I agree. The hon. Lady makes a point that I was just about to argue, based on a case that I know full well from my constituency.

In the 1980s, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science established the city technology colleges programme. It was boldly proclaimed that 80 per cent. of the money would come from the private sector, and 20 per cent. from the public sector. There were to be hundreds of CTCs. But the programme ran into the ground after about 20 had been established. The figures are clear, including for my constituency. Eighty per cent. of the money came from the public sector and 20 per cent. from the private sector, because it did not think that was the best way to spend its money.

Ms Eagle: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Confederation of British Industry is on record as being extremely sceptical that the Government's optimistic forecasts have even a remote chance of being met?

Mr. Hughes: That is completely correct.

The most objective test of all is in the Library research paper 95/113 on investment, which the hon. Lady may have seen. It includes a section on the private finance initiative, and in its summary of criticisms quotes the *Financial Times* of 10 November:

> "Critics of PFI—and they are everywhere—fall into two broad groups."

The Treasury was not persuaded of the merits earlier this year, and there is strong evidence against the PFI, for obvious reasons.

It is clearly the case that capital expenditure not met by the public purse now is being avoided in return for payments over years to come. To the risk of an uncertain outcome—the NHS, for example, may not inherit a hospital—the PFI adds the costs over 50 years. There is no guarantee that those costs will be less for those of us who pay than capital funding now.

We are not stupid. The reason for the private finance initiative—apart from the Government's belief in such a partnership, which we share—is so that the Budget can show a holding down of public expenditure and there can be tax cuts. That is not an illusion—it is obvious—but the Chancellor ought to be honest.

There has never been a manifesto commitment that the NHS hospital building programme will be put out to the private sector. The British people have never endorsed such a proposal, and it has never been formally endorsed even by the House. That policy has never been tested by the British people. If it were tested and the public agreed, that would be one thing—but effectively putting the hospital building programme entirely in the private sector, which looks like happening, is something to which I and my colleagues cannot subscribe without qualification.

That proposition has never been put to the nation, and I am sure that the public would have all sorts of doubts, quite apart from those of the CBI and the *Financial Times*. We would want convincing evidence that the risks of the PFI are not considerably greater than the benefits.

As to community care, the Secretary of State, referring to Thursday's announcement, said that there will be a 4 per cent. increase in special transitional grant for community care funding, which is the additional cost to local authorities of funding the threshold of £16,000, instead of £8,000, before which people pay a contribution. I welcome that increase, and ask the Secretary of State to confirm that the figure required by local authorities is £60 million, and that it will be met in full.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington was accurate and generous enough to say that we are at least being straightforward with people. We have said that we will vote against the tax reduction tomorrow night—unlike Labour, which apparently will abstain. We believe that the additional money being put into the health service should be used in a different way. We are committed to restoring free eyesight tests and dental checks, and to freezing prescription charges for those people who pay them. Labour should commit itself to the same. The public want those changes, but the Government did nothing to respond.

If we favour a national health service from the cradle to the grave, and if the Chancellor is making a great point about putting additional money into the NHS, I cannot understand why the Government continue with policies that prevent people taking their own preventive health care steps, by charging for eyesight and dental checks and increasing prescription charges whatever the individual's ability to pay.

That policy is unnecessary. The Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Health should have changed it. That policy indicates again that the public's real concerns about the NHS have not been addressed by the Budget. The Budget is an illusion and a con. There is not a great deal more public money. Health service expenditure will be reduced in real terms, and the public will not be deceived.

6.27 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I am pleased to take part in the debate, which has been dominated by the national health service—but not one that I recognise. I was a health authority chairman before entering the House, and the vision of today's health service offered by Opposition Members is very much that of the NHS as it was before 1991, when it was inefficient and incapable of making decisions. Patients were treated as lumps of meat and not as people. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Patients were required to turn up en masse for bulk appointments instead of being given specific times. They were pushed from pillar to post and not given information. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not true."] Believe me—I was a health authority chairman and I had specific and clear evidence of that happening in the east end of London.

Even in those days, we were debating priorities and the need to ration services. One area that we felt we could begin by approaching was whether the NHS should provide cosmetic operations for varicose veins and tattoo removal. That clearly shows how priorities and requirements have changed to meet the needs of the patient. The NHS today is a patient-oriented service and no longer a producer-oriented service.

My constituency has a brand new hospital—a hospital that was cancelled under the 1976 cuts and which was only built because of Conservative investment in health. The turf was turned for phase 2 of the hospital by the Minister for Health in the summer. Moreover, my right hon. Friend has allocated extra money to East Sussex so that our much-needed mental health strategy can go ahead. So as we move into phase 3 in Hastings and Rye, a comprehensive pattern of health care which has been missing until now is emerging. Hitherto the system had always been ad hoc; doctors and nurses worked under extreme pressure and were unable to deliver the health services that my constituents deserve. All of that has now changed and we are approaching a health service, provided by the taxpayer, of the highest quality.

I for one do not disagree with the need to increase the number of managers in the health service. To deliver the service that people require we need to manage it more efficiently and effectively. The lack of such management was the fundamental flaw before we brought in the purchaser-provider split. Some of the managers, however,

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

are still not of the quality needed to develop the service further. I therefore look forward to more reform of the management of the service, to bring in many more highly skilled people. I should also like medical schools and nursing schools to train doctors and nurses in management techniques so that they, too, can bring those techniques to the treatment of patients.

Today we have also been discussing the Budget in broader terms. Like all other Members, I am sure, I spent the past weekend in my constituency being apprised of the views of my constituents, going around Christmas fairs run by charities and other worthy organisations—and thank goodness I did, as it was the only way I could have done my Christmas shopping this year. The message from my constituents is that, once the changes come into effect in April, they will feel considerably better off and more in control of their own spending. The cumulative effect of the increased allowances, the widening of the 20p band, the reduction in tax on savings to 20p in the pound, and the 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax, will give them more money in their pockets which they can choose how to spend. That is a basic tenet of Conservative party policy, which I should not need to repeat here.

On Friday I also met some local industrialists and found them appreciative of the tax changes and the changes in the uniform business rate. Like many others, they commend the idea of introducing plain English to taxation law. I look forward to the first legislation to be written in plain English.

I consulted many local businesses before the Budget to find out what their owners wanted included in it. Broadly speaking, the Chancellor delivered what they were looking for. They are still hoping for a further reduction in interest rates, because, like most home owners, they will enjoy a distinct improvement in their cash flows when interest rates come down. I believe that the Chancellor's Budget was geared to such a reduction even if he could not say so at the time.

There has been some debate about the private finance initiative. At the risk of boring hon. Members again on the subject of our road communications, I should point out that it gives me pleasure to welcome the inclusion in the PFI of a number of crucial sections of the A21. Unlike Opposition Members who are deeply sceptical about the PFI, I am enthusiastic about it. It provides one way for the construction industry to invest, to help it out of its current difficulties, which have to do with the long-term changes in the housing market. Right across the construction industry, the PFI will come as a tremendous fillip. I look forward to speedy applications by a number of companies to build sections of the A21.

Like one of my colleagues last week, I also urge on the Government the idea that the PFI panel should include as many private sector members as possible, with minimal civil service influence. Civil servants' writing of specifications and contracts often seems more geared to ensuring that those contracts are not met or tendered for, rather than encouraging people to tender for them. I note that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury appears to agree with me, and I hope to hear confirmation of that later.

My travels around my constituency at the weekend brought me into contact with a number of farmers. This time last year they were warning me about possible changes to vehicle excise duty for tractors. I am glad that that problem has been solved, but farmers are becoming increasingly worried about large increases in the duty on gasoil. Last year's Budget and, I am told, this year's both increased the duty. I should be most grateful if the Treasury would stop increasing the duty on gasoil excessively. Such increases constitute a deterrent to farming and an additional cost for an industry which, although recovering, is still not so profitable as it might be.

A constituency such as mine contains a large number of pensioners, many in straitened circumstances. In the context of long-term care, they therefore welcome the increase in the allowance ceiling from £3,000 to £10,000. I am worried, however, that the floodgates will be opened to applications for services provided and paid for by social services departments. I still entertain strong doubts about the ability of social services departments, not just in East Sussex but in other areas, effectively to deliver services at competitive cost.

I have long complained, for instance, that East Sussex pays itself £100 per week more for rest home and nursing home care than it pays the private sector, even though the latter provides similar if not better care. That is a waste of about £4 million a year. I am also conscious that some of the assessment and reassessment services are, to say the least, extremely slow. Sometimes doctors need to admit emergency cases but social services will not speed up their processes, and poor souls in deep distress find themselves caught between medical requirements and social services bureaucracy.

An enormous amount still needs to be done, and it will be done only when we introduce the purchaser-provider split to social services as well. At present, social services are judge, jury and prosecutor. Until we allow them either only to provide or only to purchase we shall not be able to introduce to the provision of long-term care for the elderly the sensible services that people need and pay for through their taxes.

I am pleased that longer-term changes will be introduced to ensure that the increasing number of retired people with substantial occupational pensions and savings will be able themselves to provide for any care that they may need in their later years, while at the same time retaining capital to pass from one generation to the next.

I welcome the increased provision that will be made available to the counties for education, including the one in which my constituency is placed. I am sure that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends would join me in deploring the campaign that was waged to terrify parents, governors and teachers. Threats of cuts were based on the economics of the madhouse as opposed to those of reality. We must ensure that the increased moneys pass straight to the schools. I believe that the campaign of misinformation may backfire. So many people were distressed by it. I would not be surprised if parents did not start to demand ballots for schools to go grant-maintained to ensure that they never again have to face such an appallingly political and distressing campaign.

It would not be a speech on the Budget from me if I did not mention smuggling. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General is on the Government Front Bench because one of his responsibilities is excise duty. I never believed that in the Budget we would see, in effect, a freeze on excise duty on most forms of tobacco and alcohol. I thought that if we were lucky we might see a minor increase. Instead, we have seen a reduction in the duty on whisky, while excise duties on beer and wine remain the same. The freezing of the duty on hand-rolling tobacco is a bonus for small businesses, breweries, tobacconists, restaurants and cafes, which have all suffered dramatically from bootlegging.

I am concerned that the increase in tax in the Budget will make it more profitable to smuggle cigarettes. It is a fact, however, that the most profitable area of bootlegging is still hand-rolling tobacco. There is a potential profit of about £5 for a 50g bag. I understand that the small-time smuggler who would bring in seven to 10 kg of cannabis now finds it more profitable to bring in a car boot full of hand-rolling tobacco. The Treasury must take more seriously yet the difficulties that businesses find as a result of the differentials in excise duty rates between those in the United Kingdom and those elsewhere in Europe.

We must take seriously the threat to health faced by youngsters who have access to cheap tobacco. More and more young people will be encouraged to take up the pernicious weed. Our high-tax policy has deterred them from doing so for so long, but as access to cheap tobacco becomes easier, our policy is no longer a deterrent.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give us an idea of what happened in Lisbon on 13 and 14 November. I understand that the meeting was to discuss excise duties throughout the European Union. It would be useful to know whether any progress has been made.

Deterrence is costly, which I suspect is causing concern to excise officials. Given the low cost of tobacco and alcohol throughout the rest of the Community, bootlegging is not something with which excise officials should be concerned. We are a single market. At the same time, huge hauls of cannabis, cocaine and other drugs are coming into the United Kingdom. Excise officials should be concentrating on that area.

Finally, I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for producing a Budget which will, in the long run, be successful. It has kept the City in good heart and at the same time has ensured that businesses in my constituency feel confident that they can invest and go forward, and I and my constituents support it.

6.45 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I was rather saddened by the nasty little introduction of the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait). She attacked those who are working within the national health service and their professional standards. She seemed to imply that everyone in the NHS is in it for themselves.

That never struck me when, after operating all day—I would probably finish at 7 or 8 o'clock and nip home for a bite to eat—I would return at about midnight to check on the folk on whom I had operated. I would be back on during the middle of the night and then in again next morning for another large clinic. The idea that it was great personal fun is the opposite of the truth.

All my colleagues had the appointments system for out-patients. We had diaries, and patients were given a date for their operations if that was the treatment they needed. Never a day passed without my spending a considerable time talking to patients and relatives. I hope that the hon. Lady will reflect on what she said, and perhaps consider not making the same attack again.

Mrs. Lait: I would never impugn the work that is undertaken by doctors and nurses. I merely said that, in the past, they were not working as efficiently as they could have been if they had been properly managed.

Mr. Galbraith: I think that the hon. Lady is having second thoughts and backtracking. She is qualifying her response by using the term "properly managed". All that she has said about arrangements for appointment times and other provisions were in place, or were being introduced, long before the Government's reforms. The problem was that a great deal of time had to be used to deal with other matters. The introduction of the Government's reforms was delayed. That is the reality.

Whenever I have spoken in debates on Budgets or on health service funding, I have made the speech which we heard today from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I would explain how the increase was not what it seemed to be, once account had been taken of various factors and deflators. I would explain that there would be no increase in funding, or only a slight increase.

Since 1979, the real increase in health care has been only 1 per cent. That increase is lower than that achieved by any other Government since the inception of the NHS. I shall not make the same speech again. First, it has been well made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. Secondly, I shall refrain from doing so, because, as the hon. Gentleman said, the public do not recognise what the Government say as reality. They trust their senses. They realise that funding is a problem that has further to be considered, and that it is not as the Government suggest.

I shall refer to some of the issues that are related to funding in the light of the private finance initiative. It should not be necessary to say too much about rationing within the health service. When I last spoke in the Chamber about the health service, I discussed the issue at great length, and analysed it in some depth. I hope that it is not something to which we shall have to return.

The debate about these matters continues in a somewhat confused manner. We find that we talk at cross purposes. I shall make just a few short but important points.

The first thing to get right in the debate is the definition of rationing. It is the denial of care to a patient when he or she wants it, when the doctor wants to give it, and when it is beneficial to the patient's physical and mental health, other than by placebo effect. We should be clear about that.

That does not, of course, include the provision of ineffective treatments. Stopping ineffective treatment is not rationing; it is good clinical practice, and we must learn to separate one from the other.

The commonest example of ineffective treatment that people know about is the use of antibiotics in upper respiratory tract infections, the majority of which are viral. As long as one does not put a blanket ban on their use but realises that, in most cases, they are ineffective in stopping such infections, that is not rationing but good clinical practice. In that way, one can fund the health

[Mr. Galbraith]

service, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) says, it means that there is no bottomless pit. The bottomless pit does not exist. It is a myth, and any justification for basing the health service on it is false. There may be other reasons why one does want to fund it.

When responding to funding, it is important to separate need and demand. That, again, is another area that gets confused in the debate. Demand can be generated by many areas and by many individuals—drug companies, Government policy, doctors and so on—but we should respond not to demand, only to need. We can work out what the need is. We know the number of people who require hip replacements or cholecystectomies. We know the number of people who will get carcinoma of the bronchus and require an operation. It is not endless. It is not a bottomless pit.

As long as we respond simply to the need, and providing we have the political will, we can indeed fulfil all the necessary expenditure. That requires some tough decisions, of that there is no doubt, to which some people might object, but as long as we ensure that we base those decisions on the clinical necessity and effectiveness of the treatment, we should be strong, and take them.

The other phrase that creeps up nowadays when talking about rationing is "priority setting", which I am sure the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye knows about. I always worry when we move to other phrases, because we generally think that there is a bit of sophistry going on. I admit, however, that there is a system of priority setting within the NHS. There always has been.

I take as an example renal dialysis, which was not always available to everyone. In effect, it was rationed. Heart transplantation was also not available to everyone. Priorities were set, but it was a different type of priority setting, because the decision was taken that it would be necessary in the future and that we would work to fund it. Indeed, it was delivered, as in the case of renal dialysis and heart transplantation.

The trouble is that priority setting is now defined as stopping funding for a procedure, and never funding it again with money from the NHS. That is the difference. That is why priority setting as defined by the Government is just the same as rationing.

I was recently talking to a manager about priority setting, and he mentioned a case in which a treatment might be beneficial to someone but not everyone, and said that therefore it could be stopped—for example, patients with head injury or coma.

For patients with a head injury, one can predict with reasonable certainty that, in certain comas, 95 per cent. will die and 2 or 3 per cent. will survive but be severely disabled. Some 2 or 3 per cent. will do well. He said, "We waste all this money in saving a small percentage, so we should stop doing it." That case can be argued. I would not disagree that decisions are made on that, but no absolutes can be drawn from it. It has to be left to the judgment of the individuals concerned.

The decision relates, of course, to the age, the clinical practice, who they are, and various other issues. It is not a matter that is simply open to the statistical analysis that is available and on which one can then make a judgment. It is a very difficult one, as anyone who followed the recent case of a young girl who had a leukaemic disease will know. Someone said, "Well, the chances of recovery are small, so we won't fund it." Beware anyone who denies that treatment. Even in a small number of cases, it would be beneficial.

The manager also told me that the great advantage was that they could use evidence-based medicine. When I first heard the phrase "evidence-based medicine", I thought, "Splendid—here's a new tool for me to use." But I wonder what it is. I always thought that I had been using evidence-based medicine, reading five or six journals a week, as I still do. All my colleagues were doing the same—studying what they were doing, analysing the statistical analysis. We thought that we were using evidence-based medicine, but here was a new tool.

I looked at it and, after a while, came to the conclusion that there was nothing new. It was just a new phrase that some people had discovered. They found that medicine was a science, and that they could use that phrase to make such decisions. The decisions are quite difficult, but they had found the answer.

The Government have spoken a lot recently about evidence-based medicine, but it is not easy or simple. Sometimes the evidence is poor. Sometimes it is almost impossible to collect. I have often thought about how we could set up studies to find some absolute statistically significant result in the end that did not prove their case, but even when one has the evidence, sometimes it is such that one has to make a judgment, and one cannot escape the political, social and medical judgments.

Again I am reminded of a case. If the evidence were that treatment X resulted in death in the majority—let us say that 5 per cent. survive but are disabled and 5 per cent. do well—what does the evidence tell us about what we should do? That is the evidence of the outcome, but one has to make a political, medical and social judgment about what to do in such cases. So beware of the glib phrase "evidence-based medicine".

I now come briefly to the private finance initiative, because we have some experience of it in Scotland. I realise that the Secretary of State has no responsibility for the Scottish health service, but I shall use these examples, so that everyone appreciates some of the problems.

With the PFI, one loses flexibility in the health service, because one is locked into long-term contracts, from which it is impossible to get out. In Glasgow, some of the care of the elderly was taken over by a private company, Takare. Contracts were signed and systems were set up. Now we discover that that model is not the most appropriate model and we would like to move to a different one. The problem is that we are locked into a long-term contract with that company, and we cannot change it. Medicine changes—it moves with the times. One requires that flexibility. In Glasgow, we have lost that, particularly in the case of the demented elderly. That is one of its problems.

The other problem is simply the cost. The Greater Glasgow health board took out a lease on an office building for its headquarters under the PFI—use now, pay later, no need for the capital spend. It has discovered that its needs have changed, and it has moved to other offices. But it is left with the building on a huge lease, which it cannot get rid of, despite the fact that it has tried time and again.

The real aim of the PFI is that it is privatising the health service. It is not as though it is the thin end of the wedge. The wedge is rammed in tight, and it will be difficult to get it out.

The Secretary of State spoke at great length today, as he has done in the past, about how the PFI does not apply to clinical services, and how it applies only to buildings. That is not the case in Scotland. As has been mentioned, at Stonehaven hospital, every aspect comes under the PFI, including the provision and delivery of clinical services. Every part of that hospital comes under the private finance initiative. I dare say that the Secretary of State does not wish that to be the case, but his Government are actively involved in the programme. I have given three examples from my own area, which give us grave concern about the private finance initiative.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said, the NHS is a fine example of the community in action. We believe that the only way in which individuals can realise their full potential is by working together. That is one of the reasons why we favour the NHS so strongly, and that is why we shall continue to defend it.

7 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): This year, the hype and hot air that are part of the build-up to the Budget reached record proportions. Alongside that, there has been the increased drama that has accompanied Budget statements in recent years as a result of simultaneous television and radio transmissions and the almost neurotic scramble of the various media organisations to be the first to judge and to comment on the Budget, even before my right hon. and learned Friend has sat down. It is, perhaps, not surprising that the initial analysis of the Budget is hardly balanced, fair or logical; indeed, that has been the case this year.

Nearly a week after the Budget statement, we are in a much better position to judge the Budget's real impact on ordinary people. While the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) no doubt spent the weekend feverishly working out her great fictional piece on the health service, to which she treated us this afternoon, I, like most of my hon. Friends, was in my constituency meeting and talking to ordinary constituents to see what they felt about the Budget and what impact it had on them.

I started my weekend by attending a meeting of the Abbeyfield Society which looks after older people. Most of the people there were pensioners and I talked to them at some length. There was universal praise for the Budget among those people and some real enthusiasm. They will gain from tax cuts, and their standard of living and their security will improve. The Opposition may be surprised to know that those people were talking not about the national health service deflator or about macro-economic policy but about how they would be affected by the Budget.

I talked to one elderly lady who was a retired teacher—not a fat cat or a person who had huge inherited wealth but someone who was past the age at which she felt she could live on her own in her home and who had sold it and moved into residential care. That lady had invested the proceeds from her house sale in a building society and was using the interest to pay for her care. She told me that she had calculated that she would be £550 a year better off as a result of the Budget.

The Budget had made a great deal of difference to her, because it had made it possible for her not only to pay for her residential care but to have money left over to enable her to have a relaxed style of life. It also enabled her to know that she would have the security of such a life as long as she wished. She knew that, when she eventually passed on, she would be able to leave money to her next of kin, which made her happy.

Ms Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman think that his constituent will be happy when interest rates go down in the next few days? There are always checks and balances in these issues.

Mr. Merchant: I am glad that the hon. Lady is so confident that interest rates will come down; I hope they will, because that will benefit the economy. However, my constituent's tax savings will outstrip the likely reduction in interest rates, so the hon. Lady's point is a bogus diversion from the real benefits that people will have.

I also talked to an elderly couple who were still living in their own home. They were benefiting by more than £1,000 a year from the Budget and they, too, were very pleased. However, they were concerned about what might happen if one of them had the misfortune to fall ill and to require long-term nursing care, a problem that affects many elderly people. It is as much the worry of that possibility, with its financial consequences, as the actuality that upsets people. That possibility worries not just elderly people but younger people who see it as a possibility for their later years, and those who have elderly relatives and who are concerned about their future care.

The people to whom I talked were pleased and optimistic about the changes that have come from the Budget, such as the tripling of the basic threshold below which they will face no charge for their long-term care, however long it is, and the doubling to £16,000 of the figure under which they will have to contribute only a small amount. People with average savings of £14,000 would previously have had to pay some charge for an average-priced nursing home and would have expected their capital to be reduced by £280 or £290 a week. Now their capital will not be reduced, which means a great deal to them. The Opposition, far from rubbishing the changes, should recognise that they will help many people, and should welcome them for that reason.

Elderly people will also welcome the raising of the age allowance by £280 and the reduction in the basic rate of tax by 1 per cent. They will welcome the extension of the inheritance tax threshold to £200,000, which will benefit many who hold property. All those measures will help elderly people, so I was not surprised to hear so many people expressing pleasure at the Budget and its implications for them.

People's concern about moving into residential care is exaggerated by many. There is a myth that, if one has to move into long-term nursing care, one automatically loses one's house. It is often said that people will lose their house even if they have a spouse living there. That is entirely incorrect, because as long as a spouse remains in the family home, it cannot be treated as an asset in the calculation. There are other cases in which the house will not be lost even if only one person lives in it and then moves into nursing home care. It is advisable for people in that situation, their relatives or their advisers to take good financial advice in advance. They will then find that the impact of the charges is far less than many mischievously suggest.

[Mr. Merchant]

Another group of my constituents who are concerned about the impact of the Budget are those at the Wellcome research laboratories in Beckenham who, unfortunately, are facing redundancy following the takeover of Wellcome by Glaxo. They were extremely concerned in the run-up to the Budget because it was suggested that those receiving redundancy pay would have to pay tax on the first £30,000 of it, which had not previously been the case. I was sure that that would not happen and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made it perfectly clear in his Budget statement not only that it would not happen but that it had never been contemplated. In other words, those people were quite unnecessarily alarmed by a rumour that had no basis.

I understand, however, that a small matter affecting redundancy pay is still being considered. It does not, I believe, affect any of my constituents, but it has affected some people in other parts of country. It involves a redundancy payment being made and the person concerned signing an agreement either to do or not to do something—for example, not to work for a rival company—as part of the redundancy deal. Some tax inspectors in some parts of the country who have narrowly interpreted the law have suggested that, in those cases, the whole of the £30,000 that is, at present, tax-free would be taxed. I understand that that matter is being examined by the Treasury, but I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would refer to it when he sums up, so that further reassurance can be given.

Those constituents who are facing redundancy are also intimately concerned with the region's future economic health and with other possibilities that might come their way, so the Budget measures affecting small businesses are of particular interest both to them and to me. My constituency is perhaps unusual in that, other than the Wellcome research laboratories, it has no major employer, but it has an extraordinary number of small employers. There are literally hundreds of retail outlets on dozens of streets and in small shopping areas. Alongside those, there are many small businesses running service industries and some small manufacturing and engineering companies. They will all benefit from the reduction in small companies tax to 24 per cent., down from 42 per cent. in 1979.

Those companies will benefit too from the reduction to 10 per cent. in employers' national insurance contributions. As an added incentive to those people, who often work extremely long hours and hard in the early part of their lives, they have the prospect of retiring at the lower age of 50 and of obtaining capital gains tax exemption when they pass their business on to others. Some will be able to benefit from the extension of inheritance tax relief to non-quoted shares.

Business, especially small business, will therefore benefit considerably from the Budget, which will do all those firms in my constituency—employers and employees— a great deal of good, but the effects of Budget will also flow through to people who wish to set up in business, who will be encouraged by the extra incentives that are included.

Over the weekend, I met a group of my constituents who are vintage car enthusiasts. That is a surprisingly widespread hobby and an attractive one. In the past, I have attended vintage car rallies. Those people were not only extremely delighted that the original Green Paper proposals for continuous licensing had been effectively withdrawn as a result of the Government's listening to their representations—and to my representations as well, as I had strongly supported them—but delighted and surprised that continuous licensing would be operated in a way that produced no charge for those who were not using their cars on the road. For anyone owning a car that was more than 20 years old there was also the added and surprising bonanza that no vehicle excise duty had to be paid.

I am on the verge of declaring an interest in that matter, as the car that I own and run is more than 20 years old and I may benefit from that measure in three or four years, if my car lasts that long. I sincerely hope that it will. If it does not, I intend to show my appreciation for that Budget measure by buying a car that is even older. Some of my constituents will benefit, however, and are genuinely pleased about that Budget measure, which I welcome.

I should like to move on to four sectors of expenditure that affect my constituency. Much has been said today about the health service. Much of it, however, has been theoretical and a great deal of it has been fictional or fantastic. The truth is that real resources for my constituents who need the health service will increase by more than 2.5 per cent. as some £3 million extra money flows to Bromley health authority. That will trickle down to the vital facilities that are offered to my constituents.

I expect Bromley health authority to make good use of that money to reduce waiting lists still further, on top of its great successes in the past 12 to 18 months. I also expect that that will work through to a further improvement in accident and emergency services locally. The casualty service at Bromley hospital needs improving, but a great deal has already been done, to which I pay tribute. That money will enable more to be done, and I look to forward to that happening.

I, too, welcome the private finance initiative. It will especially benefit my region, as Bromley Hospitals NHS, trust has advanced plans to build a new district general hospital that is needed in the region. For historic reasons, the present structure is haphazard and inefficient. Doctors and clinicians working in the hospitals, Bromley health authority and local people want a new district general hospital to provide a better, more efficient and more up-to-date service. I look forward to that materialising with the help of the measures announced in the Budget.

Another concern of my constituents is the fight against crime. It is encouraging that the Metropolitan police will receive an enhanced budget that will enable the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to employ a further 180 policemen in the coming year in the region. That will help to reduce the crime level still further. The number of recorded crimes dropped by 60,000 in the year to June 1995. It is important that that is continued. The extra police that the Commissioner promised will now be able to be put on station. We will do that, along with extending the innovative closed circuit television schemes.

The CCTV scheme in the centre of Bromley has been a great success. It has been up and running for a few months and has already resulted in a reduction—

Mr. Simon Hughes: Why did you get the funding for that?

Mr. Merchant: Because we lobbied so effectively. It has resulted in a reduction in the number of crimes committed in that region. I should like that scheme, however, to be extended to Beckenham town centre and to the other town centres in my constituency. The large extension of some 10,000 schemes will enable us to have a fair share of new CCTV schemes.

All those measures will enable the security that people need to feel in the region to be extended in the face of what, in the past, have been serious crime levels. I regularly attend local police community liaison meetings. It is interesting to note that attitudes have changed in the past six months as the crime level has fallen considerably, across the country, in the Greater London area and specifically in my constituency. People are aware of that, and they are pleased to see it. They want the successful measures that have been used to bring the crime level down to be continued. The Budget will enable that to happen.

There will be an increase in the local education standard spending assessment of some £4.2 million—an increase of 4.3 per cent. That, too, will feed through to the benefit of local people, as will the local government settlement. Calculated through its SSA of £203 million, this year Bromley will receive a distinct increase. Its SSA is up by some 2.7 per cent., or £5.4 million, and it is considerably more than was predicted even by optimists in the borough. The pessimists were talking about £196 million, the optimists of £199 million. The figure of £203 million is considerably in excess of that.

It should enable the borough not only to continue providing a high level of good basic services, for which in any case it receives much praise, but to keep the council tax low. Bromley has one of the lowest council tax rates in London. After the rhetoric and fiction and the reinterpretation of reality, ordinary people will see how the Budget affects them and their locality and will appreciate its success. It is wise and well measured and will allow extra spending on things that people want, while allowing them to keep more of what they save and earn.

7.20 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): The focus of the debate is the national health service. I have always appreciated the importance of that great service, but I shall concentrate on the need to build a successful economy that can provide the resources for an expanding and efficient health service. That would certainly have been the aim of Aneurin Bevan, who founded the NHS. He, too, would have deplored the creeping privatisation of the service.

The Budget was not a giveaway at all. The most that can be said about it is that it amply meets the charge that is often made by the shadow Chancellor: that the Chancellor is giving with one hand and taking with the other. Whatever our political persuasion, none of us likes paying tax. I welcome the 1p off income tax, but I emphasise that it will be paid for in many ways.

There is already considerable worry in Wales about the Government's plans to increase council tax. The Secretary of State for Wales has confirmed that there will be increases. The revealing fact is that it is widely anticipated that the rise will be 11 per cent. on current tax levels in Wales, whereas in England the corresponding rise will be 5 per cent. and in Scotland it will be 8 per cent. I can safely predict that when the suggested 11 per cent. increase in council tax is added to the 14p increase on petrol and the £5 increase in the road fund licence, the people of Newport, of Gwent and, indeed, of Wales will hardly be better off.

On Sunday nights over recent weeks, BBC Wales has been running a series of programmes about the state of Wales after 16 years of Conservative government. It is known as the "Kane" programme, because that is the name of its distinguished presenter, Mr. Vincent Kane, who has not exactly made a reputation for himself as a Labour supporter. A fortnight ago, the programme dealt with poverty and made a convincing case for Wales to be described as the most poverty stricken area in western Europe, certainly on a par with some of western Europe's most devastated areas such as are found in Greece, Portugal, southern Spain, Sardinia and the former East Germany.

Once vibrant communities in Wales have been totally decimated. In addition to massive unemployment, officially registered and otherwise, wages are deplorably low. If ever there was a case for a minimum wage, it could certainly be made for Wales.

From time to time, the Government boast about overseas investment in Wales. I do not wish to detract from the Government's efforts in that respect, but I am bound to say that local authorities have also given considerable help. However, such investment has much to do with the low wages in Wales and confirms the belief that Wales can be classified as equivalent to a third-world country. We certainly need more investment, both public and private, and it is abundantly clear that a massive increase in industrial training is called for. Successful UK companies should be told that charity begins at home and that they should invest here.

What are the investment percentages among our principal competitors? Japan invests 28 per cent. of its gross domestic product, Germany invests 23 per cent. and France invests 19 per cent. However, the United Kingdom is down to 15 per cent. No wonder we have dropped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league.

At a dinner that I attended last week organised by a major trade organisation, I sat next to a leading figure in a company that once had strong links with south Wales. He talked about his company's plans in Germany, Belgium and India, in countries of the Pacific rim and in Brazil in south America. When I asked what was left of his company in south Wales, he shook his head, because the answer was nothing. Surely our Government should be exhorting our major companies and giving them financial incentives to invest here so that our people can get back to work.

I applaud the shadow Chancellor's plans to put the £1 billion collected from a windfall tax into ending unemployment for the 600,000 young people who are out of work. The only alternative is for them to continue to turn to drugs and crime, because they have no stake in society. They are merely adding to the gigantic social

[Mr. Roy Hughes]

security bill that is doing so much harm to our economy. Unemployment is a scourge that must be eliminated. That is why I support Labour's plan for a £75 a week tax rebate for employers who take on people from among the 800,000 long-term jobless.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Over the weekend the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) met a considerable number of people. Unfortunately, he did not seem to bump into anyone who was unemployed. My hon. Friend also met a considerable number of people. Were the unemployed dancing in the streets of Newport after the Budget?

Mr. Hughes: They were not exactly enthused.

It is not only the unemployed but those in work who feel uneasy in these difficult times. The President of the Board of Trade has described job insecurity as an attitude of mind. He can say that again. A job is basic and a person's whole future depends on it. People who have been made redundant often have their homes repossessed. Many thousands regularly suffer that fate, and in such a climate there can be no feel-good factor.

A boost for the housing industry could do much for the economy as a whole, and local authority assets from the sale of council houses should certainly be released. The construction industry is in a parlous condition at present. A recent survey by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors showed that 21 per cent. more firms were expecting their work load to decline in the next three months. Many firms are moving out of housebuilding altogether. What a sad situation that is.

The construction industry working flat out could have such a good effect on employment, as the industry embraces the professional classes—architects, quantity surveyors and accountants—and unskilled labourers. In addition to the people involved, there is the multiplier effect in other areas of industry.

My final point is that I deplore the cynical attitude of the Government to road transport. The Budget will impose a massive increase in fuel duty of approximately 14p a gallon, with a further £5 going on vehicle excise duty. The roads programme has been drastically slashed, and the green lobby is clapping its hands. But surely even those dedicated warriors—slim in number though they may be—realise that they are being conned by the Government. None of the expenditure saved will be spent on long-overdue improvements in our rail, bus, tram, cycling and walking networks.

Some 22 bypasses have been deleted from the Government's programme and that will cause a lot of heartache, and certainly pollution, in the years ahead. I pity all the people in Witney, which is simply snarled up at present. In addition, two bypasses on the borders of mid-Wales have been deleted from the Government's programme. Those bypasses could have done so much for the environment, besides reducing travel times and improving overall efficiency.

I support the principle of getting more freight and passengers on to rail, but for the foreseeable future we shall be essentially a road-based economy. What is more, when one puts up the price of transport—as the Government have—one puts up the price of just about everything. As a result, our goods and services becomes less competitive in the marketplace, and ultimately jobs are threatened. What a shortsighted policy that is.

In conclusion, the Budget has done little to bring down the high unemployment that has persisted for so long. Bringing down the burgeoning social security bill to get our young people into work would have helped to curb the drug-related crime and muggings that have become such a feature of our society. The impoverished of Wales will be further hit by savage increases in council tax. Our transport infrastructure will be allowed to continue to deteriorate. It is obvious that the time has come for change. Britain needs an early general election, so that this worn-out Government can be replaced by a Labour Government who will put our people back to work and restore our economic fortunes.

7.33 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I am not sure whether it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) or not, because I cannot believe that a single man or woman in his constituency or in Wales would thank him for describing their home as equivalent to a third-world country. I cannot believe that they would thank the hon. Gentleman for describing them as living in an impoverished state and equating them with some grossly chaotic country overseas. I would be furious to be put into such a category, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will later apologise to the people whom he represents. The hon. Gentleman does not represent those people in a way worthy of them.

Mr. Roy Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) *rose—*

Lady Olga Maitland: I am not going to give way. It might be helpful to the House if I pointed out one or two facts relating to unemployment which seem to have escaped the attention of the hon. Member for Newport, East.

The latest published figures show that, since 1992, unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency alone is down by 23 per cent. Since 1994, unemployment in Newport, East has fallen by 12.7 per cent. That is a success story, and is an example of the Government's commitment to bringing increased prosperity to our country and giving dignity back to our people so that they can provide themselves with homes and jobs. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will apologise to the House for having exaggerated the situation in his constituency.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Lady Olga Maitland: Opposition Members will have plenty of time later to make their own remarks.

I wish to welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget, which has something in it for all my constituents. I was out in the streets the other day, and I asked an elderly man what he thought of the Budget. He replied that it meant he was able to pass on more to his sons when he dies. He was delighted by the lifting of the threshold on inheritance tax from £160,000 to £200,000, as more of his life savings will now go to the next generation. That will fulfil the Government's commitment to allowing the rewards for a man's life's work to cascade down through the generations.

There are those for whom it is important to be able to keep as much of their life savings as possible. I welcome the Government's recognition of that. The amount of personal wealth that people can now keep after they have provided for residential care has been raised from £8,000 to £16,000. Those figures are important, and that is a significant measure for the people concerned.

I wish to speak on a subject that is close to my heart—health. I welcome the fact that the Government have made a commitment to spend an extra £1.3 billion on health. Health is an emotional topic that has been tossed around like a political football, and sometimes the very people we are trying to help become anxious, concerned and distressed as they wonder whether they are getting the care that they deserve. The truth is that they have been getting that care. Health spending today stands at £41 billion—twice the amount that we spend on the defence of our country. Nobody can ever say that the Government do not have a total commitment to health.

The sum spent represents £697 for every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom. It is interesting to compare what is spent in real terms now with what was spent in 1978 when this country had a Labour Government. In those days, the Government spent £433 per person on health, at today's prices. So the increase in spending on health has been dramatic and the results are there for us all to see.

However, I have a word of caution. I should like to make sure that every penny of that £1.3 billion goes to patient care and is not siphoned off into administration. I welcome the fact that the Government are working extremely hard in urging all the health authorities and health trusts to look into the money that they spend on red tape and bureaucrats to make sure that we get it down and the money goes to the areas where it is most needed.

We have a record of which we should be proud. We do not have to be defensive one jot about our health programme. At times it gets forgotten that on average a multi-million pound project is completed for the health service almost every week. The number of people working in our health care services has increased by a tremendous number. Between 1983 and 1993 the number of hospital doctors and dentists rose by 8,000. The number of qualified nurses and midwives has risen by a colossal 18,000. That is on top of the fact that we now have more GPs than ever before and that today they number 29,000. All this is funded by the health service.

Of course, as a result of the increase in staff, more patients are treated than ever before. In the debate on the health service, it is right that sometimes we should reflect back to the days when the health service was first instituted after the war and look at the changes in our demands and expectations. In the late 1940s, the level of sophistication that was available was much lower than it is today. Hospitals did not have the high technology that we have. They did not have the expertise or the knowledge; it was a different world; it was a time when people went into hospital for minor operations and spent days occupying a hospital bed. Today that is no longer necessary, but that does not represent a cut in the number of hospital beds. What we have done is increase services to patients.

Today people can have hip operations when they are as old as 95. A leading patient in this country, Her Majesty the Queen Mother, has had such an operation. I welcome the excellent news that she is making a good recovery and will be able to be back with her family at Christmas. What is remarkable is that Her Majesty's operation was unthinkable way back after the war. Her operation is available to everyone on the national health service.

Ms Eagle: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lady Olga Maitland: No. I do not plan to give way to the hon. Lady because she is quite capable of making her own speeches, and she does.

We must make sure that our hospitals produce not only quantity of care but quality of care. In this, I am going to blow very proudly the trumpet of my local hospital trust, St. Helier NHS trust, which comes out extremely well in all the hospital league tables in terms of performance. May I just give one example?

Waiting times are a topic much beloved by the Labour party. It tries to give the impression that the whole country is queuing up for unreasonable and unbearable times for operations. I can only say that if any patients in their constituencies are having to wait for unreasonable lengths of time, they had better send them to Sutton. In Sutton they would get five-star treatment. Five-star treatment in waiting times is now applicable in urology, ear nose and throat, ophthalmology, oral surgery, gynaecology, general medicine and dermatology. We have a track record to be proud of—fine quality services.

Another hospital in my constituency which will benefit from the increase in health service funding is the Royal Marsden. It has a reputation across the world. It is second to none. People travel far and wide to Sutton for treatment. It now has NHS trust status. It has been doing extremely well in the past two years. The Royal Marsden dovetails its work closely with the Institute of Cancer Research. The purpose is to integrate their research, education, training of medical students and the development of patient care.

As a result of the close harmony between those two important institutions, they have not only become world leaders together in quality care but have improved no end man's knowledge and understanding of how to cope and live with cancer, how to make it more bearable for the patients and how to improve the quality of life, not only of those who will make a good recovery, but of those who may not. They can still have a quality of life which was denied to their peer group years ago.

The Labour party seems to have a fixation about the private finance initiative. I suppose that it is the latest buzz word in what to attack as a Government project. We are proud of our progress with the private finance initiative; it is making great inroads; it is of great benefit to projects; it provides an opportunity for projects to expand at a faster rate than they might otherwise have been able to do.

In my constituency a programme is now being put together to build a massive Sutton medical campus. Such a project is possible only by working through the PFI. The programme is being drawn up. Bankers have been consulted. There is no shortage of people willing to invest. When this wonderful new hospital comes to be built in my constituency in the next century, the end result will be to the benefit of all around.

The hospital will be able to bring into my constituency and provide for the community expert services in all the different disciplines. It will have a medical training school

[Lady Olga Maitland]

and research facilities. It will become an academic centre of excellence. It will be an opportunity to create a major trauma centre from which everyone will undoubtedly benefit. In short, people are planning to build for the future. Surely if we are building for the future it is absolutely right that we should look at all possible alternatives for funding. That is the only way in which we can provide effectively for the next generation.

Although so far I have been talking about hospitals, I should like to devote a moment or two to GP fundholders. Fundholding practices have been a colossal success across the land. They have created a revolution. Indeed, 41 per cent. of all GPs are fundholders. The patients benefit. They have wider access to services. The GPs can now apply their professional skills right the way through into decisions about how the hard cash is spent. They can summon hospital consultants to give consultations in their own surgeries. Patients can only benefit from that. I trust that some of the money that has been earmarked in the increased health budget will go down to expand further the services that GPs can deliver.

What a pity it is that the Labour party carps and criticises and tries to undermine the whole concept of GP fundholders—those wonderful, dedicated people who are there to serve the community. What a pity it was to hear the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) say that GP fundholding is, as it currently stands, unacceptable. The truth is that the Labour party wants to intervene at every level of the profession and if it can intervene politically and control and dictate to GP fundholders, it will—much in the same way as it would, if it could, control the NHS trusts.

Of course, there would be a price to pay for such interference, because, if the Labour party had its way and brought in the minimum wage and the social chapter, valuable resources would be denied to patients; they would go to pay for increased wages for others in the NHS. I know who I think should get the fairer share of the pot.

I welcome the fact that the Government have committed more resources to education. Sutton alone will benefit from an extra £3.3 million for our schools. I hope that the local education authority in Sutton, which is Liberal-controlled, will, for once, heed the advice of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, who said that he wanted the money to go directly to schools, and parents to ask where the money is being spent and for the schools or local education authorities to be accountable. If parents do not get the answers, we should find out why.

The trouble is that local education authorities, especially those under Liberal Democrat control, tend to spend money on other things. I for one regret that important services are not ring-fenced. The local authority in Sutton has earmarked £48,000 to create mini-town halls, as in Tower Hamlets. If I were a parent, I would want that money to go to education. It has spent £105,000 refurbishing the entrance hall of the civic offices—what a waste of money. It should go to essential services such as education and social services. Indeed, just the other day, the authority had to inflate its vanity by spending £21,000 on a MORI poll to try to show how green it is.

The Budget is a wide and important subject; it affects our lives in every possible way. It is a welcome Budget. The Chancellor is not trying to buy people's votes, which is to his credit. It shows him to be a man of integrity, as the Government are a Government of integrity. We would never stoop so low. The Budget makes sure that there is something for everybody but it does not throw away the careful prudence that we have built up over all these years. I therefore give the Budget a hearty welcome.

7.53 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I am glad to hear that all is well in Sutton and Cheam, Bromley and Hastings. In Sunderland, we tend to take more a more sceptical view of Government policy, but I do not plan to dwell on that.

I welcome the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) to our deliberations. Let the record show that he first set foot in the Chamber at 6.55 pm, remained on the premises for 30 seconds, and returned 30 minutes later clutching a copy of the Red Book. He is one of the most original thinkers on the Conservative side of the House and is always entertaining, with something interesting to say. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will look kindly upon those of my hon. Friends who have been waiting since 3.30 pm to catch your attention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to take over the Chair, he should volunteer for the Chairmen's Panel. In the meantime, he should take advantage of the fact that he has Floor now, and note further that the shortest speech so far has been 14 minutes. I hope that I can record his as even shorter.

Mr. Mullin: I do not think that they would have me on the Chairmen's Panel, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I do not intend to follow the line on the health service taken by the two Front-Bench speakers, except to say that the Secretary of State made the usual claim about spending on the national health service having increased substantially since 1979. In 1979, it was a darn sight easier to get a bed in Sunderland general hospital than it is today.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mullin: The Minister shakes his head, but only last month, someone telephoned me from Sunderland general hospital to say that there were six geriatric patients aged between 60-something and 90 in the gynaecology ward because of the shortage of beds. That sort of thing did not happen in 1979.

The huge cuts in the local health budget were sold to us on the basis that all sorts of primary health care would be put in place to take up the slack. That has not so far happened. Within the time allotted me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to address a slightly wider issue.

As other hon. Members have said, this is an irresponsible Budget. It is not as irresponsible as I feared, nor, to judge from the glum looks on the faces of Tory Back Benchers on Budget day, as irresponsible as they had hoped it would be, nor as irresponsible as the next one is likely to be. It is based on the entirely cynical belief that votes can be purchased; the only argument between the Chancellor and his Back Benchers is over the price.

The large cuts in social security spending that arise from the Budget will place still further strains on our damaged social fabric. If the Government really want to do something about the burgeoning housing benefit bill, they could start by regulating landlords. They will not, of course, because they are the party of the landlords.

It is surely one of life's richest ironies that, after 17 years of Governments that have never ceased to proclaim their commitment to low taxes, the overall tax burden is as great today as it was 16 or 17 years ago. Even with the benefit of North sea oil and the massive one-off revenues from the sale of public assets, this Government of so-called tax cutters still cannot get taxation down to the level that they inherited from the wicked socialist Government that preceded them. *[Interruption.]*

Tory Members may huff puff about that, but it is an uncomfortable fact of life. There is no great mystery about why that is so. To keep 2 million to 3 million people out of work permanently is extremely expensive. There is not only the cost of benefit—vast though that is—but the cost to the Exchequer of lost taxation, and the additional cost of maintaining our disintegrating social fabric.

As we all know, the Thatcher decade gave rise to the birth of an underclass, the like of which we have not seen since the 1930s. To cope with it, there has had to be a massive increase in the law and order budget. While Conservative Members may deny any connection—indeed, I heard the Home Secretary making just such a denial only last Thursday—most sensible people, of all political persuasions, know that there is a clear link between permanent mass unemployment and the tidal wave of yobbery that accompanied the Thatcher decade.

Not only law and order are affected. The burden on schools, the health service and just about every other social agency is increasing. A psychiatrist in my constituency told me the other day that she was having to deal increasingly with chronically depressed men in their 40s and 50s from the former mining towns of Murton and Seaham, who had no hope of working again and no purpose in life.

When the Government closed the mines and shipyards, and encouraged the privatised utilities to unleash a war of attrition against their employees, they may have thought that they were choosing the cheap option. The truth is that, for everyone except the shareholders, privatisation was a very expensive option, and Muggins the taxpayer has to pick up the tab. The bills are now coming in for the Thatcher decade.

That is why, whether they like it or not, the Tories are a party of high taxation. Margaret Thatcher came to power, cheered by most Conservative Members, promising to end the benefit culture. Is it not ironic that she and her heirs ended up creating a benefit culture on a scale hitherto unknown? I recall that she promised to end to what she used to call "pretend" jobs. The irony is that she ended up doing away with real jobs, and creating pretend jobs on a vast scale. We have all been paying the price of that ever since.

To be fair—although I do not see why I should be—the doubling and trebling of the unemployment rate over which successive Conservative Governments have presided is not entirely their own fault. New technology means that capital no longer requires so many human beings to make it function. Monetarist economics means that capital is particularly ruthless about disposing of those human beings who are surplus to requirements. Mass unemployment is happening across the developed world; we just got there first, and embraced it with more enthusiasm than our neighbours. There is no easy solution. The genie is out of the bottle, and it will be difficult to put it back.

We have created a generation, particularly of unskilled young men, who are entirely alienated from society. Even if, by some miracle, work became available tomorrow, they would not be capable of doing it. In the long term, there is only one way in which to cut taxes—either by creating new jobs or by sharing out existing work more equitably. That is the only way we will reduce the huge benefit bill—anything else is just tinkering.

When we reduce unemployment, we not only reduce the soaring cost of welfare; we will also find that we are spending less on shoring up our disintegrating social fabric. In addition, the Treasury would gain more in extra tax revenue. In every respect, we will be a healthier society. For those reasons, the Labour party gives a high priority to job creation, especially for the young.

The job creation programme recently proposed by my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor may not be a panacea, but it is a serious attempt to address the most important issue facing our society, besides which short-term gimmicks of the sort that we saw in the Budget pale into insignificance. If anyone has better ideas, let us hear them, but let us not mock those who are at least addressing what is surely the greatest threat to the stability of our society.

There is one issue, however, that we should not duck: the cost. A job creation programme on anything like the scale needed to make an impact on the problem which any new Government will inherit will require huge public investment. That money can come only from taxation, borrowing or growth. It is not credible to suggest that it will be provided solely from growth. In an age when we are all signed up to sound money, it is not credible either to suggest that that investment can come only from borrowing. It will therefore have to come mainly from taxation.

My hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has said that he intends to fund his initial programme through a one-off windfall tax on the utilities. I should be surprised if that is enough, given the scale of the problem we face. We must therefore leave open the possibility that further revenue will need to be raised, in the short to medium term at least, through taxation. I therefore urge my hon. Friend not to rule out that possibility. We should not get involved in an auction over taxes. It is one that we could never hope to win, because, in the last analysis, the Tories will simply lie, as we saw at the previous election.

There are only three promises that a responsible Labour Government should make about taxes. First, we should pledge that we will raise whatever is necessary to maintain the social fabric. Secondly, we should promise that Labour will spend taxpayers' money at least as efficiently as the Tories. That will not be hard, given the billions squandered on the poll tax, Trident missile systems and the cut-price sale of public assets.

Thirdly, we should promise that the burden of taxation will fall on those who are most able to pay. That should be the cardinal principle of our approach to taxation. By

[Mr. Mullin]

all means say that there will be no return to the ludicrous surtax levels that obtained under past Governments, Labour and Tory—that is only common sense—but let us make it quite clear that those who have done best out of the Thatcher decade will be expected to contribute most to repairing the damage.

When my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor is challenged, as he has been and will be, to say whether he will restore the irresponsible tax cuts in the Budget, or the next one, I hope that he will give no hostages to fortune. Social stability is far more important than short-term gimmicks.

If there is one thing I most deeply resent about the Government—beside the fact that they have brought politicians lower in public esteem than estate agents—it is that they have turned taxation into a dirty word. As a result of the constant baying for tax cuts from Conservative Back Benchers, and the mass hysteria liable to be unleashed by their friends in the media at the slightest hint of a tax increase, it is no longer possible to have an honest debate about taxation.

I shall always remember one summer two or three years ago, when the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who spoke in the Budget debate the other day and who represents, in my view, the meanest instincts in Tory Britain, appeared on the television news. Item one was the catastrophe then taking place in Kurdistan, and was illustrated by harrowing film of families living without shelter on freezing mountain sides. Item two was the famine in Somalia, illustrated by harrowing pictures of starving children, then dying at a rate of 1,000 a day. Item three on the news was the hon. Member for Bridlington, standing in front of an elegant period house, where he no doubt lives, calling for cuts in the overseas aid budget. He was at it again the other day.

I do not believe that the British people are as mean-spirited as the hon. Gentleman thinks they are. He may well speak for most Tory Members—I do not think that he necessarily does, but he may do—but I do not think that he speaks for most Tory voters. Such meanness should not be pandered to; it should be resisted.

It is the duty of responsible politicians in a democracy to will not only the ends but the means. It is our duty to point out that, if people want decent public services, they have to be paid for. If people want something done about crime and yobbery, they will have to spend money tackling their social causes. If people want intervention to end the unspeakable suffering in Somalia, Rwanda or anywhere else, it must be paid for. Taxation, honestly raised and efficiently spent, is the basis of a civilised society. We should not be afraid of saying so.

8.6 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I regret that we have not had a chance to hold a debate specifically on employment during the debate on the Budget. The abolition of the Department of Employment has meant that no separate press release has been issued on specific employment issues.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has not appeared at the Dispatch Box to talk about the Budget, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has just said, tackling unemployment is crucial to our ability to deal with our current economic problems.

The Budget offers tax cuts of £3 billion, which will be paid for by public expenditure cuts of £3 billion. The Budget is notable for what it did not tackle, and the questions it left unanswered.

The forecasts in the Red Book are ominous, and unrelated to reality. Some commentators have even called them heroic. They are incredibly optimistic, and we all know, unfortunately, that the Treasury's record on achieving its forecasts is dubious, to say the least.

The Government's economic strategy, based on forecasts, appears to be founded on the understanding that there will be a slowdown in manufacturing output this year, continuing into next year, and an increase in consumer spending. That will then work its way through to become an increase in growth next year. One of the structural problems with the British economy, which has been well recognised, is our inability to finance growth and recovery from recession by anything other than consumer spending. We should instead try to create a bigger manufacturing base to sustain recovery in the long run. The Government, however, seem to happy to work according to their own forecasts, which suggest that consumer spending will fuel growth.

How will that extra growth be achieved? We are now in the third year of the so-called recovery from the recession. The Red Book reveals that the Government have revised downward the estimate of investment growth from 3 per cent., as expected in last year's Red Book, to a mere 1 per cent. this year. That means that we are managing only 1 per cent. growth in investment, at a time when the economy is meant to be in recovery. That is the worst record of investment out of recession since the 1930s.

According to Treasury forecasts, next year investment is scheduled to grow by 4.5 per cent. However, the Budget strategy gives no indication of how that investment will come about. The Chancellor is paying no attention to stimulating the huge increase in investment that the Government forecast, so how will it be achieved?

I believe that the cuts in public investment are likely to lead to an opposite result. Instead of an increase in investment, we may well have a slowdown. Many City economists also predict that the Treasury's forecasts for growth are grossly optimistic, and are unlikely to reach about 1.75 per cent., let alone the 3 per cent. that the Red Book forecasts.

The swingeing cuts in public investment are likely to cause that downturn. The construction sector, where one usually witnesses the beginnings of economic recovery, is stagnant, and the cuts in public housing, the cuts in other public investment and the £4 billion of cuts in road investment are all likely to lead to continuing stagnation in the construction sector.

I do not believe that the private finance initiative will ever fill that gap. We had some discussion earlier about the likely efficacy of the private finance initiative, but obviously the initiative has failed to reach the targets that were set for it in the past, and I am aware of no reason why the rate of that failure should improve in the next few years.

Last year, £5 billion of private finance initiative so-called investment was announced, but a mere £500 million was delivered during the year. At that rate of delivery, all we are likely to see are significant cuts in public investment, and the gap created, which was meant to be filled by the private finance initiative, simply left.

We have heard many examples of the failure of the private finance initiative from both sides of the House during today's debate. I add another. The channel tunnel rail link was announced as a private finance initiative in 1986, yet here we are, almost 10 years later, not really any closer to having our high-speed link. Those of us who have been to France and seen how their high-speed rail link works are still waiting for the private finance initiative to deliver the goods in this country. So the omens for filling the gap of that investment are not good.

Why should consumer spending increase and generate growth in the year to come? The modest tax cuts that we have had have left families about £2 better off. That is not £9, as the Government first tried to claim when the Budget emerged, and we know that most of that £2 will be swallowed up in other charges as a result of the Budget. That leaves a deflationary balance of about £16 billion from the tax increases in the past two or three years—21 tax increases, 7p up and only 1p down.

Therefore, although this year's Budget was effectively neutral, I cannot imagine where the stimulus will come from for strong growth in the years to come.

Mr. Jack: May I take issue with the hon. Lady on one detail? She speaks about people being £2 a week better off as a result of the tax changes in the Budget. Does she agree that the average family would be £190 a year better off specifically as a result of the changes in tax, which I work out to be about £4 a week?

Ms Eagle: I understand—it is typical of the sleight of hand in the Budget that becomes apparent when one studies it—that initially the Government claimed that people would be £9 a week better off, but that included a Treasury assumption that there would be a 4 per cent. increase in wages next year.

I do not know how many people expect a 4 per cent. increase in wages next year, but I very much doubt that any of those in the public sector do. The Red Book, and various of the press releases that accompanied it, show that the Government have not calculated, or provided any extra finance for, public sector wages next year. Any wage increases are meant to be paid for out of efficiency savings, which have been made so often, year on year, that there is very little left to save, and certainly not 4 per cent.

On the one hand, the Treasury makes an assumption that there will be a 4 per cent. wage increase next year, and on the other, it deliberately fails to fund any of that increase in the public sector. That is a telling comment on the way in which the Government treat the public sector.

I return to my question—why will consumer spending not increase to generate growth? There is the persistence of the feel-bad factor, as I call it, or the lack of the feel-good factor, as some people call it. What did the Chancellor do to tackle that significant phenomenon, which has been with us throughout most of 1990s?

First, why is it here? It is here because of insecurity and fear in the labour market and the flat, stagnant condition of the housing market. The Chancellor had little to say about either. There was no action for the housing market. Perhaps he hopes that interest rate cuts will give some stimulus to that, but we must wait and see.

The Chancellor did nothing about the labour market and unemployment. People will not start unleashing massive spending when they do not know whether they will have a job next week and whether they will be able to pay their mortgage if they become unemployed. They expect to be thrown out of their houses if that happens. After all, we have 1,000 repossessions a week at the moment because of the effects of unemployment and job insecurity. It is impossible to tackle those issues without tackling the causes of the feel-bad factor.

The tax cuts that we have had are wrapped in a large IOU, partially because of those issues but also because of the significant cuts in public spending and public service that were revealed in the press releases that accompanied the Red Book. The £4 billion cut in the road programme, without extra investment in public transport to compensate, can only add costs to business as our roads become more and more congested.

Have the Minister or his officials estimated the increase in costs to business that will result from the decisions to abandon investment in the roads programme? I know that businesses believe that that will add to their costs.

We have cuts in housing budgets, at a time of increasing homelessness, with 1,000 families being repossessed a week. We have cuts—this is shameful—in training budgets and education, at a time when we are carrying mass unemployment and its burdens. We have a 5 per cent. cut in the colleges of further education, in spite of the fact that they are meant to provide 50,000 extra places in further education.

How are those sums to be balanced? How are we meant to preserve a public sector that we can be proud of in the face of cuts of that size? We have 3 per cent. cuts in university budgets: £4 billion of cuts in capital spending in the next three years.

It is the third year of freeze also, as I said, for public sector pay.

Mr. Jack: Let me give the hon. Lady a simple answer. By the end of the current public expenditure survey, we expect that £14,000 million of private finance initiative deals will have been signed up. That is a massive infusion of capital and provision of services for the benefit of the public.

Ms Eagle: That is the usual wish list, and it sounds as though the Minister is appealing to Father Christmas. We must wait and see whether he gets his wishes. I have already placed on record my great scepticism about that ever happening.

We have had the nasty little cuts in single-parent benefit, housing benefit for the under-25s and the lone-parent premium, which will have significant effects on individuals, especially lone parents, but save little money.

We must remember, as we contemplate the public sector, that the Government have had £120 billion of North sea oil revenues and £80 billion of revenues from privatisation sales, yet all around us, day in, day out, services for real need continue to be underfunded. It is not a record that I would be proud of.

Instead of the significant, damaging cuts in the fabric of the public sector, why on earth did the Chancellor not attack unemployment? There have been significant cuts in public expenditure, and they have saved only

[Ms Eagle]

£3 billion, yet we spend £20 billion a year on maintaining all those people in unemployment, doing nothing. Surely that is where cuts in public expenditure could best have come, and the Chancellor did nothing about it.

I shall comment briefly on the arrangements and the agreements that were signed in Beijing by representatives of the Government at the fourth international conference on women. I quote from the platform for action, which the Government signed up to, about lone parents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady may be ingenious, and perhaps the relevance of her comments to the Budget will come out. I hope that it will.

Ms Eagle: My comments are relevant, and I shall explain my train of thought. We have signed up, as a Government and a country, to the commitments that emerged from the women's conference. The platform for action contains a specific section on lone parents, which states that Governments must

"provide adequate safety nets and strengthen State-based and community-based support systems . . . to enable women living in poverty"

with children to

"preserve their livelihood, assets and revenues in times of crisis."

We have cut support for single mothers and lone parents, to save a mere £13 million a year.

In the 1985 Green Paper on social security reform, the Government admitted that there were additional costs for lone parents bringing up children. The Green Paper described the need for the creation of the lone parents premium in income support

"as a contribution to the additional costs faced by lone parents bringing children up alone."

Why have the Government, in the Budget, decided to freeze that premium and announce its future abolition? They are punishing lone parents.

When the Select Committee on Employment, of which I am a member, looked at the issue, it discovered that lone parents who are women are the only group of women who, over the past 10 years, have found it harder to get out to work. Fewer of them, as a percentage of the total number, work now than they did 10 years ago, simply because of the difficulties of looking after children, going to work and the costs involved. Yet the Government, in the Budget, have deliberately made matters worse for them, just to save very little money.

The Budget contained no measures to solve unemployment; it contained nothing to increase investment; it contained nothing to repair the social fabric—indeed, it made even more attacks on it. We wait for the so-called prudent Chancellor to introduce the electoral bribes next year ahead of the general election. When he does so, we shall immediately ask him why he has had the change of heart.

8.21 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I understand the rebuke directed towards me by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). I am sorry that I was held up on the motorway and I plead guilty, albeit with some mitigation, to some of his charges. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have rectified matters by properly calling two speakers in succession from the Opposition Benches.

Although I crave the indulgence of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South, I hope that the House will give proper attention to his significant speech. The shadow Chancellor has suggested a 10p rate of income tax and I have no doubt that it is a splendid thing. Many ordinary working people must feel tremendous pride at being led by a public school activist on the make who is anxious to gain the middle-class votes of people from Hampstead and to preserve the high earnings of those at the Bar and engaged in, similar activities. It is refreshing and interesting to hear the voice of old-fashioned, honourable socialism saying that socialism is not about creating inflation by vast deficits, but is properly financed by higher taxation and redistribution. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South spoke in unfashionable but honourable terms. I hope that the myriad spin doctors now employed by the Labour party will give proper prominence to his interesting and honourable speech.

As the hon. Gentleman chided me, he said that I had gone off to get the Red Book, which I did. I hope that he will note that it is a well thumbed Red Book and I have given a little thought to the balance of the Budget these last few days. I shall do something unusual: I shall commend the Chancellor's judgment over the Budget. I have known the Chancellor, man and boy, for more than 30 years. He and I were at Cambridge together; we were at the Birmingham Bar together; we ran the Birmingham Bow Group together and we have been in the House of Commons for a long time. On almost everything that is important in politics, he and I have disagreed. I read that many of my hon. Friends were almost insulted when the Chancellor said that the financial deficit was now expected to be close to the Maastricht reference level of 3 per cent., but in light of the Chancellor's views I thought that he was being remarkably reticent in containing his European federalism to but one sentence.

Those are all unnecessary and adolescent jibes at my right hon. and learned Friend and his views over the past 30 years. Contrary to the views of some of my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), I think that the central question that the Chancellor had to decide was properly decided. Contrary to what commentators on both sides of the House say, we know that the balance between one action and another is well constrained and the arguments are finely balanced. My right hon. and learned Friend had to decide whether to take more off the standard rate and please my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington or be cautious and hope to have a helpful effect on interest rates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington draws on many of the arguments that have been used in the Republican party in America. Roughly speaking, the Republicans said that if taxation was cut hard enough it would create a big deficit and rising interest rates, which would force the Government to cut public expenditure. I do not know whether that happens in America, but that was the argument advanced.

The Americans' different political system and different federal structure may allow that policy to work there, but it would not work here. If we had a bigger deficit, it would merely create trouble in the money markets. Everyone knows that, although every Chancellor gives the impression of being in complete control of interest rates—as though he decides unilaterally on their level—he is merely the biggest player in the market. Of course he has a substantial influence on interest rates, but he does not control them.

If the Chancellor had followed the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington, we would have had a funding crisis, higher interest rates and possibly a cut in public expenditure—although that would have happened much later. The dislocation and sense of crisis created would have been far more damaging. Those effects would have had to be balanced against the stimulus that would not occur until next year in lower rates of taxation.

I believe that we should be more helpful towards interest rates. As we debate the Budget in the autumn, we forget that its effects will not come until next April and are not immediate, whereas the effects of interest rates can be immediate and variable. Let us consider the effects on interest rates. We know that there has been a dispute between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England. At this stage, no one can say who is right. The Chancellor has been applauded and it has been said that the Governor of the Bank of England has lost authority as a result of being overruled by the Chancellor.

But the Governor may yet prove to be right. The Governor is simply saying that he, as the custodian of sound money, is told that it is the Government's objective to achieve an inflation rate no higher than 2.5 per cent. per annum and he replies, "Okay—if those are my riding instructions, we should not have lower interest rates." The Chancellor says no and that, perhaps for other reasons, we must have slightly lower interest rates. This year's cautious Budget may not result in lower interest rates immediately, but it will be a factor for lower interest rates and it will certainly prevent them from rising.

Lower interest rates are felt by all the most fragile elements in the economy. Mention has been made of the construction industry. I have in my constituency one of the largest construction companies, Tarmac, which has faced considerable troubles. It was not the company's fault, but it bought an awful lot of well priced land in the south-east hoping to build houses very profitably. The company's housing sector has had great difficulties, as has every house builder in recent years.

I am told that there are only six or seven big contractors who undertake major road building contracts, and it is said that two or three of them are in an extremely dodgy state and may either go into liquidation or be taken over. The construction industry itself is in a very dodgy state at present, and for that industry interest rates are the most crucial element in the economy.

Interest rates are also important to those entering self-employment or starting up small businesses. Companies and individuals who are not making profits, but are borrowing a bit of money because they are starting out, are not terribly interested in getting 1p, 2p or 3p off the standard rate of income tax. If they are not paying any profits or making any money, all that they want is the lowest possible interest rates to keep them going for the initial and most difficult period. So lower interest rates are good for unemployment in the sense of reducing unemployment and making it easier for people to move into self-employment.

Lower interest rates are crucial to the housing market. Of course we have had much discussion about whether something selective could be done for the housing market. I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor that nothing affordable would do anything selectively for the housing market, but the housing market is also important for employment.

If a chap is made redundant at 40 and wants to go into self-employment, perhaps as a consultant in the services that he was previously providing for a large firm, he borrows some money from a clearing bank and uses his house as collateral. If he is in negative equity, the house is not acceptable as collateral. Some improvement in the housing market is important to the economy and itself is dependent on the level of interest rates.

I do not believe that my right hon. and learned Friend had any great room for manoeuvre or, as some would argue from these Benches, that he was mistaken in not further cutting the standard rate of taxation. I believe that he was right to provide the way for lower interest rates, which can take effect immediately, as opposed to lower taxation, which would not take effect until some time next year. I believe that the central and most disagreeable and difficult decision that he had to take was rightly taken.

8.33 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): We have heard some right royal back slapping from Conservative Back Benchers to the Chancellor and their colleagues on the Front Bench. Unfortunately, the last three Conservative Members who spoke were not even in the Chamber at the start of the debate. No doubt the Conservative Whips have been running around Chelsea and Mayfair dragging them in to speak.

This year's Budget did absolutely nothing for poor people and very little for the elderly and served further to emphasise what 80 per cent. of the country already knows—that we cannot trust the Tories to look after the national health service.

We must set the Chancellor's Budget statement against the background of £1 in every £10 being spent on NHS administration, the number of hospitals in England having been reduced by more than 200 in the past four years and two in every five hospital beds having been cut since 1979. No matter how much the Government massage the figures, there are more than 1 million people on NHS waiting lists. The NHS repair backlog has soared by 38 per cent. since the reforms and capital spending cuts, and the number of NHS nurses and midwives has declined by almost 50,000 in four years.

The Government should be ashamed of that background—and they are. Earlier this year, the Maples report admitted that the Tories wanted zero press coverage on the national health service. That is clearly not a sign that the Government are proud of their record in health and this year's Budget offers little to change that record.

The cost of bureaucracy in the NHS has more than doubled since the reforms. An extra £1.5 billion per year is spent on administration. The Tories tell us that they will cut bureaucracy, but bureaucracy, administration and the internal market are still costing the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds.

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

Now the Secretary of State says that he will make 3 per cent. efficiency savings. He calls those new efficiency targets "challenging". They certainly are challenging; they are ill thought out and unrealistic.

Pay rises next year will have to be earned through those so-called efficiencies. Once again, NHS employees are being unfairly treated. Already, one in five nurses are set to leave the NHS due to low pay, increased work load and poor promotion prospects. At the same time, productivity in the NHS has increased. Department of Health data confirm that the NHS is treating more patients with fewer qualified nurses. Surely the overall funding allocation to the NHS should include fair pay awards, but unfortunately it does not. Managers of health authorities have already voiced their concern that the 3 per cent. efficiency savings will lead to job losses because they do not see how further efficiencies can be achieved without cutting jobs.

Once again, the Government are cutting the NHS capital budget. They are cutting the hospital building programme by some 16 per cent. in just one year. There will be a shortfall of more than £100 million, even after the expected revenue from the private finance initiative—that is, if the Government get the private finance that they project. Many of my hon. Friends have covered that subject. Like them, I do not believe that the private sector will produce the amount of money that the Government expect. On top of last year's cuts, that will demolish the NHS hospital building programme and may leave the private sector calling the shots. If that is the case, it is not privatisation by the back door, but privatisation by the front door. The Government are afraid to admit that to the electorate, because the electorate do not want a private health service.

Last year, the Government said that private sector investment should be in addition to capital spending, but it is being made instead of capital spending. The Government predicted capital spending cuts of 1.4 per cent. but the figure is 16 per cent. The backlog of health service repairs stands at 40 per cent. Patients are being treated in hospitals that are 30, 40 or 50 years old and desperately in need of repair and renovation. Unless private finance is forthcoming, the Government are not prepared to meet the cost. This year's shortfall is £100 million, which is equivalent to three new 700-bed hospitals. We cannot trust the Government over the shortfall next year or how long it will be before private finance overtakes public finance in the NHS capital building programme and hospitals are fully privatised—which I am sure is where the Government are heading.

I welcome the announcement that the assets threshold above which elderly people must pay for their long-term care is to be raised, but is it not a case of too little, too late? A £16,000 threshold will not help many elderly people, who will still be forced to sell their homes as a result of the current system because their assets—including their homes—are well above £16,000. The Government are trying to quieten down the outrage felt by many elderly people on realising that they will not be provided with the care that they expected in their old age.

The Government are offering the elderly a short-term solution to a problem that should be considered in the long term. Despite an increased threshold, access to care for the elderly will be a lottery, with patients in one part of the country forced to sell their homes to buy care that is provided free in another part of the country. How will the raised threshold be funded? Unless local authorities are adequately funded by the Government to meet the extra demand, the new threshold will help nobody.

The Budget has done little to make the Government proud of their national health service policies. It proves that the Tories are privatising the NHS and care more about trying to win over the electorate with token tax cuts than about funding capital expenditure on hospitals and offering fair pay deals to NHS staff. Time and again, the Tories say that the health service is safe with them and that they value the service, but it is not true. The Government have let down the ill, the elderly and the nurses, and they are letting down the people of this country.

The Government want the public to be kept in the dark about what they have done to the NHS, but the public already know the story and the Budget gives them little reason to change their minds. Their only choice now is to change the Government—and that cannot come too soon.

8.43 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The most interesting part of the Budget debate is not the gloss of the Chancellor's statement but the detail to be found in the Red Book and ensuing statements. Having ploughed through them all, I can commend the Budget only for being consistent. All the things that were not in the Chancellor's statement are not to be found in the supporting documents either. The Budget did not tackle unemployment, create jobs, help the poor or solve the problems of the homeless. In many cases, the Budget will create more ill health than it will remove.

I was fortunate enough to have a much better alternative Budget published by *New Statesman*. I will not describe it in detail, but I commend it to the Chancellor.

I shall focus on three key aspects of the Budget and health. The first is the relationship between health and wealth. A huge burden of ill health is poverty-related—the poverty of unemployment, of the environment in which people live, of dependence on inadequate pensions or benefits and of being caught in the harshness of the means-test trap.

The Chancellor and many Conservative Members made great play of the fact that Government policy aims to give people freedom to keep or spend their money by reducing the burden of direct taxation. For the working poor, that is an unprincipled fraud. The Government's obsession with a labyrinth of means-tested benefits is such that the working poor pay the highest marginal rates of taxation in the land. A number of my hon. Friends pointed out that it amounts to about 97p in every £1 earned by the working poor. That is a combination of the interface between low pay and the benefits system, where successively the clawback from family credit, housing benefit and council tax rebate eats into the amount that the individual thinks that he or she is earning.

I was on the verge of doing the Government a disservice by suggesting, on the basis of my first calculations, that the impact of the Budget changes would be to reduce that clawback rate from 97.08p in every £1 to 97.03p. I got that figure wrong because it was calculated on the basis of the extra £1 earned. If one takes the impact on the individual's existing income, a much more generous interpretation must be made. The clawback rate is reduced to 95.5p in every £1.

For the working poor in that category, the reduction of 1p in the basic rate will deliver a net increase in spending power of 5p per week—a total of £2.78 a year. I would dearly like to see the Chancellor out on the streets trying to explain the virtues of his Budget, on the basis that he was offering to deliver to the working poor less than the cost of a Mars bar a month. I suggest that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would find no shortage of people willing to suggest to him how a Mars bar might be deployed, if only they could afford one.

The Budget will not improve the lives of the working poor. More than 600,000 households are caught in the clawback trap of paying marginal rates of tax of more than 70 per cent. That is the direct consequence of the shift in Government employment policy, which has created the facade of employment figures—with people being shifted out of full-time employment and into part-time employment and dependence on the benefits system. Any Budget must be tested against that interface.

There is a strong case for reducing the real burden of basic tax on the working poor. There may be an argument for further reductions in the basic rate, but I say to members of both Front Benches that there is no credible way of pursing that as a realistic policy unless it is underpinned by three other elements. Such a policy would have to be based first on the restoration of universal benefits and the ending of means testing. It must be done in conjunction with the raising of top rates of tax, so that the people who are £35 billion a year better off than in 1979 accept the burden of paying for that shift. It must be done also in conjunction with the introduction of a fair and progressive taxation system for industry and commerce.

It is not fair to ask industry to be taxed on the basis that firms that provide work should pay the social insurance costs for firms that do not. The structure of the taxation regime for industry is massively regressive. We ought to be looking at the approaches pursued in Germany up to 1965, involving a progressive tax regime on contributions from industry. Apart from anything else, there is a fundamental inequality in the United Kingdom's approach to contributions to the Exchequer from industry and commerce. Their contribution is well below the average of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. If we were to equal that average—7.8 per cent. of gross domestic product—that would bring in £33 billion more a year to the Exchequer.

I make no apology for saying that this country has the wealth but not the will to tackle poverty, ill health and unemployment. An incoming Labour Government should not be afraid to use our resources to deliver genuine personal growth and improved health opportunities. Those things should be our birthright.

I come secondly to hospital funding. I want to offer the example of the Queens medical centre in my constituency, one of the leading teaching hospitals in the country. It faces a huge budget crisis. The chief executive of the QMC university hospital trust says:

> "Because of the hospital's low costs, high productivity and efficiency, together with the need to deliver a 4.85 per cent. efficiency gain in 1995-96, there is no latitude to absorb the unexpected financial pressure which the hospital has now experienced . . . because those who pay the hospital for treating patients do not have the extra resources to cover the unexpected additional emergency patients . . . we are forced to consider measures that will manage their activity back to an affordable level".

That is what the trust has told the public of Nottingham in the past month.

It is a myth that the extra funding that the Government say is going into the health service can be paid for out of retained savings. There are no retained savings to be found in the QMC in Nottingham, and I suspect there are few to be found anywhere else. In essence, Government funding for the NHS is camouflaged funding. The Secretary of State made that clear at the start of today's debate, when he confirmed that the extra money for research would not be confined to medical research but would be spent on management research. It has come to something when the only consultants to be found in hospitals these days are management consultants. That absurdity derives from the Government's obsession with money and with privatising health care.

My third point concerns the relationship between health and housing. In the UK there are 50,000 avoidable deaths every year due to fuel poverty. Eight million households live in properties that they cannot afford to heat adequately. Absurdly, the VAT regime taxes energy saving more heavily than energy use.

Against this background, the Chancellor turned his back on a series of sensible proposals from the all-party warm homes group. We said that there needs to be a programme by which the House commits itself to the improvement of the home insulation standards of 500,000 houses a year, over the next 15 years. We should do so in the clear knowledge that we are saving lives, saving energy and creating a huge number of jobs. Those who have followed the experiments done around the country know, too, that such moves have a tremendous effect on reducing neighbourhood-based crime.

These proposals must be set alongside the need—widely recognised outside the House—for 100,000 new homes a year over at least the next decade; but the Chancellor says that none of the foregoing is affordable. I point out that the warm homes initiative would cost £1.5 billion a year—the equivalent of about half the public spending cuts that the Government announced in the Budget. The same amount would be almost covered by redirecting the fossil fuel levy, and it would be more than covered by the introduction of a new tax: a public service obligation placed on the whole energy industry to bring to an end the scandal of cold homes in Britain.

The last thing that the housing market needed was a cut in the housing benefit entitlement of the under-25s. The Secretary of State spoke of reducing entitlement to the average cost of local shared accommodation. There is a certain irony in the fact that no one under 25 will be able to afford to live alone and enjoy an entitlement to housing benefit. The Tories call themselves the party of the family and frown on the idea of cohabitation, yet that is exactly what the Government will be forcing on young people.

Before the ink has dried on these Budget debates, this measure will be seen to rank alongside some of the Government's greatest follies—such as the idea of sharing a bath with a friend to save energy. This will soon be known as the bunk-up-together benefit. The under-25s will be able to find accommodation only by finding a

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

friend to share it with them—the whole idea is farcical. It is not an answer to our housing problem, but it will contribute to worsening it.

We needed a Budget that would give a direct boost to jobs, infrastructure and investment—we did not get one. We needed a Budget to restore the value of the state pension and the status of universal benefits—we did not get one. We needed a Budget to introduce a progressive tax regime for industry—we did not get one. We needed a Budget that re-established a progressive personal taxation regime under which the richest in Britain paid at least as much as their counterparts in Europe—we did not get one. We needed a Budget that did not tax the poorest at higher marginal rates than are imposed on the rich. There should have been an honest reduction in the real impact of tax on the poor. To achieve that, we need to tackle the interface between the basic rate of tax and the benefits system.

Faced with all this, the Chancellor has simply piddled about at the margins of the economy. And this is the saddest conclusion about the whole Budget: what a way to spend a penny.

8.56 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I had thought of saying that one of the few things for which we can thank the Government is the boost that they have given education over the past few years. I hasten to add that I am not referring to education for three and four-year-olds, who are still waiting for nursery places and whom the Budget did nothing to help. I regret that the Budget did nothing, either, for mature students, who are not taken into account in the Government's policies for student finance. The Budget did nothing but make matters worse by transferring student loans to commercial banks.

The Budget, however, together with certain other Government measures, has done a great deal to educate the general public on taxation and the Government's policies to deal with it. The average household has watched its tax burden and charges rise year on year since 1992—increases in indirect taxation and council tax, cuts in income tax allowances, and rising bus fares, rail fares, national insurance costs and water and sewerage charges. The people have learnt their lesson; they have pledged never again to be fooled by a gimmick of a penny or two off income tax just before an election. They have also learnt that the Tories cannot be trusted with their targets, and if their targets are wrong their Budgets falter.

An analysis of the difference between the Chancellor of the Exchequer's targets last year and what happened needs to be remembered. There was 14 per cent. less growth than the right hon. and learned Gentleman predicted last year. Inflation was 20 per cent. greater than was predicted. Government borrowing was 29 per cent. more than he foresaw. The balance of trade was 100 per cent. worse than he predicted. If the Chancellor's targets this year are as shaky as those that he presented to us last year, the Budget strategy has no credibility.

The story has been especially bad for lower income groups. Successive Budgets over the past few years have shifted the relative weight of taxation from direct income tax to indirect taxation and charges. Value added tax or charges are based on volume, and low-income households or families spend a much greater proportion of their income on essentials. Volume-based taxes on essentials will inevitably penalise low-income households, and that is what we have seen. Such taxes may be all right on goods that are subject to choice, but on essentials they are unfair, especially on lower-income groups in our society.

Fuel costs, for example, amount to far more of lone parents' weekly incomes than of the incomes of couples. The same applies to the costs of other essential outgoings such as water, council tax, food and housing, which take the lion's share of a lone parent's income or wealth, leaving virtually nothing for the goods that they have the so-called freedom to buy.

The freezing of one-parent benefit was especially mean. I shall quote from a letter written last week by the woman of a one-parent family to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. She did not write directly to me. She said that cutting

> "this benefit will greatly increase the stress and pressure in my life and the main person to suffer will be my 5 year old daughter.
>
> I am not a single parent by choice, but became one to escape a severely abusive relationship. This Government seems to have a lot of misunderstandings about single parents."

I worry about the Chancellor's mean approach to lone families and the way in which that has fed through. It has also fed through in some of the other minor income-related issues in the Budget.

Essentials are important, of course, for a household that does not have much to spend. That is why I supported the Chancellor's rejection of VAT on newspapers, books and periodicals. I believe that such items are essential to people's quality of life. I would have fully supported the cutting of VAT on the cost of women's sanitary protection. It is a minor but essential and regular cost. The imposition of 17.5 per cent. VAT penalises low-income women and their families. I pay tribute to the excellent campaign by the Asda chain of supermarkets and to the many of my constituents who have signed a petition that focuses on the issue.

I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on the Budget's lack of effect on housing, the policy area that at present has the greatest "feel-bad" factor. Pundits throughout have recognised that feeling and the seriousness of the problem. The Government have done nothing to meet the problems of housing decay and need. The estimates made by the Department of the Environment tell us that only 60,000 new social housing lettings will be generated next year. That figure is right at the bottom of the Department's estimates of housing need.

The proposals set out in the Budget will cut by 10 per cent. the capital that is available through Housing Corporation grant for housing association new build and renovation. Shelter has told us that that expenditure alone would have provided at least 11,000 new homes over the next two years. The mean proposal to restrict housing benefits for the under-25s, on the assumption that they can simply continue to live with their parents, will do nothing to boost the housing market. I worry that it is a rather cynical wheeze to bring down the huge discrepancy in the Budget between the number of houses in the social sector—which are what people require to have independence—that are allowed to be built and the indices of housing need. It is quite right to say that it encourages dependency culture, not the opposite.

Of course we welcome the raising of the level for community care, but there is incontrovertible evidence that what elderly people really want is not to be pushed into residential care. What really gives them dignity as they become frail is adequate community care in their own homes, with their own front door, and the right, even if they are too disabled to manage it, to come and go as they please. The evidence shows that community care is underfunded, that is has been underfunded and that, tragically, local authorities find their budgets squeezed, so that the simple things—grab rails, ramps for wheelchairs and walk-in showers, rather than a bath that they are too scared to use—cannot be provided. Those things make the essential difference in determining whether somebody retains his or her independence.

Often, local authorities' discretionary funds for such services are exhausted by Christmas, so councils struggle to make ends meet and old people are pushed into the sad but cheaper option of living collectively in private residential and nursing homes. All of us have known, either in our families or through our friends, the quite sad results that can result from that exploitation.

I am being frowned at, but I make one final point, on environmental issues. I have struggled today to find from the House of Commons Library any suggestion in any of the Budget speeches that there is any money for the extra monitoring that is required for air quality standards. A clear pledge was made during the passage of the Environment Act 1995—there was no time to put it into the Act—that the Secretary of State for the Environment would be urged to make resources available in this year's Budget statement, so that local authorities could plan to do that important new work, which had cross-party approval. To my knowledge, there is nothing in it. I should be grateful if the Minister would respond on that point. There is no disagreement about the need for that work, but we are adamant that, unless resources are made available, local authorities simply will not have the staff to undertake their new duty.

On the environment, to follow the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South, it is disgraceful that the home energy efficiency scheme was used in the cynical way it was, to appear to make it all right that VAT was placed on the cost of keeping people warm in their own homes, an essential need. The scheme has been cut right back by 30 per cent.; instead of £100 million being available each year, there is a mere £69 million this year. It is no wonder that Opposition Members and the people outside are saying, "You cannot trust the Tories." Words do not fool them any longer.

9.8 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I have very little time, but I shall start with two disarmingly simple propositions, with which Conservative Members will disagree: first, that taxation should be fair; and, secondly, that it is right to tax wealth, especially inherited wealth, where vast fortunes are passed down the generations. The Duke of Westminster inherited £1,500 million, the Duke of Buccleuch £400 million and Alan Clark a more modest £41 million.

I shall start at the other end of the scale by referring to a constituent of mine, Mrs. Smith, who earned 15p an hour, possibly an all-time record. She was employed by a loathsome individual, Peter Pomgourou of Christina Fashions of Manchester. She was paid £1.75 to make up a suit which retailed for £55 and was described in the local paper as a "hard-up granny". She said:

> "It is definitely exploitation of the worse kind, nothing short of slave labour."

The *Pendle Citizen* contacted the firm and asked about this employment. The owner of Christina Fashions told Stephanie Beardsworth, the reporter:

> "If she"—

Mrs. Smith—

> "does not want the money she has no need to work for me. Mind your own business."

I sent copies of all this stuff, including a file of cuttings from the *Pendle Citizen* and the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*, to the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans). He wrote back:

> "We believe that employers should treat employees with consideration and should adopt fair personnel policies . . . but, of course, instances such as the case highlighted in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* will occur from time to time . . . The regulation of homeworking would represent an unacceptable burden on the great majority of employers . . . I hope this has explained the position."

It does not really explain the position. It does not explain the position to my constituents who gag when they see the Government responding in that way.

People at the other end of the scale seem to be treated in a completely different way. The chairman of the National Grid Company will receive £2 million in share options, pay and special dividends from the sale of that company. We have just read about Lord Young, a former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is trying to screw £2.5 million out of Cable and Wireless plc, having been sacked from that company. We read of the people in charge of National Power getting a monthly salary of £36,000. It would take more than seven years for someone on £2.50 an hour to earn that sum. In my neck of the woods, the highest paid director of NORWEB gets £19,739 per month. It would take almost four years for someone on £2.50 an hour to earn that kind of money. That is what upsets people.

It was the deputy chairman of the Conservative party who, a little over a year ago, said:

> "The rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest who are getting poorer."

That indeed is the case. The poor are poorer and the rich are richer. The Government's own figures confirm that after housing costs, the poorest 10 per cent. are 70 per cent. worse off and the richest 10 per cent. are a staggering 62 per cent. better off. Indeed, the gap between the highest paid and the lowest paid is greater than at any time since records began in 1886.

The tax burden falls disproportionately on the low-paid. Everyone knows that since April 1992 the tax burden has increased by 7p in the pound, although we had the 1p cut in the basic rate last Tuesday. The typical family now pays 35.6 per cent. of their gross income in tax, compared with 32.2 per cent. in 1979.

My constituents would have been as intrigued as I was if they had turned on the BBC yesterday lunchtime. I watched John Humphrys, in the "On the Record" programme, quizzing the chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). He was asked a simple question: whether the tax burden would be lighter at the time of the next general election than it was in April 1992. The right hon. Gentleman could not or was not prepared to answer the question. He came out with the fiction that people would be £9 a week better off. That answer has been blown apart

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

because we know that, of that £9, £6.56 is accounted for by optimistic predictions about the growth in earnings. We have been told that that 9 per cent. anticipates an increase in earnings of 4 per cent. Again, the right hon. Gentleman was unable to answer that point.

What did he say yesterday? He told viewers to

"trust the instincts of the Tories."

Can you believe that, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is an absurd notion. After the experience of the past few years, the electorate would not trust the Conservatives to look after anything. We have had broken promises on value added tax, VAT on fuel and the infamous 21 tax rises since 1992. We hear about the growth in the economy, but the Conservatives never remind us about the devaluation in September 1992, which unleashed that growth and which is now petering out. That is from the party that in 1991 had the brass neck and effrontery to put up posters all over the country accusing the Labour party of going for broke. That is why people are so cynical about the Conservative party and why, when they hear Conservative Members talk about trust, they choke on the word.

Yesterday, the front page of *The Sunday Times* reported a national opinion poll that stated that only 26 per cent. of people now trust the Tories on taxation. Seventy-one per cent. distrust them, and I wonder why. More than anything else, we need some fairness and equity in the tax system. We need more income tax bands. It is simply not fair for someone on £25,000 a year and someone on £250,000 a year to pay the top tax rate of 40p in the pound. There are eight bands in the council tax. Property has been taken by this Government as a rough proxy for wealth. Income is perhaps a more accurate proxy for wealth, yet we have two or two and a half bands.

Inheritance tax is another example of where the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer are so disingenuous. The Prime Minister says that he wants to abolish it so that wealth can cascade down the generations. The £155,000 limit has gone up to £200,000, but that will affect a tiny number of people. In my constituency in north-east Lancashire, where many people are on low incomes, 36,460 households are in properties worth up to £160,000—the limit that has just been moved—and only 544 in properties above that level. When they die, most people's estates consist of the family home. People do not have expensive jewels, shares and all the other bits and pieces to hand on to their offspring. A tiny number of people live in family homes that are worth more than that level.

Recent Inland Revenue statistics, published in 1995 but based on the value of estates in 1991-92, show that, if inheritance tax were abolished on estates worth more than £2 million, in the entire country only 157 people would benefit—but to the tune of £141 million. If inheritance tax were scrapped in total, just over 16,000 people would benefit, but they would garner more than £1 billion, so let us hear no more from the Conservative party about fairness and equity. The tax policies that have been pursued since 1979 have brought great injustice and great unfairness to our tax system, which is riddled with inequities. The abolition of inheritance tax—a stated policy of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and of his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—will do nothing to bring forward the notion of the classless society that the Prime Minister claims to want.

The Budget is entirely typical of the Conservatives and it is another reason why they will soon be out of office.

9.19 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Five minutes are available to me so I shall have to be brief. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) spoke about the possibility of a windfall tax and gave his reasons for opposing it. There is a strong argument for such a tax and I shall certainly support the Labour Government when they introduce it in a year or 18 months from now.

Almost all the privatised utilities are monopoly suppliers with protected rights to make profits because of the way in which the legislation was carried when they were privatised. For example, the profits of the water companies are assured by the formula and despite recent interventions by the regulator they cannot fail to make substantial profits. National Power and PowerGen work within the pool system and the great fluctuations in prices in the pool result in grossly inflated profits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) asked who gets the £9 a week about which the Government, the Chancellor and the chairman of the Conservative party talk. We saw the chairman of the Conservative party on "On the Record" speaking about that yesterday. Few of my constituents will get anywhere near that amount from the Budget. Because of the single allowable maximum at the lower rate, the most that a single person who pays only the 20p tax rate can earn is £7,665. That is equivalent to about £147 a week, and in a constituency such as mine that is high pay. The majority of people in Burnley and Pendle and north-east Lancashire get well below that amount. However, the person earning that amount will be £83 a year better off as a result of the tax cut. That is equal to just over £1.50p a week.

Hon. Members have spoken about the national health service and the private finance initiative. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) intervened during the speech of the Secretary of State for Health and twice asked whether the Government would guarantee the programme if the PFI did not deliver what it was expected to deliver. The Secretary of State failed to answer. We have nothing against the principle of the private finance initiative, but we think that the programme for health service provision is so crucial that we want it to be guaranteed. Much of what the Government say is ludicrous.

A fourth phase of development was planned for Burnley general hospital in my constituency and the planners were asked to see whether the private finance initiative would be appropriate. In the end it was deemed inappropriate and the programme was considerably delayed. The PFI will not deliver what is expected.

Most people think that the Government have failed to recognise not only the major need for housing investment but the fact that housing development is one of the quickest ways to get the economy going. What have the Government done to housing associations? In 1979 housing associations were the favourite sons of the incoming Tory Government. The National Federation of Housing Associations briefing states:

> "The Chancellor announced that . . . housing associations will receive less than £1.1 billion to provide affordable homes for those most in need. That is a cut of £450 million from the £1.5 billion first promised by the Government".

That means that next year the housing associations will be able to provide only 41,000 new homes, compared with the 76,000 that could have been built. That reduction makes no sense when there is such a desperate need for housing investment.

Another issue is the £1 billion privatisation of the Housing Corporation's loan book. I have no particular objection to that, but if we have to move in that direction why not invest some or most of that money in housing stock? If the Government were prepared to use the £1 billion of capital receipts, they could start to tackle some of the problems in housing. They could get people back to work and get the economy moving in the right direction.

The cut in funding for the home improvement energy efficiency scheme is nonsense, and is a step in the wrong direction. Reducing the funding from £100 million to £69 million—a cut of 30 per cent.—will mean that 200,000 fewer homes are insulated.

Finally, I wish to raise the funding that councils will get for education. The rise in the standard spending assessment of 4.5 per cent. will not in itself give councils a single extra penny, because most local education authorities are already spending more than the Government said they should this year.

9.25 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): This has been a very long and interesting debate which—for most of the time—has concentrated on the issue of fairness and on the divided Britain. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) concentrated his comments on the structural changes in employment, a subject to which I want to return later in my speech. He talked about the need to create jobs and the need for sustainable growth, and—in a thoughtful speech—talked about the deep-seated problems of the economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) made a precise speech on the NHS, and reinforced the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in her opening remarks. In particular, my hon. Friend concentrated on the jargon and the way in which words are used in the NHS to disguise the denial of care to those who need it. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) characteristically defended his countrymen, and women, against the onslaught of Tory tax rises.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) graphically described the lack of hope bordering on despair and the alienation of young men in particular, and referred to the Government's broken promises year in, year out. My hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) spoke eloquently about the NHS, and also referred to the need to reduce unemployment, to increase security in work and to provide investment in our economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) highlighted the inequalities in health and in wealth, and put the case for a fair tax system. He made the point that, if the Government were interested in reducing taxes, the fairest tax cut that they could have made would to reduce VAT to 5 per cent. My hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike) talked about the unfairness of our divided Britain, and referred to the hunt for the £9 that was allegedly on offer to all of our constituents. When we return to our constituencies, the burning question from our constituents will be: "Where is that £9?" Like all Tory promises, it is an illusion. It is only there for the wealthy, and is not available for the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

The Government have failed in the Budget to tackle the real weaknesses in the British economy. They have failed to encourage new and sustained investment, and they have failed to close the investment gap with our competitors. They have failed to move people out of welfare and into work, and they have failed to bring down the crippling levels of unemployment. It is because they do not understand the relationship of the welfare state to the changing nature of work and the restructuring of work in society that they still cannot address the question which blights the lives of so many of our citizens.

Public borrowing will now be £7 billion higher next year and £10 billion higher the year after. Public finances are in such a poor state under the Government's stewardship that there will be a 17 per cent. cut in public investment and a 27 per cent. cut in the hospital building programme. Having put taxes up by the equivalent of 7p in the pound, the Government propose in this Budget to reduce them by just 1p. That is giving with one hand and taking back with the other.

As Britain slips further into despair, moving down the world prosperity league from 13th to 18th place, the Government have failed to deal with the continued economic failure and the rising social distress that accompanies that economic failure.

Even the tax cuts are distributed unfairly. The simulations by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, the figures produced by Coopers and Lybrand for *The Guardian* and those produced for *The Times* show that the better-off get more and the poorly-paid get less. The Chancellor has completely missed the fact that people now demand tax fairness, not simply tax reductions.

The Chancellor repeated in his Budget that the Conservatives wanted to abolish tax on inheritance and capital gains. Half the benefit from those tax cuts will go to the richest 5,000 people in our country. Instead of abolishing those taxes, he should use the money to introduce the new lower starting tax rate of 10p that we have proposed.

The tax giveaways announced by the Chancellor will do little to reverse his previous two packages. High indirect taxes—VAT and excise duties—have made a serious dent in families' pockets, particularly low-paid families. Unless we strengthen our economy for the long term, tax cuts will not last and public services will continue to deteriorate.

We must deal with unemployment. Changing patterns of employment mean that we have to have a strategy not only for keeping people in work but for getting them back to work. During the Government's reign we have seen a growth in insecurity in the labour market. The new jobs that are being created are insecure and poorly paid. That

[Ms Dawn Primarolo]

is why we proposed using the windfall tax of £1 billion on the public utilities to guarantee to every young man and woman under 25 a proper job with proper pay, a job that provided qualifications, or a full-time education place.

In his speech last year the Chancellor said:

> "We must combine greater prosperity for the majority of our people with measures to prevent the emergence of a deprived underclass, excluded from the opportunity to work and dependent on welfare."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1079.]

There is nothing in that Budget or this year's Budget to assist the 20 per cent. of households—one in five non-pensioner households—who have no work and no prospect of work and are trapped on benefit. The Chancellor still fails to understand that those people are caught in an unbreakable circle of high rent, poverty and benefits and are excluded from work. The Budget continues to favour a shift to the creation of a low-pay employment market. Many will find themselves less able to escape reliance on benefit. There is nothing in the Budget to create security at work.

The Government claim that they have understood the changes in the labour market and are designing policies to overcome them. Women, who are over-represented among the low-paid and under-represented in the House, and whose concerns are not spoken about by Conservative Members as they have their private conversations, still disproportionately take the burden of all the tax increases in this Chancellor's Budget. The gap between men's and women's earnings is widening and the divide is getting ever greater.

Mr. Forman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Primarolo: I promised the Minister that I would sit down by 20 minutes to 10. As Conservative Members have made so many long speeches, I shall take only 15 minutes; so, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will continue.

Lack of child care has been identified as one of the major barriers to women taking up full or part-time employment and the Government still refuse to deal with that. Not only that, they will not recognise that women are driven from the labour market by a lack of elder care. The Budget has not helped the low-paid individually and it has done nothing to attack the over-reliance of our economy on low skills. There has been no closing of the poverty trap, and benefit penalties on earnings will continue to act as a disincentive for people to go to work.

The conditions under which the Beveridge welfare state was created half a century ago have changed. Beveridge's—and the Government's—assumptions that women should not work outside the home and that the nuclear family should always exist are no longer the norm. Mothers deserve incentives to return to work rather than having their hopes that they can afford to work and still care for their children shattered.

The Women's Budget Group pointed out that, unlike an increasing number of countries, the United Kingdom does not publish an assessment of the differential effects of fiscal and public expenditure on women as distinct from men. The House and Conservative Members are so preoccupied with male-only interpretations that they do not realise that using the household as a focal economic unit is now recognised as producing gross social inequalities—inequalities which they do not challenge.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Lady cannot be serious.

Ms Primarolo: The low political representation of women in the UK also means that women's diverse views and needs are not heard. Yes, Chancellor, I am serious: 52 per cent. of the population are women and his Budget does nothing to assist them.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Ms Primarolo: Let me explain. One in six people aged under 25 are unemployed; 3 million Britons earn less than £58 a week. They are not able to make contributions to their own pensions, as the Chancellor tells them to. The majority of those people are women, and while a quarter of people with occupations are women, most are unable to accumulate savings. They cannot be more thrifty, because they do not have the money in the first place and the Chancellor's Budget does nothing to assist them.

The Chancellor clearly says that lone parents need no extra help, but that flies in the face of common knowledge and understanding. It costs more to bring up children in a lone-parent family. There are no economies of scale or shared housing or fuel costs. There is less opportunity to share responsibility for caring for the children and more need to pay for child care. The shameful attack on lone parents is a piece of punitive symbolism through which the Government seek more scapegoats instead of addressing the problems that our welfare state is creating.

The Budget does nothing to help most of those in poverty in old age, women. Women cannot afford to rely on private pension schemes and they are affected by a casualised labour market. The effects of discrimination and low pay throughout their lives guarantee their poverty in old age. While the Chancellor referred to older couples, the reality is that most of the elderly and frail are women who have outlived their spouses and who are more likely to be reliant on Government benefits.

We welcome the rise of the thresholds for residential nursing homes. The majority of frail, disabled and elderly women live in their own homes and die in them. Only 5 per cent. of them are in residential care. The increase has little to do with preventing old, frail people from being insecure in their homes and everything to do with the Government trying to save their skin at the next election.

How can the Chancellor claim to be a one-nation Tory when he encourages division, privatisation and the exclusion of people from our society; when he cuts employment programmes and the hospital capital building programme; forces up council taxes and deepens the poverty trap and the divisions in our society?

The Budget further divides the country. It gives with one hand and takes with the other. It fails to create jobs and security. It fails to create investment and to understand how people live their lives. It is a failed Budget from a failed Government, and it is about time they went to the country and allowed us to be the Government.

9.39 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): I was amazed by the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo). The Budget was for the men and women of this country. The Budget benefits men and women in work. The hon. Lady does not seem to acknowledge that under the Conservative Government we now have one of the highest proportions of women in employment anywhere in the European Union.

The Budget benefits men and women with savings. The Budget benefits men and women with children at school, who can now enjoy more resources as a result of the Budget. It will benefit men and women in their old age who need care. The Budget is for the whole of the United Kingdom, and not for the small sectional interest described by the hon. Lady.

The other Saturday night I saw the television programme "Have I Got News for You". It is little wonder that, when the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) was asked to comment on Labour's economic policy, he said:

> "Let me know what it is and I'll comment on it."

Today's debate has left us no wiser as to what is Labour economic policy. It is therefore extremely difficult to comment on it in detail. I accept, however, that we were offered a brief glimpse of it, and I shall say something about that later.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South referred to people being "allegedly" £9 better off. She obviously was not listening to "Any Questions" on Friday, unlike her hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), when I explained clearly that had it not been for a Budget that would lead to growth, one could not have a combination of tax cuts and increases in earnings, which will deliver to the average family £9 per week. I do not recant one part of the achievements of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in producing a Budget that can deliver that money to the average family.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South and some of her hon. Friends mentioned their desire to see yet lower taxes. That leads on to the question of the so-called 10p tax. I want to talk about that tax, because I was particularly interested in what the hon. Member for Garscadden said about it at Bilston on Friday. I probed him very hard about it, and he acknowledged that he was not certain whether it would cover all those currently covered by our 20p band. He and his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) seem to be at odds about that.

I challenged the hon. Member for Garscadden about the cost of introducing the 10p tax—£8 billion—but no answer did we get about where the money will come from. I challenge the hon. Gentleman again to say whether he is aware that just 10 per cent. of the low-paid whom he aims to assist with the 10p tax would benefit, whereas 90 per cent. of its benefit would accrue to standard and higher rate taxpayers. That proposal is supposed to be a great one for work incentives. Does any Opposition Member who cares to break the Trappist vows that the Opposition have all had to take agree with the likely cost of that tax? Do they have any figures of their own? Do they agree with anything that we have said about taxation?

I am prepared to give way, but no answer will be forthcoming, because *Tribune* this week—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition may laugh, but read what it says. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said there could be

> "no commitments on levels of tax and spending beyond the existing Budget."

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is present. He has had the figures. He knows what the Budget says, and he has read the Red Book. Will he now come clean and tell us what his targets are for inflation, growth and spending? The facts are there in the Red Book. We are not setting him the difficult question about what he would do if, God forbid, the Opposition ever became the Government. We will set the Opposition the easy question. We will supply the answers. Silence comes from the Labour Benches. We know that they are well and truly rumbled.

We heard some sane economic voices from my hon. Friends the Members for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell), for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), all of whom made a positive contribution to the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire rightly drew the attention of the House to the effects of the reductions in taxation achieved, not only by 1p off the standard rate of income tax, but by some substantial changes in tax allowances. He asked me how much a married man may earn before he pays any tax. I will tell him. The answer is £5,108 per year—£98.23 per week.

I hope that that will help my hon. Friend in the task that he will be undertaking—to communicate to his constituents the fact that the Budget went far beyond a straightforward 1p off the standard rate of tax. It had the benefit of extending the 20p band to a quarter of all taxpayers. It took more than 200,000 people out of tax altogether. It answered in clear and unequivocal terms the question, what were we doing for work incentives—unlike the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who refuses to answer similar basic questions.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire drew our attention to the subject of small businesses, and I was glad that he did so. He mentioned the penny off the small companies rate of corporation tax. He will note also that national insurance charges have decreased, not only for smaller companies, but for larger employers. There will also be deregulation packages in relation to annual VAT accounting, and special help for the transitional arrangements with business rates. The Government take the role of small businesses seriously and have acted in their interests, as witnessed by their strong endorsement of my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget.

My hon. Friend mentioned deregulation. He knows that the Inland Revenue will shortly publish a report on that subject, arising from section 160 of the Finance Act 1995.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington, who has been a doughty campaigner on the subject of employee share ownership, paid tribute to some important changes that we are making regarding such ownership, because that is a significant way in which working people can share, not only in the success of the companies that they work for, but in the success of the growth of the economy that will surely result from my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

As my hon. Friend knows, we introduced in the Budget improvements to the save-as-you-earn option scheme, coupling it for the first time with the work of employee share-owning trusts. I am glad that my hon. Friend was keen in his advocacy of that change. We have opened it up to people who can save as little as £5 a week, who can invest in the success of the companies that they work for. Improvements have also been made to the profit-sharing scheme. Both those schemes incorporate a total of about 2 million people.

We listened carefully to what industry and employees told us. Sometimes little people working for multiple supermarkets wanted a share in their company. Their employees wanted to give them that. We introduced in the Budget the new company share option plan, which has been widely welcomed. I am delighted about that.

My hon. Friend asked why it was not possible to put the national insurance cut into effect earlier than April 1997. It is linked with the timing of the landfill tax, which does not start until October 1996, and it was fair to employers to make the changes later, in April 1997.

A moment of rare history occurred when my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West made a sage, balanced and well-judged contribution to the debate. It was such that he admitted that he was able to support my right hon. and learned Friend unequivocally. It will bring joy to the Chancellor's heart to hear that, and I am sure that a framed copy of *Hansard* will hang on his wall for many a long day to come.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam, in a wide-ranging and helpful contribution, reminded the House that the Budget went beyond the issue of health, to which I shall return later, and would benefit education especially. She rightly drew our attention to the Chancellor's challenge in his speech, in which he threw out the words to remind every local authority in the land that they must pass on to the schools of the country the full benefit of the £778 million of additional revenue passed through the revenue support grant. My hon. Friend did the House a service in reminding us of that perspective.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham reminded us that it was a good Budget for both pensioners and savers. The age allowance changes that we have made in tax help those with modest incomes or occupational pensions, and those savers within the 20p band will enjoy more of what they can earn through their savings. Pensioners are the major beneficiaries of that change. My hon. Friend also drew our attention to the benefits to communities throughout this land of the additional expenditure available for close circuit television and the police. That will find an echo in every town, city and village throughout the country.

My hon. Friend asked a question about one other welcome aspect of the Budget: my right hon. and learned Friend's repudiation of the non-story in the newspapers about redundancy. My right hon. and learned Friend confirmed that there would be no tax on the £30,000 exemption and that there was no intention to restrict that exemption's scope. The precise definition of the payments covered by the exemption was causing difficulties in practice, and discussions are presently continuing between the Revenue and interested parties, particularly the Law Society, to clarify the details.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye made a useful contribution to our debate. I am delighted with her comments on the way local business has responded to the Budget, and her support for the private finance initiative.

Those were some of the saner comments during the debate. I shall now turn to the comments of those hon. Members who perhaps require some education on the benefits of my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget.

I listened to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) with growing incredulity. I have to suffer her outbursts in my kitchen as I make my breakfast when she attempts to convince the nation, without success, that the Government want to privatise the health service. Nothing could be further from the truth. I should have thought that the Secretary of State for Health, in his polished presentation of what he is doing to advance health care, would have silenced the hon. Lady once and for all. But in case she has a thirst for more information about the facts, I shall give her some.

The view of the health service that I have heard from Opposition Members is not that of my constituents, who tell me about the quality and exceptional care that they receive. They have a different view of the health service.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: I cannot give way, as I have much information to give, which I am sure the hon. Lady wants to hear.

In spite of having to administer a tough spending round, my right hon. and learned Friend has seen spending on the health service next year grow by £1.3 billion—a 1.6 per cent. real increase. That is not an example of someone who is running down the health service. Since 1978-79, spending on the health service in real terms will have risen by 71.1 per cent. I can say that with pride, whereas the Labour party not only presided over cuts in NHS capital spending, but in cuts in nurses' pay. That is the Labour party's track record, not ours, which is one of which we can be proud.

There were comments from the Opposition and some of my hon. Friends on management costs in the NHS. Those much maligned managers have done much to try to improve the operation of the health service. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to consider that issue. The £650 million, which will be carved off administrative costs and generated through improvements in efficiency in the NHS, will go directly to patient care. I know that the Labour party finds that concept difficult to understand, but improvements in the efficiency of the NHS have helped us to be able to say truthfully that more patients are now being treated in our hospitals than ever before.

If one adds the private finance initiative to the real-terms growth in funding—I underline that it is added to the real-terms funding—one finds that there is yet more increased funding for the NHS in total. It adds to the funding; it does not take away from it. The hon. Member for Peckham has the idea that, because we have found another way to build new hospitals and new facilities in the health service, we are taking something away. I do not know where she has been, but perhaps she should reflect on what is happening in Peckham under the private finance initiative.

Ms Harman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Lady has enough time to entertain us with misleading columns. Let her hear it from me that in King's College hospital, which is in her constituency, the trust issued an advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* in August 1995 for a £70 million project to consolidate acute and specialist services on the Denmark hill site. I am sure that her constituents and the people of Peckham will be delighted with the rubbishing that she has given a project that will clearly bring improvement in health care. Far from competing for the work being a minority sport, tenderers are already shortlisted down to three, and they will be competing for a quality piece of business.

I announced in my recent action agenda that, to ensure progress in the private finance initiative, we would put before the construction industry and those providing the services for the nation good quality business projects which would be run from within Government by highly trained people, and that there would be a private finance initiative training exercise with Price Waterhouse to train between 5,000 and 10,000 civil servants in the ways of private finance.

Ms Harman: Before the Minister creates the impression that people in King's College hospital are tucked up in the beds provided by the new private finance initiative, will he confirm to the House that in one year the Government have cut 17 per cent. of the NHS capital budget? Will he confirm that the proposed 242 per cent. increase in one year in the private finance initiative is an unlikely and unachievable target?

Mr. Jack: I shall confirm neither, but in respect of the private finance initiative I can confirm that my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out that we expect some £14 billion-worth of projects to be agreed by the end of the public expenditure period, and we know that £5 billion will be signed up by the end of the financial year.

Turning to deliveries on hospitals, why cannot the hon. Lady acknowledge the success that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced recently in Amersham and South Buckinghamshire of £35 million-worth of real hospital? There are many more to come. I recommend that the hon. Lady spends less time on the "Today" programme and more time reading the press releases from the Department of Health, where she will receive information about what we can achieve through the private finance initiative.

Let me tell the hon. Lady about some of the other thrilling successes that are about to happen. They include projects worth £140 million in Norfolk and Norwich, £60 million in North Durham, £50 million in Swindon and Marlborough, £26 million in Bishop Auckland and £90 million in Dartford and Gravesham, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said in his telling intervention. Those contracts are being negotiated and represent real progress in the private finance initiative.

If the hon. Lady wants to know what the NHS really thinks, I suggest that she reads what the clinical directors of the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust said about that project. They were absolutely delighted and they could not believe that that initiative would deliver them such a remarkably good hospital.

I conclude by saying that the worst speech we heard this evening was from the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes). I have never heard an hon. Member run down in such unequivocal terms the part of the country that he purports to represent. He destroyed Wales in but a few telling moments, and he did not tell his constituents and the House that, as a result of the Government's excellent economic policies, unemployment in Wales is below the national average and that Wales has the highest percentage of three and four-year-olds in education compared with the rest of the country. Barclays bank tells us that confidence is growing at a faster rate in Wales than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Those are the symbols of success, not failure, and the hon. Gentleman has done a great disservice to Wales and his constituents in the way in which he has conducted himself.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned league tables. This country is the biggest European destination for direct United States of America and Japanese investment. We have the highest proportion of the population of working age in work than any other major European country. We have the best job creation record in Europe. Our level of unemployment is well below the European average. We export more per head than the USA or Japan, and we have far fewer labour disputes than the European average. We are proud to be top of those league tables, and we are a party proud to support an excellent Budget, which will bring improvements to the lives of 26 million taxpayers in this country. I commend the Budget to the House.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Lancashire

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): It is fair to say that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is a southerner, but nevertheless I welcome him to an important Adjournment debate for those of us who live in the north-west. It is important because of its subject, which is the future of Lancashire, and timing—a day on which England has been saved by its Lancastrian captain's magnificent innings of 185 not out.

This debate is also happily timed to commemorate another day in Lancashire's long and proud history. Exactly 700 years ago last week, Lancashire's first two Members of Parliament arrived at Westminster. According to the Library records, on 27 November 1295, Sir Mattheus de Redman and Sir Johannes de Elwyas took their places for the first time. Sir Mettheus hailed from Levens in the former historic county of Westmorland, near my own home. The second knight of the shire, Sir Johannes, was from near Salmesbury, near Blackburn, but he was also connected with Breighmet, which I take to be the Breightmet in my constituency of Bolton, North-East.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My hon. Friend may be interested to learn that my treasurer for many years had the same name as the original knight, and our association offices are named after him.

Mr. Thurnham: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is here this evening. I thank her for all the support that she gives in the House for everything to do with Lancashire.

Lancashire's long and proud record as a county stretches back more than 800 years—to 1168, when it was first mentioned as the county of Lancaster. In 1351, the Duchy of Lancaster was created, with boundaries that have—I am glad to say—remained intact to this day. My constituency was justifiably proud of its 806 years of Lancashire history—at least, until the disastrous local government reorganisation of 1974, which created the infamous Greater Manchester county council, and attempted to tear up Boltonians' loyalties to Lancashire by trying to make them into so-called Greater Mancunians.

The Government wisely recognised their folly, when, in 1986, they abolished Greater Manchester county council, allowing Bolton its independence as a unitary authority. Bizarrely, the Government have left the Greater Manchester county boundary in place, much to the annoyance of the vast majority of the people of Bolton.

Bolton is known all over the world as a Lancashire cotton town. There may not be much left of its cotton industry, but overwhelmingly it wants to return to its historical county of Lancashire. Opinion polls by the *Bolton Evening News* showed that more than 99 per cent. of respondents want Bolton to be back in Lancashire. It is hard to find anyone who disagrees, other than in the Minister's Department and the Lord Lieutenant's office in Greater Manchester.

All political parties in Bolton supported the unanimous resolution of the council on 19 October 1993

> "that the Council re-affirms its traditional affinity with Lancashire and requests Her Majesty The Queen to appoint the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire . . . to act in Bolton".

Other councils throughout the north west have expressed similar views.

I was delighted last year when my hon. Friend the Minister of State accepted my invitation to visit Bolton, to learn for himself the strength of local views. He met councillors and other representatives of the Friends of Real Lancashire, and was left in no doubt about the strength of people's feelings—at a time when the Friends of Real Lancashire were raising a petition with about 30,000 signatures, calling for the return of Lancashire's historic boundaries.

The day after his visit, the *Bolton Evening News* carried a front page banner headline:

> "Red rose to bloom again".

And the people rejoiced that a Minister had listened to their views.

I commend the work of the Friends of Real Lancashire under their leader, Mr. Chris Dawson, who, with others, and out of the goodness of his heart, has campaigned ceaselessly for Lancashire's proud history to be remembered and its boundaries properly restored. The Friends of Real Lancashire are a part of the Association of British Counties; I commend my hon. Friend the Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) for his work for the association. I am delighted that he and 25 other hon. Members have signed early-day motion 109, calling for the marking of historic county boundaries with clear signposts on all roads as they cross the historic counties' boundaries.

Last year, I presented to the House a petition with 30,000 signatures gathered by the Friends of Real Lancashire, calling for the restoration of Lancashire's historic boundaries. It was presented on 21 March to mark the birthday of Her Majesty the Queen, who, as monarch, carries the title of Duke of Lancaster, dating from the time of Henry IV.

I hope that the Minister is in no doubt as to the strength of people's feelings about this issue, which strikes at the very heart of each person's sense of local identity.

Not only does the Greater Manchester county boundary limit the Parliamentary Boundary Commission in its work—not so happily in my case—but it has a negative effect on industries such as tourism, and on the whole sporting, cultural and emotional heritage of Lancashire's people. Surely the home of Lancashire county cricket club should be in Lancashire, especially after today? I hope that my hon. Friend will now cease to procrastinate, and will direct the Local Government Commission forthwith to undertake an immediate review of Lancashire's boundaries, with a view to restoring them for ceremonial, sporting and cultural purposes.

In 1974, the Government said, in a statement quoted in *The Times* of 1 April:

> "The new county boundaries are administrative areas, and will not alter the traditional boundaries of counties, nor is it intended that the loyalties of people living in them will change, despite the different names adopted by the new administrative counties".

Perhaps 1 April was the right date for that statement, which seems to have been honoured much more in the breach than in any attempt to observe it.

In 1990, my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), when he was the Minister responsible for local government, confirmed that the statement was still true, and the situation had not changed.

In spite of the clear assurance that the traditional county boundaries were not altered in 1974, they are no longer shown on Ordnance Survey maps, and have been replaced by administrative county boundaries. In the areas affected by changes to local government in 1974, road signs naming traditional counties have been removed and sometimes replaced by signs naming the administrative counties—while other boundaries remain totally unmarked.

Travellers can no longer tell when they pass from Cheshire, Cumberland, Westmorland and even Yorkshire into the county of Lancashire. Travelling north on the M6 from Cheshire into Lancashire, drivers are not informed that they have arrived in Lancashire until more than 20 miles past the border, where they reach a sign north of Charnock Richard proclaiming that they are in Lancashire, the red rose county. Not only is this confusing for the traveller; it means that people moving into the area have no idea which county they are living in.

The Post Office is happy for mail to be addressed to Bolton, Lancashire, and I am glad to see that Bolton council now includes Lancashire in its notepaper address. Indeed, the Post Office warns customers not to put Greater Manchester on the address, as letters thus addressed may be delivered 24 hours late, having had to go to Manchester first and then be sent back to Bolton. If the Post Office can recognise Bolton as being in Lancashire, why cannot the Government?

Hitherto, we have been passed backwards and forwards between the Department of the Environment and the Local Government Commission, with each saying that the other must take a decision to carry out a review. Now that decisions are being made on unitary status for Blackburn, Blackpool, Warrington and Widnes, surely this is the time to carry out a proper review of all Lancashire's former constituent parts, so that Bolton can once more be restored to Lancashire.

I hope that my hon. Friend will listen to what the people are saying and ensure that the Government no longer stand in the way. The lord lieutenant of greater Manchester may regard the campaign as a nuisance factor, and I have nothing against that excellent gentleman's work, but the fact remains, however, that the people of Bolton do not want to be Greater Mancunians.

In a letter to me, Mr. Dawson wrote:

> "The restoration of the historic county of Lancashire to the boundaries that it held prior to 1974 would be no more than a confirmation of the promise, made by the Government of that day to the people of the county, that these boundaries had not changed. This could be demonstrated by ensuring that the boundaries of historic Lancashire are signposted on all major roads, including motorways, and that the boundaries of the historic county are shown on all maps."

When my hon. Friend the Minister of State with responsibilities for local government visited Bolton last year, I was happy to present him with a rare copy of Henry Fishwick's 1894 "History of Lancashire". I have been able to obtain a second copy of the book, and would be happy to lend it to my hon. Friend the Minister if he wishes to learn more of Lancashire's proud history, so that he can better direct its future.

10.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) made the key point of ceremonial or sporting purposes. I am beginning to feel that I am the target of the ceremonial purposes, and that is certainly so of the sporting.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, and on raising the interesting and emotive subject of local identity. If nothing else, I shall attempt to clarify the position on formal recognition of the traditional county of Lancashire, and the limits on what could realistically be done to meet my hon. Friend's requests.

On the point of most concern to my hon. Friend, that of common ceremonial arrangements for historic Lancashire, we had an historic lesson this evening—perhaps a lesson of history would be more accurate. We do not have the power simply to return former parts of Lancashire for ceremonial purposes. The relevant primary legislation allows us to make changes to ceremonial arrangements only as a consequence of structure or boundary changes following a review. I think that my hon. Friend is aware of that.

Changes to ceremonial arrangements for an area where there has been a recommendation for no change, for an area that has not been reviewed, or one which is not affected by changes happening elsewhere, are therefore not possible. As my hon. Friend knows, the outcome of the recent structure review of the present county of Lancashire, carried out by the Local Government Commission, was that there should be no change to the existing two-tier structure of local government in the county, and that there should be no change either to the ceremonial and related arrangements.

Following completion of the county reviews in England, we asked the Local Government Commission to carry out further reviews of districts to test the case for consistency. In some instances, the commission recommended different outcomes for what seemed to be very similar districts. Among the 21 districts referred back to the commission for further review were Blackpool and Blackburn in the present county of Lancashire, and Halton and Warrington in the present county of Cheshire.

In its draft recommendation for public consultation, the commission recommended unitary status for all four districts, with no change to the present arrangements for ceremonial and related issues. That means that Blackpool and Blackburn would be deemed to be part of the present county of Lancashire for ceremonial purposes. Similarly, Halton and Warrington would be deemed to be within the present county of Cheshire. The commission is due to submit its final recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the beginning of January next year.

With the completion of the structure reviews of counties and the further district reviews, the only way in which some of the ceremonial changes called for could be further considered is if there were a boundary review of the metropolitan areas of Greater Manchester and Merseyside. That must lead to a wry smile from behind me.

Legislation does not permit the commission to recommend structural changes to areas which are already unitary. It could, however, recommend boundary changes to abolish a metropolitan county, establish the metropolitan districts within it as counties in their own right, and recommend as a consequential arrangement that those new county areas should be associated with existing counties for ceremonial and related purposes.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

We are considering the commission's future timetable for reviews, but given its statutory duty to undertake periodic electoral reviews, some of which are increasingly urgent, it is unlikely that it will be able to carry out the metropolitan reviews to cover all Greater Manchester and Merseyside in the near future, particularly tomorrow, as has been requested. However, as we have always said, it is possible that, in due course, we shall direct the commission to review certain metropolitan areas where there is pressure for change. Southport, in the Merseyside borough of Sefton, is an area where we are aware of strong—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]—as reinforced this evening—and widely shared pressure for a review.

I know that my hon. Friend presented a petition of 20,000 signatures to the House in April 1994, seeking the abolition of the metropolitan counties of Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cumbria. I appreciate the feeling that that represents, but the fact is that we cannot act on that petition alone. We have to consider it against the diversion that it would represent of considerable resources from other reviews that the commission is under pressure to undertake.

I should also emphasise that, with the further district reviews due to be finished shortly, we are seeking to conclude the major local government reviews, in the interest of minimising disruption and uncertainty. We do not wish to launch another major review unless there is an outstanding reason for doing so.

I recognise that there will be some disappointment at this response to what is undoubtedly a heartfelt issue for many people in historic Lancashire. However, as my colleagues have pointed out in the past, local government boundaries are concerned essentially with administration, and changes, whether arising from the 1974 reorganisation or as part of the current review, need not affect ancient loyalties and affinities.

I need hardly name some of these. Lancashire county cricket club was mentioned, and continues to have Old Trafford as its main ground and headquarters, and has managed to do quite well on it in the last season, despite being within Greater Manchester. Participants in the rugby league Lancashire cup are drawn from across the traditional county, and, as far as I am aware, the performance of the individual teams is unaffected by the fact that they come from the administrative areas of Halton, Wigan and so on. In fact, I recall a very well known Lancastrian—Tuigamala—who, I believe, plays for Wigan.

The Queen's Lancastrian regiment continues to maintain its traditional affiliations with areas such as Warrington, Bury and Oldham, despite their incorporation into Cheshire and Greater Manchester.

The matter of postal addresses was also raised. I doubt whether the presence of the metropolitan counties makes much of an impact on the level of misdirected mail where correspondents choose to use the traditional county rather than the administrative county in an address. Indeed, as I understand it, the Post Office is unconcerned whether letters are addressed using the administrative county or the traditional county, as long as the postcode is correct.

I hope that those examples, of which there could be many more, serve to demonstrate that an area does not have to have a formal structure in order to maintain a clear identity.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Accident and Emergency Departments

1. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to visit Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority to discuss the situation in local accident and emergency departments. [2172]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to do so.

Mr. Gapes: Is the Minister aware that there is a serious crisis in accident and emergency departments in Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority, that Whipps Cross hospital closed on 14 November and told doctors not to send people there, that King George hospital has regularly told ambulances to go away, and that some of my constituents have had to wait on trolleys for 10, 12, 14 or, in one case, 24 hours? In one case, a constituent was questioned about an incident by the police in front of other people in the area. Is not that a disgrace? When will the Government do something about the crisis in accident and emergency departments in Redbridge and Waltham Forest?

Mr. Horam: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point clearly because there are problems in those two hospitals in his constituency. However, he has exaggerated the problems. I can tell him that both the trusts involved are looking at the situation closely. They are taking short-term measures, and, to deal with bed management, are recruiting additional staff and so forth to cope with the problems. The problems are caused by a higher demand for A and E treatment throughout north London, which is also being examined by the trusts. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that things are improving.

Sir Michael Neubert: I welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box in his new responsibility. Is he aware that the A and E service in the adjacent Barking and Havering area is already under strain as a result of the decision to concentrate casualty at Harold Wood rather than at Oldchurch hospital in my constituency? If the service at King George hospital, Ilford—the hospital to which many of my constituents will in future have to turn—is also to be terminated, that will result in an unacceptable reduction in standards of access in an emergency.

Mr. Horam: Again, I understand my hon. Friend's point. I would be very concerned if the A and E department at King George hospital were to close. I have no information to that effect. On the contrary, I understand that there is no intention of closing the A and E department at King George hospital.

Mr. Barron: Does the Minister accept that the picture which has just been painted is a national one? Accident and emergency departments are currently closing their doors because of a shortage of beds, and patients are waiting hour after hour on trolleys in corridors. The Minister should recognise that A and E departments are twice penalised by the internal market: a lack of bed space means that they cannot meet patient charter times, but because they cannot meet those times, purchasers are withholding payment. The Secretary of State has announced this morning the Government's so-called blitz on bureaucracy. Given that the Government created the internal market, will his announcement be followed by an apology to people who work in health and to the British people about the mess, and will he listen to what the British people want from the NHS, that is, proper patient care and not the privatisation that is creeping in at hospitals throughout Britain?

Mr. Horam: That sounded like a statement of Labour party policy in a nutshell. Labour Members have nothing more to say. The fact is that the hon. Gentleman in his calmer moments will surely realise that he is exaggerating. The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) was rightly referring to a situation in his constituency and that was perfectly fair, but in London as a whole 35 A and E departments are open 24 hours a day. Some £37 million have been spent over the past five years and things are definitely improving.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend accept that this is by no means a national situation, and will Opposition Members appreciate that there are some hospitals in the country that run their affairs efficiently? I have today heard from the head of the accident and emergency department in Lancaster that we have no problems because we treat our staff well and we have a good reputation. Other hospitals might try doing likewise.

Mr. Horam: I am delighted to hear it. As a Lancastrian, I am delighted that Lancashire is once again leading the country.

GP Fundholders

2. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current percentage of general practitioners who have moved to fundholding status; and what is his estimate for the percentage of GP fundholders over the next two years. [2173]

4. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to evaluate the impact of GP fundholding. [2175]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Independent evaluation has repeatedly demonstrated the benefits of fundholding. That is why the Government are committed to further development and expansion of the scheme. Over 39 per cent. of general practitioners in England are already fundholders and this is expected to rise to over 50 per cent. by next April, with more practices preparing to join in 1997.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his reply, which shows that by next year, half of

Britain's GPs will have to operate like small business men. Can he answer a more important question? According to figures that he gave me last week, £66 million is now spent on the bureaucracy of administrating fundholders. That £66 million is almost exactly equivalent to the cost of the 15,000 hip operations on hospital waiting lists. We are all delighted this week that the Queen Mother came out so well from her operation. Will the right hon. Gentleman stop that money being spent on bureaucracy and give people on the hip operation waiting list some hope?

Mr. Dorrell: I am certainly not doing anything to undermine the development of the fundholding scheme. All the research that has been done on that scheme demonstrates that the extra administrative cost, which is certainly there, delivers improved value to national health service patients. The question is for the Labour party. Does it agree with its previous health spokesman that it should abolish fundholding, or with the present incumbent of that post that it is not a matter of abolition but replacement?

Mr. Hinchliffe: How does the Secretary of State justify ignoring clear evidence provided by GPs in my constituency of a two-tier system arising directly from fundholding?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman is behind the times.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is not it scandalous that 36,000 of my constituents are, according to their doctors, receiving a second-rate service as a result of the status of their GPs? Is not it true, as one GP who wrote to me said—that letter has been seen by the Minister for Health—that those who deny the two-tier system arising from GP funding are talking a lot of twaddle?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was right. The hon. Gentleman is behind the times. First, of the five cases that he mentioned the last time that he raised the issue in the House—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact—two have had their operations in less than 12 months and the other three are on a waiting list for treatment in less than 12 months at Pinderfields hospital. Furthermore, both the fundholding and the non-fundholding GPs joined Wakefield Healthcare last week to issue a jointly agreed statement which said:

> "As far as Wakefield Healthcare and GPs, both fundholders and non-fundholders, are concerned there should be no difference in the way patients, whether they go to fundholders or non-fundholders, are treated."

That is the policy of every GP in Wakefield, whether a fundholder or a non-fundholder, and it is also the policy of Wakefield Healthcare.

Mrs. Roe: Has my right hon. Friend seen a recent interview with the hon. Lady for Peckham (Ms Harman) in *Doctor* magazine in which she says of the Opposition's plans for fundholding:

> "We don't call it abolition, we call it replacement."

Does my right hon. Friend think that fundholding doctors will be reassured at the prospect of being replaced and not abolished?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I do not think that they will be remotely reassured. Every fundholding GP in the health service wants to hear what the Labour party would do if it ever found itself in government. The previous Opposition health spokesman said:

> "We can live with a whole range and variety of models."

She also said that the Opposition are committed to abolishing fundholding. Are they or are they not committed to abolition?

Mr. Spring: Is my right hon. Friend aware that an increasing percentage of GPs in Suffolk are in fundholding practices and that that is bringing benefits in the forms of increased personal counselling, chiropody for diabetics, and better diagnostic and physiotherapy services—all very much to the benefit of patients?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. His experience in Suffolk is repeated throughout the health service. One of the two questions that I have answered jointly asked what steps I have taken to evaluate fundholding. My hon. Friend has offered a local evaluation, but it has also been evaluated by the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee, the Fabian Society, the OECD and the health service research unit at the university of Oxford. They have all published evaluations of fundholding, and the only problem with them is that they have been inconveniently optimistic for the Labour party.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Since it is the intention to offer primary-led health care, do the Government intend to change FP10 to allow GP fundholders and others to provide new treatments for leg ulcers in the community rather than in the secondary sphere, which is more costly?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall certainly consider that specific proposal. We need to ensure that the maximum range of clinical care that can safely be delivered by practitioners in the primary care context is delivered. Such care has been provided throughout the country as a result of fundholding. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific idea, I should be happy to look at it.

Mr. Barry Field: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Isle of Wight has one of the highest percentages of GP fundholders in the country? Does he attribute that success to the fact that the Liberal Democrats opposed such a scheme before the election and then, after it, led the charge in forming a fundholding consortium on the Isle of Wight, which has given us such a high percentage of fundholders?

Mr. Dorrell: The Liberal party has had just as much difficulty as the Labour party in deciding its policy on the issue. Both parties forecast that there would be no support for fundholding when the scheme was launched. Both have found themselves embarrassed by the fact that, next year, more than half of all GPs in the health service will have opted voluntarily to join the fundholding scheme. My hon. Friend is quite right.

Mr. Burden: Can the Secretary of State tell me what the reaction of fundholders and other purchasers of health care in Birmingham will be when they look at the small print of the Budget? They will find that a promised 1.1 per cent. increase in funds will turn out to be equivalent to no more than a half per cent. increase, which will mean around £6 million cuts wherever health care is purchased. When the Secretary of State visits Birmingham next week, will he explain to the local people why their community services will be cut?

Mr. Dorrell: This is a question about primary care. One of the best bits of news in the Budget about primary care is that it allows for the continued growth of the family doctor service through the 4 per cent. real terms growth in resources available to it. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman might welcome that.

Mr. Dunn: Many thousands of people in the Dartford constituency have benefited from GP fundholding. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Conservative party is the only party that supports that scheme? The Labour party is totally opposed to it now, as it always has been.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the Conservative party, and its Government, is the only party committed to the development of fundholding. Every fundholding GP and their patients want to know the policy of the Labour Front-Bench team. When the Opposition appear before a fundholding audience they say that they recognise that the freedoms available under the scheme have produced improvements. They give a soft message to fundholding doctors, but once they get back into the television studios they say that they are committed to abolishing the scheme. What is their policy? We are waiting.

Ms Harman: I presume, Madam Speaker, that I am supposed to ask a question rather than answer one. The Secretary of State has acknowledged that one of the effects of GP fundholding has been extra administrative costs. Is not it the case that as a direct result of the Government's NHS reforms the cost of NHS bureaucracy is an extra £1.5 billion every year? That money should be spent on patients, not on paperwork. I welcome the publication of the NHS bureaucracy league tables, which the right hon. Gentleman made available this morning, but can he explain to the House why it is that the worst health authority in the country—the one that spends most on bureaucracy—is Huntingdon, the Prime Minister's constituency?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady might have welcomed the fact that in that same health authority there is to be a 10 per cent. reduction in administrative costs next year. As she raised the subject, she might also have welcomed the fact that the announcements I made this morning represent a shift of resources out of grey suits into white coats of £280 million next year. There will be £280 million extra next year for the treatment of patients. When will the hon. Lady welcome that?

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Is my right hon. Friend aware that by April next year 100 per cent. of my constituents will be treated in GP fundholding practices? Does he agree that that is the result of decisions by GPs in order to give their patients the best possible level of primary health care services? In the light of that, is it not an absolute disgrace that the Labour party proposes either to abolish or emasculate GP fundholding?

Mr. Dorrell: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. GPs in his constituency have chosen to operate a completely voluntary scheme because they believe that it will improve care to their patients. In that they agree with the Fabian Society and a wide range of other commentators who have looked at the scheme. We are still waiting for an answer from the Opposition Front Bench as to why they will not support the scheme.

Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee

3. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Pharmaceutical Services negotiating committee; and what was discussed. [2174]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): Officials regularly meet the Pharmaceutical Services negotiating committee to discuss issues that affect community pharmacy contractors. Ministers meet the committee whenever it is appropriate.

Mr. Turner: I am sure that the Minister will have heard about the committee's anxieties and the cash flow problems that pharmacists are facing because his Department is an extremely bad payer. As he must be aware, small pharmacists in particular are concerned that they are not receiving within a proper time scale payment for prescriptions that they have already dispensed. That is making it impossible for them to solve their cash problems and they are creating redundancies. Should the attitude of the Minister's Department and the Government be causing redundancies at a time of massive unemployment? The Minister should stop his Department being such a bad payer and get on and pay the people the money that the Department owes them.

Mr. Malone: I read the briefing note that the hon. Gentleman is clearly using. It misses out a fact that perhaps the pharmacists did not discuss with him—if he had discussions with them and did not just read the note. A voluntary agreement that was negotiated with the pharmacists has been in place for some time. It sets out how the payments are structured so that they can be made as quickly as possible after the Prescription Pricing Authority has processed them. That agreement was highly welcomed when it was put in place and I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that it is being honoured to the letter and payments are being made in the context of the agreement. Of course I recognise that pharmacists are business men and have to run their businesses in a proper way. They make a valuable contribution to the community and if there are any ways of taking that forward that we can discuss with them, I am always happy to do so.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that, like all other interest groups, pharmacists have a legitimate case? If the Opposition take up the arguments of every interest group in the community and ask the Government to pay 100 per cent. of their claims, public expenditure is bound to get out of control. Although it is certain that the Opposition will temporarily become popular with farmers, lawyers, civil servants and every other interest group that wants to get its snout into the public trough, that is a clear indication that public expenditure under Labour will get grossly out of control.

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Every time that there is a request for additional funding, the Labour party accedes to it in the same breath as it suggests that taxation can be brought down, but those attitudes are incompatible. Unlike Labour, the pharmacists are always responsible when entering discussions. Last year the global sum from which they were paid was increased by some 2.5 per cent. The pharmacists also agreed to a change in the structure of the payments made to them, so that we can ensure that more payments go to pharmacists who provide more professional services. That was a welcome way to approach added public expenditure for added value. Labour says that payments should go up for no reason.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Minister aware that many people on regular prescriptions complain that chemists are giving short weight—that the doctor writes a prescription for 30 tablets but that the chemist dispenses only 24 or 26 tablets? People on regular monthly prescriptions are having to pay as much as one month extra per year because of that short measure. The pharmacists blame the packaging. Nevertheless, many members of the public feel cheated when they have paid more than £5 for a prescription but receive too few tablets. Will the Minister get together with the pharmaceutical and packaging industries to ensure that the customer gets what he pays for?

Mr. Malone: Rather curiously, the hon. Gentleman asked a question that might have more point in six months' time, as we introduce patient pack prescribing—which is in its early days and has not yet been generally introduced. Pharmacists must dispense the appropriate medicine according to the doctor's prescription. That will be the case when patient pack prescribing is introduced. It will ensure that the patient is given the appropriate amount of medicine to treat the symptom for which he sought a prescription from the doctor.

Mr. Deva: Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the important role played by pharmacists in helping people with self-medication, which contrasts sharply with Labour's health policies—which are all diagnosis and no prescription?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Community pharmacists play an important role in providing medical care, and it is one that we are extremely keen to encourage through the payment of the professional allowance for displaying pharmacy practice leaflets and health promotion literature. Pharmacists, as health care professionals, are keen to develop that important role.

Breast Cancer

5. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's progress towards the use of specialist breast units for the treatment of breast cancer. [2176]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): The Calman report forms the basis of our strategy for the development of cancer services. We have charged regional directors with the task of taking that forward and, where necessary, reconfiguring services to treat common cancers, including breast cancer, in specialised units.

Mr. Gunnell: Given that the Calman report regarded as urgent the move to specialist breast cancer care units, which was endorsed by the Health Select Committee report, is sufficient urgency being shown by the Department? I think not. Is not it important that the Government move rapidly to establish a network of such units, so that the fears that haunt many women in this country can be allayed by the provision of prompt, effective and thorough treatment in every area? Is not that absolutely necessary? Why are the Government so dilatory in moving to that position?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is uncharacteristically ungenerous in not acknowledging the work being done by the NHS. Calman reported only in April, since when regional offices have been working on the recommendations. Calman set out a structure of primary care refering to cancer units for diagnosis and treatment and cancer centres at which rarer types of cancer—and particular specialist services, such as radiotherapy—would be available. The hon. Gentleman needs only to look in his own back yard. The United Leeds teaching hospitals have developed fine services that include a specialist unit. That is the way forward for Leeds, and the hon. Gentleman might have paid tribute to that development. We are looking to see how to develop services throughout the country for the benefit of patients.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the Royal Marsden hospital in Sutton, in my constituency, which offers an excellent breast cancer service with particular expertise in early detection and palliative care? Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the extra budget allocated by the Chancellor should go to that superb service?

Mr. Bowis: I am happy to pay tribute to the Royal Marsden, and I was able to do so yesterday because I was at the Queen Elizabeth II centre when it received a charter mark award. I congratulate the hospital publicly again today. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the resources that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has negotiated with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—£1.3 billion more for the coming year; a 1.6 per cent. increase in real terms. I have no doubt that some of those resources will lead to further improvements in our cancer services.

Mr. McLeish: In view of the concern about high mortality rates for breast cancer, will the Minister reaffirm the Government's commitment to ensuring that a reduction in the mortality rate for breast cancer is a key part of the "Health of the Nation" strategy? Will he also confirm that he is satisfied with the progress that is being made to achieve the target of a 25 per cent. reduction by 2000? Will the Minister outline what steps he has taken to monitor progress at the district health authority level; and does he agree that the development and publication of local targets at DHA level is vital if the "Health of the Nation" strategy is to mean anything?

Mr. Bowis: There were about five questions there. I have already announced that our regional offices will examine the configuration of services, and will build on that. Of course we stand by our "Health of the Nation" targets. Progress has been made, and we want to see more. That is why we are developing services; why we are investing in services; and why much research is being done. I pay tribute to the range of research conducted by Government and by the voluntary sector and pharmaceutical companies.

Infant and Perinatal Mortality

6. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the change in (a) infant and (b) perinatal mortality rates in the last 15 years. [2177]

Mr. Dorrell: Infant and perinatal mortality rates are at their lowest levels ever. Deaths of children aged under one year—the infant mortality rate—fell by half between 1979 and 1994. Stillbirths and deaths of babies less than a week old—the perinatal rate—fell by nearly 40 per cent. over the same period.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's reply, which reveals a staggering reduction in the number of fatalities. Does he agree that that is due principally to three factors; first, the great advances in medical technology; secondly, the increasing skill of our doctors and nurses; and, thirdly, the vastly increased amounts of taxpayers' money put into the national health service? Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures underline the increased quality of infant health care, like so many other NHS services, for the benefit of the whole nation?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right on every count. Those indicators are interesting, because they are some of the relatively few health outcome indicators that are directly comparable with those in different countries. Such indicators tell heavily in favour of the good value and efficient health service delivered by the NHS, which has been consistently supported by the Government and which we shall continue to support.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Has the Secretary of State had a chance to look at the King's Fund's recent publication, "Tackling Inequalities in Health", which confirms—as is to be expected—that over the past 10 years there has been a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and that that gap is reflected by widening differentials in mortality rates for adults and infants? If that is so, what is the Department of Health doing to ensure improvements in health nationwide by increasing equality in wealth and income for all citizens?

Mr. Dorrell: I talked yesterday about some of the things that we are doing to ensure that we deliver, nation wide, the objectives of the national health service. The establishment of proper purchasing arrangements for the health services within the reformed management is designed precisely to target resources on health need. The Government's commitment to weighted capitation—I announced a further step towards its delivery yesterday—is also intended to eliminate variations. That commitment is precisely directed to answer the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be welcome, fair and right if the media sometimes concentrated on the remarkable advance that has been made in this part of the health service as in others, and that tiny babies are saved today who would not have had a hope of life even 10 or 12 years ago?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is a dry statistic that tells a very human story of which anyone interested in the NHS should be proud. It is a comparison between health care in Britain and health care in virtually every other developed country and it tells in favour of both our national health service and the Government's support for it.

Mr. Milburn: Although the overall fall in death rates is clearly welcome, will the Secretary of State explain why last year both the South Tyneside and the Sandwell health care NHS trusts had a perinatal mortality rate of 13.7 per 1,000 live births, while in Kingston and Richmond the rate was just 3.4 per 1,000 live births? Will he also confirm that, if all infants and children enjoyed the same survival rates as those in social classes I and II, up to 3,000 deaths a year might be prevented? Does that latter figure not show that the price of widening social and economic inequality under the Government is being paid for in the health of poorer people?

Mr. Dorrell: What the hon. Gentleman does not cover is two facts: first, that health outcomes are improving for all social classes in Britain; and, secondly, that the Government have put in place reformed management of the health service, precisely to ensure that health resources are targeted at health need. It is precisely for that reason that we changed the management of the health service. Since the hon. Gentleman raises the subject, I assume that he would now like to welcome that.

Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust

7. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the development package recently announced by the Huddersfield national health service trust. [2178]

Mr. Malone: I very much welcome this £10 million development programme. It will provide improved health care facilities for the people of Huddersfield, in the context of a modern health service.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that this £10 million development programme, across a range of health facilities in my local hospital, represents a remarkable investment in improved health care for the people in and around Huddersfield and is the sort of good news about which we never hear from Opposition Members? Is he aware that I get far fewer complaints about my local hospitals than, for example, about my local Labour council?

Mr. Malone: I am not surprised to learn of the content of my hon. Friend's postbag, because he does indeed have an excellent local hospital. May I, in the words of the trust chief executive, point out that

> "Never before have we had so many new developments planned on this scale . . . together, they form a major step forward for patient care"?

That is a great improvement, in the context of that particular hospital. What the Labour party always fails to acknowledge is that such things are happening throughout the country. Perhaps when it happens in the areas of Opposition Members, they might table the sort of question that my hon. Friend tabled today.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the Minister accept that what happens in Huddersfield impacts on Calderdale, because they share the same purchaser? Is he aware that the development about which he talks means that in Calderdale we will lose 300 badly needed beds?

Mr. Malone: Yet again, we have the hon. Lady complaining about investment in the health service which will benefit the whole range of the population that this hospital trust serves. Of course we understand that it is up to local health authorities to decide where they purchase their health care; now they will be able to do so on behalf of my hon. Friend's constituents and those of the hon. Lady. Those people can be served by this hospital through updated facilities in which £10 million is being invested. I would have thought that the hon. Lady might welcome that.

Haemophiliacs

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about making an ex gratia payment to haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C. [2179]

Mr. Horam: Representations include seven earlier parliamentary questions, and five early-day motions. There was also an Adjournment debate initiated by my hon. Friend on 11 July and a short debate in another place. Ministers have received 291 letters.

Mr. Marshall: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his promotion to the Department of Health. Since his promotion, has he had a chance to read the impact study produced by the Haemophilia Society, which has been made available to his Department, which demonstrates the physical, financial and emotional hardship suffered by haemophiliacs? As the cause of that hardship, infected blood products, is the same as that which passed on the HIV virus to haemophiliacs, should not the Government's reaction be the same?

Mr. Horam: First, I congratulate the Haemophilia Society on its sensible review and my hon. Friend on his relentless questioning over many years, which has already achieved quite staggering results. I have not yet read the full review, but I shall do so as a matter of priority and I shall obviously take its conclusions most carefully into account.

Mr. Mudie: Does the Minister realise the stress caused to the families of individuals, such as a 13-year-old youngster in my constituency, who not only have to cope with haemophilia but have now been totally devastated by having to cope with the effects of hepatitis C? Please may we have an early and sympathetic decision to bring some hope to those families?

Mr. Horam: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the problem will always receive sympathy from me.

Residential Care

9. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will clarify the criteria used to assess voluntary groups providing high standards of care in residential settings for those with challenging behaviour, in respect of the application of necessary minimum levels of proper discipline and restraint. [2181]

Mr. Bowis: Regulations require that the owners and managers of homes should both safeguard and promote the welfare of residents. We expect statutory authorities to ensure that service providers should have clear, written policies on the management of people who may cause harm to themselves or others.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not an easy job to look after the severely mentally handicapped, and that common-sense disciplines should prevail over fashionable, impractical social services' ideologies which are certainly not in the best interests of the residents themselves?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is entirely right. When we are talking about difficult to manage individuals, we must ensure that the restraint and control used are sufficient to prevent a person from hurting himself or herself, other people or property. That is common sense, which must always take precedence over political correctness.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

10. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to privatise the role of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [2182]

Mr. Dorrell: None, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the Minister not concerned that access to in vitro fertilisation is so variable around the country, and barely exists at all in my part of Devon? Instead of talking about privatisation and hiving off, what action does he intend to take to ensure that that authority makes that vital service available to young couples throughout the country?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman accuses me of talking about privatisation, but when he asked me what plans I had for privatisation, I said none. That is hardly an accusation that can be made to stick. With regard to the development of IVF, I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman might welcome the fact that that is a new science which has been developing fast within British hospitals and which is being made available by different health authorities in different parts of the country to the people of their areas. We have always made it clear that that is a matter for local decision making within individual health authorities, reflecting the health priorities of their districts.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there can be little public confidence in a body whose members and employees are involved with and generate their income from destructive experiments on living human embryos? Is it not a positive disgrace that not one person has been appointed to that authority who believes in the sanctity of human life and who reflects the majority view in Britain that such experiments are repugnant?

Mr. Dorrell: Strong views on the subject are held on both sides of the argument, the resolution of which, as the House knows, was achieved by a free vote during the passage of the legislation. The authority's membership is intended to reflect the necessary scientific expertise and the commitment to apply proper ethical standards to the use of that science. My hon. Friend may not like every member of the authority, but I hope that she will at least endorse the objectives that guide the authority's deliberations.

Hospitals (Emergency Admissions)

11. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of trends in the numbers of emergency admissions to hospitals. [2183]

Mr. Dorrell: The number of emergency admissions to hospital increased by an average of 3 per cent. each year in the five years to 1993-94. That is broadly in line with the increase in total admissions.

Mr. Rooney: Is the Secretary of State aware that staffing levels in Bradford royal infirmary's accident and emergency department are far worse than those in any comparable department in the country? Has he any intention of meeting regional and district health authorities to set minimum staffing levels so that patients charter standards are met?

Mr. Dorrell: Patients charter standards define the standard that a patient is entitled to expect when he or she approaches the health service for care, whether through an accident and emergency department or through any other department. It is obviously the responsibility of trust management, in consultation with the health authority, to make certain that those standards are delivered. I am sure that that will be the guiding principle in Bradford, as in every other part of the country.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures demonstrate the need for hospitals to have proper systems in place to ensure the prompt admission and speedy discharge of patients? Is it not vital for social services departments up and down the country to get their act together to ensure the proper discharge of elderly patients into the community?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The relationship between the health service and social services departments in every part of the country is the key to the delivery of the objectives of both the health service and social services departments, and it is given a high priority throughout the health service.

PRIME MINISTER

GP Fundholders (Lichfield)

Q1. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet a delegation of general practitioners from Lichfield to discuss the future of fundholding. [2202]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): Fundholders' views on developing the success of the scheme are always welcome. Any detailed recommendations will, of course, be considered.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. Is he aware that every general practitioner in Lichfield will be a registered fundholder? The reason is that those GPs believe in the Conservative party's crusade for choice: they believe that it is right for them to be able to choose the consultant and the hospital that are right for them. Does my right hon. Friend realise that they are appalled at the Labour party's plan to abolish fundholding? Does that not give the lie to Labour's crusade for schools, which is evidently empty rhetoric—just another empty soundbite?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that GP fundholding has improved patient care and increased patient choice up and down the country. An increasing number of doctors are choosing to become fundholders, and I welcome that, in Lichfield as elsewhere.

There is, of course, all the difference in the world between a policy that genuinely believes in choice—as ours does in relation to both health and education—and one that believes in choice for marketing reasons. We saw an instance of that this morning.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December. [2203]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Prime Minister agree with me, and with all the other users of the Great Western main line from Paddington to south Wales and the west of England, that the signals for railway privatisation are now firmly stuck at red? Now that the consortium Resurgence Railways, led by the Prime Minister's Huntingdon Tory crony, Mike Jones, has been rejected because it cannot raise the money, and the second-choice preferred bidders—led by the present management team at Western Region—cannot raise the money either, should we not be singing the old song "Let's call the whole thing off"?

The Prime Minister: That was rather contrived, I must say. Rail privatisation is going ahead, for one simple reason: it will deliver a better service for rail passengers. If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends really think that, over the past 40 years, the public have had the rail service that they would like, I do not know where he has been.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend believe that, if he appointed Scottish-based Members of Parliament to key Cabinet posts such as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Chief Whip, and then proposed to set up a Parliament in Edinburgh that failed to address the West Lothian question, that would be good for the Union of the United Kingdom and for relations between Scotland and the rest of the UK?

The Prime Minister: I do, of course, have a number of very distinguished Scots in my Cabinet and in my Government, but I certainly agree with the thrust—*[Interruption.]* Not at the moment, it is true. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is distinguished, but he is not a Scot. The thrust of my hon. Friend's point is surely right—if the devolution plans proposed by the Opposition parties were to proceed, they would undoubtedly lead to conflict between Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. I hope that, even at this late stage, the parties advocating those policies will consider what they would mean in practice both for Scotland and for the rest of the United Kingdom and will decide that extra taxation for Scots alone is not a way to improve the prosperity of Scotland.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree, as the Government's report "Lifetime Learning" which was published today confirms, that Britain's skills and education attainments are nowhere near where they should be? Rather than encouraging a small number of children to leave state schools for the private sector, should we not be raising educational standards for the 7 million children who are educated in the state sector, many of whom do not get the education that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: Of course, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have produced a whole series of plans to raise educational standards over recent years, many of which, alas, have been strongly opposed by the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to know where in the education sector there is failure, he might look at Hackney for example. [[HON. MEMBERS: "Islington."] I shall come to Islington. The right hon. Gentleman might look at Lambeth, where the secondary schools are so bad that the Office for Standards in Education has to inspect every one of them. He might, of course, look at Islington, which has just come absolutely bottom in the table of GCSE results. What is consistent among all those is that they are all Labour-controlled education authorities.

Mr. Michael Brown: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate SCM Chemicals in my constituency, a subsidiary of the Hanson Trust group, which yesterday announced a massive expansion of its titanium dioxide plant? Is that not clear evidence that international investment is making my constituency the chemical capital of the world?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a formidable advocate for his constituency and his constituents. I hope he will agree that Government policy as well as his advocacy might have played some part in bringing that investment to his constituency.

Q3. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December. [2204]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Will the Prime Minister explain to the people of Cornwall and Devon why they should accept the Government's conclusions today that Government spending in the region compares favourably with that in the rest of the country, when every independent report shows that spending in the region is 10 per cent. less Department by Department, education to industry, than that in the rest of the country, despite high unemployment, low wages and a high cost of living?

The Prime Minister: As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, we have a number of measures to deal with those problems in the west country and elsewhere, and it is extremely important that those problems are dealt with. We are determined to address them and to improve the living standards and opportunities for people in the west country. That is what we have been doing and what we shall continue to do. It is pity that the hon. Gentleman seeks to denigrate every effort that is made.

Mr. Devlin: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports of the disgraceful intimidation and browbeating that is going on in Hurworth in my neighbouring constituency where the Labour party is trying to prevent a local school from opting out? Apparently, the whole affair is being organised by none other than the Leader of the Opposition, aided by the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn.)

The Prime Minister: I believe that any form of intimidation of parental choice is to be condemned. Parents have a natural and a legal right to decide whether they want the school to which their child goes to opt out and they should be able to exercise that right without intimidation, either by the education authority or by anyone else. If there is evidence of that, I hope that those implicated in it will examine it without delay.

Q4. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December. [2205]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms Quin: My question concerns the appalling human rights abuses in Nigeria, together with reports in the press today of confidential information from Home Office files being leaked to Tory central office and thence to the press. Will the Prime Minister order an immediate inquiry into those leaks and further assure the House that there will be no deportations to Nigeria of people at risk from that murderous regime?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, our position on Nigeria is clear and, in company with others, we set that out clearly at the Commonwealth conference. The case in today's newspaper to which she refers was one where the applicant or his representative had chosen to make public details of their cases and allegations about their consideration. In those circumstances, the Home Office gave information that was necessary to set the record straight in response to telephone inquiries that it received and, subsequent to the information being given by the Home Office, it was also used by others.

Sir Michael Shersby: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to consider the outstanding success of Operation Christmas Cracker? Is he aware that some 12,000 police officers in 40 force areas today made a number of staggered raids in which more than 2,000 suspects were arrested, and recovered property ranging from bicycles to reptiles? Does he agree that that is one of the best Christmas presents that people could have?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who touches on a matter that is of importance to everyone. I certainly welcome the priority given to today's operation, which involves some 40 police forces and has occasioned more than 2,000 arrests. There is no doubt that, over the past couple of years, innovative policing methods have made a distinct impact on the crime level, and we are now beginning to see the crime statistics fall. It is policing of that sort that can give people considerable reassurance. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may scoff about crime falling, but it is a matter of importance to the public out there.

Q5. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December. [2206]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Foulkes: Has the Prime Minister seen the astonishing reports in the press that the official video of the party conference has been doctored to make the party chairman appear good, and to play down the popularity of the Secretary of State for Defence in the party? If the Conservative party cannot tell the truth about its own conference, is it any wonder that no one trusts it on tax?

The Prime Minister: From the party that has more spending pledges and higher tax in the pipeline than anyone else, I find that ironic. On the newspaper reports, the hon. Gentleman should look at reality, not newspaper reports.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my right hon. Friend aware that high-quality textiles from Yorkshire were used in the new James Bond film? James Bond may be ruthless in what he does to his enemies, but he is also particular about what he wears. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the three west Yorkshire textile companies that were involved in that project?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly happy to congratulate west Yorkshire and the textile industry and I hope that, as a result of that extra advertisement, they will sell far more of their textiles at home and abroad.

Q6. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December. [2207]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Corston: The Prime Minister describes himself as a one-nation Tory. Will he therefore tell us which is fairer—abolishing capital gains and inheritance taxes or implementing a starting rate of income tax of 10p?

The Prime Minister: I see that the shadow Chancellor is here. One of his hon. Friends, also a Front Bencher a year or so ago, referred in very scathing terms to precisely the sort of proposition that the shadow Chancellor made. It is a gimmick and the shadow Chancellor knows it. What is fair is to lower the basic rate of tax to 20p, which is what we are doing by raising thresholds so that one in four people now pays tax at 20p, by cutting the tax on savings for all basic-rate taxpayers so that they only pay 20p, and by reducing the basic rate of tax.

The hon. Lady reveals the deep innate distaste of the Labour party for cutting taxes. It is a spending party and a tax-raising party, while we cut taxes.

3.30 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, of which I gave you prior notice. You will have just heard the Prime Minister refer to what appears to be a major change in the long-standing policy of the Home Office not to disclose to a third party confidential information concerning anyone involved in immigration or asylum applications. In view of the disclosure by Conservative central office of information concerning a Mr. Igbiuidu, a Nigerian national seeking asylum in this country, could you, Madam Speaker, arrange for the Home Secretary to make an early statement about what changes the Home Office has made in its policy of not disclosing information about individual applications?

Madam Speaker: I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman kindly gave me notice of his point of order. I certainly heard the Prime Minister's response today. I understand that the information was released by the Home Office. I, as Speaker, have no responsibility for the actions of Government Departments, but even so I took the opportunity this morning to look at the matter and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it is precedented.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask you to look in the *Official Report* tomorrow at question No. 1 to the Prime Minister, tabled by the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). He asked a closed question. We all understand the ground rules. A closed question prevents any supplementary from being asked, other than in relation to the subject matter of the question.

My complaint is that the Prime Minister did not respond either in detail or by implication to the question, which specifically asked whether he would meet general practitioners from Lichfield. There was no mention of Lichfield in the Prime Minister's reply, and certainly not in relation to general practitioners. If the rules are to apply, a Minister has to respond to a question, or it is unfair to Opposition Members.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Sit down. I am taking no further points of order on this matter. Indeed, it was not a point of order anyway. I am not responsible for the answers given by Ministers. We shall now get on with the business of the House.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Many of us could not hear what you said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). For clarification, could you tell us whether you said that the procedure was precedented or a precedent?

Madam Speaker: It is precedented. If the hon. Gentleman would like to come to see me I will give him the information.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw to your attention the happy fact that, after 15 months, I am back in service?

Madam Speaker: It is a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman back. I shall look for quality contributions from him in future.

BILL PRESENTED

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Secretary Forsyth, supported by Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Dorrell and Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, presented a Bill to amend the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 to enable licensing boards to make byelaws including licensing conditions relating to certain events involving music and dancing and to make new provision for the composition of licensing boards for licensing divisions: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 11.]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Income-related Benefits Schemes and Social Security (Claims and Payments) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2303) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—[*Mr. McLoughlin.*]

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming debate on Question [29 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation otherwise than by—

(i) zero-rating or exempting supplies of goods which are, or are to be, subjected to a fiscal or other warehousing regime; or

(ii) zero-rating or exempting supplies of services on or in relation to such goods;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax otherwise than to persons constructing or converting buildings in cases where the construction or conversion is not in the course or furtherance of a business;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

Madam Speaker: I must tell the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition to the first Ways and Means motion. It may be convenient if at this stage I also announce that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition to the motion on public expenditure which is being debated together with the Budget resolutions.

3.35 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer had three principal objectives in his Budget: first, to maintain the Government's determination to make this country the enterprise centre of Europe; secondly, to enhance still further the priority that we give to three vital public services—education, the health service and the battle against crime—while reducing overall public expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product; and, thirdly, to pursue the Government's objective to allow people to keep more of their own money through a programme of significant tax cuts. I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend for producing a Budget that achieved all three of those objectives. He has delivered a Budget that will get borrowing down, secure our reputation for governing responsibly and in the national interest, and continue to promote a sustainable, lasting recovery.

I referred to our determination to build in this country the enterprise centre of Europe. We have recognised as a Government—perhaps more frankly than any other Government—that over the past 100 years, our position as a trading nation, from about 1860 onwards, has been one of relative decline. As a Government, we inherited in 1979 an economy heading for still more serious decline—structurally unsound, grossly overmanned, seriously unproductive and ridden with industrial disputes. It was widely acknowledged that in 1979 this country was the sick man of Europe.

Today, we are among Europe's fastest growing economies. The United Kingdom grew faster than G7 average growth in 1993 and 1994, and we are set to do so again this year. The International Monetary Fund expects us to join Germany at the top of the G7 growth league in 1996. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has praised the change. Its survey of the UK noted:

> "the UK's sweeping structural reforms are yielding dividends in a more flexible, competitive, and less inflation prone economy."

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister refers to sweeping structural reforms. Has he noted the sweeping structural reform in my constituency, where an American company, Campbell Soups—60 per cent. of its share capital is owned by one family—was able to take a decision which closed one of the most advanced food-producing plants in the country, owned by Home Pride, effectively wiping out 123 jobs at a stroke? Home Pride was profitable last year; it made £4 million. The entire food industry is outraged, and my constituency is outraged, yet the Government stand back and do nothing. Who is going to step in to stop such companies wrecking the local economy in my constituency? If the right hon. Gentleman has any honour, will he stand at the

Dispatch Box and join me in appealing to the British people to boycott the products of the company—Campbell soups and Fray Bentos corned beef—so that it knows that we will not stand aside and watch it wreck a constituency such as mine?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): So much for inward investment!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course I do not like unemployment being created in any constituency in any circumstance. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) seriously. Was he saying that a future Labour Government would become involved in preventing companies from closing down? Would a future Labour Government be prepared to offer subsidies to such a company? Is that one more—

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I will not give way. This is a question not for the hon. Gentleman, but for Front-Bench Members of his party. What faces us today is old Labour anticipating old demands that it will make to a future Labour Government. Perhaps the deputy leader of the Labour party will tell us how much money is tucked away in the coffers of a potential Labour Budget to save jobs in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has described.

I noticed another characteristic of old Labour when the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) spoke against inward investment, cynically attacking one of the most successful aspects of the British economy.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the right hon. Gentleman not carry out his promise of a short time ago, when he talked at the Tory party conference about intervening before breakfast, before dinner and before tea? Why, in this respect, does he not intervene before the soup?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I and my right hon. Friends have intervened time and again and the result has been that there have been more than 4,700 inward investments into this country which are creating or safeguarding 700,000 jobs. That is the sort of intervention in which we believe, creating an enterprise economy which is making us the most successful enterprise centre of Europe.

It is interesting that this is the new Labour party. At any sign of success, any inward investment by overseas companies or any decision to cause a redundancy, the Labour party is up in arms with indignation. There is nothing new about the Labour party. Labour Members are the oldest men and women, psychologically, in British politics.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: There is no point in my giving way when the Labour party has given way to every intellectual argument that this party has paraded over the past 16 years. Labour Members—the whole lot of them—do not realise that they are intellectually flat on their backs.

The people of this country must make a decision. Do they want this country's economy to be judged by the standards of the Labour party, or by the standards of the men and women running the world's most successful international companies who, in the freedom they enjoy, are choosing to invest in this country—a country that the Tories have made the most successful in Europe? Which is the right judgment? Should people choose Labour's restrictionism, which harks back to yesterday, or the Tory party's bringing the investment that will create prosperity and jobs tomorrow?

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The Deputy Prime Minister closed the pits and put 30,000 miners out of a job. Why are new mines now being opened in the north-east of England? Why are companies opencasting half my county? Why is that happening when the right hon. Gentleman put 30,000 miners on the dole?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I took that most uncomfortable decision for the same reason as Labour Ministers took exactly the same decisions year after year after year, in the unhappy circumstances when they sat temporarily on the Treasury Bench. They took that decision—as I did—because the industry was uncompetitive. The reason why the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) can point to the fact that new mines are being opened, new opportunities are being created and coal is being exported is that under the private sector, the coal industry is competitive. That is the transformation which has come about.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Bearing in mind the fact that I voted against the coal proposals to which my right hon. Friend has referred, but moving further forward, does my right hon. Friend accept that the Labour party demonstrates its utter hypocrisy by continuing to cavil and complain about how we are running the economy, when the Labour party was behind the exchange rate mechanism and is in favour of further integration into monetary union? Will my right hon. Friend say here and now that the United Kingdom will never go back into an exchange rate mechanism? It is precisely because we are outside that system that we are now competitive and have all the growth to which my right hon. Friend has rightly referred.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Now that my hon. Friend has reminded me of the facts, I recall that he disagreed with me on the issue of the coal mines. But the day when my hon. Friend and I agree on all aspects of policy will be a day for the Tory party to rejoice from one end of the country to the other. I only suggest to my hon. Friend that he should use his considerable rhetorical skills not to attack the record of the Government but to attack the Labour party, which will otherwise take the place of the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that it is only fair that the Opposition spokesmen should have a chance to speak in the debate, as opposed to allowing the whole thrust of Labour party policy to be dictated by its Back Benches.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am being fair to the Labour party because I understand that it cannot make up its mind which way to vote tonight. Perhaps I should give Labour Members more chance to debate these matters between themselves. I will not give way to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd); she will forgive me.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

The fact is that international opinion and world commentators now praise the remarkable changes that have occurred in the British economy. To quote only one, the chairman of BMW said earlier this year:

> "structural change has made Britain by far the most attractive place to invest in Europe."

The fact is that the change is happening in manufacturing, the service industries and in the vital super-highway industries of tomorrow. The people who have to make the judgments upon which so many jobs and so much investment depends know that the British economy under the Conservatives offers the best tax climate, excellent industrial relations, low inflation and a climate of enterprise which the Government are systematically extending and expanding year after year.

There can be no clearer indication of the success of our policies—it is one that was at the heart of the Labour party's preoccupation—than the fact that unemployment has fallen by almost 750,000 over the past two and a half years. The United Kingdom now has more people in work than any other major European Union economy.

I shall expand on some aspects of the Government's continuing agenda of competitiveness, to which the Chancellor referred in his speech. I shall start with the deregulation initiative and the burdens on industry. After the outstanding work of the task forces, first under Lord Sainsbury and now under Francis Maude, far more than 1,000 regulatory provisions have been earmarked for repeal or amendment. Some 500 will have been dealt with by the end of this month, and many more are in the pipeline.

We are now saving companies hundreds of millions of pounds per annum, which of course feeds through into enhanced competitiveness, investment and jobs. Out of the hundreds of regulatory provisions, I shall give the House three examples. First, merely by simplifying the food temperature control regulations, the Government will have helped save industry about £40 million a year. Secondly, we have increased the proportion that charities can invest in equities from 50 to 75 per cent. On the charities' own estimates, that could increase their investment returns by some £200 million a year. Thirdly, the simplification of trade marks legislation is already generating savings of some £30 million a year.

I am pleased to announce today the progress that we have made on a major area of regulatory concern—bringing in greater joint working by the Inland Revenue, the Contributions Agency and Customs and Excise to make dealing with Government more straightforward and less burdensome for business. Anyone in business will know that every year, two heavy documents arrive, one explaining the tax system, the other explaining the national insurance contribution system: two systems, two organisations, two sets of inspectors, two documents.

Today, Peter Wyman, senior tax partner of Coopers and Lybrand and a member of Francis Maude's task force, has agreed to oversee and drive forward the project of joint working between the Inland Revenue and the Contributions Agency and to ensure that this delivers real early benefits to business. We are talking about concrete things that really matter to people who run businesses: like having just one initial audit visit covering both PAYE and national insurance; like a single telephone help line to deal with queries and to cut out the duplication of paperwork. Peter Wyman will bring exactly the external experience and perspective that we need for this task.

I referred earlier to our inward investment. One third of all inward investment in Europe is now based here. Forty per cent. of all American and Japanese investment in Europe is here—world-class companies transforming management practices, our employment prospects, our research expertise and our export markets. This investment from overseas, together with very optimistic forecasts for domestic investment, is helping the transformation of our economic prospects. But there is more to it than that.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does my right hon. Friend believe that if the Government were to sign a sweetheart deal with BT allowing it to compete against the new entrants into the cable market, we would get the information super-highway built quicker? Would that have the effect of cutting off inward investment from such companies?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would be grateful if my hon. Friend would bear with me. I had it in mind to return to that subject a little later in my speech.

This is not just about our industrial and commercial base. Britain is being modernised and rebuilt in what will be seen in perspective as the greatest period of urban renaissance since the 19th century. None of this is luck; it is as a deliberate consequence of the strategies that the Government have pursued.

First, trade union reform and the privatisation of our nationalised industries played a critical part in restoring the wealth-creating ethos in this country. They have become established here despite the in-built resistance at every stage of the Labour party, which is characterised now only by its abject surrender on all those major issues of principle for which it fought so hard in the 1980s.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, we know into which Lobby the hon. Gentleman went all through the 1980s. We know the record.

The fact is that our reforms in the restructuring of our economy and the privatising of our industries have become so entrenched here that they are the subject of intense investigation across the world. There is virtually no country today that is not exploring and experimenting with the ideas that we developed in the 1980s. They are established here and admired across the world. The fact is that we are moving on to new ideas that again will become part of the world culture change.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Talking about new ideas, or perhaps rehashed old ideas, my right hon. Friend has been discussing regulation and competitiveness. I understand that there are one or two parties in the House—or even three—that have a proposal for a Scottish Parliament. What would that do for the competitiveness of industry and deregulation in Scotland? My right hon. Friend may intend to deal with that later, but if he does not, perhaps he could tell the House what he thinks about it.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is difficult to be sure how much extra tax it would lead to because I would have to know how much extra tax was going to be imposed by a future Labour Government across the national economy. As I understand the specifically Scottish dimension, the cost of an assembly in Scotland would be of the order of 3p. That, I think, is the tartan tax. That, broadly, would be the sort of cost that the people of Scotland would have to pay. The effect on inward investment in Scotland would be dramatic, but it would, of course, be hugely advantageous to England, Northern Ireland and Wales, because we would get the inward investment that socialism in Scotland would deter from going there. Those are the obvious consequences of a Scottish assembly, and that is why I do not expect to see it happen.

We are now pioneering further developments that will affect the culture of public and private sector co-operation on a world scale. The first of those is the progress and vast potential of the private finance initiative. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for the Environment made it clear last week that we will also be extending the reach of another Government innovation—challenge funding. In many ways, the cultural shift implied in challenge funding is among the most pervasive and ambitious of our proposals.

I well remember, 15-odd years ago, the hostility that greeted the concept of the urban development corporations, the enterprise zones and the urban grant. But once again, as in so many other areas where we have pioneered, others have been forced by events to follow the lead that we set. We have seen, and will see through regional challenge, city challenge and the fund for the single regeneration budget, billions of pounds of investment from the private sector being levered in by the stimulus of public money to regenerate and revitalise our inner cities.

No one who has any experience or understanding of east London, Tyneside, Clydeside, the Tees, Merseyside, inner Birmingham, central Manchester or Cardiff bay can question that it is Conservative policies which have transformed those formerly dispirited urban areas. They have done that by creating a genuine public-private partnership, which has added hugely to what the public sector could ever have been able to afford.

We have not just created a physical renaissance—we have changed the culture of co-operation at local level. We have forced the inward looking, self-serving local Labour authorities to work effectively in partnership with their local communities, which they have been elected to serve.

Challenge funding has brought the Government, local authorities, training and enterprise councils and the private sector together. Regional challenge involves the European Commission in the same process. As a consequence of such partnerships, those involved have overcome differences and worked together for the benefit of the entire community. In order to win the competition for challenge funds, local authorities must now consult and involve their local communities. They must talk to tenants, teachers, the police and the industrial and commercial communities as they develop their plans and their priorities.

That is the politics of progress. That is how one truly builds the concept of one nation in the most deprived parts of our country. That change has been brought about because the Government have changed the assumptions that local authorities can simply expect to use taxpayers' money to finance irresponsibility and dogma.

The Secretary of State for the Environment has now proposed an expansion of challenge funding in local authority capital programmes. Shortly, the President of the Board of Trade will announce the result of the competition for the £160 million available under the regional challenge, which we have run with European funds.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Bingo and scratch card economics again.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I cannot help but notice the continuing murmuring of anti-enterprise slogans from the Labour party. The most interesting thing about sitting on the Conservative Benches is to note that the only thing that ever excites the Labour party is yesterday's slogans. The more the leadership of the Labour party talks about new Labour, the quieter the Labour party becomes. The more it lapses into yesterday's jargon, the more hysterically reminiscent it becomes of the old Labour party I know and love. *[Interruption.]* I should have thought that with so much self-evident success, benefiting the Labour constituencies of this country—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I refer to Mr. Campbell. I will have some order now from the Opposition Front Bench below the Gangway.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am referring to falling unemployment, which now creates derision among the Opposition. I am talking about inward investment in their constituencies and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) sneers. My right hon. Friends spend hour after hour trying to persuade companies to come here instead of the south of Ireland, Germany, Holland or anywhere else and all that we get from Opposition Members is sneering at the results that bring jobs to their constituencies.

That is characteristic of what we know about the Labour party. They are never happier than when they are talking Britain down. The Labour party has latched on to the 1995 world competitiveness report. It is a report in which Chile comes top for having corporate boards which safeguard proper practices and Peru is thought to be the second most likely country in the world to have a low inflation rate in the next 12 months, despite the fact that the present inflation forecast for Peru in 1995 is 20 per cent. To cap it all, it is a report in which public confidence in financial intermediaries in Colombia surpasses that in all G7 countries except Canada.

Not content with that piece of fantasy, the Opposition turn desperately to some of the OECD figures that the Government used in the competitiveness White Paper. The OECD figures do not help them enough, so what do they do? They stick Hong Kong and Singapore into the OECD league tables of GDP per head and select the position just above the United Kingdom in which to put them. They have no idea as to whether they should put them there, so they do whatever suits their political propaganda.

The Opposition are not comparing like statistics with like, but that does not matter. It may not fit the facts, but it serves the narrow, knocking purpose of the Labour party. They leap about and start crowing that the United Kingdom has apparently slipped from 13th position in 1979 to 16th now and when they include Hong Kong and Singapore, it is 18th. However, they overlook inconvenient facts, as they always do.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

We might explore whether the Opposition are prepared to get rid of the unemployment benefits and the welfare benefits that we have here but do not exist in Singapore in order to raise the investment levels in Britain to those in Singapore. Perhaps that is new Labour policy, and that is how Britain's competitiveness is to improve, but we might be let into the secret this side of a general election campaign. Perhaps they have it in mind that people should live in conditions characteristic of those in some of the fastest growing economies of the far east. If they would be prepared to allow those housing conditions to exist here, people should be entitled to hear about it.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): This is absurd.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not absurd; it is absurd that the Opposition are attempting to compare Britain with those two economies for their own narrow, selfish party purposes, although they were not included in the OECD figures.

Even if one were talking about the events of the 1980s and 1990s, and considering the countries that were included, in 1979 we were the sick man of Europe. Nobody seriously argues with that. I cannot believe that the Opposition would defend it; that would imply that they wanted to go back to it. They certainly would go back to it, but they do not want to imply that intention.

In 1979 we inherited the disasters of restrictive practices, rampant inflation and soaring debt. Thanks to that legacy I concede at once that we slipped to 19th place in 1981. I wholly fail to understand how anybody can imagine that in the immediate aftermath of the winter of discontent we could have seen anything other than the deterioration of the British economy. Where the whole game plan comes unstuck is that from 1981 onwards, we have worked painstakingly and steadily to right the effect of those years of decline. We have achieved something that the socialists opposite never achieved—real, lasting success. While Labour fiddles with statistics, we have been tackling the competition head on.

Mr. Prescott: It is not us who have been doing the fiddling, such as on the unemployment statistics.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Use the word "fiddle" and the deputy leader of the Opposition wakes up. That is his stock in trade, and he is expert at it. I suggest that he calms down because I shall be coming to the deputy leader in a few minutes. Give me a minute or two to deal with the facts before we get to the right hon. Gentleman.

Since 1981, we have seen a significant recovery in this country's status as a world economy because we have systematically put in place the conditions for competitiveness. Although Labour has changed its language, it has changed none of its instincts or ambitions. Labour in the end is the party of the producer, not the consumer. It is the party that will always serve the interests of organised labour as opposed to the interests of the market place. In the end, the Labour party will put its interests above those of the nation at large.

If anyone wants to understand how little Labour has changed and how little it understands of the responsibilities of government—and of how one does not fiddle in Government—consider the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce). The leader of the Labour party stitched up a deal with BT, which he announced with maximum publicity at the Labour party conference. If we in Government behaved like that, we would be in the courts for abusing our legal restraints. No wonder the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has been spending his time ever since trying to persuade the cable companies, which we encouraged to invest billions in Britain, that he had not done a deal with BT. The right hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Either he has done a deal with BT that no one in the Government could do within the constraints of the law, in which case the right hon. Gentleman does not have any idea of the responsibilities of government, or he has not done a deal—in which case he deceived the British people into believing that he did. With the Opposition, if votes are for sale the price is of no regard.

One of the responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is to preside over the regulatory climate and to operate, objectively and on advice, within the law. I have received a letter from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), who is an Opposition spokesman and could find himself in a responsible position and required to study evidence and listen to advice, in taking a wholly analytical and detached view of problems put before him—for that is the job that the hon. Gentleman shadows. Before the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central received any independent advice or heard what the regulators had to say, he wrote to me:

> "Bskyb is abusing its market position by restricting consumer choice and disabling potential competitors."

I read in the newspapers that the deputy leader and the Leader of the Opposition ordered the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central to withdraw that letter. After all, what is the point of flying all the way to Australia to suck up to the executives of the Murdoch empire if one's official spokesman back home is trying to carve up one piece of that empire at the same time as one is trying to win votes in Australia? I will give Mr. Murdoch a simple word of advice. Before he listens to the organ grinder, he should keep his eye on the monkeys back home. Nothing shows more clearly what Labour would be like in power and that it has no idea of the responsibilities within which a Government must operate. Labour is not fit to govern.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central) *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course I will give way to the hon. Gentleman. I will get the letter.

Mr. Caborn: While the Deputy Prime Minister is getting the letter, I can tell him that legal advice was taken on the BT deal by the Select Committee. In fact, we took three sets of legal advice. We were told that the proposals in the Select Committee report were attainable, and that is what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said.

I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman might do better in government if he did some of the things that he suggested when he was in opposition. I also suggest that if he revisited his book "Where There's a Will", he might gain more backbone to take on the Treasury—as he said that he intended—and that might be helpful in the future.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am glad that I gave way. I read the *Financial Times* and—

Mr. Caborn: We have read the book.

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had read my book, he would not have made such inane observations.

If the BT deal announced by the Leader of the Opposition in his bravura performance was real and of value, why is he now telling the cable industry, to quote the *Financial Times—[Interruption.]* I shall give way if anybody wants to tell me that what the Leader of the Opposition told the *Financial Times* is not true.

The Opposition cannot have it all ways. What the Leader of the Opposition said at the party conference was designed to give the impression of a deal that would change the world. What he said today to the cable companies "at a private meeting"—not on the platform at the Labour party conference, not at a great gathering of the Labour party and with no trade unionists there to check the minutes—was

> "that BT would only be allowed access to the market after 1998 if it presented a detailed programme for the construction of a nationwide "broad-band" cable network—the so-called information superhighway."

Mr. Caborn: That is what the Select Committee said.

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are talking not about what the Select Committee said, but about what the Leader of the Opposition tried to con the British people into believing at the Labour party conference. Obviously, he was trying to have it both ways. If the right hon. Gentleman had been in government, he would have been in the courts—and the Opposition know it.

The Budget debate has had the flavour of the old Labour party. One after another, Opposition Members have been demanding higher levels of public expenditure. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) wanted a community action programme. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) demanded investment in the construction industry. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) wanted £20 for the disabled. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) wanted more family credit. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) wanted regional development agencies.

Opposition Members want policemen, money for roads, housing benefit, money for education, investment, money for lone parents and more overseas aid. Their wishes were all summed up by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) when he said:

> "Greater expenditure is justified in many areas."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1283.]

All that at 10p in the pound income tax!

I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) cannot answer the questions that have been put to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and other colleagues. One after the other they have intervened, but they have received no answers. Not only is the Labour party not fit to govern, but its sums do not add up.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the right hon. Gentleman answer a question that will be in the mind of a typical teacher in his constituency? "If I am to get £9 more a week out of the Budget, I would need a pay increase of 4 per cent. If I got a pay increase of 4 per cent., schools would not get another £848 million because that entirely depends on the teachers' pay settlement being much lower. Which do I take?" Surely the same Budget cannot offer both.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly capable of understanding the Chancellor's language. My right hon. and learned Friend referred clearly to the average income rising by £9 a week next year. He said time and again that that increase takes into account a range of factors, such as wage settlements, bonuses and overtime earnings, which will vary as between companies, employees and industries. That is bound to be the position, and everybody understands it, but the fact is that we have a conflict: a shadow Labour Chancellor who cannot answer any of the questions, and a Labour party that is determined to try to seek increased expenditure in programme after programme.

I was interested to see a question that was tabled by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), which read:

> "To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost in a full year of introducing a new 30 per cent. tax band on £3,000 of income above the basic rate band; and what would be the yield from introducing a 60 per cent. upper rate at a 40 per cent. rate limit of *(a)* £50,000, *(b)* £70,000 and *(c)* £100,000."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1995; Vol. 265, c. *426*.]

If that was an idle question from some relatively new and inexperienced Labour Back Bencher, I doubtless would do my best to draw that to the attention of the House, but it may not have quite the credibility that it has when it comes from a Labour Front Bench spokesman. What possible interest has a shadow Treasury spokesman of the parliamentary Labour party in asking the Treasury to calculate the product of a 60 per cent. upper rate tax band? Is it idle curiosity, or is it to help with the arithmetic? If it is the latter, it would help the shadow Chancellor to answer the questions, but at least we should know that this side of a general election campaign. *[Interruption.]* I read out the question. I did not get it wrong. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is a Front Bench spokesman. *[Interruption.]* If I have revealed that I was not sure that the hon. Gentleman was a Treasury spokesman, have I revealed something else: that there is a split between hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench—between the Treasury trying to keep expenditure down and some other departmental responsibility trying to find the money to pay for increased expenditure? I do not mind which way it is; all that I tell the people of this country is that the Labour party is planning a 60 per cent. tax rate and it is doing the calculations on that basis.

Of course, the Labour party may try to suggest that one is raising claims about its policy that cannot be substantiated, but in the real world its own party members are asking the same questions. I happened to notice what the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said on the "Today" programme:

> "Gordon—

I would be more respectful if I was referring to the shadow Chancellor—

> can say anything he likes if he thinks that is going to win the election. When Labour is in power they will be looking for other priorities apart from tax cuts".

I have to say, of course, that the hon. Lady is a young and enthusiastic Member of the Labour Back Benches, so perhaps again we can dismiss it as an isolated occasion, but I have always been interested in the old hands who

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

have been around a little longer, one of whom is our old friend the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who was on the "Clive Anderson Talks Back" programme. *[Interruption.]* I understand that Labour Members do not want to hear it, but hear it they will, not just from me but from their right hon. Friend. Let me quote what he said:

> "The Labour Party doesn't want to cause trouble because we want to get this bunch of crooks out of Government." *[Interruption.]*

We can unite the Labour party on that. He goes on to say:

> "And that's absolutely right".

Now get the cheer ready, boys.

> "And then when we come to power, then you'll find the Labour Party is the same . . . party as it's always been."

So there we have it—a party determined to egg up expenditure at every moment; a shadow Chancellor refusing to answer any of the questions; a shadow spokesman asking for calculations of the product of 60p in the pound income tax; and the old hands of the Labour party saying, "Let them say what they like as long as we get into power, then we will revert to type."

I am not telling the Labour party anything that it does not know. It knows that the shadow Cabinet is torn apart by the traumas of the debate that is going on—the shadow Chancellor talking about 10p in the pound income tax.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Hear, hear. That is a very good policy.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Well, the hon. Gentleman should go and tell the shadow Foreign Secretary that, because he blew his top when he first heard about it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No, he did not.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, he did.

> "Shadow Chancellor talks about denying welfare payments to those people who do not present themselves for work."

The shadow Chancellor just did not tell his colleagues in advance, so the shadow Foreign Secretary flipped his lid when he was first told.

The only thing that can be said for the deputy leader of the Labour party is that, as no one ever tells him anything, he cannot be blamed if anything goes wrong. I do not want to give the House a misleading impression about the deputy Leader of the Labour party. I do not want to give the impression that just because no one talks to him they do not love him. It has become abundantly clear through the media of *The Times* that at least someone loves the deputy leader of the Labour party.

I was intrigued today to see that a young lady, Fleur Adcock, has written a little poem to the deputy leader. It reads:

> "In the dream I was kissing John Prescott—
> or about to kiss him; our eyes had locked
> and we were leaning avidly forward,
> lips out-thrust, certain protuberances
> under our clothing brushing each other's fronts,
> when my mother saw us, and I woke up."

I must say, it was a merciful release for somebody.

We are back with the essence of a Budget which has left the Labour party floundering with a wholly inadequate response. It is a Budget which will deliver an extra £9 a week to the average income in Britain. It is a Budget which has seen us pursue our priorities of extra expenditure on the health service, on education and on the police. It is a Budget which has seen us march on a journey which is intended to take us to our 20p in the pound tax rate. It has revealed, by the Labour party's abject inability to make up its mind which way to vote tonight, that it is a party of opposition and not fit to govern.

4.22 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I would appreciate your guidance on a matter of some importance before the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) rises to move the amendment on the motion on public expenditure. The amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal party, which has not been selected, includes an honourable declaration of interest by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). The amendment in the name of the leader of the Labour party includes a call to switch resources

> "to investment in transport from the cost of rail privatisation".

Would not it have been helpful if the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East had also declared his interest arising from his sponsorship by a rail union?

Madam Speaker: I have made my views known on this matter before and I shall not get further involved in it. The hon. Gentleman has raised such issues before, and I refer him to the *Official Report.*

4.23 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion, in line 4, after 'tax', insert

> 'other than in respect of value added tax on fuel and power for domestic or charity use'.

The amendment gives the House an opportunity to vote again on the issue of VAT on domestic fuel.

It was sad to listen to the Deputy Prime Minister today. I have much respect for the right hon. Gentleman. He has written a lot on many issues; I am in common accord with him on some, and in strong disagreement on others. But he rather treated the House to a speech that did not address the issue. It was more in accord with the circus than with a debate in the House of Commons. I am sad about that, because I believe that the right hon. Gentleman is capable of making a more serious speech about the important issues involved in the Budget. The Budget debate is one of the most important debates in which the House engages in discussing the nature of the economy and the prosperity of the country.

The Deputy Prime Minister is, in fact, more concerned with being the chief propagandist of the Tory party, an art in which he proved himself proficient today. We have heard of the fiddling of statistics from a Government who have fiddled the unemployment figures—among others—to such an extent that the responsibility for recording those figures has been taken from the Department for Education and Employment and given to the Central Statistical Office. At least they are now reported more honestly.

The right hon. Gentleman's speech was indeed a propaganda speech. It continued much of the argument that he advanced on this morning's "Today" programme, when he spoke of the "sacrifice" that had to be made if we were to achieve the success to which he referred this afternoon. It is not a sacrifice made by millionaires such as the right hon. Gentleman, and the many other millionaires who have done very well under 16 years of Tory government. It is the low-paid—people who desperately need assistance—who have suffered, and have borne the heaviest tax burden.

I find it offensive that it is those who have made the decisions in Cabinet who have benefited from those decisions, while launching an attack on people who desperately need the protection of a minimum wage. That is little enough to expect when more and more people are being driven down into poverty pay. That is what has happened in the 16 years of this Tory Government, and it is a disgrace to the country.

Yes, a sacrifice has been made; but it has been made by the millions whom the Government have put out of work, often by deliberate acts of policy. Millions of low-paid people have been denied the protection of a minimum wage, and driven into poverty pay by exploitation.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Would the right hon. Gentleman be prepared, on behalf of his party, to guarantee jobs for those who become unemployed as a result of a minimum wage?

Mr. Prescott: I will not take any lectures from any Tory Member about the level of employment, but I give the hon. Gentleman this guarantee: we shall be committed to putting employment at the top of our list of objectives as a Labour Government. We believe that there are certain things that the current Government could do now to return more people to work, rather than allowing them to waste away on the dole. I am talking about real jobs, not the "skivvy" jobs offered by the Budget.

That is the challenge for us, and we readily accept it. I might add that it was a Labour Government who, after the war, produced full employment for the first time, despite the opposition of the Tory party of the day. That is a matter of record.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): If by some mischance the right hon. Gentleman manages to gain power, will he and his party bring back the national dock labour scheme, which ruined the port of Hull and turned it from the country's third port to its 15th? Hull is now recovering, and has doubled its trade since the Conservative party did away with the scheme.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman is living in the past. Let me tell him what I would bring back: I would bring back a minimum wage, which would help an awful lot of employees in his shop who are earning very much less than that wage would be. Can the hon. Gentleman honestly say that those people are at least guaranteed the level of wages introduced by the Wage Councils Act? No, he cannot. He should look at his own business before he starts lecturing us about the conditions of people in jobs.

A week has gone by since the Chancellor announced the 18th Tory Budget. The common theme—this year's Budget is no exception—is that these are Budgets for recovery. Every Tory Chancellor has said at the Dispatch Box, "This is another Budget for recovery." Lord Howe said it in 1983; the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said the same in 1992. According to the Government, we are always recovering, but we can never quite shake off the illness from which the country has suffered over the past 16 years.

We have had time to study the Budget much more closely since it was announced last week, and we have had judgments from the media, economic experts, industry and hon. Members. It is clear from the general view that the Budget has failed to meet the needs of the nation. According to *The Sun*:

> "It was about as inspiring as a cold kipper."

The *Daily Mail* questioned:

> "Where's the magic?"

The *Daily Express* announced:

> "It's too little, too late."

Those quotes are just from the Tory press, never mind anyone else. The CBI's welcome was distinctly lukewarm, and even senior members of the 1922 Committee are critical of the long-term failure to cut public expenditure and taxes even further. As most people have agreed, the Budget is the first step towards a grubby attempt to win the next general election.

After the biggest tax hike in history in 1992, what has the Chancellor done to redress the balance? What principles are behind his new tax policies? Are they honest? No, they are deliberately misleading. Are they sustainable? No, and they show no desire to secure a more prosperous economy and greater employment. Do they reward hard work and provide opportunity? Certainly not in terms of providing real jobs and training. Are they fair? No, they are not.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has had a chance to study the Budget. Last week, I asked the shadow spokesman for Trade and Industry whether there was any tax reduction in the Budget that her party opposed. I asked her whether there was any spending ceiling in the Budget that her party would increase. She found those questions difficult, and was unable to answer either of them. The right hon. Gentleman says that he has studied the Budget. Which tax cuts does he propose to vote against, and on which services will he advocate more spending?

Mr. Prescott: We have made it very clear that we disagree with the Budget's general strategy. I am moving an amendment to reduce value added tax on fuel. That is an important step, and hon. Members disagreed with the Government and supported us on that matter. We will undoubtedly approach taxation in a fair way. The Government do not. For the past 16 years, they have followed an unfair and regressive tax system. That is why we shall be fundamentally different.

In the context of spending, we shall operate much more fairly the private finance initiative, which I was one of the first to advocate. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members think they have discovered private finance initiatives, but when we spoke about them in the House, the Government constantly told us that we could not have them. The Chancellor will certainly confirm that. We disagree with the strategy, and we have made it clear that we disagree with the Government's taxation principles. We shall vote accordingly.

The Budget hides multitudinous unfairnesses. Some 5 million people on benefits will not share in the 1p in the pound tax cuts or the widening of the 20p band.

[Mr. Prescott]

[Interruption.] The Deputy Prime Minister said that his objective and that of the Chancellor was to reduce the burden of taxation. I am afraid that is not the case, because it has been increased, even on the Chancellor's figures. The overall tax burden has increased, and the Chancellor agrees that people are £670 worse off than they were after the last Budget. By any measurement, that shows that, on their own criteria, the Government have failed to be fair on taxation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman is again drifting away from the point. He cannot just be against a Budget strategy but not against any of its measures. A Budget is a combination of tax reductions that allow people to keep more of what they earn and what they save, and a series of public spending judgments about how much will be spent on each service. It strikes a balance between the interests of allowing people to spend their own money and providing good-quality public services.

Is there any tax decision or spending decision in the Budget with which the right hon. Gentleman's party disagrees? If not, how can he oppose the Budget strategy? He is just saying that he does not have an opinion at all on the Budget's contents.

Mr. Prescott: I can well understand why the Chancellor of the Exchequer continually wants to explain his Budget: the rest of the country has certainly not understood it, and gives it the thumbs down. We have an entirely different strategy from the Chancellor. For example, the Government have made great play—he keeps talking about it—about the windfall tax that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition proposed, which they disagree with, but it is a proposal. We identify that extra tax with jobs, and we are entitled to do that.

We disagree with the judgment exercised by the Government in cutting the resources in the training sector, which is vital. We disagree with the judgment in respect of the reduction in public expenditure. We disagree with the Budget's fundamental drift and direction, and we are entitled to do that. We are called the Opposition at this stage, not the Government, and we are discussing the Government's proposals.

The Budget hides a multitude of unfairness. Five million people on benefits will get no share of the Government's 1p in the pound tax cut or of the wider 20p band, yet those people must still pay VAT on fuel. In Britain, deaths from hypothermia are much higher than in Scandinavian countries, where climates are colder. Today's cold weather reminds us that pensioners cannot afford to turn up their heating as easily as we can in the House of Commons.

It is a disgrace, and an indictment of the proposal in the Finance Bill to cut £30 million from the energy conservation budget, that that money could have been used to put people back to work in decent jobs, providing energy conservation so that pensioners could live with a little more heat and a little less insecurity. That is what we call jobs and social justice, where we meet the need for a real job and for people who are desperate simply to have the essential requirement of decent heat in winter. That is one clear example.

If the Chancellor really had some money to spare, would it not have been fairer to the old, the low-paid and the unemployed to cut VAT on fuel? That is what we will offer the House the opportunity to do. Again, it might be the only tax reduction that has ever been forced on the Government, apart from last year's VAT cut, when the Government were prevented from putting up VAT on fuel. We will give the House the opportunity to do that again.

An awful lot of Conservative Members have made it clear that they support that. Why? Because they think that it is a more progressive way of tax than the regressive measures that identify much of the Government and Budget proposals.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Gentleman on VAT on fuel, and I will join him in the Lobby this evening, but will he explain why, when the Scottish National party and its allies gave the House the same opportunity on 21 January this year, he and his colleagues abstained, calling it a cynical ploy? Why was it a cynical ploy in January and right tonight?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman must make his own judgment on this matter. We have given the House an opportunity to vote, and we are the only party that is likely to achieve victory. If the SNP and other political parties join us, we will have achieved that objective, and many pensioners, people who are dependent on heat, will be very pleased that again the Labour party has led the way in making another tax reduction.

The Deputy Prime Minister *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: Ah.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Why was it a cynical ploy in January and the whole Opposition strategy tonight?

Mr. Prescott: I keep getting an explanation as to why it should be. I stick to my argument, which is that we have put the case and given the House an opportunity to cut VAT from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. As the House knows, we cannot reduce it any further than that, because of the requirement of European Community regulations. We will provide the House with that opportunity.

These Budget tax cuts are unfair, dishonest and typical of many of the Tory tax proposals: the more one has, the more one gets. These tax proposals give nothing to millions of people, but their tax burden keeps increasing. Despite what the Deputy Prime Minister has said, the burden has increased from 34.7 per cent. of gross domestic product to 36.5 per cent. this year. Does he accept that figure? I assume that he does—they are the Government's figures. He suggests that the Government's objective is to reduce the overall tax burden, but nothing in the Budget reduces that burden. Even on the Chancellor's projections, it increases the burden.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): What did the Leader of the Opposition mean when he told the CBI recently that, under a Labour Government, there would be no return to the old penal rates of taxation, such as 80 per cent? Did he mean a return to 70 per cent. or 60 per cent?

Mr. Prescott: We have made it clear that we will not return to penal rates of taxation. The hon. Gentleman has a reputation as someone who is concerned about the less fortunate in our society. Perhaps he should concern himself with the penal rates that affect people on welfare—if they take work, an 80 or 90 per cent. penalty is imposed on them. I wish that as much attention was paid to that problem as Conservative Members pay to penal rates or the top rate of tax.

We will make a judgment on the different levels of tax rates at the appropriate time. My right hon. Friend has taken an important step forward by stating our policy on the lower end of rates. I understand that Conservative Members are arguing whether 10p or 15p is practical. It is certainly practical in other countries. It is an important step towards measurable wealth which will help us to find the best ways to get people from welfare into work. It is an important point, and I shall deal with it in more detail later.

Mr. Marlow: Are the right hon. Gentleman and his party considering at some stage increasing the top rate of tax from 40 per cent? If so, what parameters is he thinking about?

Mr. Prescott: We will make a decision about that level of tax at the appropriate time. It is fair to assume that there will be another Budget before the general election, and I do not know what the Chancellor will include in it. We have an obligation to make clear, at the appropriate time, our precise approach to taxation at all levels of income.

What characterises this Budget is that the Chancellor gives with one hand while he takes away with the other. Council tax, car tax, petrol tax and cigarette tax are all going up—while for a few top earners there will be huge pay increases. They will be hundreds of pounds better off, yet the average family will be £670 a year worse off than they were at the last general election—and that is before the rise in council tax is taken into account. As many of my hon. Friends have said, it is a 7p up, 1p down Budget. It is unfair, regressive and a flop.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire) *rose—*

Mr. Prescott: I do not have much time, and I have given way a number of times already.

At the end of the Budget speech, the Chancellor boasted that it would put Britain on course to becoming the enterprise centre of Europe—a soundbite if ever I recognised one. On what basis does he claim that, when the public sector borrowing requirement will be £29 billion—£6.5 billion higher than the right hon. and learned Gentleman predicted a year ago? I am worried by the Chancellor's promises, because every time we have measured his promises against reality, he has been way off target. The PSBR is an example of that.

The PSBR is going up, inflation is rising, growth is slowing down, and the balance of payments is deteriorating despite a massive 25 per cent. devaluation. The Government have made great play about Labour Governments and devaluation, yet they introduced a 25 per cent. devaluation in one go, and then claimed the credit for the increase in exports.

With such a devaluation, there should have been a trade surplus—but that has not happened under this Tory Government. Instead, there is an increasing deficit in the balance of trade. It is the slowest investment recovery from any recession this century. Investment in manufacturing—that crucial area of wealth creation—is 20 per cent. lower than it was in 1979, and it is falling as a proportion of gross domestic product. It is a catalogue of failure.

The Deputy Prime Minister made great play about the world prosperity league. The right hon. Gentleman's own report, "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead", published this year, contains a table showing that Hong Kong and Singapore have overtaken Britain. The right hon. Gentleman suggested that Hong Kong and Singapore had done well because they did not provide the sort of unemployment benefits or housing programme that Britain provides.

Will he tell me which of the following countries—they are all ahead of us in the prosperity league—do not have unemployment benefit or a housing programme: Luxembourg, United States of America, Switzerland, Japan, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Canada, Iceland, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Australia? All those countries have done better than Britain. Will he tell us which one of those countries does not have a housing programme or does not pay unemployment benefit? Can he tell us that, or was he mistaken in his remarks?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I was talking about Singapore and Hong Kong.

Mr. Prescott: The right hon. Gentleman was talking about those countries that had done better than Britain, and he suggested that Singapore and Hong Kong had done better because they did not pay unemployment benefit or have a housing programme. I do not know whether he reads his Department's publications. Obviously not: otherwise, he would know that all the countries I mentioned have done better than Britain. It is nonsense for him to suggest that that has anything to do with benefits or the social costs involved in providing decent housing.

Another interesting fact is that almost all those countries have a minimum wage. Why have they done better than Britain when the Government say that a minimum wage would be a problem for our economy? The people who make that claim should face facts. Most of those countries have a minimum wage, but they do far better than Britain in the world prosperity league. Does the right hon. Gentleman look at the evidence and take it into account, or does he just ignore it? A few years ago, the right hon. Gentleman used to believe in a minimum wage. He has changed his mind. However, the principle is still right, even if he has moved away from it.

As well as the world prosperity league, we should study what the OECD has said—an organisation that the right hon. Gentleman claims has said Britain is doing well. I accept that it has said some good things, but it has also said some bad things. It, too, has leagues, and they show that employment in Britain is lower than it was in 1979, that Britain has plunged to 21st in the investment league, to 24th in the skills league, and to 35th in the world education league.

Those figures show the total and chronic failure by the Government to provide the essentials to make Britain a prosperous country. That is why Britain is falling down the leagues: we do not train our people sufficiently, and we do not give them a good enough education. We do not invest sufficiently in our industries. All that has happened while the Government have been in power, and it has contributed to our dismal fall from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league.

[Mr. Prescott]

In addition, most of that happened while the Deputy Prime Minister, in previous jobs, has been in charge of competitiveness. He has been in charge of that area of policy over the past five or six years, but it has been nothing but a dismal failure. I do not know whether the fact that he is Deputy Prime Minister will make any difference. Perhaps he can now take on the Treasury. We hope that Britain's position will improve, but our judgment is that the Budget will not do anything to bring that about.

The international tables are clear proof of the long-term failure of Tory economic policy, yet the Chancellor thinks that it will put Britain on course to be the enterprise centre of Europe. What will the Budget do to reverse Britain's decline? Nothing. All it has done is give us new theories and new targets.

In the 1980s, we were plagued by the theories of Friedman and the money supply—now generally discredited. Now we have the target of reducing public sector expenditure to below 40 per cent. of GDP. We are told that, if only that can be achieved, we will have the self-sustaining, non-inflationary growth the Government talk about continually. Do they not realise that it is not just how much they spend, but where they spend it? Labour spent money on investment and kept people in work. There were fewer than 1 million unemployed when the Government took office.

It is sheer arrogance for the Government to say constantly that somehow they have improved the employment situation—the number of unemployed people has risen from 1 million to 2.5 million, even by the fiddled figures. If the Government remain in power, there is the possibility that we will go into the next century with more than 2 million people unemployed. That is not only morally unacceptable, but creates massive problems with public finances which we are now trying to address. We are identifying the problems of failure.

We have to make it clear that the Tories—apparently—spend more on keeping people out of work than using it to get them back to work. That is one of the essential differences between the Labour party and the Tories. They have cut public investment and increased public consumption—despite the enormous opportunities for investment. In the history of this country, no Government have ever been blessed with more resources in such a short period—from the £100 billion that they have taken from North sea oil to the £120 billion from privatising nationalised industries at a knockdown price.

That money has largely been wasted on keeping people on the dole. No Government in our history have had such resources, or, indeed, ever had such an opportunity to do something about fundamentally changing the relationship between investment and consumption to achieve greater prosperity in this country. That has always been our case, and the problem which we have always tried to address. It is not easy to deal with politically—I readily accept that—but, with such vast resources, the Government had an opportunity to make that change. No other Government would have squandered those resources like this Tory Government.

As last year's excellent report on manufacturing competitiveness by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry—chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn)—said, investment is the key. The Committee catalogued the decline in manufacturing, which it said was due to the lowest levels of investment, training, qualifications and skills among our people. It pointed out where the failures lie.

If one reads the report's conclusions and looks at what this Budget—and the one before—have done, one sees that it has made no recommendations along the lines of those suggested by the Committee designed to deal with problems in reversing the decline in our manufacturing industry. The Government have ignored the Committee's recommendations. We have to invest if we want the economy to grow. That is the crucial variable in every successful economy which one studies. We need long-term investment in capital, infrastructure and people.

In Germany, Japan, the United States and any other major competitor country, investment, with an industrial strategy, is the key to economic prosperity. Why should industrial strategy be considered an ideological difference between the parties in Britain, when Governments of the left and right in various successful countries have managed to deploy a proper role for Government in developing one?

Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman who is now the Deputy Prime Minister has often advocated the case for such a strategy. I thought that he was right to do so, and I wait to see whether he is successful in his new job in challenging the rather short-term view of the Treasury which has often dictated matters.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No.

Such a strategy is also the key in the Asian tiger economies, about which the Chancellor and the Prime Minister often talk, and on which the Deputy Prime Minister is so keen. In those economies, public and private finances work together in partnership, and the Government have a proper role to play. That is true of Singapore, as it is of Hong Kong. Any visitor to those countries notes that their deserved prosperity is as much to do with public as private investment. That is also true in Italy and Norway and a number of other European countries, because they invest more in capital and people. It is about not simply wages, but skills and productivity.

It is a mistake to suppose that the inward investors of whom we hear so much, and whom we welcome, come to Britain to take advantage of low wage rates or to dodge the social chapter. That is just not true. If that were the case, why has three times more investment left this country than come into it in the 16 years of Tory government? Of course, in a global economy, money flows in and out, but one cannot make the judgment that the money coming into this country is doing so simply because of cheap wages, and that the money leaving countries is because their wage levels are usually higher than ours. One cannot assume that that is somehow an indictment, and that we must therefore aim for the lowest costs with lower wages, and get rid of the social chapter. Such conditions have often been present in the countries where the money has gone.

Inward investors come to Britain because of the international advantage, and we should recognise that. Such an advantage is often down to our language

—a common language and culture. Of course, we are also close to Europe. Those are the reasons why companies invest in this country.

Mr. Fabricant: On that very point, will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott *indicated assent.*

Mr. Fabricant: That demonstrates that persistence pays off. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he think that one of the reasons—just one—why companies invest in this country is that we have the lowest rate of corporation tax? While we are at it, does he support the 1p reduction in income tax, given that a year ago he said that he would not support the Labour party if it were ever to go down the road of cutting income tax?

Mr. Prescott: I thought that the Whips gave out only one question, not two. I shall deal with the first one. Again, if one looks at the OECD figures and the levels of taxation, whether corporation or personal, one sees that no common criteria produce a successful result. In some countries, conditions are very different. From the evidence, one can see that even those countries with high corporation tax have done better in getting more people back to work and attracting more investment. In some cases, low taxation has had that effect. *[Interruption.]* I suggest that the hon. Gentleman looks at the OECD figures—

Mr. Fabricant: I have.

Mr. Prescott: I am afraid that he has not looked very carefully—

Mr. Fabricant: I have.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I deplore seated interventions, especially given the fact that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has already been allowed to make certain interventions quite properly.

Mr. Prescott: Basically, investors come here because of the access to markets, especially Europe. Of course, the devaluation of the pound by 25 per cent. has been attractive too.

Investors come, and they are welcome, but we cannot rely only on inward investment for future growth. We have to boost the indigenous investment—that is another thing that the Budget has failed to do. It has failed to provide any additional incentive for private investment in manufacturing. Industry has made that absolutely clear. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has made it clear that we would do more on allowances. Again, there is disagreement between the parties on the allowances that investors get against tax, but at least we argue the case.

The Budget has certainly failed to provide any additional incentive for small and medium firms. They clearly do not think that there has been much in the Budget to help them. There has not been any additional incentive for private investment in plant, training and public investment, on which much of the private sector is dependent, especially in construction and manufacturing. It is often not understood, and rather unfortunate, that much private investment is very much dependent on public sector investment, whether in housing or in various other industries. It is very important for manufacturing companies.

Yet the Government have been pursuing cuts in public expenditure—by 6 per cent. this year and 11 per cent. for 1996. It is hardly a Budget for investment. Given that investment is crucial to the development of prosperity and to moving up that league of prosperity, the Budget had to be designed to deal with investment. Frankly, it failed to do so.

The only argument given by the Government is that of the private finance initiative. We have heard it in every Budget since the Tories stumbled on the idea. I have spent a number of years at the Dispatch Box opposite various Chancellors and Secretaries of State for Transport arguing that there was a role for a private finance initiative—indeed, a very good role. I think that the Chancellor concedes that. I wish him well, so that public and private finance meet in investment.

Such investment should be in addition, but the Government's problem is that such investment often hides cuts in public expenditure; it is used as a smokescreen. It is often suggested that extra money through private finance will replace cuts in public expenditure, but, frankly, that does not happen. The Chancellor knows that to be true; the figures are very clear on it. Nevertheless, the idea is sound—it should be: it came from the Labour party. But the Government have ruined it through incompetence, sheer ignorance and blind ideological prejudice.

On transport, it was Labour's plan to bring public-private leasing into British Rail that forced the Government into a £150 million leasing deal two years ago. It was in our manifesto, after all. The Chancellor must have read it at the time. It was a good idea. They used to tell me that it could not be done. Yes, it was a leasing agreement, but leasing deals can be involved in private finance. We showed them that it could be done, but now it has been ruined. The whole process is being undermined by a Treasury still wedded to arcane principles and run by people who do not understand what they are doing.

I know that the Chancellor has sent a number of his civil servants away for training and education to break the cultural logjam in attitude, and I wish him well. That is absolutely right. Indeed, it was one of the recommendations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East and myself on changes in private finance.

The Economist said that the Government's proposals were a "dog's breakfast". The PFI has replaced actual investment with expressions of intent. We have seen the growth of the PFI in the Government's wish list—from 78 projects in 1993 to 1,500 today, worth almost £27 billion. But only 64 of those projects have been completed, and less than £500 million of private finance has been levered into public investment. The private finance initiative has been a smokescreen for the Treasury, behind which it can cut hundreds of millions from public investment, which is set to be cut by a further 18 per cent. over the next three years.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): The right hon. Gentleman has made many disparaging references to cuts in public expenditure. He has also said that he fundamentally questions the whole Budget judgment. In the view of the Labour party, what percentage of gross domestic product is it appropriate for the Government to take?

Mr. Prescott: At the time of the general election, the hon. Gentleman promised that the Government would cut taxes. I do not know how he answers that point now. The quality of public expenditure is as important as the quantity. We suggest that, instead of wasting money on keeping people on the dole—about £20 billion—we should use it to put people back to work. I will come back to that point in a second.

The real point about private finance is that our transport infrastructure is crumbling and our construction industry is on its knees. Our businesses are not getting proper access to the markets in the United Kingdom and abroad. The Birmingham northern relief road should have been built in 1992. It has been delayed, and is still not being built, despite all the arguments about private finance.

Good, modern railway works in York were closed down, simply because the Treasury would not approve any more leasing agreements, which would have enabled the carriage works to produce the trains. Yet more than 50 per cent. of the trains on Network SouthEast are over 25 years old. The leasing agreements were a simple way in which to finance new trains, which would have kept people in work instead of putting them on the dole. If people are in work, they can pay taxes and contribute to providing other services. That is the question we face today.

The east coast main line is more modern than the west coast main line, which is falling down, because it has had the investment. When the Chancellor and I were walking to another place, I said to him that, yet again, there was a Bill on the channel tunnel rail link. There has been a Bill on the channel tunnel rail link every year since 1986. Why is that? It is purely because the Government could not deal with the problems involved in financing the link.

The Secretary of State for Transport at that time, Lord Parkinson, told us that the link would not be built if the Government could not find private money, yet he is leading one of the consortiums bidding for about £2 billion of taxpayers' money to pay for the link. In the meantime, we have lost the benefits that come from a modern transport infrastructure.

That kind of disaster has plagued Britain in dealing with these matters, and one hopes that there will be a sensible compromise on the problems, with which I know the Chancellor is dealing. The issue is how we deal with sharing the risk between the public and private sectors. I had intended to say more about that, but time prevents me from doing so. It is an important question, and unless we solve the problem, we shall not be able to unlock the tremendous amount of private funds that are available to help us build the infrastructure. The infrastructure must be modernised, so that our regions can compete as they desperately need to do.

Regions are important, yet they are not mentioned in the Budget statement. We need to expand investment in training, jobs and regional economic development. We believe that that can be done, and that public and private finance can play their part. The release of local authority housing receipts must be a classic way in which to release funds. The Government admit that £4 billion or £5 billion is still held in the accounts.

We are paying about £2 billion to keep a quarter of a million building workers on the dole. We have record levels of homelessness. Why can we not release people from the dole, provide jobs, train our youngsters in apprenticeships, and meet the requirements of jobs and social justice? That is what we think needs to be done. Construction jobs are real jobs—one can give many more examples.

The Government's only contribution to employment has been to propose the workfare scheme. This is the Government who told us in 1979 that Labour was not working. Unemployment has now grown to 2.5 million even on the Government's fiddled figures, yet all they offer is a workfare scheme. That came about as a panic measure. After the Budget was received badly, the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister went on an assault over the weekend to improve people's attitude toward the Budget.

There were two proposals. The first was workfare—chain gangs—which does not mean proper jobs. There will be no education, no training and no connection with the real jobs my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East talked about when introducing our welfare-to-work proposals. The Government are forcing people to depend on the welfare services.

There was a second element in the assault this weekend on people's attitudes to the Budget. Can the Deputy Prime Minister answer this question, once and for all? He has been asked this before, and I have written to him to this effect. Is it a fact that people will be £9 better off as a result of the Budget? If so, does the figure include a 4 per cent. rise in earnings? Are the Government calculating that there will be a 4 per cent. increase in earnings next year in reaching the figure of £9?

Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us? If he will not tell us, I assume that that must be the case. The Government are now telling us that they have a 4 per cent. wage policy; no doubt that will be noted. Is that what the Deputy Prime Minister wants? Is that what he is saying? The House and the country will note that the Deputy Prime Minister has no intention of doing anything.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I was going to save the answer for my winding-up speech, but there is little else for me to answer, as the right hon. Gentleman has not yet mentioned one measure in the Budget with which he disagrees.

The figure of £450 a year better off next year is the usual figure that is given if one asks the Treasury to make assumptions about the growth of the economy, about inflation, about earnings and about the effect of all the Budget changes. That includes changes that mean that tax goes up, such as the increase in tax on tobacco, and those that mean that taxes go down, such as the reduction in income tax. Every year, the Opposition ask the Government those questions, and the Treasury answers the questions on the basis of those assumptions.

The answer this year is the best forecast that could be made for next year. The average family will be £9 a week better off as a result of our best forecast of the economy and the Budget measures next year. That is what I said when introducing the Budget. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is deliberately misusing the figure and claiming that I said that there would be a £9 a week reduction in taxation. I did not say that. I talked about what matters to people—the money in their pockets, and the extent to which they are benefiting from the economy's recovery.

Mr. Prescott: It is very clear that the figure means that there will be a 4 per cent. increase in earnings. The Chancellor has not rejected that argument—indeed, all his arguments take that point into account. We have deduced from his figures what the tax reductions will be and what their effect will be on the average family. When we deduct that from the effects of the other changes, it is clear that the figure of £9 a week assumes an increase in wages of 4 per cent.

Mr. Clarke *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: I do not think that anyone denies that. Let the House make a judgment about it. The figure includes that 4 per cent. I do not know what that will do for the Government's education proposals, although the Chancellor says that there will be improvements in education. I do not know what that will do for improvements in the health service. The Chancellor now tells us that the figure is an estimate.

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman says that the figure is not good enough. What tax changes would the right hon. Gentleman make? This whole nonsense is based on an assumption that the Labour party has an opinion, one way or the other, about the changes we made in personal taxation. This is not a difficult question for a shadow Government. Is the Labour party in favour of the changes we have made to personal taxation, is it against the changes, or do Labour Members not have an idea in their heads except when a soundbite is given to them by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)?

Mr. Prescott: "Now you see it, now you don't." The House will make a judgment, and I shall move on. The 4 per cent. wage increase is clearly implied in the figure, and people will no doubt take that into account.

Our main indictment of the Budget is that there is no industrial strategy, no regional strategy, no training strategy, no investment strategy and no growth strategy. This is not a Budget for enterprise, as the Chancellor says it is: it is a Budget for continuing failure. It is a Budget of a busted flush Government who are led by a weak Prime Minister, a has-been, hop-along Deputy Prime Minister, who gave us some examples of his approach today, and an inadequate Chancellor. The Government have no idea what they want for our country. The sooner they are gone, the whole rotten lot of them, the better it will be for Britain.

5.8 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): If there was an entire alternative strategy buried in the speech we have just heard, it was buried very deep and with many layers of verbiage above it. We shall have to do a lot of digging to discover the alternative strategy. Although the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) recognised and, I think, understood some of the points about the private finance initiative, it is regrettable that he did not give one word of acknowledgement—he gave one small word—to the amazing story which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister described as unfolding in the United Kingdom. The story can be summed up in one sentence: all around the world, people do not regard the United Kingdom as the catastrophic failure that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East and his friends describe; they regard it as an outstanding success.

Those people from around the world do not use mere words, they act. If one talks to those people, they say that they want to put their factories here, and they do so on a colossal scale—more than in any other country in Europe. That activity is not slowing down but increasing. Those people want to put their funds here for management. The entire savings of Asia, from where the funds will come, are increasingly managed and recycled through the financial services industry of London, which dominates the whole world. I declare an interest here because I advise those people. They want to educate their children here because the United Kingdom is a brilliant exporter of educational services. They want to buy houses here, and they are crowding in to do so, which accounts for some of the vagaries of the housing market, particularly at the upper end. They want to keep their personal funds here.

If those people want to do all that and regard Britain as such a successful place, above all other countries in the world, why does the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East and his colleagues need to keep coming back to the failure theme? That is a naive question in a sense. They belong to the Opposition, and they want to dig out the failure. They want to turf out my party. I understand that motivation because I remember being in Opposition, and that is what one spends a lot of time doing.

The story is not plausible, however, if one leaves out half the theme which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister set out this afternoon. Opposition Members have left out another, major element of the story. Not only is the United Kingdom the magnet for inward investment on a massive scale, which brings in hundreds of thousands of jobs, but we are—there is nothing to be ashamed of in this, although it may offend old Labour doctrines—one of the world's largest outward investors. We place assets around the world on a colossal scale, which in turn brings back such large invisible earnings to this country that they exceed our entire earnings from manufactured exports.

Around the world, we have about £600 million of portfolio investments, £300 billion to £400 billion of direct investment and another £700 million of loans to foreign residents, which means that our total overseas assets are worth about £1,400 billion to £1,500 billion. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked where the money from North sea oil has gone, and where the money from this and the money from that have gone. The money about which he is talking is a small amount compared to the colossal investment and inward flow of funds back into this country. In turn, that inward investment enables us not only to finance our present investment in the United Kingdom and our falling levels of unemployment but to continue to finance our undoubtedly expensive system of welfare and universal provision, which, like every other country, we are rightly worried about because it is such a burden on the budget.

The right hon. Gentleman made a speech about the Budget and the economy and he left out those gigantic elements in the story, which are the ones that determine where we trade. It is overseas in[illegible]nt that opens up trade nowadays. Trade does not follow the flag; trade follows investment. We put in the investment first, and then we put the goods into those markets. That is the story of jobs and investment in this country, and that is the story of our success. Although the right hon. Gentleman may not to give that aspect of the story the acknowledgement

[Mr. David Howell]

that it deserves, because he wants to set up a critical position, to leave out that aspect altogether leaves one with an absurd, empty husk of a speech. His case will not stand up and it looks ridiculous.

I ask the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, even if they will not speak in glowing terms—I understand that—at least to study what is going on in this country and what is happening to the economy. That would be the first move towards any claim that they may have to be a responsible Opposition, let alone a responsible Government.

I should like to return from that sad story of not understanding what is happening in the British economy to one or two specific aspects of the Budget and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's presentation on it.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The right hon. Gentleman has presented an oversimplified picture. Can he give us the net figures for inward and outward investment and tell us what has happened to our net foreign assets?

Mr. Howell: The net figures are obviously very different. We are outward investors and inward investors. Just as for net exports and imports of physical goods, the figures for exports are smaller. Nevertheless, we are a substantial net earner of invisible earnings. That offsets any export deficit that we may have had in the past. The picture is rapidly changing, particularly in our trade with Asia. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we now have an export surplus of physical exports to the tiger countries and we have recently achieved a surplus of such exports to Japan. So there, too, the story is changing radically. It is about time that that was recognised by someone on the Opposition Benches.

I wish to deal with three aspects of the expenditure and taxation plans of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. I am afraid that, having reinforced the strong case that my right hon. Friends have made, I now wish to strike a mildly critical note on an expenditure matter. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister asked the Opposition whether there was any policy area on which they thought that expenditure should be higher. Nothing was forthcoming. I believe that a mistake has been made in one policy area. It is rather small, but it is at the cutting edge of our world effort. I refer to the cuts proposed in the budget of the British Council.

The Government propose to cut the British Council's budget by 17 per cent., or about £22 million in today's money. That is a devastating cut in the work of that agency. I do not know whether the same cuts are to be imposed on the BBC World Service, which is the other major arm of cultural diplomacy. I do not have the figures, but perhaps we could learn them from my right hon. and hon. Friends.

I wonder whether the Government's action is the right way to go about cuts or whether we have a touch of the slash and burn which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that we should not have. The cultural diplomacy effort of the British Council creates the climate that enables British investment to go overseas and British goods to go after it. It creates the attractive nature of Britain that makes everyone want to invest here. Yet we have seen the same slicing of the small agencies of the British Council and the World Service, which are highly effective, as has been applied to much bigger operations such as defence and other aspects of our overseas effort.

The Government may say, "Fair is fair. Everything has to be chopped off together." I wonder whether that is right. The World Service and the British Council are the spearhead of today's foreign policy effort. If the Government have to make a shorter spear, why cut off the tip as well as the tail? It cannot be right. Although I do not ask that more money be found from nowhere, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to go back to their colleagues who have responsibility for foreign policy, defence, the diplomatic wing, the agencies and overseas aid and consult on whether it was right to slash the British Council budget. I know that there must also be restraint in overseas aid. That is probably right. We need an entirely new approach to aid and development nowadays.

I have made a criticism. One may say that it is a plea for more spending unless I suggest some alternatives—which I can do. I make the criticism with the strong feeling, which many of my right hon. and hon. Friends share and which has been aired in the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Select Committee, that the British Council and the World Service are the cutting edge of British success and interest in the world and we slash them at our peril.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Why does my right hon. Friend believe that we ought to have a fundamental change in the way in which we deal with our overseas aid programme? The United Kingdom programme is one of the finest in the world. It is not only quantity but quality that count.

Mr. Howell: My hon. Friend tempts me to make a much longer speech than I wish. We have reached the point in the post-war doctrines of donors and aid at which it is realised that aid does not necessarily equal development. Merely calling for more aid, in particular more Government-to-Government aid, does not lead to the processes of development which are hoped for. Sir William Ryrie, who has been with the International Finance Corporation for some years, has written a book on the subject which I commend to my hon. Friend. It brings home the message that, if we are to make our aid budget smaller or limit its size, that ought to go hand in hand with implementing the policies that are necessary to achieve development. It is time that the whole aid policy was reviewed. That is happening in the United States, Japan and France and I hope that it is happening in Britain. Perhaps my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker will be able to tell us that that aid policy is being changed pari passu with limitations on the size of aid funds.

I commend the book to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks). It shows that the new engines of development are not primarily overseas aid but private investment. Even some of the more enlightened African leaders, who may understand free market economics better than Labour Members, are beginning to ask for capital, not aid. They want capitalist enterprise and entrepreneurs to get their economies—even in central Africa, let alone the booming countries of Asia—going.

I have declared an interest in the private finance initiative because I advise people on such matters. It is a superb initiative. I am glad that the Labour party supports it; it has even claimed some parentage of it. I am not sure that I would accept that, but I shall let it go for a moment. What is being done is immensely valuable. There are some points on which I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor can go even further and give the PFI a stronger push.

I reject the argument that the PFI simply shifts funds off-Budget. It creates the opportunity for projects to be fulfilled, even if it is only a case of sale and leaseback, with far greater efficiency. The Northern line and the national insurance over-the-counter payments system are two examples of ways in which the PFI can produce—for the same amount of money as or perhaps a little more than can public finance—vast savings, much greater efficiency and a better product.

I hope that those responsible for the PFI in Departments will be organised even more effectively than they are. My impression is that the PFI has got going in the Health and Defence Departments. They are thinking about ways in which private finance could deliver more efficiently all sorts of services hitherto financed in the public sector. However, the other Departments need to get their acts together. The Health and Defence Departments seem to be ahead of the others, which need to move more vigorously. I hope that they will be encouraged to do so by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and his officials and colleagues in the Treasury.

In the private sector, the construction consortiums should stop grumbling and realise that they have to get organised. They must win the support of, although they need not become directly mixed up with, organisations that can raise the capital and handle the financial side of the huge new operations that they are going to build, own, operate and perhaps transfer. That will require capital support. The building industry and construction firms do not have the capital—and never have had it—for that sort of operation. They must work out relationships with the operating companies that can produce the capital.

I would like a little more attention to be paid inside the Treasury to working out the implications in years ahead of such deals. Some people argue that the PFI merely postpones until tomorrow the payments that we should be making today for infrastructure. That is partly true. It is a good thing if it produces greater flexibility, but we need to monitor it carefully and count up what the future payments will be—how they will operate and how they will impact on the Budgets of five, 10 and 15 years ahead; otherwise we will be back to year-by-year, seat-of-the-pants finance that opens us to the accusation that the PFI only postpones the evil day. I am not against flexibility, but the matter needs to be handled using a more modern accounting method than appears to be used at present.

The PFI opens up enormous opportunities. What is more—again, I declare my interest—just as we exported the skill of privatisation, along with many other skills that are needed all over the world, so also, if we develop the techniques for the PFI, we shall find every country in the world, from Malaysia to China, Taiwan, India, the Americas and Africa, seeking to learn the techniques from us. We have colossal opportunities and leverage in respect of that. I hope that it happens.

My last remarks involve another set of initials which concern a bird which, in my view, will never fly: EMU—economic and monetary union and its convergence criteria. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked some extremely pertinent questions, which I was glad to hear, when he made a speech the other day at the Guildhall about EMU. His questions have not received any answers because they are devastatingly accurate. Labour Members ought to feel that they should be trying to answer them because they are supposed to be broadly in favour of the single currency, the Maastricht criteria, the timetable and all that.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked how the relationship between the countries in the single currency and those outside it would work. How will those inside it feel about exports that will affect their textile and motor industries sweeping in from countries that cannot—or do not want to—join the single currency and have more competitive currencies?

What will the single currency do to the Euro-budget if there have to be huge compensatory mechanisms and a vastly swollen Brussels bureaucracy to increase redistribution to compensate the countries that cannot escape through a more flexible exchange rate? What will it do to the whole single market, which some of us have spent a quarter of a century encouraging and trying to build up? We are told that new barriers and divisions may have to be introduced between countries in the inner core and those outside it.

I never thought that I would make a speech in defence of the former leader of the Labour party, Commissioner Neil Kinnock, but I understand what he was thinking about when he began to say, as I believe he did, that the whole attempt to put the single currency into a political timetable over the next three and a half years or whatever was dangerous. If there is ever to be a single currency, it must come as a result of market forces and demand. It cannot be imposed by politics.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor keeps reminding us, the Maastricht criteria—there are several others that one could add—are the normal indicators of good behaviour to which any sensibly run economy needs to adhere anyway. What discipline forces us to comply with them? It is not a lot of treaty declarations in Brussels but the dictates of the global financial system. That is the new gold standard.

People say that we should have a gold standard and that the single currency, instead, is not so bad. In fact, we have a gold standard: global financial disciplines that are so strong and which involve such a rapid withdrawal of capital in seconds—or nanoseconds—that, if things go wrong, they impose a deadly discipline on any country that seeks to move too far away from the sensible indicators of a low inflation rate, low interest rates, sensible borrowing, a sensible fiscal system and sensible rather than penal taxation on work and enterprise.

There is no need for us to submit ourselves to the so-called discipline of the single currency, even we wanted to do so. We have plenty of disciplines and they are the ones that we must obey. If we do not, the global financial system will come down hard on us.

Mr. Jenkin: Could it be that the Labour party is lunging at the single European currency because it imagines that it can escape from those international disciplines and believes that a single currency would somehow be a refuge from the real world?

Mr. Howell: There could be something in that. EMU may begin—although I do not think that it will fly—and

[Mr. Howell]

do great damage to Europe. If it goes at all, it will be full of curious arrangements such as stability pacts and compensatory arrangements, about which the French are talking, and could provide an opportunity for an irresponsible Government to start doing irresponsible things and somehow take cover behind the European system. I had not thought of that. It may be a way out. It explains why the Opposition do not talk much about global financial disciplines but hang on to the idea of a single currency.

Economic and monetary union and the single currency mean bigger government. Perhaps that really explains the enthusiasm of the Labour party. It means a lot more central Government, higher taxation by Europe and higher redistribution. Even if it came together—and, heaven knows, events in France make that less likely every day—I think that it would explode.

I realise that, in asserting that view, one is saying something rather challenging. One is saying that the whole French political establishment, which has been wedded to the idea of recapturing its monetary destiny, as it calls it, is wrong. One is saying that Chancellor Kohl, who is a great man, the small entourage around him and many other learned Europeans, great bankers and officials are all wrong. They are the ones who said that one cannot have a single market without a single currency. They said that that was essential for the future of Europe, and that, if we did not achieve that, it would be the end of civilisation.

If I am wrong, and we go ahead with EMU, we will have division in Europe on a most miserable scale. It is a prospect from which I want to rescue Europe. If all those people are wrong, we will witness the discrediting of the entire European establishment. That is an awesome and dangerous thing as well. I do not think that we should cheer should that occur, particularly as the European establishment has linked the future of European integration, which I favour, to the ludicrous project of the single currency.

We have an agonising choice with which we should never have been faced. It was not necessary. There is no solid economic argument for a single market having to have a single currency. With tomorrow's technology, one could probably have many more diversified currency relationships than one can have today. There never was any need to face Europe with that choice. There never was any need to put the European story and the enlarged Europe which we want at risk with the single currency. I believe that those who try to pose that choice to us will greatly regret their action in due course.

5.30 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I listened with great interest, as always, to the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). I could not have agreed with him more when he said that Britain is an attractive country. Of course we are, but that does not mean that we are economically successful. There are plenty of attractive countries.

As for the proof of our economic success, look at the Red Book and our balance of payments deficit. That is the best test of all. Last year, the balance of payments deficit for this year was forecast to be £3.5 billion; it was increased in the Red Book to £6.5 billion. Is that a sign of success? Next year the balance of payments deficit will be £5 billion. Is that a sign of more success? Given the low level of activity in the economy in the past four years, we must ask ourselves why we have not been in balance at all. A period of low economic activity puts the brakes on; it is a version of stop-go. It is a recipe for getting an economy round and into balance. I have argued against stop-go many times, but one of its advantages is that it brings about a balance of payments surplus, or at least it removes the deficit. That has not happened during the past four years, and it is clear that there is something seriously wrong with our economy. Although we have carried on in the standard stop-go manner, we have not produced the results that one would normally always expect to find.

In a recession, imports and consumption decline, and that effect is the standard means of bringing an economy round. Not only have we suffered from a recession, but the value of the pound has reduced from DM2.95 to DM2.20. We all know about the J-curve effect, but that happened long ago. We should have been reaping the benefits now, but we are not.

I have always argued for a much lower exchange rate than we have had in the past, but I never expected to see it go down to DM2.20. When the exchange rate was DM2.95, I argued that it should drop to somewhere between DM2.30 and DM2.35. I did not like to voice that opinion because everyone would say that it was ridiculous. Now that we have an exchange rate of DM2.20, however, I am in the unique position of not wanting a lower exchange rate. If anything, I want it to be little higher.

We have had the recession and witnessed the pound going down against the deutschmark to DM2.20. We have seen cuts in public expenditure. We have seen a 7p increase in taxation followed by a reduction of 1p this year. The public sector borrowing requirement has gone up from £21.5 billion last year to £29 billion this year. All that has happened, and the balance of payments deficit is getting worse. One can draw just one conclusion from that—something has gone seriously wrong and our economy has not operated as it should have done.

I do not blame the Chancellor of the Exchequer. His predecessors thought that they were undertaking an economic miracle; in fact, they were preparing the foundations for a disaster. They ignored manufacturing industry and abandoned the skills and investment that used to be the cause of our prosperity. The basis of our prosperity was demolished in the early 1980s and those Ministers, in their arrogance, thought that they were doing something wonderful.

The question for the Chancellor and the House is, "What are we to do about the economy now?" We cannot allow the current tinkering with it to be the solution. A range of measures should now be employed. The one golf club approach, put so graphically by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), seems to be the standard feature of British economic policy, whichever Government are in power. In the 1960s, we had the one club of the exchange rate; in the 1970s, we had the one club of sterling M3; in the 1980s, we moved to a position between M0 and M6; and now we have the one club of inflation. Despite the intellectual power that is supposed to lie behind Government decision making, Ministers are unable to concentrate on more than one variable at a time.

In practice, the Chancellor is well aware that he must balance several claims—growth, unemployment, the balance of payments, investment and inflation. They are all factors. The Bank of England can, of course, afford the simplicity of concentrating on one claim, the Chancellor cannot. His skill is to provide the mix of policies that balance all the competing claims. He is in a worse position than Harold Macmillan who complained that he had only last year's "Bradshaw". The Chancellor does not even have that; he has something much more out of date.

Doctrine is not required now. The Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot exist on a doctrine—we cannot exist on a doctrine. We require judgment—the ability to make decisions based always on inadequate evidence. We are always confronted with inadequate evidence, which is why we need judgment. If we had all the solutions we would not need high-powered people to make important decisions. Most Chancellors try to produce a theme for their Budgets around those important decisions.

No theme was attempted for this year's Budget—they are frequently rather contrived—but there is one ready to hand. My hon. Friends will not be surprised when I say that it has to do with investment. We must take that issue much more seriously than we have ever done before. We must invest in people and in capital equipment. We must invest to reduce unemployment and to encourage modernisation. It is through such investment that a Chancellor can lay the foundation for our future growth and our future as an economically successful country.

The problem for the Chancellor is that investment in people through education and training is mostly for the longer term. We know that. We know that results are not obtained quickly. With the approach to a general election, I would expect to see some deference to such investment. It is likely, however, to fall well short of what we really need. If there is to be more than a superficial response from the new Department for Education and Employment, it must engage in some long-term planning.

Although we hear many protestations about the need for training and vocational education, little has been done. We have been down that road many times. We have had more than 100 years of lamentations about the skills gap. Time and again in that period, half-hearted measures have been introduced. With the current level of unemployment, the need now for action is even more urgent. Our weakness in this respect is well documented.

One of the more ambitious measures of the past was "Rab" Butler's plan for technical schools, as envisaged in the Education Act 1944. It was a brilliant idea, but it withered—like so many schemes that have been played out before and since. In order to improve our skills we must come to terms with the fact that the education establishment does not like the idea of technical training. By a long process of inactivity it has thwarted, again and again, proposals to produce technical and engineering skills which other countries have always regarded as normal. As long as we used to be wealthy, we could afford to tolerate that bias against industry, but we should not underestimate it now.

Capital allowances must be brought up to date. I know that this is my old theme, but I have to mention it again. I have long been a supporter of the old investment grants for plant and machinery and there was a big surge in investment following their introduction in 1967. Of course, those investments were not always good—that is the nature of such assistance—but there was a big improvement and the grants were a major encouragement for investment. However, the time has passed when such measures could be reintroduced.

We now need higher investment allowances. Once again, I must point out that the 25 per cent. allowance is damaging industry. Hardly any investment does not decline by 25 per cent. in value in the first year. We now have a massive disincentive to investment that is quite shameful. One would expect investment allowances to be pari passu with the decline in value of an investment. That would be ideal. Although it would not provide an incentive, at least it would recognise the reality. The current allowance does not even recognise the reality, let alone provide an incentive.

The loss of revenue is only a question of delayed payment of corporation tax, as the Chancellor will get the money in the end. I do not belittle the delay and I understand its implications, but it is not as serious as forgoing it altogether.

I should like the development agencies to expand to other parts of the country. They can be a useful way to channel investment. They have been successful in Scotland and even in Wales, although the Public Accounts Committee has had a few nasty things to say about what happened in Wales. The advantage of regional development contracts is that decisions can be made on the basis of involvement with those directly concerned. That gives people a stake in their own area and can promote greater responsibility in taking industrial decisions. It is an excellent idea and I should like it to expand.

All industrial decisions require management ability. Regular calls are made for the institutional investors to play a prominent part in improving management. Although they might not be good guides for making industrial decisions—I would not trust them with those—they can make excellent decisions about when to buy and sell shares and they should be able to use their weight in getting independent, non-executive members on to boards. Despite Cadbury, non-executive directors are too often chosen by the chairman, who wants friends to support him, not people who ask awkward questions. We must understand the nature of the relationship. Although the responsibility of non-executive directors might be more limited—one cannot expect too much from them or overload them as they work for only a few days a month at most—their presence can be a useful promoter of good practice.

One important area of economic policy where consensus between the parties would be most desirable is capital taxation. It is necessary because of the opportunities for postponing the realisation of capital gains and making transfers to avoid inheritance taxes.

In the post-war years, it has been possible to take advantage of the division between the parties and to wait for a different Government which might bring about changes. People can postpone the transfer of moneys until a change of Government and that can be destabilising, but capital taxes are an essential part of fair and sensible taxation. They are also valuable, even to those on the far right of the Conservative party, if only as a means of combating tax avoidance between income and capital. There have been many cases in the past of incomes being moved into capital for spurious reasons. We should seek to establish some common ground. We shall have to await

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

the new thinking that will surely come when the Conservative party seeks to come to terms with its period in the wilderness following the next general election.

I do not understand how the Government can reject capital taxes, which have existed for the entire century and are an essential part of taxation. We require the creation of a consensus on the treatment of those taxes. The level of such taxation will always be a matter for disagreement, but there should be some agreement on its structure. It is obvious that that is impossible now, but I expect some new thinking from the Conservative party after the next election.

Some people see the solution as looking to other countries and copying their activities. I was surprised that the Governor of Hong Kong fell into that category. Others have pointed to the tiger economies as though we have only to copy them. It is all becoming too fashionable. A flow of ideas is always useful, but we cannot consider emulation.

There are real dangers in importing economic models from other countries. Comparisons with eastern countries can be rather less useful than one might have thought. There are certain lessons to be learnt, but comparisons based on a failure to understand their social and historical backgrounds cannot be justified. So much of what we do develops from our historical and social backgrounds, and if we make use of them we can achieve results that are far better than those that result from copying alien Administrations.

All that may come about in the next year or so, after the election of the next Labour Government. The Budget was an opportunity to show how the decline of our country could be brought to an end, and it is a thousand pities that it was not taken.

5.46 pm

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): The House is none the wiser about what the official Opposition would have liked in the Budget than it was before the debates began. I understand the concerns expressed by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) about the size of the PSBR, and the comments early in his speech about how some public expenditure decisions are made, and I shall return briefly to both those topics.

First, I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. He was hemmed in by unwelcome economic and political reality, and, with his Budget, he has extricated himself with considerable skill. He has put no new impediments in the way of continued economic growth, and he has given it some fresh impetus. I regard that as a success. He could so easily have done neither.

My right hon. and learned Friend's great achievement was to contrive to get his Budget dismissed by the Opposition and much of the press—not to speak of quite a number of my hon. Friends—as dull and unimaginative. By that means, he avoided most of the cynicism with which electors would view highly promoted tax cuts at present, while making sure that they appear in next April's pay packets, when they will be noticed rather less dismissively.

The announcement of tax cuts does not cut nearly as much political ice as some people believe, but reductions in stoppages on pay slips, whether as a result of thresholds going up or rates coming down, make a much deeper impression when they actually happen.

In the summer economic debate, I urged my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to have the courage to be boring. However, I am afraid that he has been a little too exciting in one respect. I am sorry that, in addition to his well-judged raising of thresholds, he felt obliged to cut the standard rate of income tax by 1p. I would have preferred him to use the money to cut the PSBR. It would have been better to show those who are worried about its size and persistence that he gave a higher priority to reducing it. It would have been much easier then to make a substantial cut in interest rates.

The proof of the Budget's long-term success will be the way that those rates come down—and come down they must, and stay down, if we are to achieve the Chancellor's ambitious growth target of 3 per cent. next year, on which I take it that his public sector borrowing requirement projections are based. That is the only way of helping to restore confidence and activity in the housing market, and to assist property owners caught in the equity trap. No tax reductions or clever devices could conceivably do that, or have such a stimulating effect on the economy generally.

If there had been larger reductions in public spending, taxes could have gone down further, too, but there never was a realistic chance of that in this Budget. Spending programmes cannot be turned on and off like a tap without creating as many political problems as are solved, and just as many spending and administrative inefficiencies as are cured.

It is imperative that the inexorable growth in spending is checked and steadily reduced as a percentage of gross domestic product. One does not have to accept all the tiger economy argument to know that the United Kingdom would be better off if public spending were well below 40 per cent. rather than well above 40 per cent.

It is no criticism of the Budget to say that we do not have a sufficiently good mechanism to control public spending over more than one year, enabling Departments to plan properly for the medium term and to provide incentives to re-examine what Departments do and how they do it, in a way that produces proper priorities and genuine efficiency gains.

The way in which public expenditure survey reductions work is frequently wasteful of resources, and often compounds rather than cures inefficiency. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) offered a good example. I do not understand the Government's justification for the cuts affecting the British Council and the BBC Overseas Service, and I cannot believe that they were thought through in terms of their impact on those organisations.

I do not have the finished solution to the overall problem—at least, not for this speech. I do not underestimate its complexity, which remains simply because it is so difficult to solve, even though real improvements have been made over the past few years in controlling spending sensibly over time.

If there is to be vigorous, unimpeded, long-term economic growth, that problem is one with which this Government or any other will have to deal much better in future than in the past. The Government cannot go on straining at the seams—in the way that the Chancellor has had to do, in trying to contain spending, in this Budget.

5.52 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am happy to extend to the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) an invitation to join us in the Lobby to vote against a 1p reduction in the standard rate of income tax—and I shall shortly extend that invitation to Labour Members. I apologise if the right hon. Gentleman finds himself in bad company for that reason, but there will not be much of it, because it appears that most Labour Members do not want to vote on an issue central to the Budget's strategy.

The Deputy Prime Minister gave a glowing account of the state of the economy, in an optimistic, cheerleading manner that, such is his skill, would have enlivened the spirits of passengers who were going down on the Titanic. If the economy was as healthy as the Deputy Prime Minister said, we would be considering a different Budget from the one before us. If the economy was uproariously healthy, the Chancellor would be making the tax reductions for which so many members of his party and of the press called. The fact that those cuts were not made illustrates the problems that still beset the economy.

This year's growth forecasts were cut from 3.5 per cent. to 2.75 per cent. Next year's growth forecast looks distinctly artificial, being raised from 2.75 per cent. to 3 per cent. It may turn out to be a lot less—perhaps not much more than 2 per cent. Some commentators have even suggested that a mini-recession will occur. The borrowing forecast is up from £21.5 billion to £29 billion, and next year's figure of £22.5 billion is actually above the figure supposed for this year.

Again, that is a sign of an economy not in a state to deliver the tax cuts that the Conservative party wanted. There is to be a rise of only 1 per cent. in the whole economy investment forecast, and the 11 per cent. cut in Government investment will not help. That is not a healthy picture.

The Deputy Prime Minister, in dwelling on the significant, in some cases, structural changes that occurred some years ago, is in danger of looking as geriatric as he accuses the Labour party of looking. The right hon. Gentleman also is speaking from the past. Certain things were achieved, but they are not bankers and do not provide for the kind of improvement that the Chancellor wanted.

What a price we now pay for the failings that I identified. There is to be no additional investment in housing. The construction industry is profoundly worried, because it expected the cut in the roads programme, for which we argued, but there is no investment in the housing programme, which could have taken up some of the industry's slack. The private finance initiative is looking like a rescue operation rather than a means of adding to the stock of valuable public resources by allowing investment that would not have occurred otherwise—which was the basis on which the PFI was devised.

Year after year, I have sat on the Treasury Select Committee and been told, "This year, the PFI will really work. The rules have been successfully relaxed." Every year, false expectations have been entertained. This year, the PFI is expected to rescue a substantial part of that which everybody expected to be the normal public sector investment programme. The PFI is transferring a great deal of the current account to future years, because all that investment will have to be paid for—normally on current expenditure, in the price that will be paid for hospital services, or prisons. As was pointed out earlier, that aspect ought to be taken more clearly into account.

The real-terms cut in overseas aid abandons the Conservative's manifesto claim that they would move towards the United Nations target. The substantial cut in the British Council budget has upset right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, who recognise the council's important function, which it undertakes at low cost in terms of the good will that it earns for Britain abroad.

Something mysterious is happening with the Post Office, and I would like a specific response when the Chancellor winds up. In May, the Deputy Prime Minister, in setting out future plans for the Post Office, pledged not to take more than about half its forecast profits through the external finance limit. That pledge has apparently been abandoned in the forecasts before us.

The external financing limit will be £210 million next year and £300 million in the two succeeding years, which appears to be raiding the Post Office's profits. The result will be an inferior postal service, because the Post Office will not be able to reinvest those profits in the way that it ought to keep postal services ahead. The public will pay in postal charges.

The Government still do not have the energy package right, and tonight will face opposition to a number of their proposals for that reason. The Government attacked us bitterly when we talked about raising petrol duty by 5p a gallon. We were castigated by Conservative central office for making such an outrageous proposal. The Government are increasing the price of petrol by 16p a gallon, with no compensatory element for people who are wholly dependent on a car to get to work—which is particularly the case in rural areas.

One obvious way to compensate such car users is to reduce their fixed costs by cutting vehicle excise duty. There would still be a penalty on large users of fuel. The Government are increasing vehicle excise duty, albeit by only a small amount, when they should be cutting it as a compensatory mechanism for increased petrol duty. We will vote against the increase in vehicle excise duty.

It would be right for the House to revisit the issue of value added tax on domestic fuel, as one amendment would permit, because the Government are taking away a key compensation element for VAT. They are taking so much from the energy efficiency budget that 200,000 fewer pensioners' homes will have their lofts insulated, and 1,000 fewer people will be employed by the small businesses that provide insulation work. The Government are pulling the rug from around the knees of the elderly by taking away the compensation that they need to cope with even 8 per cent. VAT on fuel.

The Government were right to identify education, crime and health as priorities in the Budget. But close examination reveals that the Budget does not—as the Chancellor said it would—shift more spending to schools, hospitals and the police. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment claims that she has won £878 million extra for schools, but in fact that money is not there. Merely to stand still, local authorities would need £443 million for rising pupil numbers, new EC regulations affecting school transport and local government pensions. All those elements will build up to a total of £443 million.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

Local authorities also have to pay for nursery provision and the expansion of the assisted places scheme. Local government will get £774 million, but £516 million will be taken up by inflation. That leaves only £258 million, which is nowhere near enough even for a standstill budget. When inflation is taken into account, the budget does not increase and there will be a cut in services to schools. Central Government spending on local government, including education spending, has merely kept pace with inflation. The only way schools will get extra money is by local authorities robbing other services or putting up council tax.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has put parents on duty as monitors of what local authorities do. She says—in the Department's press release—that parents must ensure that local authorities spend the money in the schools. That means that local authorities will have to abandon all discretionary, non-statutory spending: grants to students in further education; the youth service, which is very important in fighting crime; teacher training; and even nursery education. Local authorities will not be able to do that, because they have already been cutting those services for the past two years. My local authority in Northumberland has had to cut those services to stand still because of the cuts it has faced.

The extra money will have to come from the council tax. We know that, the Government know that, and they have included that in the figures in the Red Book, which allow for an 11 per cent. increase in council tax. The Government are simply passing the buck to local authorities by allowing them to increase the council tax by three times the rate of inflation.

Of course, when local authorities raise the council tax, the Government will attack them, but raising the council tax is the only way of achieving the object. The problem was brought into sharp relief by the exchange I had with the Deputy Prime Minister earlier. I asked the right hon. Gentleman what teachers should do. If they were to feel the benefit of the £9 a week promised by the overall improvements of the Budget and the economy, they would have to have a 4 per cent. pay increase. If teachers have a 4 per cent. pay increase, local authorities will have even less money to fund some of the services to which I have referred. Teachers cannot have it both ways, because they will not be better off if schools get their money. The schools will not get anything like the amount of money that the Secretary of State described.

A similar deception exists over NHS spending, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) described yesterday. The much trumpeted rise in current NHS spending will be offset by inflation and cuts in NHS capital spending. Overall health spending between 1995-96 and 1996-97 will not rise in real terms, and it will decline slightly in future years.

There is a separate line now in the Red Book for NHS spending, to cover the Government's pledge to increase NHS spending. It will increase by £200 million in the coming year and by £100 million in subsequent years. However, when one takes account of the higher level of NHS inflation, and the aging population, one sees that the NHS will be seriously squeezed.

I said that the Government were right to identify crime and policing as a priority. In other ways, the Government are taking money from fighting crime by cutting the youth and probation services—crucial areas of crime fighting. The 5,000 extra police officers on the beat that the Government talk about will not be provided by the Budget. At best, the decisions in the Budget might allow 1,000 additional police officers to be appointed. That is one third the number that the chief constables requested two years ago. I welcome those additional officers, but there will be cuts in every other aspect of the Home Office budget—except, of course, prisons.

I warn the Chancellor that he has not seen anything yet. The Home Secretary has plans to increase the prison population by 20,000. There is no provision for that in the Budget, and there is no provision for the changes that the Home Secretary intends to make in remission for prisoners. That will be a serious problem for the Chancellor in future, unless he can sit on the Home Secretary soon.

On taxes, the rhetoric and the reality are worlds apart. The Chancellor said:

> "My Budgets of the past two years have kept us on the course that we said we would follow. We have cut taxes, we are cutting taxes".—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1072.]

That was just a week ago.

Where are the two years of tax cuts? Last year, the Budget contained £1.3 billion of tax cuts after indexation, but that was offset by £2.9 billion of extra taxes conveniently left over from previous Budgets, including MIRAS changes and fuel and tobacco duties. Taxes actually rose by £1.6 billion. This year's Budget appears to contain some £3.1 billion of tax cuts after indexation. However, that is offset by a £1 billion rise in fuel and tobacco taxes from previous Budgets, and a £900 million rise in council tax to pay for education spending. Stamp prices will rise by £120 million because of the Post Office changes.

The assumed contribution from business rates to local authority finance has shot up by 12.2 per cent. That sounds like marvellous news, but it is due to a more optimistic view by the Treasury of the proportion of money that will be collected and distributed. I will be delighted if that happens, but I am not convinced by the precedent set in previous years.

At best, the tax cut of £3.1 billion for 1996-97 declines to £1.1 billion after the inclusion of back-door tax rises. For 1995-96 compared with 1996-97, there is a total tax rise of £500 million, not the fall to which the Chancellor referred. Perhaps that is why we have not had the political Budget that this Budget was supposed to be.

I have some sympathy with the Chancellor. He was expected to work a miracle and to produce a Budget that solved everything that the Government have done wrong. Everything that has made people angry was supposed to be cured by tax cuts: the depth of the recession; negative equity; VAT; rail privatisation; fat salaries in privatised industries; ministerial resignations; the sleaze factor; divisions within the Conservative party on Europe; and the Scott inquiry. Tax cuts were supposed to make the people forget all those problems.

That was the theory, but it was never a good one. The Chancellor was in no position even to attempt to put that theory into practice in the Budget. *The Daily Telegraph*—a stalwart of Tory support—called it "A penny for your votes".

The theory is not going to work, and the Budget will not undo the damage done by the Government's other policies. *The Daily Telegraph*'s verdict is a deeply sarcastic and rather accurate judgment. The Tory party cannot be saved by a concession to vintage car owners. I admit that I wrote to the Chancellor on this. I do not have a vintage car, but some of my constituents have. The measure is useful, and tidies up the position, but the Government cannot be saved by vintage cars.

The Budget cannot save the Government from their fate. It fails to meet the national need for investment in education. But where is Labour? The Opposition are trapped in the Tory tax-cutting agenda, like rabbits trapped in the headlights of a car. A rabbit can run this way a bit and it can run that way a bit, but it dare not get out of the headlight's beam. The Labour party is engaged in a tactical game, the rules of which are made by the Conservatives. If the Government say tax cuts, it says tax cuts. If the Government say standards in education, it says standards in education. Whatever the Government can deliver, Labour can deliver more of the same. That is not a realistic basis for Opposition policy.

I ask Labour Members of Parliament to tell us what Labour's priorities are. I ask them not to give the Leader of the Opposition a political blank cheque to put tax cuts before decent education by going into the wrong Lobby tonight. If the Labour party can abandon that much in opposition, how much could it abandon in government?

Tonight, we will vote against the 1p reduction in income tax, because we, like the public, want to see the money go at this juncture to decent schools, to guarantee the future of our country. It is no use going on about monitoring standards unless one talks about where the resources will come from to raise them, so we invite those who believe that, in this Budget, the priority should be to put education right to join us in the Lobby and vote against that tax cut.

6.9 pm

Sir Thomas Arnold (Hazel Grove): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). When he was a member of the Treasury Select Committee we had a very good understanding. I was amused, therefore, by what he had to say about the Liberal Democrats' policy on roads, saying that they welcomed the Government's decision to cut the roads programme. But that is not what the Liberal Democrats locally in Hazel Grove have been saying. They want a number of local roads. Indeed, they forecast locally that the roads programme would be cut. It was not and a number of programmes will go ahead. That episode underlines once again the wisdom of the American politician—I think that I am correct—who said that all politics is local.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on a very skilful Budget, and join the right hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed and for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) in making one or two remarks about the private finance initiative. This morning, the Treasury Select Committee took evidence, yet again, on the PFI. We have been doing that now for several years and, I have to tell the House, we are none the wiser. There is too much that is opaque and couched in language that is simply incomprehensible. It is not a party issue. Indeed, judging from this morning's exchanges, there is a good deal of cross-party agreement on the subject and a desire to go ahead and support the policy, but we need to know more about it in ordinary language that people can understand. Therefore, I think it likely that the Committee will want to hold an inquiry on the subject in the new year, and issue a short report, because we simply cannot go on like this. It really is incumbent upon the Treasury to find ways and means of making the policy more easily understood. Let us have some specific examples of the agreements that are being made. Let us see how they vary between one project and another, and then we can begin to understand how this wholly admirable policy in principle is being implemented in practice.

I shall concentrate my remarks on monetary policy and welcome the robust stand that my right hon. and learned Friend took during the summer months in agreeing not to put up interest rates. It has been only a few months since the Bank of England—we know what the advice was from the publication of the minutes of the monthly monetary meeting—was asking for an increase in rates at a time when it was already becoming apparent that the economy was slowing. My right hon. and learned Friend resisted that appeal and was absolutely right to do so. I say that because we have had a good deal of evidence during the autumn and as we go into the winter that growth has been moderating and slowing down. Even if there is not a deflationary bias in the economy, it is certainly now apparent that there is not an inflationary bias. Whatever increases may have taken place as a result of a surge in commodity prices, they appear to have worked their way through the system, and the immediate prospects for inflation are not at all bad.

I fully understand the difficulty that the Governor of the Bank of England faces, because he is enjoined by the Government, the Treasury and the Chancellor to give advice that is designed to help the Government to meet the very strict inflation target of 2.5 per cent. by the end of the Parliament. He can give that advice only on the basis of the evidence that is available to him when he is asked to give his opinion. He carries out what he calls a balancing act and then gives his opinion. Clearly, the Chancellor has to take account of a much wider range of factors, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will listen to what I believe is a persuasive case for cutting interest rates.

The Budget forecasts that expansion—growth in the economy—over the next year will be some 3 per cent. One can say that that is trend or slightly above trend growth, but it appears to be a faster rate of activity than that which we are currently experiencing. If that is so, given the slowdown in activity elsewhere in the world, it is likely that we will not be able to rely on the expansion to be driven on net trade, as the recent expansion was. We must all look for more buoyancy from consumer spending, and we are unlikely to obtain that unless we can promote more activity in the economy. Indeed, a cut in interest rates would help that process considerably.

I understand the difficulty that the Chancellor faced in framing the Budget when his tax receipts were considerably less than that originally forecast—the public sector borrowing requirement came in very much higher than was forecast this time a year ago. He was short of some £8 billion or so of revenue. That has been a very difficult situation for him to deal with, but again that is a reason for relaxing monetary policy now to encourage more activity and in turn more buoyancy from the

[Sir Thomas Arnold]

revenue. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that a modest stimulus of the kind that we could expect to see from a gradual loosening of monetary policy at this stage would be effective for the rate of activity in the economy.

We now have a much better understanding of the way in which the Government take decisions on monetary policy, and the monetary framework is, in many respects, admirable. I have no wish to criticise it in any way. The framework shows that the evidence on which the Bank gives its advice is of a kind about which it is frequently difficult to be certain. Indeed, if one looks at the last Bank of England inflation report, one sees that, far from the Bank showing the certainty that the Governor showed in the late spring and summer, it says—at the beginning, in the middle and again at the end—that the situation is so full of uncertainties that it is difficult to know exactly what is taking place. That being the case, set alongside the evidence of a slowing economy, I think that the Chancellor would not be taking any great risks if he now moved towards a slow easing. I have no particular view about the number. I think that it can be done in quite modest steps, and we can see how the situation develops. I simply do not believe that he would be taking any great risks with inflation, for the reasons that I have given. Inflation is low and is likely to remain low for some time to come. His Budget arithmetic depends on a revival of confidence, and on a further expansion of output and of activity. I hope, therefore, for all the reasons that I have given, that he will now feel able to ease monetary policy.

6.17 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I agree strongly with the comments of the right hon. Members for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about the British Council and the BBC World Service. It would be a mistake to implement the cuts that the Chancellor proposes to make, and I hope that a way can be found to ensure that they do not happen.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) on a polished and eloquent speech, made, of course, without reference to notes, which is something that I will not try to emulate. I agree with his remarks in relation to the PFI, and I shall say one or two words about that later.

Two things can be said about the Budget: first, that it has been grossly over-hyped by both the Tory tabloid press and by Tory Members of Parliament. It was supposed to be the Budget that would simultaneously restore Tory party fortunes and galvanise the country behind the idea of another term of Conservative Government. In fact, the Budget has completely failed to make any kind of impact or impression on public opinion.

The Budget arithmetic is already beginning to unravel. This is a Budget characterised by creative accountancy and false claims. People will not be £9 a week better off because of the Budget. The real figure for a typical family with two children, according to the House of Commons Library, is £2.03 a week. People will be left seriously out of pocket when the 21 Tory tax rises since 1992 are taken fully into account. They will be £670 a year, or £13 a week, worse off. That will be the true state of personal finances after the Budget.

Even the claims that the Government have made for the Budget rest on Treasury forecasts, and we know just how unreliable those forecasts have been in the past. We have had higher inflation than expected, borrowing has been much higher than predicted, investment forecasts have been hopelessly inaccurate and there has been slower growth and smaller manufacturing output.

The problems for the Government are more fully reflected in the Red Book. Last year, the Government thought that their receipts in this financial year would be £298 billion. Now they think that they will be £284.8 billion. That is a spectacular and unprecedented undershoot of more than £13 billion. We have seen an undershoot of £4.8 billion in income tax and £5.2 billion in lower and smaller VAT collections.

That serves to emphasise the second point that can be made about the Budget, which is that it has failed to address the fundamental weaknesses of the British economy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) vividly revealed one of the central weaknesses of the British economy towards which the Budget will make no significant contribution—the serious balance of payments deficits that have been run up in recent years. Most importantly, the Budget will fail on the key question of investment. There is nothing in the Budget which will stimulate private investment while, at the same time, public investment, particularly in areas such as the NHS, has been hit hard.

There is an obvious but depressing short-termism about the Budget. Despite the Chancellor's claims to the contrary, investment in infrastructure is one of the few ways in which the Government can improve the conditions for economic growth. But even if we are to take the recycled claims about the private finance initiative at face value, the Chancellor is still planning to cut capital spending in education and health in favour of higher consumer spending. We all know that the Chancellor is in a political hole—he refers to it frequently—but it is a hole entirely of his own making.

However, this is a case of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. In short, there is little in the Budget which will help investment or reduce the unacceptable levels of unemployment in our society and deal with the real problem of job insecurity, which is now a major drag on the British economy. The jobless will get little cheer from the Budget.

Training budgets have been cut by a further 4 per cent. on top of the substantial cuts in training and enterprise councils' budgets this financial year. My county of Cumbria suffers pockets of extremely high levels of unemployment, particularly in my constituency and along the west coast of Cumbria. But Cumbria training and enterprise council's budget has been cut by £1.25 million this year—nearly 7 per cent. Such cuts are completely unjustified against the background of the unemployment problems in Cumbria.

The balance of tax measures in the Budget will neither promote greater fairness, which should be a priority for Government, nor represent good value for money. I mention in particular the £250 million being spent on reducing inheritance tax liability. That money could have been better spent, and should have been spent, either by reducing income tax for the lowest wage earners or by lowering VAT on domestic fuel. Either of those measures would represent a much better spending priority.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that inheritance tax is iniquitous because it is a tax on money which has already borne tax throughout the lifetime of the deceased person?

Mr. Hutton: No, I do not accept that. Inheritance tax is a Conservative tax. If the hon. Gentleman has those strong feelings about inheritance tax, I am surprised that he has not been voting against previous Conservative Budgets.

I come now to the impact of the Budget on the housing market and the building industry and I want to say one or two further words about the private finance initiative. The Chancellor ruled out taking any special measures to boost the housing market or to promote growth in the construction industry. He may be right that there is no magic solution to the problems of the housing industry and the construction industry generally, but at the very least we should stop doing things that damage the confidence of home owners and prospective home buyers and which in turn have a damaging effect on the construction industry.

In my constituency, the construction industry and the housing market are seriously depressed. The Government could do two things in particular which would improve the general confidence of home owners and prospective home buyers. First, they should consider much more seriously the phased release of capital receipts from the sale of council house properties. If that was done in a sensible way, it could stimulate the construction industry. In particular, the Government should reconsider recent changes to income support and mortgage protection payments for those people who are out of work.

Clearly, the Government's intention is to switch the emphasis on to private insurance and away from support from the Department of Social Security. That will cause huge hardship. In particular, it is doubtful whether private provision will ever be able effectively to compensate for provision formerly provided by the DSS.

The Government should consider two problems in particular. First, there is a serious lack of awareness on the part of borrowers about the effect of the Government's income support changes. Recent surveys conducted by the building societies show that a third of existing borrowers still believe that in the event of unemployment the DSS will be there to provide them with a helping hand. That simply will not happen. Secondly, many of the mortgage protection insurance policies are so full of holes that they frequently fail to cover many of the redundancy situations that our constituents experience.

A particular problem in my constituency, which I know will be reflected elsewhere, concerns contractors and those who are self-employed. Many existing mortgage protection insurance policies fail to deal adequately or at all with those categories of workers. Policies such as those whose virtues the Prime Minister has trumpeted in the House and elsewhere—particularly those now adopted by the Skipton building society, to which the Prime Minister referred on 8 June at column 317—as representing the best practice of building societies, in fact turn out to be something substantially less than that.

The Skipton building society policy does not cover the first 56 days of redundancy and does not apply at all to absence from work caused by illness or accident. I am perfectly prepared to accept that the Skipton policy probably represents the best policy that is available. But it does not deal with the real situation facing many of our constituents. In many cases, there will effectively be no mortgage protection payment in the first 56 days of redundancy, and that will stoke up serious arrears problems for many people.

Many lenders restrict the sale of insurance to new borrowers, because they are concerned, as the Woolwich and other building societies have made clear, that an existing borrower who wants mortgage protection insurance to cover redundancy could well be perceived as someone who is at risk of redundancy, which is one of the conditions that will frequently exclude a person from taking any benefits under such a policy.

The chief executive of the Cumberland building society wrote to me on 29 November to express his concerns about that Government policy. He said:

> "We strongly feel that the reduction in income support to owner occupiers is inequitable and can only have an adverse effect on the housing market."

I agree with the chief executive of the Cumberland building society, Mr. Ian Kitchen. It is a shame that the Government are not prepared to reconsider their proposed changes to the rules governing income support.

Many hon. Members have spoken of the private finance initiative. Along, I am sure, with every other hon. Member, I support the concept of genuine partnership between the private and public sectors: indeed, Opposition Members have long advocated that concept. The PFI involves problems, however—problems accurately identified by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove.

I have further anxieties. There is evidence that the PFI is becoming a vehicle not for genuine partnership between private and public sectors, but for a takeover of the public by the private sector, which would be a regrettable development. There is also clear evidence from the Budget that the PFI is a substitute for previously promised public sector capital spending, particularly spending in the national health service. The PFI does not, of course, provide cheaper sources of finance than those currently made available to the public sector by the national loans fund. Moreover, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has pointed out, in transferring capital spending to current expenditure streams we risk stoking up problems for many public sector organisations in the future.

I want a successful private finance initiative. I want sources of private finance to be released for use in the public sector. I do not, however, want the PFI to be substituted for public expenditure itself. For many years, a hospital in Ulverston, in my constituency, has provided excellent services for elderly people who need national health service beds; along with other services, it provides respite care. The building is now unsuitable, and no longer provides the standard of care that many people expect from the national health service. It needs to be replaced.

Morecambe Bay health authority is currently consulting organisations in my constituency and elsewhere, including the community health council, with a view to replacing the hospital with a new all-purpose residential facility and a new primary health care facility. I support that plan, and I support the concept of involving a private financial partner; but I have reservations about the application of the PFI to the renewal of the hospital. In particular, I want

[Mr. Hutton]

the range of services provided in that hospital to stay in the national health service. I think it extremely important for such services to be provided by NHS trusts in particular. I do not want management services in the new hospital, when it is built—which I hope it will be soon—to be contracted out to people outside the NHS, and I do not believe that my constituents want that either.

Moreover, as the hon. Member for Hazel Grove pointed out, the PFI is so bureaucratic and the rules relating to approvals so cumbersome that the scheme could be seriously delayed. I do not want the PFI to operate in that way: I do not want it to delay schemes, and to ensure that they disappear. We need that new hospital in Ulverston, and I want to make certain that we get it. The PFI has become something of a smokescreen to hide cuts in public sector capital spending—and, I suspect, an example of the kind of dubious creative accountancy for which the Government have become notorious over many years.

I do not think that the further round of cuts in the Ministry of Defence budget has been mentioned, at least today. I am sure that everyone supports the case for increased efficiency in all Departments—there can be no argument against it—but it is now proposed that a further £500 million of cuts this year, a further £500 million next year and a further £400 million the year after that should be found in efficiency savings. Those savings were not identified in the "Front Line First" study this time last year; they are to be made on top of the savings identified then.

If those are genuine efficiency savings, there can be no argument. My only concern in that event would relate to why they were not identified earlier, as the failure to identify them clearly represents a substantial loss to the taxpayer. If, however, the £500 million this year and the total of £1.4 billion over the next three years is to be found from the MOD's procurement programmes, the cuts should be resisted. I see no justification for further large cuts of that kind, especially as they affect the Royal Navy—which, as many hon. Members know, has a substantial base in my constituency. Two big programmes are coming up, for the replacement of submarines that the Navy needs in the future and for new assault landing ships. I do not want either programme to be delayed. I do not believe that there is any military argument for delay, and I hope that whoever winds up the debate will be able to reassure me. *[Interruption.]* Does the Chancellor wish to intervene?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. I was just sitting here sympathising with the hon. Gentleman, who represents a lone voice in the Labour party in expressing doubts about defence cuts. But he is, of course, the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness. His distinguished predecessor, Albert Booth, used to find himself rather alone on that subject.

Having listened to all his hon. Friends asking for more to be spent on everything else while asking for taxation to go down to 10p in the pound, does the hon. Gentleman really believe that there is the slightest prospect of Labour's not trying to cut the defence budget to make room for some of that?

Mr. Hutton: I was simply saying that, if these are efficiency savings, I think that every hon. Member would agree that we need to continue to make efficiency gains.

Mr. Clarke: I am trying to help the hon. Gentleman. I did not intend to stand up and attack him. I can reassure him that these are efficiency savings, which are not based on any cuts in procurement. He was right to ask the question, which interests people in Barrow and Furness, but he will have to protect them from the rest of the Labour party if it is ever near to taking office.

Mr. Hutton: I do not want us to have an argument about the matter, although I suspect that we are about to have one.

None of my constituents will take lectures from Conservative Ministers, or other Conservative Members, about cuts in defence expenditure. Since 1991, billions of pounds worth of programmes have been cut from the expected work profile of Vickers Shipbuilders and Engineering—capital projects and procurement programmes. The result, in terms of job losses, must be clear even to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nearly 10,000 jobs have been lost from the VSEL shipyard in Barrow since 1991.

I am not arguing against efficiency savings; I support them. I do not want money to be wasted anywhere in the public sector. I do not, however, want substantial cuts to be made in front-line equipment that the armed forces need if they are to defend and protect the country's interests internationally and in NATO, and I do not believe that my hon. Friends want that either. There is no consensus in the House of Commons for such cuts.

I am glad that the Chancellor has confirmed that there will be no further procurement cuts in the MOD's budget; my constituents will welcome that news. It may surprise some of the Chancellor's Government colleagues, but I am grateful for the assurance.

This Budget will make no lasting impression. There is a growing gap between ministerial rhetoric about the state of the economy and the way in which our constituents experience the economy in their own lives. That growing gap between rhetoric and reality, which underscores everything that the Chancellor has said in the Budget debate, is one reason why I expect the Budget to be regarded with contempt as a pathetic attempt by the right hon. and learned Gentleman to regalvanise support for his dispirited and now degenerate Government. I do not believe that hon. Members—especially Conservative Members—will do themselves any favours by supporting this contemptible Budget.

6.38 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): It seems that we are all agreed on at least one matter: this is unquestionably a Budget for another Budget rather than for a general election in 1996. It is none the worse for that; Budgets dubbed general election winners—or, indeed, general election losers—have an uncertain historical record. What matters is the proper management of the economy and the electorate's perception of it as it affects them, their families and even their neighbours. That failure was at the root of Labour's loss of office in 1979, and it has been at the root of the lack of electoral success in all the long years since which Labour has enjoyed—if that is the right word—in opposition.

We are experiencing an uncanny echo of those days, but this time it is in France where, instead of the International Monetary Fund, the German Bundesbank is writing the script. I wonder how many business men in this country realise that what is happening in France has far more profound effects on our economic and political prospects than the Budget, with its fiscal adjustment of 1 per cent. of total expenditure and 0.5 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Market realities, monetary policy and exchange and interest rate movements are far more serious determinants of the future economic prosperity and well-being of those whom we represent, whether rich or poor, young or old, employed or unemployed, and in those respects the Budget, although worth while in itself, is like holding a candle to the sun.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) mentioned the awful events in France. The recession, the unemployment and the resultant out-of-control public finances and public sector anarchy result from applying, come what may, the straitjacket of an overvalued currency in a single-minded obsession with monetary union, with reaching the Maastricht criteria and with eventual abolition of the franc and adoption of the Euro-mark by the turn of the century. How right my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was to negotiate that single currency opt-out for us.

I know that the Cabinet is uneasy about policy on monetary union and the abolition of the pound, but as I am on the Back Benches I am, thankfully, not bound by such collective responsibility. I am also flushed by the recent letter that I received from my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip telling me how much he appreciates my "unblemished voting record" in the last Session. Perhaps I can afford to spend a little of that credit in saying that if France is forced by the unions and by student-led turmoil—to which the French Government will probably soon capitulate, as they have so many times in the past—to release the franc from its straitjacket and let it float free, the cheers that should go up in the House, and from No. 10 Downing street no less, ought to be heard in Paris. The consequences of that in setting back the ridiculous timetable for monetary union and the single currency would lead to a greatly improved competitive age for us all. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor would certainly recognise the benefits for his next Budget.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martin: No.

Throughout Europe, interest rates would come down with greater confidence, which is precisely what is required here, and the Government might even be encouraged to rule out any question of abolishing the pound in the lifetime of the next Parliament. In saying so, our backs, unlike those of the French, will clearly be turned against further damaging European integration which neither people in this country nor the overwhelming number of businesses want. Nothing could be more drastic than the adoption of a single currency, which is the absolute essence, the heart and soul, of integration, which would bring with it not only impossible pressure to adopt the social chapter in due course but compliance with all the other anti-competitive Euro-nonsense measures that would undoubtedly be forced on us once the great currency plunge had been taken.

I shall now turn to matters that are specifically dealt with in the Budget. I say quite frankly that I would have welcomed bigger tax cuts, but taxes can come down only if the state takes less. In that context, I welcome the Government's determination to reduce below 40p in every pound the amount of national earnings that are taken by public expenditure. If we can achieve that with further tax cuts, I have no doubt that we shall discover that the consequential growth that is generated will produce more pounds in taxation to pay for the teachers, the doctors, the nurses, the police officers, and so on, which we require and which the Budget has also produced. That is welcome.

That is the answer to the old socialist claim that one person's tax cut is another person's loss. Such a claim presumes that the national income remains the same, but what in fact happens is that more national wealth is created when enterprise is encouraged in a low-tax, high-incentive economy such as the type mentioned recently by no less a person than the Governor of Hong Kong. In my experience, he has not always been so closely associated with promoting such economic views.

On a related matter, may I say that those who rely on opinion poll evidence of voting intentions—that people would rather more was spent on education than on lower taxes—have been shown by the Budget that that is a facile approach and a false choice in a prudently managed economy. With such management, we can have both. That brings me to those who wish to see change and reform to improve the working of the welfare state rather than damage it, which change and reform are often misrepresented as seeking to do. I wholly agree with what the Chancellor said when he presented his Budget. He said:

> "the British people need to be prepared and equipped to embrace change in a flexible way. They will be more willing to do that if they know that high-quality schools, health care and a safety net for the unemployed, the disabled and the old are there if and when they need them."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1058.]

That is what I, too, entered politics to promote. Those objectives are often wrongly taken to be the exclusive preserve of so-called one-nation Toryism, and equally often mischievously contrasted with the aims of those who press for change in the means of achieving them.

Of course the welfare state can and does help to deliver all these good objectives with which no one can argue, but they are not achieved wholly through reliance on the way in which our welfare state and economy operate today compared with what seemed sufficient yesterday or in 1945 or at any time since. If the welfare state as it has been operated has indeed created one nation, it is difficult to explain how, despite more and more money being poured into it year after year, it cannot under any Government sustain full employment or comprehensively tackle serious worries about violent crime, vandalism, drug abuse or family breakdown, to mention just some of the issues that are on the minds of my constituents.

Many people believe not only that too easy access to the benefits of our welfare state contribute to all those problems but that the burdens of taxation, particularly on the working poor to pay for them, fuel the disincentive to work for a living and drive a wedge between those in receipt of benefit and those who do not qualify for it. My definition of one-nation Toryism embraces not only the Chancellor's objectives but the means to bring them about. Public expenditure is required, of course—less of it, but certainly a great deal of it—with private sector methods to make the best use of it in serving the public, more encouragement of self-help, of saving, of

[Mr. Martin]

independence rather than dependence, and more action to encourage social responsibility through individual rather than collective state-run action. We need more trust in terms of people keeping their own money, and more belief in the benefits of doing that, and we need more recognition that the pursuit of profitable enterprise serves the public and that it could not succeed if it did not. Those who want reform to bring about such changes are not living in cloud cuckoo land. They are inhabiting this land and they are mindful of votes.

Some people's votes for parties or Governments may depend on a crude assessment of how much taxpayers' money—miscalled public money or, even worse, disguised in jargon as resources—is spent to buy them. The Labour and Liberal Democrat parties exist on that belief. But I represent a substantial number of people who are not motivated solely by such considerations and who do not have such trust in the all-powerful state. Whether they sometimes forget it between general elections, they are Tories and they are one-nation Tories too.

6.49 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) did not give way to me. I was going to put the far from facetious point to him that, if he believes, as I am sure he does, that in the past three years one of the few successful bright spots in the United Kingdom economy has been the pound's accidental devaluation and depreciation after the exit from the exchange rate mechanism, the last thing that he would want is to see France, one of our major competitors, go down the same route, particularly if it provoked a series of competitive devaluations across the rest of the European Union. All the gains that the UK has had from that have been dependent on other countries not depreciating as well. He might want to consider that thought before he suggests that the French economy should get itself into a more competitive position than the UK.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I shall offer the Chancellor of the Exchequer the opportunity to defend the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I give credit to the Scottish Nationalists for having an economic policy for Scotland, which is more than the Labour party has, but is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that the best route for France is for the communist trade union and others to succeed, for the social security system to remain broke, for all the structural reforms in France that are needed to be defeated and for the country to seek resort to competitive devaluation? He makes it sound as though he thinks that the successful outcome of the strikes and the franc's devaluation is all that the French should aim for. That is what the Labour party used to do when it was in office.

Mr. Salmond: I am sure that the Chancellor has been listening to my remarks, but, clearly, he has not been listening to the remarks of his hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South, who was predicting as welcome the exit of the franc and the departure of French policy from the exchange rate mechanism, following the same path as the UK three years ago. I was merely pointing out that there is a competitive gain from that accidental policy three years ago. I know that the Chancellor does not like to acknowledge that—which is understandable as it removes any credit that he might want for his policies—but is it not true that, if other countries in the exchange rate mechanism follow a downward competitive devaluation, the competitive gain that the UK has experienced in the past three years will largely be written off? Whether it is a good or bad thing is neither here or there. The point is, that is a fact.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I shall allow the Chancellor one more attempt to explain his thinking on the matter.

Mr. Clarke: I know of no country that, since the war, has gained any economic advantage just by devaluing its currency. It is a mistake to start spreading the belief that devaluation is some sort of desirable activity.

Mr. Salmond: I was speaking about a belief that I know is widespread among Conservative Back Benchers. When the Chancellor deals with such points, he should turn around and address the atheists on the Conservative Back Benches who do not follow his position and who believe that any gain experienced in the past three years has been the result of his predecessor being humiliated and chased out of the exchange rate mechanism.

Having stirred the Conservative party into total revolt against the Chancellor, I shall go on to make my speech. I note that Conservative Members have taken some consolation from the argument that, many times, Budgets that are poorly received develop like fine wines through the course of time. It is also true that some enthusiastically received Budgets have turned into vinegar later. I think in particular of the 1988 Budget, which was ecstatically received by Conservative Members at the time. By the end of that year, however, most of them were rueing the day.

I want to offer the House a third possibility: a Budget that is poorly received initially may remain poorly received over a period. I suspect that that is what will happen in relation to the fate of the Chancellor's present Budget. I noted that Bill Keegan, commenting on Sunday in what was a friendly column, given what he has written previously about the Chancellor and his predecessors, described the Budget as perhaps a "prisoner of failure". That is roughly right, because the Chancellor's room for manoeuvre was boxed in by a range of factors that are merely the result of this country's poor growth performance over the years. The Chancellor has therefore been reduced to manipulating his public sector borrowing requirement forecast and to giving an optimistic view of a surge in growth in a slowing economy.

In the past 16 years, the United Kingdom's growth performance has been poor by international comparisons. Those of us who were here for the economic debate that preceded the Budget will remember an exchange about whether it was appropriate or correct to make international comparisons with the UK from 1981 instead of 1979, when the Conservatives took office. The argument from the Government Benches was that it was unreasonable to count the first two years of their stewardship of the economy because, apparently, the problems of the period from 1979 to 1981 were not the fault of the then Chancellor of the Conservative party; they resulted from the winter of discontent whose effects were rolling through the UK economy.

Some of the disastrous things that happened to the UK in that two-year period might have had something to do with the deliberate policy options that were taken to transfer the taxation burden on to indirect taxation, thus increasing the inflation rate substantially. The exchange and interest rate policy set sterling at a rate that, in retrospect, I think everyone would regard as extremely uncompetitive. Certainly, the Tory Back Benchers who argue that devaluation has been the salvation of the UK economy in the past few years must surely accept that sterling's rate between 1979 and 1981 caused severe strains for the UK economy.

It is reasonable, therefore, for Opposition Members to say that, if the Government want to compare their record with other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, they should compare the record over the full 16 years of their stewardship of the economy, not conveniently omitting the first two years, when the economy effectively fell off the cliff and it was hardly surprising that it managed to scramble its way partly back up the precipice.

By virtually any international comparison, those 16 years have not been a good experience for the UK. It was the one major western European economy that had the benefit of a huge windfall gain from the North sea—£100 billion, a huge boost to the GDP, to the balance of payments and to Government revenue—yet, with that windfall, over those 16 years, the UK's average annual growth performance since 1979 has been 2 per cent. The average for the rest of the European Union is 2.1 per cent. That is not a huge difference, but all those European Union countries did not have the benefit of that huge windfall gain.

What makes it even worse is that, in the previous 16 years—from 1963 to 1979, when the economy was run by unreconstructed socialists such as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and the late Lord Wilson—the UK's average growth rate was 2.6 per cent., considerably better than the average rate over the past 16 years, so neither by the comparison with what previously happened in this country nor by any fair international comparison is it reasonable to describe performance in the past 16 years as anything but mediocre.

Especially in Scotland, we consider the experience of the other oil-rich country of Europe, the small nation of Norway, which has experienced a growth rate of 2.9 per cent. over the past 16 years and which, from a position in 1979 roughly equivalent in terms of GDP per capita with Scotland and the UK, is now roughly 25 per cent. more prosperous. That is the penalty that we have paid in the past 16 years for this country's mediocre economic performance and for the Chancellor being a "prisoner of failure", as Bill Keegan said about the Budget.

I am tempted to consider further the oil benefit that the Chancellor and his predecessors have had, which was followed by the privatisation benefit to the PSBR. In this Budget, we can detect what the third great trick with the PSBR figures will be: the private finance initiative. Just as oil and privatisation proceeds massaged the PSBR, the private finance initiative is set to take its place as the great camouflage to hide the underlying position in public finances, which is desperate.

My party and I and our allies in Plaid Cymru will vote against the 24p basic rate of income tax, although not, I suspect, for entirely the same reasons as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) set out earlier. It is reasonable, after 21 Tory tax rises—£1,000 a year for the average family—for the Chancellor to give back some of that money to the people from whom he has taken it. If it is £3 billion, that is fair enough, but a choice must be made as to how that £3 billion would best be spent. That is why on the Order Paper we have tabled our choice, which would bring the low rate of income tax, the first rate of income tax, towards 15p instead of the basic [illegible] towards 24p.

I can claim fairly substantial credentials in arguing for a lower starting rate. I first put forward a proposal for a starting rate of 20p in the SNP budget before the 1992 general election. No sooner had I made that suggestion than I was pounced upon by the then Tory party chairman in Scotland, Lord Sanderson, who said that it was an idiotic idea and that no one would be convinced by

"that sort of O-grade economics."

Within two weeks, the then Chancellor encompassed that proposal in his 1992 Budget. Obviously, he was convinced by O-grade economics.

This year, a week or so before the Budget, we said that it was time that the starting rate of income tax moved towards 15p. Our Budget was immediately attacked by the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, who said it was a "back-of-the-envelope calculation". Within hours of that attack, the shadow Chancellor announced that he, too, now believed in moving towards a starting rate of taxation not of 15p, but of 10p. I was outbid by the shadow Chancellor.

I am confused by the Labour party's decision not to vote on the 24p tax proposal. I can understand that Labour does not want the Tories to claim that Labour Members are not interested in helping ordinary people through tax cuts, at a time when most family budgets are under severe pressure. However, what I cannot understand is why, having chosen a different priority from the Chancellor for tax cuts—a low starting rate—the Labour party did not put that on the Order Paper and vote against the Chancellor's proposal to reduce the basic rate to 24p.

It is quite clear that, if £3 billion is available for tax cuts, it is possible to lower the basic rate to 24p and to do a few other things on the side or it is possible to go for a 15p starting rate—but it is not possible to do both. By accepting the 24p proposal, the Labour party is excluding the 15p proposal from future calculations. Therefore, even at this very late stage, it would make me extremely happy if it reconsidered its position and voted against the 24p proposal. If there are tax cuts available, it would be better not to have them in a range from £50 to £1,000 a year depending on family income levels, but instead to consolidate those tax cuts at about £200 a year for most earners—as would happen if the low starting rate option were chosen.

I want to raise the question of VAT on fuel. Earlier this evening, I pointed out that when, on 23 January, the SNP moved an almost identical amendment to tonight's Labour amendment, the Labour party decided not to vote in favour of it—although one or two brave souls defied the Labour Whips.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Seven.

Mr. Salmond: My hon. Friend tells me that seven Labour Members defied the Whips. I welcome the fact that the Labour party has repented since its mistake in January.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the circumstances are entirely different? Our vote earlier this year was intended to ensure that VAT on fuel was held down to 8 per cent. By voting in the way that the SNP wanted, there was a possibility that we could have ended up with VAT on fuel at 17.5 per cent. We were not prepared to put our victory on VAT on fuel at risk for the sake of SNP gesturism.

Mr. Salmond: Earlier this evening, I heard the shadow Chancellor mumbling just that explanation to the deputy leader of the Labour party, who sensibly did not take it up. As the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) knows, under the procedures of the House a clause must be agreed before an amendment can be made to it. The clause relating to 8 per cent. VAT passed without a Division, before the 5 per cent. amendment was called. The end result of Labour party posturing was that the opportunity to reduce VAT on fuel to 5 per cent. was lost. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should apologise to the people who are suffering the consequences of that posturing rather than, 10 months after the event, coming out with some sort of lame explanation.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman should apologise for his remarks, as he will in due course when we exchange correspondence on this matter and I demonstrate that I am right. Is it not the case that, before the procedures that he mentioned, in law VAT was due to rise to 17.5 per cent.? We succeeded in securing an amendment to the Bill, which had not then been passed, to keep it down to 8 per cent. At that point, a wrecking amendment was moved to reduce it to 5 per cent. Will he accept that if there had been a possibility that the 5 per cent. amendment would be accepted, the Tories who voted with us on the 8 per cent. amendment might not then have done so, so the 8 per cent. option would have been lost, the 5 per cent. option would have been rejected and we would have been left with VAT on fuel at 17.5 per cent? That would have been the consequence of what the SNP wanted.

Mr. Salmond: That was not just the longest but the most convoluted explanation I have ever heard. I remind the hon. Gentleman that by 23 January the Chancellor had accepted an 8 per cent. rate. The Conservative party did not even divide against that rate. The only issue that remained to be determined was whether that 8 per cent. should be reduced to 5 per cent. The Labour party decided to sit and do nothing on that issue—as it intends to do again this evening on another issue—rather than take the opportunity to reduce the rate. No amount of post-match explanation can alter that fact. The only party changing its attitude is the Labour party.

I welcome Labour's belated conversion to a VAT rate of 5 per cent. on fuel. I will not refuse to go into the Lobby with the Labour Members this evening just because it is now a Labour amendment to reduce the rate to 5 per cent. If the Labour party extended the same courtesy to other Opposition parties' amendments as we do to Labour amendments, opposition in this House would be rather more formidable.

My last point on the Budget proposals relates to increased tax on fuel. It is a serious matter for hon. Members who represent rural constituencies. This Chancellor and his immediate predecessor set targets of real increases each year in fuel duties of 5 per cent. over and above the rate of inflation. This Chancellor has excelled himself—there is to be an 11 per cent. increase in certain duties. Rural areas that are highly dependent on transport to get goods into the shops will face higher prices for virtually every item in every shop.

That is being done, as are so many things—including the original imposition of VAT on fuel—in the name of meeting environmental targets. In fact, it is being done for the much baser motive of getting as much revenue as possible for the Government. One official survey was quoted in *The Economist*:

> "Higher fuel prices will do little to cut congestion. A study of five cities—Leeds, Bristol, Sheffield, Derby and Reading—by the Transport Research Laboratory, a recently privatised research unit, found that even if fuel costs were raised by 50 per cent. there would only be a 3-4 per cent. reduction in urban congestion."

The evidence shows that the Chancellor's motivation is the revenue that can be gathered for the Government, rather than any savings in energy and fuel that could be guaranteed by such a punitive policy.

When the Liberal Democrats suggested something similar during the Kincardine and Deeside by-election in 1991, the Conservative party greeted it as the saving of its campaign. Tories in that rural community argued strongly that it was a punitive policy being pursued by the Liberal Democrats without regard for the interests of the area. However, the Liberal Democrats were actually suggesting compensation for rural areas. The Chancellor is not suggesting any compensation. The SNP will vote against the increases in fuel duties. I hope that, on this occasion, we will be joined by other Opposition parties.

I want to speak about the Budget in a Scottish context. I would argue very strongly that the Scottish economy has two significant advantages over the economy of the United Kingdom as a whole. First, it experiences a relative lack of inflationary pressures when the economy is running at higher levels of output than at present. In the late 1980s, recovery in the economy was arrested in the United Kingdom, especially in the south-east of England, by spiralling house prices and other inflationary pressures. That was not evident in the Scottish economy to anything like the same degree. There is much convincing evidence that the Scottish economy could be run at a higher level of output without succumbing to inflationary pressures.

The second major advantage, which was spelled out yet again today, is in the export performance of Scotland. Export productivity in manufacturing industry runs at a level around a third higher than that in the rest of the UK. Scotland's export growth is running much higher than that in the rest of UK. Per capita, Scotland exports more than Germany, Japan or the United States of America.

That is again a sign that the balance of payments constraint, which has been the undoing of so many Chancellors—and may yet be the undoing of this one—is not prevalent in the Scottish economy to anything like the same degree. Rather than the tame, lame affair that the Chancellor presented last week, a Scottish Chancellor, producing a Scottish Budget, could have introduced measures for output, growth, employment and for social justice.

7.10 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): We are in the fifth day of the debate on the Budget. Having sat through some of the earlier days, I think that it is improving as the days go by—somewhat like England's performance in the recent test match. Tonight, Conservative Members have made a series of excellent speeches, beginning with those made my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), and followed by my hon. Friends the Members for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin). They all made some fine points.

I should like, first, to deal with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) at the beginning of his speech. I hope that the hon. Member now understands the Government's policy on exchange rates. There is no difference between the views of Conservative Back Benchers and Ministers. There is no difference between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and me, for example. We all believe in floating exchange rates. It is as simple as that. We have learnt the lessons of membership of the exchange rate mechanism and we now all believe in floating exchange rates. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has told the House again and again that he has no target for the exchange rate.

As for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South on France, I would say that there is no benefit to the United Kingdom from France's maintaining an unrealistic exchange rate that damages the French economy and political stability there. I want Europe's economy to be healthy as a whole. I want France, which is a major export market for the United Kingdom, to do well and to prosper through political and economic stability. There is no difference at all on that point among Conservative Members.

The further we get away from the initial rhetoric on the Budget, the more constructive our debate becomes. I greatly welcome the measures that the Chancellor has introduced to control public spending, especially those in social security to restrict housing benefit and combat fraud. He rightly pointed out that projected social security spending over the next three years had been cut significantly.

The proposed social security reforms cannot, however, be the end of the matter. The Red Book shows that social security spending this year is being increased by £1 billion over previous plans and that, next year, it will increase by £1.2 billion over existing plans. Despite healthy economic growth for a number of years and the Treasury forecast of 3 per cent. growth next year, overall social security spending is set to increase by 4.5 per cent. in next year's estimates. That is one of the biggest expenditure increases announced in the Budget. There is plenty of scope for extra measures in that area and I hope that my right hon. Friends will continue to introduce measures to cut fraud and end the abuses that are rife among social security claimants.

Overall, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has made it clear that he is an adherent to firm control of public spending. There is, however, sometimes danger in making our rhetoric too tough. If the reality does not match the rhetoric, we do not benefit. Most people believe that the Government have been cutting public expenditure, but the figures in the Red Book show that in no year has public expenditure been reduced in real terms. Treasury Ministers have sometimes planned to reduce public expenditure in real terms, but the reality is that it has increased in real terms each year, so we should not let our rhetoric become too harsh. It will not fool the financial markets and it might mislead voters.

Nevertheless, the Budget is much tighter than is normal a year before an election. It appears that the Government have learnt some important lessons on public expenditure, especially if one compares next year's spending with, say, the levels set for 1992-93. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) had control of the nation's purse strings, public expenditure was increased in real terms by some 5.7 per cent. We have come a long way in controlling public expenditure and I applaud the levels set in the Budget.

The Labour party has derided Conservative achievements on inflation since 1979, but if anybody had said in 1979 that, under a Conservative Government, inflation could be brought down to a level that had not be seen for 40 or 50 years, that the horror of inflation—it was a horror for many people—could be brought to an end, everyone would have said that it would be a great achievement.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that inflation was negative during the depression? People would not say that the country was exactly booming then.

Mr. Legg: I am not talking about negative inflation. Indeed, I am an advocate of ensuring that we do not have it. I shall make further comments on monetary policy later. Under the Conservatives, inflation has been brought down to a level that has not been seen for 40 or 50 years. Following the hon. Gentleman's comments, I am afraid that I must again remind the House that inflation reached 27 per cent. under Labour.

The prospects for inflation are good. In the coming year, it will fall further—because we have a very competitive economy. Competition is particularly keen in energy prices, for example. The electricity rebate—derided by the Labour party—will make a big difference to consumers. The productivity and efficiency savings achieved in the public utilities will work their way through to people's pockets.

Indirect tax increases have been substantially reduced, the mortgage rate is falling and many firms will begin to destock in the coming months. Those trends will provide further competitive pressures in the economy. It would not surprise me if inflation came down to between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. over the coming year.

Some concern has been expressed about monetary policy, and especially about the growth in broad money, M4. It has grown towards the top of its monitoring range in recent months, but we should not over-worry about that trend. Developments in the financial world, such as the demutualisation of building societies and substantial takeovers, are important factors in that trend. There is not yet sufficient evidence to make us over-concerned about the current level of expansion of M4. The favourable inflation background should lead to further reductions in interest rates.

There are a number of forecasts in the Red Book to which I should like to draw the House's attention. I especially welcome the section that deals with the

[Mr. Legg]

economy in the medium term. It has been greatly expanded and I draw attention to it because it makes a number of important points. It highlights the substantial improvements to the supply side of the economy that have occurred during the past few years and the significant and substantial margin of spare capacity that still exists in the economy. It points to there being plenty of scope for non-inflationary growth in the economy and an improvement in the long-term trend rate of growth in the UK economy. The Treasury maintains that the sustainable long-term rate of growth in the economy has increased from 2.25 per cent. to 2.5 per cent. That is an extremely welcome development. Spare capacity and improvements in the supply side are safeguards against higher inflation in the medium term and provide the opportunity for the economy to grow at above the levels we have seen in recent months.

There has been considerable comment about the Treasury's projection of 3 per cent. growth in 1996. This morning, the Treasury Select Committee interviewed Treasury officials on that and other points. They maintained that it was possible to achieve that level of growth without further interest rate cuts. However, it appears that their assumptions on that score are optimistic. Their view is that exports will increase markedly in the coming year although the figures on world trade in the Red Book show that the rate of increase in world trade will fall. They have extremely benign views on the impact of reductions in stock levels in UK manufacturing and commerce and they hope for a reduction in the savings ratio.

It seems unlikely that a 3 per cent. rate of growth can be achieved without further interest rate cuts. The weekend press talked in terms of interest rate cuts of 0.25 per cent. I believe that, for confidence to come back into the economy and for the growth rate of 3 per cent. to be achieved, we shall need an initial interest rate reduction of 0.5 per cent. and, probably, further reductions as the months pass.

I draw attention to the comments of Professor Congdon, one of the Treasury's six wise men, on the 3 per cent. growth forecast. After the Budget, he said:

> "If GDP growth ran at 0.3 per cent. per quarter until the end of quarter 1 1996, the annualised growth rate in the remaining three quarters would have to run at 6 per cent. (ie. at a boom rate) in order to deliver the 3 per cent. growth figure projected by the Treasury for the calendar year as a whole."

Quite a lot must happen if that growth rate is to be achieved, especially as the growth rate for the most recent quarter was due entirely to stock building. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove said, the Chancellor will have to make some further easing. The determination and good judgment that he showed last May in countering the views of the Governor of the Bank of England on interest rates will have to be brought into play again if our economy is to perform at a healthy rate next year.

There has been much talk in recent weeks about Iain Macleod and his legacy to the Conservative party. It has been right to bring Iain Macleod to the fore. Some hon. Members might remember that he was the shadow Chancellor when the Conservatives were in opposition from 1964 to 1970. He had some extremely robust views on the level of spending in the economy and on the consequent level of taxation. In October 1965, he described his views as follows:

> "There is a limit, and that we are already beyond it, to the percentage that we can take of the GDP in public expenditure and to the burden that one can put on personal taxation without a dramatic drop in efficiency and enterprise and there I take my stand."

He said that there was a limit to the level of public spending that we could have as a proportion of gross domestic product and, consequently, a limit to the amount of taxation that could be borne to pay for that expenditure. He made his comments in 1965, when the level of spending by the state, which he considered unacceptable, was 35 per cent. of GDP. We are now battling with expenditure levels of 42 per cent. of GDP.

We see in the Red Book the consequences of setting expenditure at that level. Once it gets there, we have Budget deficits that generate extra interest burdens on the economy. Last year, public spending was 42 per cent. of GDP. The level of public expenditure this year is, again, 42 per cent. of GDP. If the state becomes very big, it is difficult to reduce its size—it acquires a momentum of its own. What is more, it becomes difficult to raise taxation to pay for the expenditure. That is what is happening at the moment. The Treasury has had to cut its forecasts of the amount of taxation that the economy will bear.

Last year, the Treasury forecast what revenue could be raised in the current year. In reality, the revenue take in the current year will be £8 billion less than was forecast. For the coming year, it will be £12 billion less than forecast. There are many reasons why tax revenues are down. Admittedly the economy is growing less quickly, but people also have a natural reluctance to pay high levels of tax. If high levels of tax are set, people seek shelters, and there are plenty of shelters in the UK economy, such as personal equity plans and occupational pension schemes. Many of us know that our constituents use far less orthodox shelters to escape higher levels of tax.

Part of the purpose of having a unified Budget was to take tax and spending decisions together. We shall have to look much more firmly at the spending side so that we do not impose excessive burdens that cannot be funded by taxation.

There are a number of other important changes set out in the Red Book. It has not been brought to the attention of the House that the Maastricht criteria on the budget deficit, which we were led to believe we would achieve in 1996-97, have now gone by the board. Paragraph 4.10 of the Red Book shows that, in the last full fiscal year before decisions will be made about membership of a single currency, the forecast for Britain's public spending deficit is some 3.5 per cent. of GDP. That exceeds the 3 per cent. Maastricht criterion.

How wise my right hon. and learned Friend was when he said in his Budget statement that the public sector borrowing requirement was the difference between two very large numbers. Forecasts are often missed by quite a wide margin. Basing so much of one's economic policy around trying to hit precise public spending deficit targets each year, in strict percentage terms, risks grave dangers for any economy.

We have not been able to meet our target for the PSBR in the current year because there has not been as much growth in the economy as we forecast last year. That is the problem that exists in France today. The French cannot meet the Maastricht criteria because they have to hold down the level of growth in their economy to defend an artificial exchange rate which requires higher interest rates than the domestic economy can bear. If politicians pursue artificial criteria come what may, they will only drive their economies into deflation.

I note with pleasure what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said about the difficulties of forecasting the percentage of the Government deficit each year and I congratulate him on his stance at the Economic and Finance Council meeting some six or seven days ago. He met other European Finance Ministers the day before the Budget to consider the Waigel stability pact, which placed further requirements on member states to the effect that, if a single currency were to be achieved, they would no longer have to aim for a 3 per cent. budget deficit but for a 1 per cent. deficit.

Those of us who have argued that a single currency would reduce sovereign parliaments such as this one to no more than rate-capped councils could have no better example of what that would mean in practice than the proposals of Herr Waigel, the German Finance Minister. I am relieved that my right hon. and learned Friend opposed those proposals, and I hope that he will continue to oppose any similar ones put before European Finance Ministers.

The Budget is another welcome step in rebalancing the economy. Further steps must be taken to ensure that it achieves the forecasts for the coming 12 months that are set out in the Red Book. If we are to achieve them, there will have to be further interest rate cuts to bring further confidence to British business and consumers. When we get to next November's Budget, I am sure that we shall see a further instalment of the Chancellor's prudent management, which will enable the economy to generate considerable growth during the remaining years of the century.

7.33 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Small Heath): I have always believed that Budgets should be judged by the reaction from one's constituents. My constituents are interested not in figures in the Red Book but in facts in the real world. Last week's Budget did not bring about great dancing on the streets of Small Heath or the rest of Birmingham. Indeed, it brought a rather long yawn, but behind the yawn there was real anger. Once again, the people of Birmingham have seen missed opportunities.

My constituency is one of the most deprived in the country. On all the indices of deprivation, Small Heath comes near the top of the list. There are 6,632 people unemployed in my constituency. Male unemployment is 26.2 per cent. Overall unemployment is 19.9 per cent. of the working population. Small Heath has one of the largest numbers of single-parent families in the country.

What has the Budget done for people in my constituency? I put aside the comments made in the traditional Tory newspapers such as, in *The Sun*:

> "It was about as inspiring as a cold kipper",

in *The Daily Mail*, "Where is the magic?" and in *The Daily Express*, "too little too late." I put those comments to one side and judge the Budget against what it does for the unemployed, the deprived and the single-parent families in my constituency. The Budget abolished the community action programme. That did not do much for the unemployed. Likewise, the 4 per cent. cut in job training. The freezing of one parent benefit did not help single-parent families very much. While 27p off a bottle of whisky is to be welcomed, it does not have much effect on my constituents. Nor does the 1p off income tax.

We have heard the Chancellor say on a number of occasions that this is a Budget for recovery. The Conservative party has been in power for 16 years, so what is the recovery from? Is it recovery from the stewardship of the Chancellor's predecessors, Mr. Howe, Mr. Lawson, Mr. Major and Mr. Lamont? Is it recovery from the ravages of Thatcherism? If that was the case, the Budget could be welcomed, but I regret that it has nothing to do with any of those things.

The Budget that we heard last week did nothing to deal with the real problems of the economy because the economy remains fundamentally weak. The Budget has done nothing for private investment while public investment has been slashed. The forecast for investment growth is 1 per cent for 1995 and for 1996. The forecast for overall growth in the economy has been revised downwards to 2.1 per cent. The deficit in the balance of payments is forecast to increase to £6.5 billion in 1995.

In addition, as has been pointed out in this long debate on the Budget, the overall level of taxation has increased since 1992 by the equivalent of 7p on income tax. So a typical family now pays £670 a year more than when the Tories first came to power.

During all that time, the taxpayers of Britain have had to bear the cost of £20 billion a year to keep more than 2 million people doing nothing. The figure of 2 million is, if the House will forgive the pun, a conservative estimate. As everyone in the country knows, the employment statistics are fiddled. They have been changed so often by the Conservative party since it came to power that they have no credence whatever. The real level of unemployment, particularly in many of the unemployment blackspots, is now far higher than the official figures suggest. That is the price of 16 years of Conservative rule.

Let us consider the one thing that the Conservative party always used to be able to boast about—the public sector borrowing requirement. There is nothing wrong with borrowing to invest. Indeed, I look upon it as good housekeeping, as did a previous occupant of No. 10 Downing street. However, at present we are not investing in the future.

Investment growth is forecast to go up by only 1 per cent. next year and 1 per cent. the year after. The public sector borrowing requirement is scheduled to increase to £29 billion, despite the benefit of the proceeds of North sea oil and privatisation, purely because of the failure of the policies of the Government—the lack of growth in the economy and the huge cost that the public purse has to bear for keeping well over 2 million people unemployed.

The Budget did nothing for my constituents. What was last week's charade really about? It was all about the next general election. More than anything else, it was about the Conservative party trying to save as many seats as possible. The Chancellor had to appear restrained this year to be able to indulge in a massive give-away extravaganza in the Budget next year. If this Budget shows anything, it is that the next general election will be held in April or May 1997. This is an a cast-iron certainty.

[Mr. Roger Godsiff]

The right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) is not here, but I have great respect for what he said. He let the cat out of the bag. He referred to the 1p income tax cut working its way through into pay packets in April 1996. That is right. That is when it will come in. The 2p or 3p tax cuts which are going to be introduced in next year's Budget will look good in pay packets in April 1997.

The Tory party has always believed that it can con its way back into power. It believes that it can fool most of the people most of the time. Next time, the people will see through the con trick being played on them. They will see through the 2p or 3p tax cuts that will be offered up in next year's Budget.

The people will—I am sure that the Opposition parties will remind the electorate of it again and again—look back to the highlight of Tory economic policy in this Parliament. That occurred on so-called black Wednesday in September 1992. What a glorious day that was for the country and the Government. There were two increases in interest rates in one day; billions of pounds of the country's money was poured down the drain as the Chancellor fought as hard as he possibly could to stay in something that the Prime Minister took us out of at the end of 24 hours. It was an absolute shambles from one end to the other. That is the Government's record.

In the ensuing three years, the Tory party has attempted to try to recover from the disaster of September 1992. It will offer any bribes or incentives to try to buy the electorate next time. I believe that the people have seen through the Tories. Certainly, my constituents do not want 1p off income tax or 27p off a bottle of whisky; they want a general election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): There are 85 minutes available before the Front Bench winding-up speeches and eight hon. Members hoping to catch my eye. I hope that they will all be successful.

7.43 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): We have had a serious and thoughtful debate. Of course, only a handful of discriminating hon. Members are here to participate in the event and hardly anyone is here to report it. We have at least the comforting knowledge that we are talking to posterity. Talking of posterity, the last time that I was able to participate in a Budget debate was in 1990. I took the precaution of looking up my speech on that occasion on 1 May 1990—on what the Labour party used to call May day but about which they are no longer keen to be reminded.

Lord Rosebery, the former Liberal Prime Minister, once said that nobody reads old speeches any more than they read old sermons; the more glittering they were at the time, the more dolorous the quest. I was pleased to read what I said on that occasion because it will help me put this year's Budget in the perspective of history.

In the period running up to 1990, we were in the opposite stage of the economic cycle to the one in which we have found ourselves recently. It was a period of runaway boom following the rapid expansion of the money supply in 1987. To compare 1986 with 1987 will perhaps help to explain why we are in our present circumstances.

Through the whole of 1986, M3 expanded by less than £200 million whereas in March 1987 alone there was an expansion of nearly £1 billion; in April nearly £2 billion; and in May, nearly £3 billion. That was a case of pouring petrol on the flames if ever there was. Why did it happen? We were shadowing the deutschmark and were effectively members of the exchange rate mechanism, although we dared not admit it. The consequence of that was the runaway boom which we then had to counteract. That gave us three years of painful recession from which we have been slowly and gradually emerging, but it has been patchy progress.

All those years ago, before we joined the ERM, on Second Reading of the Finance Bill in 1990, I said:

> "Joining the ERM is no soft option. We have a choice. Either we can use interest rates to stabilise the currency, in which the case the economy will go up and down, or we can stabilise the economy, in which case the currency will go and up down. There is no way of wishing away that distinction and that choice."—*[Official Report*, 1 May 1990; Vol. 171, c. 969.]

Unfortunately, we made the wrong choice on that occasion and joined the ERM—enthusiastically supported by virtually every Opposition party, all of which wanted us to go in earlier. The Liberal party is still committed to that and, so far as one can discern from its policy pronouncements, even the Labour party is committed to shoving us back into that hell-hole.

It is a tragedy that virtually the whole of the last Parliament, and the whole of this one, has been consumed by that fundamental policy error, which has had tragic consequences for our party. It has wrecked our public finances and our party's reputation for good housekeeping because of the £50 billion deficit that we have had to massage down by tax increases that we would never have wished to bring in. It has pole-axed home owners and small businesses. I have had no need to dilate upon the property slump and its effects. That is again painful for Conservatives who had hoped that the economy would be run in a different way. It compromised our tax-cutting image and reversed, for a time, our policy of rolling back the state.

I very much agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) said. For all the talk about cuts in public expenditure, over all the years we have been in office since 1979, there have never been any cuts in real terms in public expenditure. One has only to consult table 6A.1 at the back of the Red Book to find all the figures. In every year without exception, there has been a real-terms rise in public expenditure. Consequently, we have not been able, until this year, to re-embark upon those long-term Tory policies which were so successful electorally in the 1980s and which I believe can still win us the general election when it comes in 1996 or 1997.

It is certainly instructive to look across the channel at what is happening to the French Administration as the people of France grapple with the Procrustean bed of the Maastricht criteria. That is utterly perverse because the French economy is in severe recession and the French Government are embarking upon an unprecedentedly contractionary fiscal policy which will exacerbate the recession and turn it into the sort of slump, to which the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) referred, that occurred in the 1930s. That was caused precisely by the contractionary policies of the Federal Reserve Bank—an independent bank, independent of politicians.

Wrong-headed policies were followed to the immense cost of an entire generation before the war—a mistake which we will, I hope, never make again.

The Banque de France is now no more than a branch office of the Bundesbank and, as in 1940 to 1945, French economic policy is actually being dictated from across the Rhine. The French people have no voice, and the only way in which they can make their protest is on the streets. That is exactly what many feared might happen as a result of the theories that underlay the Maastricht treaty. They feared that as a result of attempting to enforce an artificial straitjacket on something which cannot be constrained by law, we would not make decisive moves towards the unity of Europe, but break its existing institutions and political structures.

I am delighted to see in the Chamber the Minister of State at the Foreign Office. He is conducting a rearguard exercise at the moment in Europe; he is trying to shine a searchlight of common sense upon the horrors that we see developing, and which for some extraordinary and incomprehensible reasons the political elites of the rest of Europe seem incapable of seeing.

We have been in a fortunate position ever since golden Wednesday 1992. As a Government we have been able to pursue our own independent monetary policy, which has been a tremendous success story. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will go down in history—perhaps rather surprisingly to some of us—as a sane, sensible and well-balanced Chancellor. He will have solid achievements to his name so long as he does not dart off into the theological complexities of the issue to which I just referred. I think that his tenure of office in this Parliament will demonstrate what strengths come through for a country when it determines its monetary policy according to its own needs. That is why I think we need to have further reductions in interest rates.

The Chancellor's good sense was demonstrated in the summer by the way in which he stood up to the Bank of England and refused to increase interest rates as the Governor wanted. I have the greatest admiration for the Governor, who recently gave me a free lunch at the Bank. I am not sure whether that disqualifies me from speaking in the debate under the new criteria. It was a jolly good lunch and, once one builds into it all the hidden costs and overheads of the Bank of England, it may well have breached the expenditure thresholds laid down in the Register of Members' Interests. That is something that Sir Gordon Downey may need to look at.

Technocrats who run policy as sensitive as monetary policy effectively run the whole economic policy of a Government, because that is the framework within which all other tax decisions are made. That is a recipe for disaster because technocrats arrive at the wrong conclusions, perhaps by more scientific methods, and when they do so, there is no democratic means of calling them to account. That is why in France today the Government are not being made accountable through the ballot box but by riots and demonstrations on the streets. That was exactly our experience under the last Labour Government. Such lack of accountability is not a recipe for success but disaster, and one that we should certainly avoid.

I welcome very much the return to the tax-cutting-agenda. The Budget should be judged according to the long-term perspective to which I referred at the beginning of my speech. All economies go up and down. There are economic cycles that cannot be wished away, and certainly cannot be legislated against. In this Budget, and those that preceded, we were obliged to increase taxes in order to maintain a reasonably balanced budgetary policy. Those increases should be seen as part of our long-term objective to reduce the proportion of national income taken by the state from the taxpayer, and spent for him on priorities that politicians rather than the people decide.

The last three Budgets taxed our economy virtually to a standstill, and even in the past three years growth has faltered from time to time. There is still a significant feeling of insecurity in the country. People fear for their jobs in the future and are anxious about the costs that they might have to encounter in their declining years. All sorts of reasons of that kind explain why the so-called feel-good factor has been elusive over the years.

The most obvious reason for the relative lack of a feel-good factor is to be found in a table that appears in the "Economic Trends" annual supplement, which was published only last week. That table shows the figures for disposable income per head of citizens in this country. If we look at the period from 1985 to 1990 there was about a 13 per cent. increase in real personal disposable income. In the period from 1990 to 1995 that figure had dropped to less than 5 per cent. The bulk of the growth in that time has occurred in the last few quarters, so it is clear that throughout most of those five years people have been worse off than they were at the height of the boom in 1990, or only marginally better off. No wonder people have felt sore at their experiences.

I have explained why we found ourselves in such an unfortunate position, and it is not a mistake that, I hope, we will make again. The Government do not have an exchange rate target, and although it is right to consider the exchange rate as one of many ingredients of economic management, it should not be given undue weight.

We have not seen any real spending cuts in the past 16 years, let alone recently. The Government's expenditure overall has been planned, from start to finish, to rise by about 12 per cent. in this Parliament compared with 4.5 per cent. in the previous Parliament. We have been far less stringent in our of control of public expenditure—partly because of the recession—in this Parliament than in the previous one. It can hardly be a credible allegation against the Government that we have been unduly Scrooge-like in our control of public expenditure.

Labour Governments are very much better at cutting public expenditure than Conservative ones because they have a little external help. That was clear after the 1967 devaluation, and after Denis Healey's famous trip and swift return from Heathrow airport back in 1976 when the IMF came on board. In the two years following that, the Labour Government were able to make a 7.5 per cent. cut in public expenditure in real terms. That was a considerable achievement. If Lord Healey were invited to become a consultant to Her Majesty's Treasury, he might have some useful tips for my right hon. and learned Friend on how to keep public expenditure under control.

Public expenditure has gone up by a significant proportion. I do not underestimate the difficulties of controlling it. I have been on the inside of government and seen the pressures on Ministers to push up spending. I know that with demand-led programmes it is even more difficult to exert control over that discretionary part of Government expenditure. If we are to deliver our

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

long-term objective to reduce the role of the state in people's lives, and return to them the freedom to spend the money that they earn and the wealth that they create in the way that they choose, it is vital that we make better progress on controlling public expenditure.

We needed a bold Budget. It is a good Budget as far as it goes, although I would have preferred it to have been a little bolder. I do not make any great criticism of the Chancellor on that count. There are difficult judgments to strike, and no doubt we all have different views about where the balance of advantage lies. A number of fundamental features underlie the Budget, and everybody should recognise that they should incline us rather less towards caution on tax cuts and interest rate reductions than otherwise. For example, there is no inflation risk at the moment. Last year, the price of raw materials rose by 5 per cent. and more. There was a fear that that would feed a wage-price spiral, with all sorts of shortages and bottlenecks developing, but that simply did not happen. The retail prices index rose by a little more than 3 per cent. When one looks at what happened to wage rates last year, however, that shows where the fundamental weakness in our economy lies. Wage increases actually fell from 4 per cent. to about 3.75 per cent. and in some cases wages decreased in real terms. The present inflation suppression mechanism is the result of many of the policies that we have introduced in the decade and a half that we have been in government.

We have a more flexible labour market than we had in 1980. If the Opposition were to win an election, they would make it more rigid again with such innovations as signing up to the social chapter, introducing minimum wages and, no doubt, returning some privileges to the trade unions. A flexible labour market, relaxation of rent controls, deregulation of working conditions and toughening up the benefits system—in which we have much further to go—have become crucial to our ability to grow and compete without inflation.

The evidence is clear not only in wages, but in the unemployment figures and the resurgence of manufacturing exports and inward investment. Who would have thought that we would ever again export televisions and become a major exporter of cars? It is clear that there would be little justifiable fear of inflation were we to relax the controls just a little more.

The United Kingdom has become the most successful country in the world after the United States in attracting overseas investment. In 1979, the figure was £22 billion; in 1994, it was £144 billion. That is a sevenfold increase. More than 3,500 United States companies, including 98 of the *Fortune 100* companies in the United States now have operations in Britain. The three largest car companies in Japan have secured bases here and 40 per cent. of Japanese investment in the European Community is in Britain. More than 1,000 German companies are in Britain, representing 12 per cent. of all German investment overseas. In the past two years alone, more than 800 inward investment projects have brought 200,000 jobs to Britain.

That has not happened of its own accord or because companies stuck a pin in the map and decided to locate to Britain. They located here for the hard-headed reasons that we have a low-tax, relatively deregulated economy that is no longer inimical to wealth creation and is not suffused by the miasma of envy politics and the destructive trade unionism of the 1970s that repelled them from our shores.

What is lacking today, or is insufficiently to be found, is a recovery in domestic demand. We need to build on the useful measures contained in the Budget with a further reduction in interest rates, as recommended by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold).

This has been derided by Opposition Members as an attempt to bribe the electorate, but I do not regard returning what people have created for themselves and rightly belongs to them as a bribe. Bribery occurred under previous Administrations—Tory as well as Labour—when ordinary people were made a fraudulent promise that they could get something for nothing and were gulled into believing that the rich would somehow pay for vast increases in expenditure on health, education and social security.

The tragic reality is that as the welfare state and the role of the state generally has expanded over the past few generations, ordinary people have had to pay the bills themselves. As a result, they have been deprived of the freedom to choose, and that has become the privilege of the few. We have to alter that. We have taken some decisive steps in the right direction, but we have much more to do.

It is projected that there will be a surplus on Government accounts by the end of the century. If surpluses are in prospect, we can cut taxes to a level at which borrowing is sustainable without worrying. It is a pity that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor committed himself to a zero borrowing requirement in such a short time. Were it over a longer period of time, we would have had far more leeway sooner for significant tax cuts, which, as we know from our experience in the 1980s, have advantageous supply-side effects.

The Chancellor was prudent in not changing his projections for the PSBR, but had he taken a little more risk on that, we could have done a lot more this year. Patrick Minford has suggested that as much as £17 billion would have been available on a rolling tax cut programme over three years, had we adopted a rather more lenient view of borrowing in the next five or six years, but we cannot do everything at once.

Many Opposition Members fail to recognise that tax cuts produce wealth. Even after the dramatic reductions in the top rates of tax in the 1980s, not only did more revenue come into the Exchequer for redistribution, but the proportion of income tax revenues paid by those on higher incomes actually increased. It is a perverse policy to call for punitive increases in taxation because the consequences are that there is less money to redistribute and the rich pay a smaller proportion of the total tax revenue. We have a long way to go, but low-tax countries always lead the growth league.

When the United Kingdom was the leading low-tax country in the world between 1780 and 1890, we topped the growth league. The same occurred in the United States between 1890 and 1970. Today, countries such as Japan, Switzerland and certain far eastern countries—the Asian tigers—have low-tax, deregulated regimes which put them at the top of the growth league. We should look to that example and not to countries such France and Germany—the over-regulated sclerotic regimes that are attempting to force their uncompetitive policies on us because they are too frightened to adopt or have some other reason for not adopting the sensible, open-market, outward looking, low-tax, deregulating policies that have been so successful here and elsewhere.

Labour is trying to project itself as the party of tax cutting. A recent article in the *Daily Telegraph* was headed

"Blair: 'I will not squeeze the rich'".

The Leader of the Opposition said that in his speech to the CBI. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) recently laid out his stall for a 10p income tax rate—admittedly to the annual conference of the British Dyslexia Association, perhaps thinking that the audience might not be able to read the fine detail of his policies, although I say that with some trepidation as I know that the debate was opened by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. The 10p income tax rate has been derided as a gimmick by the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Opposition Members do not seem to understand the mechanisms that achieve the policy objectives that they themselves set. The best way to help those on the lowest income is not to introduce a band of tax at 10p but to raise tax thresholds, as my right hon. and learned Friend has done this year, to take out of the tax net as many people as possible who are on the lowest levels of income, because the greatest disincentive to work is provided not by the tax system but by the benefit system due to the combination of the withdrawal rates and the tax rates which apply at that level of income. There is much to be done on that side of the equation.

We need to continue in the direction that we are now taking. We are getting back to the policies on which we were elected in 1979, to which we have adhered and which have been so successful for Britain and have made the Conservative party so electorally successful. The greatest tribute to the truth of that analysis is that the Opposition have now discovered that they cannot be elected on the policies in which they really believe and therefore they have to present themselves as a watered down version of Tories.

Looking at the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and his supporters in recent months, I have been struck by the right hon. Gentleman's resemblance to Sun Myung Moon. When the moonies sign up to their cult, they have to accept the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's decision as to who they marry. He spends quite a lot of his time looking at photographs and selecting and matching the couples who are to spend the rest of their lives together. That role is being performed by the Leader of the Opposition in the Labour party as he matches his members to their new beliefs. They may not have had much connection with them in the past or any understanding of the matters that they now profess to believe, but so desperate are Labour Members to achieve office that they are no longer concerned about what they would do there.

We see in Labour a bankrupt party which has plenty of experience of bankrupting the country. That is why I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will continue the successful policy that he is adopting, which will be the best prophylactic against the country ever again entrusting the Opposition with the levers of power.

8.10 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I was present for the speeches at the start of the Budget debate and have listened attentively to other speeches during the course of the week. I left the Chamber earlier to attend a meeting of the parliamentary benevolent fund, at which we presented ex-Members of Parliament or their widows with more money than the Chancellor are giving them, and more money than the Chancellor will be offering people throughout the country. The beneficiaries of our benevolent fund will receive a Christmas box of £500. Many pensioners in my constituency would love to be afforded a £500 Christmas box from the Chancellor.

What is the Chancellor offering, and what is he taking back, and how will that affect my constituents and Wales? The House and the country realise that the Budget pretended to offer a lot to the people. With respect to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), Labour will not be running afraid of the Government at the next general election. We are positive in the policies that we want to pursue. I do not know the hon. Gentleman's majority, but I am sure that it will have to be good for him to retain his seat at the next general election—especially after this year's Budget.

Newspaper reports following the Budget, especially that in the *Financial Times*, and the state of the pound immediately after the Budget was announced, proved conclusively that the array of Order Papers waved by Government Members was a farce. As soon as Conservative Members read the details of the Budget, they realised that there was not sufficient in it to allow those right hon. and hon. Members to regain their popularity with the electorate. I would not be so complacent as the hon. Member for Tatton. If he thinks that Labour's lead in the opinion polls can be reduced within the next 18 months without a giveaway Budget and a substantial reduction in interest rates, he is living in cloud cuckoo land.

When I entered the House 16 years ago—you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were here long before, and it can be seen that we are aging—there was a lengthy list of hon. Members waiting to participate in the Budget debate. In the years that followed, most Budget debates were well attended. The Chamber would not be empty but fairly full. Things have changed. When one examines the Budget, one can understand why the Chamber has not been well attended this week.

When the Chancellor presented his Budget, he suggested that the family on average earnings would be better off next year by £450, which he said was the equivalent of £9 per week. Since then, the Chancellor and the Conservative party chairman have admitted that that large promised improvement was false.

The Treasury press release on Budget day made the inaccuracy clear. It stated that the tax changes would be worth an average of just over £2.80 a week. The day after, the Library—whose figures give me far more confidence—suggested that the average family would be approximately £2.08 better off. In exchanges earlier between the Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the deputy leader of the Labour party, it was plain that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's figure was based on rosy forecasts rather than grim reality.

Living standards have fallen over the past five months—more than at any time in 40 years. After this Budget, the typical family will still be £670 worse off

[Mr. Ray Powell]

than at the time of the last general election. The Chancellor's figures cannot be trusted. One year ago, he stated that public borrowing in 1996-97 would be £12 billion. Now he states that it will be nearly double—£22 billion. Last year, the Chancellor predicted that investment would grow this year by nearly 6 per cent. Now he says the figure is just 1 per cent. Also last year, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that the economy would grow by 3.25 per cent. this year. Now he admits that growth is running at only 2.75 per cent.

The Chancellor argued, in exchanges with my right hon. Friend the deputy leader during his true and excellent assessment of the Budget, that the Budget was all about putting extra money in people's pockets. What extra money—the £9 that the right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned when he presented his Budget, or the £2.08 that the Library calculated?

Where are the tax cuts that the Chancellor talked about? Conservative Members waved their Order Papers when the right hon. and learned Gentleman sat down, but, having analysed his speech, they began to realise that they must start looking for a job with a friendly company or a bank, because no way can they win the next general election and hold on to their seats.

As to increases in local government charges, the Secretary of State for Wales stated in a letter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) that an 11 per cent. increase will be imposed on rates in Wales, which will mean an increase of £35 a year for the average ratepayer. What kind of tax cut is that? To burden the new unitary authorities in Wales, with all their new responsibilities from 1 April, with an 11 per cent. rates increase is absolutely disgraceful, and should seriously be further considered.

What does this Budget do about job insecurity, or about expensive bureaucrats in the NHS? What are the Government's proposals to solve the negative equity problem in the housing market? Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) referred to the "Kane" programme, so called

> "because that is the name of its distinguished presenter, Mr. Vincent Kane, who has not exactly made a reputation for himself as a Labour supporter. A fortnight ago the programme dealt with poverty and made a convincing case for Wales to be described as the most poverty stricken area in western Europe, certainly on a par with some of western Europe's most devastated areas such as are found in Greece, Portugal, southern Spain, Sardinia and the former East Germany.
>
> Once vibrant communities in Wales have been totally decimated. In addition to massive unemployment, officially registered and otherwise, wages are deplorably low. If ever there was a case for a minimum wage, it could certainly be made for Wales."

After my hon. Friend had spoken, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who is not in her place now, asked him to apologise to the people of Wales:

> "I cannot believe that they would thank the hon. Gentleman for describing them as living in an impoverished state and equating them with some grossly chaotic country overseas. I would be furious to be put into such a category, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will later apologise to the people whom he represents."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 78-80.]

My hon. Friend's experience, however, does not differ from my experience of my constituency. During the 16 years of Conservative rule, seven collieries there have been closed, making 8,500 miners redundant. The decommissioning of the Port Talbot steelworks put 12,000 steel workers out of work. That makes a total of 20,500 redundancies between 1979 and the end of the miners' strike in 1984. Without economic planning, no constituency could recover from such a blow. Perhaps the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, who criticised my hon. Friend, should travel around the country and visit parts of Wales to see the deprivation and squalor there.

People of all political opinions have said that this Budget was a wasted opportunity. The overwhelming majority of people have found their concerns completely ignored. What measures were included to alleviate the insecurity felt by so many families in respect of jobs, housing, education, hospital services, social security, and increasing drug abuse? That is not to mention the Government's staggering record of failure with bodies such as the Child Support Agency, which has already claimed 35 wasted lives. The Act that set it up should be scrapped as a matter of urgency. In numerous measures, the Government have moved rightwards so as to put clear water between themselves and the Opposition.

Most Opposition Members, like me, wanted positive steps taken to solve the problems in their constituencies and in the country at large. Our constituents, especially the unemployed, are crying out for help. Some of them in my constituency have been unemployed for 10 years or more. Young people leave education with loans hanging over their heads and degrees in their pockets, desperately seeking work.

The Ford engine plant in Bridgend announced a few weeks ago that 480 new jobs were to be created under a £340 million expansion programme. It was reported that 11,600 people applied. That means that 11,120 of them are still looking for work in Ogwr borough. This part of Wales has suffered greatly over the past 16 years, and I greatly doubt that it will recover under the Chancellor's economic plans.

No one will be fooled: this is not the Budget of a Government who have succeeded. After 16 years, they have signally failed, as shown by rising taxes, declining living standards and public services, and increased borrowing. The Budget was the last gasp of a degenerate regime.

We say that the only long-term solution to our unemployment and public spending difficulties is investment to strengthen the economy, a radical welfare-to-work programme, and a fair tax system that rewards hard work. Only by putting people back to work will we build a strong economy. The Tories should have adopted Labour's plan for a windfall levy on the utilities. Then we could have begun to break the logjam of unemployment and to reduce the price that we are paying for failure. That is the only route to better public services. I am sure that the Labour party will use the next 18 months to campaign for what we are advocating.

8.26 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): After a week of debates on the Budget, an essential truth remains: given expectations about public services and the level of Government borrowing, the Chancellor had very little room for manoeuvre. Hence this was an honest, shrewd Budget, and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on it.

In the few minutes I have, I want to deal with some of the difficulties and paradoxes facing the Chancellor and those who manage our public finances. The three problems with which I shall deal are also electoral problems for us.

First, assuming that the figures given me by the Library are broadly correct, the average married man with two children will be paying £150 more in tax and £217 more in national insurance in 1996-97 than he did at the time of the last general election. Doubtless the Labour party will make great play of that. But what the Labour party will not say is that the same man's wages will have increased in real terms by £558, and he will be paying £675 less a year for his mortgage, because of cuts in mortgage interest rates. He will therefore have £877 more in his pocket. That is the honest truth as far as I have been able to determine it from all the conflicting statistics of the past week.

The fact remains that this average married man will be paying more tax—a challenge that will face the Chancellor before his next Budget. Let us assume that every 1p reduction in the base rate gives my average family man £130 more in his pocket. Let us also assume that he will be paying about £367 more in tax by the next election than he did at the last. Thus, to wipe out the tax increases, and to present us with an attractive electoral message, a 3p cut in the base rate will be needed in the next Budget. That is a very great challenge, because, as my hon. Friends the Members for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) made clear, with every year that passes, public spending increases. That is the first paradox and dilemma that faces the Chancellor as he wrestles very ably with these problems.

The second is concerned with the married man's tax allowance and mortgage tax relief. Again, there are numerous conflicting figures, but from the evidence that I have been able to glean, it seems that that allowance, which was worth £430 in 1991, is worth £268 today. If the cuts since 1988 had not taken place, a married man would be paying £878 less for his mortgage. That is a powerful weapon, which the Labour party will use.

The only reply that we can make is that what counts is not the tax that a married man pays but also what he takes home. As I said, his mortgage, because of the cut in the base rate, has been reduced by £675. I do not see how we can reverse the long downward trend in mortgage tax relief that we have seen over the past seven or eight years, but we can begin to reverse the cuts in the married man's tax allowance. I say that for good political reasons, because we have to give the powerful message that we are the party that supports the married man. It is perfectly possible, and I beg the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary, as they plan their strategy for the next year, to consider those points.

The third problem is what I call the four ages of man, and why we are slipping so badly behind—apparently—in the opinion polls. Although they feel that they have made adequate contributions for their old age through their national insurance contributions, the elderly are increasingly concerned that those contributions—as people live longer and expectations are greater—are insufficient to cover their needs. Therefore, what the Chancellor did with nursing homes was very shrewd.

The elderly also feel that some people—they blame in particular unattached teenage mothers—are taking the state for a ride. That may or may not be fair criticism—I do not want to get into that debate—but the elderly blame other sections of the community for what they consider an unfair attack on the resources of the welfare state. They blame the Government for making them contribute more.

The next generation down—those in their 50s—are increasingly concerned about job insecurity. They may well blame the Government for that, although it has very little to do with the Government. The generation in their 30s and 40s are concerned about negative equity, and, of course, the young are always impatient.

So in those four ages of man, one sees that there are enormous problems for the Government to deal with. The only solution for us is simply to be honest and to look at the Budget, to look at what we have tried to achieve, to look at our place in the world trading economy, and to tell the truth: that, in terms of real take-home pay, the average man will be better off.

But we have to do more. I say to the Chancellor that we are laying the foundations for a new socialist consensus if we argue that we can continue the present structure of the welfare state. I am not sure that that will be possible, because expectations will rise so fast that I do not think that we will not be able to meet them.

Therefore, we must have the courage to indulge in fundamental reform of the welfare state, because the Labour party will always be able to promise to spend more on health, education and social security. I do not think that we will ever be able to match its promises. That again is a fundamental problem that we face in terms of electoral popularity.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): It would appear from the opening speeches that the Labour party may make all sorts of promises, but one of them is a 60 per cent. tax rate, which will not be very attractive to the British people.

Mr. Leigh: That is true, although we can always hope, of course, that the Labour party will shoot itself in the foot, as it did in the run-up to the previous election. But I do not think that we can necessarily rely on that.

I think that we will solve the long-term dilemmas and paradoxes that face us in the management of the welfare state. We have to be prepared to look in the long term at very radical reform. There is no big bang or instant solution in the reform of social security, given that expectations are rising all the time. Nor is it possible to argue in a simplistic way that we can deliver tax cuts and ever-improving standards in health, education and social security, which is what people want. That is a simplistic point of view. The fact is that people want to spend more on their health and on education. It is easy to argue that there is room for huge cuts in social security, until one bears in mind where the money is being spent: on the disabled, pensioners and so on.

Much of the debate is conducted on an entirely simplistic basis that has no reality in fact. The only way in which we can try to fight our way out of these

[Mr. Leigh]

dilemmas and paradoxes in the management of the welfare state is to look for management and efficiency savings, and at where it is possible to privatise. All that is possible, but perhaps we are coming to the end of the road on that.

I believe, though, that there is a new, extraordinary consensus, which is coming from right and left: from the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who heads the Social Security Select Committee, and from people like myself on the right, who argue that one has to reinforce individual responsibility in the management of the welfare state.

One has to try to create more of a community. I do not propose that we privatise the welfare state; there simply is no public support for that. There is no support either for privatising the national health service or state education. Where individuals make contributions towards their old age or for education, there is support for the idea that they receive much more personal credit than they do at present. At the moment, they believe, rightly, that their contributions are just poured into a bottomless pit. They are given no credit for their contributions.

They feel, frankly, that other people are taking the state for a ride. It would be an immensely complicated process. It would have to be a rolling programme. There is no way in which one could introduce it in one Budget, two Budgets, or even five. There may even have to be some degree of cross-party consensus.

I am absolutely convinced that, if we look at how the welfare state will be managed in 10, 15 or 20 years' time, we will be looking at lifetime personal accounts, and people will have confidence that what they pay in for their old age or education will not be raided by the state, whether for tax cuts, for spending in other areas or to manage the economy.

That is a very attractive philosophy, which we have to start to grapple with. If we do not, we will always be caught between the constant desire, which Conservative Members naturally have, for tax cuts, realising at the same time that the bulk of spending is locked up in these great state bureaucracies: spending on health, education and welfare.

As part of that process, I see the Treasury not so much involved in a vast churning process of taking from one hand, whether in child benefit and so on, and giving with the other, as becoming much more of a Ministry of Finance, charged with balancing the books, with the welfare state devolved much more into charitable trusts, in which people have real confidence that their savings and investments are protected—not private companies trading for profit, but charitable trusts.

I see education organised in very much the same way, with the boundaries between state and private education blurring as the money effectively follows the pupil around to whatever school or college he or she attends. That is an attractive solution, which the Treasury should at least be considering. The Treasury would become much more of a Ministry of Finance.

At the same time, the annual Budget would not be so much an exercise in political management with the Chancellor constantly looking over his shoulder, as he has had to do this week, balancing tax cuts with managing the currency because he wishes to bring in interest rate cuts which will be important in terms of the supply-side economy, economics and electoral popularity. He would be looking at the Budget much more from the point of view of a Minister of Finance, balancing the nation's books. The currency would be run by an independent Bank of England, backed by commodities, becoming a true inflation-proof hard currency.

I accept that those are radical reforms, which could take five, 10, 15 or 20 years to introduce. But we need the courage, vision and determination to debate such reforms. If such issues are discussed in terms of a fatuous party political debate across the Chamber, we will never meet the expectations of the British electorate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are 30 minutes left before the winding-up speeches begin and three hon. Members hope to catch my eye. I hope they all will.

8.40 pm

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): I shall take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have heard a number of interesting speeches tonight, particularly from my right hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) and for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton). When a matter has been addressed so well, I see no reason in the same debate to repeat points that have already been made.

I hope tonight to address the concerns of single parents in Britain, the vast majority of whom—nine out of 10—are women. More than that, I want to address the problems of their children who will be the real victims of the measures announced by the Chancellor in his Budget. Many of my constituents are single parents and they are the scapegoats of a Budget that has made the pathway from unemployment into work more difficult.

As we all know, single parenthood takes many forms—widowhood, the abandonment of women and their children, mothers bringing up their children when the father has failed to acknowledge his responsibility, women who have been separated or divorced who still maintain their children's contact with their father and women who are unable, for many reasons, to live with the father of their children.

Those parents all care for and love their children, but their lives are challenging and stressful. There are only so many hours in the day, but there are many domestic and caring tasks to undertake and complete. With the addition of paid employment, the burden becomes truly onerous. We all recognise that such a responsibility is better shared between two parents, but we must accept the reality that that is not possible for many people—a growing number in Britain.

I want to acknowledge the magnificent job which so many single parents do for their children. They deserve our praise and support and, more than that, financial recognition of the additional costs faced by lone parents in bringing up their children. Instead, all they get from the Chancellor in the Budget is a kick in the teeth. That in itself would be bad enough, but what is worse is that the Budget will hurt their children and it is the children who are the most important people in our society. They deserve not just our affection and love but our protection and fair provision in the benefits system.

In his Budget statement, the Chancellor said that steps would be announced

> "to close the gap between single parents benefit and those paid to other families."

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) gave the impression that it is the families with a married man who are the good families, the real families, and that single-parent families are less good. The Chancellor went on to say:

> "The right approach to single parents is neither to penalise them nor to favour them."

But he has actually shown a far right, extremist and uncaring approach to single parents which is far from what I consider to be the right approach.

I listened in disbelief as the Chancellor continued. He may have been too involved in delivering his speech to hear, but I actually said, "Not true", when he said:

> "The costs and responsibilities of having children are the same for couples as they are for single people."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1060.]

The reason why that is not true was given in the Chamber the following day by my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He said that the Government had recognised the obvious truth that it is more costly for a single parent to bring up children than for a couple. He said:

> "The 1985 Green Paper on the reform of social security argued that one-parent benefit should be continued
>
> 'as a contribution to the additional costs' . . . 'faced by lone parents in bringing up children alone'.
>
> It approved the introduction of a lone-parent premium in order to recognise
>
> 'the extra pressures faced by lone parents.'
>
> In 1985, the Government recognised that extra pressures and extra costs were faced by lone parents; now it would appear that they do not."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1216.]

What has changed in the past 10 years to alter the Government's policy so dramatically?

The true additional costs of bringing up a child within a single-parent family are far too numerous to list now, but let me cover just a few. There are families with two economically active parents and families where only one parent is economically active and perhaps the wife stays at home to look after the children. In both those cases, the cost of child care is covered either by the additional income of the second earner or because the non-working mother cares for the children for free within the family unit.

The cost of child care is amazingly high. I am sure that Conservative Members will know that the cost of a nanny is well beyond what my constituents can afford. Even a registered child minder, recognised to be a good but cheaper form of child care, can cost £100 a week for 50 hours of care and another £60 or £70 for an additional child for the same number of hours. That is a tremendous amount of money. Conservative Members are out of touch if they do not recognise that a number of single parents who voted for them at the last general election are horrified at the steps being taken to freeze and reduce their benefits. After-school care of 15 hours a week for two children costs between £50 and £75 a week net.

In addition, there is the cost of babysitting. It is not a question of a single parent wanting to go out on the town at Ronnie Scott's or wherever it is that the Chancellor thinks single parents might want to go in the evening; it is a question of going to parents' evenings at a child's school—parental involvement in education, which the Government allege they want to encourage—or of going to self-improvement or evening classes so that a single mother can return to the work force or, if she is working, acquire additional qualifications so that she can progress up the ladder and provide a better standard of care for her children, which is what she is trying to do. It is clear that the additional costs are there. They were recognised 10 years ago, but suddenly in this Budget they have disappeared.

The effect of the Budget on children from lone-parent families will undoubtedly be quite dreadful. Account is not taken of children who are growing up in families without an income earner. Income support takes no account of birthday and Christmas presents, birthday parties, treats such as visits to the zoo and museums and other things that cost a good deal of money, as all of us who are parents recognise. The same applies to lone parents on low wages who receive family credit or who struggle to hold on to their jobs when their children are ill and they must stay at home.

A Budget such as this, which takes money away from lone parents, hurts children. It puts more pressure on people who, although they may be coping brilliantly now, are struggling to keep their heads above water. Conservative Members do not listen; they do not understand. They do not perceive the economic nonsense of the Government's proposals—for it is economic nonsense to block the pathway into work for those who want to work but cannot afford to, like my constituents, by freezing benefits.

This tired, discredited, failed Government are out of touch. They have run out of ideas, and the people know that they should be out of office.

8.50 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) made a comparison between the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and the Reverend Moon. I suggest a somewhat less dramatic comparison between the current Leader of the Opposition and Harold Wilson in 1963-64. Both were new, youngish leaders; there had been a long spell of Conservative Government; both apparently offered change. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield is hitching a ride on the Internet bandwagon, which carries echoes of the way in which the then Leader of the Opposition, Harold Wilson, claimed to embrace the white heat of the technological revolution.

In the event, the Labour party was just able to squeak into government. We must ensure that that does not happen this time. As one would expect, however, that Labour Government were booted out after six years. As we know, whenever the British people have had a dose of socialism they have booted out the Labour Government at the next available opportunity.

The time since the last general election in 1992 has been a tough one for Conservative Back Benchers and Conservative activists. Effectively, we have had to do

[Mr. Graham Riddick]

things in which we do not really believe. For instance, we were in the exchange rate mechanism, and we had fixed exchange rates. We Conservatives believe—or we certainly should believe—in floating exchange rates; we believe in a free market in exchange rates. We have also had to increase taxes, which was very unpopular not only with the country but with our supporters.

A comparison with the Labour party can be made in that context as well. Under the current Leader of the Opposition, Labour is also doing things in which I do not think Labour Members truly believe—but they keep quiet about all that, because they are happy to put up with whatever the right hon. Member for Sedgefield says in his quest for No. 10 Downing street. Things would, of course, be different if he were successful in that endeavour.

The experience of the past three years demonstrates just how difficult it is to control public spending. In the early 1990s, the Conservative Government took their eye off the ball, and allowed public spending to increase beyond a sustainable level. We therefore had no choice but to increase taxes in order to keep the public sector borrowing requirement at a reasonable level. Labour spokesmen make commitment after commitment, day in, day out. They are for ever criticising the Government for not spending enough money. As we know, a recent survey found that four out of 10 speeches made in the House by Labour Members called for more public expenditure. In fact, every Labour Government have increased the basic, or standard, rate of income tax, with one exception.

Before the last general election, my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) tabled an interesting question. Looking back into history, he asked about the rates of tax that had applied under various Governments. It was revealed that all Labour Governments, with the exception of the first—they came to power in 1924, and remained in power for only nine months; they did not have time to increase taxes—had left office with a higher standard or basic rate of tax than had obtained when they came to power. Now the Labour party says that if it were in government it would introduce a windfall tax on the utilities, which would pay for—so far—11 spending commitments made by a number of Opposition spokesmen. Those spending commitments are on-going, but the windfall tax would be a one-off. I think that Labour would find it impossible to square the circle, and to reconcile the desire for higher public expenditure with its express wish to keep taxes down.

I do not deny that I should have liked taxes to be reduced further in last week's Budget. There is a strong moral case for tax cuts under a party that believes that people should be allowed to keep more of the money that they earn. I believe that there is a strong economic case as well: consumer confidence is low, and a stimulus in the form of tax cuts would have increased economic activity, which in turn would have generated increased revenue. Nevertheless, I welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor—I am pleased to see him in his place—was able to reduce taxes. The fact that he reduced them by £3 billion, as opposed to the £5 billion or so that I would have liked, leaves him with considerable room to reduce interest rates, and I hope that we shall see action on that front in the near future. Indeed, I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend will have to act on that front if he wishes to meet the target of 3 per cent. growth that he has set for the economy next year.

When we say that we want taxes to come down, we are always asked where we would reduce public expenditure. That is a fair point. An aspect that causes me concern is the national lottery. I have never been a great supporter of the lottery: I saw it almost as state-sponsored gambling. I went along with it, however, on the ground that, in a single market, it was inevitable that other countries' lotteries would come into this country, and we—the British Exchequer—would lose out on considerable revenue. The national lottery has been an enormous success, generating some £4 billion to £5 billion turnover in its first year. Perhaps more tax should be raised from the lottery. At the moment the tax on the money raised is 12 per cent., but after the Budget pool betting duty will be 26.5 per cent.

Because of its effect on the economy as a whole—it is affecting economic patterns in a number of ways—perhaps we should treat the national lottery in the same way as we treat the pools companies. I suggest increasing the tax on the lottery to the same as that levied on the pools companies. I also suggest using lottery money rather more flexibly. Most of the money for good causes has to be pumped into capital projects, but much more of it could be used to meet the running costs of charities for example.

I welcome the Budget's help for the elderly. The 20 per cent. tax on income from savings will help millions of pensioners who, on average, have higher levels of savings. The fact that the Chancellor has been able to introduce that change with no opposition as far as I can see demonstrates how we have improved the debate about taxation generally and tax on savings in particular. In the old days, such income was known as unearned income and the last Labour Government penalised those who received such income with an additional 15 per cent. tax. The reduction of the tax to 20 per cent. for most savers is good news, especially for pensioners who rely so much on income from savings. I welcome the fact that the benefits system is to be more friendly towards elderly people who have long-term savings to pay for care in their old age.

I am delighted that education will receive substantially more in the next financial year than it received this year. That is right, but there is a problem in that the resources are channelled through local education authorities. I urge all LEAs to ensure that the extra money that we have made available goes to schools.

The Conservative party is the only one that believes in low taxes and whose philosophy demands that individuals should be allowed to keep more of the money that they earn. It is the only party that believes in private enterprise and free markets. Since 1979, we have made substantial supply-side changes to the British economy across a range of areas. The economy is now in good shape and it is important to maintain the approach that ensures low inflation, a consistent economic policy and competitive corporate taxation. We must also continue deregulation. The best form of deregulation is not to introduce new regulations in the first place.

Unemployment is falling, and that contrasts with the rest of Europe. The introduction of a national minimum wage and the adoption of the social chapter would be disastrous, especially for young people and for the long-term unemployed. The experience of countries such as Spain and France, where youth unemployment is 40 and 25 per cent. respectively, must send a clear message to Opposition Members that a minimum wage and a social chapter would not be good news for the people that they profess to care for, those with few skills. Such people would suffer because of the minimum wage and I hope that the Opposition will drop the approach of increased regulation of the labour market.

This is the first Budget of a two-Budget strategy that will lead to an improvement in the Government's fortunes. We have to ensure that we avoid the disaster of a socialist Government in the general election of 1997. I commend the Chancellor on his Budget and look forward to next year's, which I am sure will deliver even more.

9.3 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I shall start by declaring that my constituency party receives money from the Union of Communication Workers. I do not know whether I shall say anything in my speech to require that declaration, but I am so proud of the fact that I am sponsored by a trade union through my constituency party that I wish to put it on record.

I do not know whether the Chancellor, when he was out of the Chamber, took the trouble to go outside to feel the freezing wind which we are told is blowing from the Arctic. When he does that every day this winter I hope that it will remind him that when elderly people put on their gas or electricity, whether to cook or heat their homes, 8p in every pound that they pay will go to the Treasury. To that must be added standing charges. I have looked at the bills of some of my elderly constituents. Often up to 40 per cent. of the bill goes on VAT and standing charges. That is a terrible indictment of the philosophy behind the Chancellor's Budget last year and which continues this year. I heard someone say something about the Chancellor's language. I think that it was the language of bluff. It is the Chancellor's Budget, but it is really the Tory Government's strategy and their media "spin". The Chancellor said in presenting the Budget that a family on average earnings would be better off next year than this by around £450, around £9 a week, but it was not true. Such a family will not be better off in that way. It was strange that on the same day a Treasury press release on the Budget made the inaccuracy clear. It said:

> "Tax changes . . . will be worth . . . on average . . . over £2.80 a week".

The day after the Budget, the House of Commons Library issued a bulletin that said:

> "For a single earner couple with two children on average male earnings . . . of the total . . . £2.03 (reflects) the real change in income tax, NICs and child benefit."

Eventually, the Chancellor was forced to admit his own, I call it, exaggerated claim. In a letter on 30 November 1995 to the Leader of the Opposition, he said that

> "The Budget tax changes will leave such a family on average earnings £190 a year better off in cash terms."

I heard several Conservative Members say how disappointed they were about the position of the married man and about what has happened to the married couples allowance. After freezing the size of the married couples allowance five years running and reducing its rate from 25 per cent. to 15 per cent., the Budget increased the allowance by £70, which is in line with inflation. It is now worth £269, just over half the £523 that it would have been worth if it had been uprated in line with inflation and were still available at 25 per cent.

The Budget increased taxes on petrol, up now, taxes on cars, up now, and taxes on cigarettes, up now. We heard the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) speak about the effect on rural communities. The National Farmers Union for Scotland has written to me and said:

> "In addition to freezing Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances at this year's level, the increase in tax on vehicle fuel will bear heavily on the rural sector, and farming in particular. These increased costs will be reflected throughout the food producing chain on and off farm, and will have to be recovered from the market place"—

in other words, on prices.

The Deputy Prime Minister, who opened this debate, was responsible for the Department of Trade and Industry when he said on the Post Office external financing limit on 11 May 1995:

> "I am prepared to agree that in future we shall aim to set the EFL at about half the Post Office's forecast post-tax profit. I hope to make progress in that direction this autumn."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1995; Vol. 259, c. 885.]

But what has happened? The external financing limit, which is basically a smash and grab raid on the Post Office's profits, will go to up to £298 million next year; in 1997-98 it will go up to £317 million and in 1998-1999 it will go to £310 million. The Post Office's assessment says:

> "For every £1 we make, the Treasury is now demanding 66p."

That is not a 50-50 split. The assessment continues:

> "On top of that we have to pay Corporation Tax and together they leave nothing to invest in The Post Office."

So much for freeing up the Post Office as promised by the Deputy Prime Minister. As everyone knows, it is basically a smash and grab raid on the Post Office, an attempt to cripple it because the people would not let the Government privatise it.

On another part of the Government's strategy, the £400 million proposed cuts in social security, I want to give an example that is repeated again and again of what happens in the marginal rate. I shall call it the case of Mrs. Q, who was working and earning £19. Her husband is disabled, is unable to work and receives benefit and benefit for her. She got a job, which allowed her to earn £46. The family lost £30 and every allowance for the wife. When she went to inquire, she was told that the taper had been abolished. It was not a case of earning between £19 and £46, which one would think would be encouraged, and of her losing some benefit: they lost everything that was being gained by the husband for her.

In relation to incapacity benefit, before people would have had invalidity benefit. There is no doubt in the assessment that they are incapacitated—that has been agreed by medical officers. In April someone on invalidity benefit would have got a pension on top of benefit as an additional sum. Now that individual gets £8, whereas in April under the invalidity benefit he would have had £80. That is a massive cut in the standard of living. It was not someone who wanted to leave work and skive; it was someone who had worked hard all his life, found his health breaking down and needed some help from the state—yet he found himself £72 worse off than someone eligible for that allowance in April 1995.

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

I have been told that in the Falkirk area 7,000 invalidity benefit claims are being reprocessed for incapacity benefit. There are 14,000 people on income support, plus 1,400 receiving the severe disablement supplement. Every one of those people—more than 22,000—live in fear of the philosophy behind the Chancellor's Budget. The Government are cutting the welfare state to store money to give away, but people will not believe that the giveaway is worth anything.

There was a debate last night on the health service. I was impressed by Professor Baumol's analysis of health care when he spoke at the Office of Health Economics annual lecture 1995. His theory was basically that we can afford all the additional costs of health care, even though it is a personally delivered service, from which we cannot get great productivity without taking out staff. He said in his analysis that health care can be afforded only if the rest of the economy maintains its growth and productivity. We must have growth and we must have a productive economy.

In September, the CBI's report—I believe that it was sent to the Chancellor—said that the manufacturing order book for the UK is now lower than before September 1992. Manufacturing confidence is now lower than it was in September 1992. The Chancellor will recall that it was in September 1992 that Britain was kicked out of the exchange rate mechanism and there was a 16 per cent. forced devaluation of the currency. That has been squandered and we are back where we started—manufacturing order books are down.

I have looked at the figures for unemployment because the Chancellor has claimed that they are getting better. We must examine two counts. The first is the count done by the unemployment unit, based on the same standard that was used in 1979 under a Labour Government. On that count, there are 3,355,500 people—11.4 per cent.—unemployed, whereas the Government claim that the figure is 2,265,100—8.1 per cent. I want to put on record the definition of the unemployment unit count, because that is very important. It is, "The UU Broad LFS"—that is, the unemployment unit broad labour force survey—

> "is a provisional estimate of unemployed people who have not undertaken any work for pay or profit in the Survey reference week, who want work and are available to start work within two weeks."

In other words, it is the unused capacity in Britain's labour force. For Scotland, the count is 297,800—11.5 per cent., whereas the Government claim that the figure is 196,100—7.9 per cent.

Let us examine the Government's unemployment figures. For 1995, it is 8.1 per cent. of the population; for 1994 it was 9 per cent.; for 1993 it was 10.3 per cent; for 1992 it was 9.7 per cent., and so on. The point is that if we are not using that massive amount of productive capacity in our economy, we cannot generate the productivity and the growth that would allow us to do all the things that a Government who were running the economy properly could do.

I shall conclude my speech now because I am conscious of the fact that there have been very long speeches. Although I have sat here all day yesterday and all day today, I am being squeezed in at the end of the debate. However, that is the way the place runs. I want to focus on the end of the Chancellor's figures. An important speech was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). If we want to gauge the real state of our economy, we should look at our international trade balance, especially for each year from 1990 to 1994. In 1990, there was an £18 billion net negative figure. There was a £10 billion net negative figure in 1994. This year, the net negative figure so far is only £3 billion, but it will end up at a negative figure of £6 billion and the Chancellor has forecast that in 1996-97 it will reach a negative figure of £5 billion.

If, after a 16 per cent. devaluation, we cannot actually beat other countries, Britain will turn into something that the right hon. and learned Gentleman criticised, but which was commended by one of his Back Benchers—a country that makes its money by being a tax haven for other countries, laundering their money rather than selling them products. That is the problem with this Budget. It is simply fiddling about. I do not blame the Chancellor—he is a sweeper-up. The real economy is broken. The real economic policy of his Government has failed. The Budget is just fiddling about. The Chancellor is fiddling while the futures of my son and other children are going down the tubes. His Budget will do nothing to help them because it does not address the real problem—the economy of this country, not fiddling about with taxes on the margin.

9.14 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): This Budget fails the test of investment, fails the test of prudence and fails the test of fairness. That is why we shall vote tonight to give this House the chance to cut that most iniquitous of taxes, VAT on fuel, and why we could not accept the amendment to the law motion as it stands.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: In a moment.

We shall abstain on the tax changes in the Budget resolutions because although they do not include measures that we should have liked to see, we believe that people have suffered enough from the Government's broken promises and we do not intend to stand in the way of the small relief that the resolutions provide. In addition, we shall not only vote for the public expenditure amendment, moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), but we shall vote against the Government's public expenditure programme because it is a product of wrong priorities and fails totally to provide the employment, investment and skill strategy needed for a fair society and a strong economy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) spoke with characteristic wisdom of the importance of investment, which is now growing more slowly out of recession than at any comparable time this century. He referred to the need for capital allowances—something that we urged on the Government in our Budget submissions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) deplored what he rightly called the "depressing short-termism" of a Budget that leaves the construction industry in slump and does so little for investment or fairness.

The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) raised the issue of the cuts to the British Council, as did a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I look forward to the Chancellor explicitly referring to that in his winding-up speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) said that it was an unfair Budget and, of course, he was right. A fair Budget would not have made the poorest fifth of the population even poorer as a direct result of its measures. A fair Budget would not have rejected, as the Chancellor did, our proposals for a windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised monopoly utilities. I do not see how the Government can possibly claim fairness for measures which make more from the poorest while doing nothing about the privatised utilities in which £100 million on share options remain to be cashed in and in the very week of the Budget Yorkshire Water increased its profit by 50 per cent.—not by supplying the people of Yorkshire with water, but by not supplying them with water.

On privatisation, that industry had a green dowry of £1.4 billion, with £6 billion of debt written off and £3 billion in investment credits set against tax. Yet since privatisation, executive pay has gone up by 339 per cent., profits have trebled, dividends have risen by 57 per cent., pollution incidents have gone up 53 per cent., investment has gone down by 20 per cent. over the past year and almost no mainstream corporation tax has been paid.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) argued, a windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised monopoly utilities applied to fund a welfare-to-work programme to help the young and long-term unemployed into real jobs with quality training would have been the cornerstone of any fair Budget. As for the Government's claims that their measures make people £9 a week better off, as my hon. Friends have said, we have exposed and will continue to expose the truth that, even on the Government's figures, only £2 of that can be set against the measures in the Budget, the rest is a Government assumption of earnings growth.

In his letter responding to my challenge on the matter, the Chancellor conceded that he cannot make his claims stand up as a direct effect of tax changes—only as speculation on growth and wages next year.

What becomes clearer by the day is that even that little bit the British people have been given back in the Budget will be taken away in other charges. Council tax, travel costs, rents, postal charges, water charges, prescription charges, dental charges, school meal charges and television licences will all go up. Everywhere they look, people will see that what is given with one hand is more than taken away with the other. As always, it is those on the lowest earnings, who are struggling to get off benefits and into work, who will be hit hardest by the increases. If the Government think that people will suddenly start to feel a lot better off as a result of the Budget, they are in for a shock.

Some of the measures in the Budget are welcome. The lower tax rate on savings income is a step towards the fairness on savings for which we have been calling. The increase in the thresholds for contributions to long-term care is welcome. The cut of 1p in the basic rate, the increase in personal allowances and the 20p band all provide a little welcome relief against the huge tax increases the Chancellor has imposed since the general election, but they will still leave typical families £670 a year worse off. People are still paying the price for the Government's record of failure—broken promises year on year and not the tax cuts year on year that they were promised.

Conservative Members are fond of talking about their instinct on taxation. Yet they now repeat the pledge to end capital gains and inheritance tax. They choose to spend £4.6 billion to benefit the better off, half of it going to the 5,000 wealthiest families in the land, rather than to cut the starting rate of tax which would help the many and especially those moving from welfare to work. It only goes to show that when it comes to instincts, the Tory instinct is for unfairness.

Mr. Riddick: I very much welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman welcomed the new 20 per cent. tax on savings, which he said was fairer. Why was it that at the general election the Labour party intended to impose a 9 per cent. surcharge tax on savings income?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is in no position to lecture us on promises made at the general election. He should explain to his constituents why he promised tax cuts year on year and why they have had tax increases that mean that they are £670 a year worse off.

On the expenditure side of the Budget, we see the same sleight of hand at work. We find that the much-vaunted increase for education will depend on council tax increases and cuts in other council services, many of them essential services such as the fire service. Education will face difficulties this year, like the difficulties in Northumberland which have been reported to me. Extra funding, as the Chancellor has promised, does not always translate into improvements in front-line services because of the problems that the Government are causing those services. The extra funding for the police does not add up to the 5,000 extra officers the Home Secretary has promised. In the health service, we see real cuts next year of 17 per cent. in public capital spending and a 6.5 per cent. cut, even including the hoped-for public finance initiative expenditure, with total capital spending from public and private sources together set to fall by 11 per cent. over the next three years. Again, more is taken with one hand than is given with the other.

We have to ask what sort of Government cut overseas aid by 6 per cent. after having wasted £234 million on the Pergau dam and what sort of Government cut the schools subsidy scheme even as they increase UK spending on the common agricultural policy by £100 million. How can it be right to freeze lone parent benefit which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) said, will make it harder for single parents to get into jobs, even as the administrative costs of the Department of Social Security go up this year by £100 million? How can it be right to cut training by 4 per cent. even as the community action programme is dumped? My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) was right to stress the damage that those would create. It is no one-nation Budget which ends 40,000 opportunities for young people and in which the Chancellor axes the one programme designed to help young unemployed people with disabilities get into work. For those young people it is not a one-nation Britain but a no-hope Britain. I give way to the Chancellor on no-hope Britain.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman has given a long and passionate list of savings in public spending to

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

which he is opposed. His arithmetic is wrong and he has distorted several of them. Would it be fair of us to take some of what he said as a commitment that a Labour Government would reverse any of the spending savings? If so, would he like to say what is the cost of his commitment on any of those policy areas?

Mr. Smith: I will give the Chancellor some commitments. We would make cuts in the assisted places scheme. We would phase it out to put proper resources into cutting class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. We would cut the cost and the waste of rail privatisation and put that money into an integrated transport policy. We would cut the excess bureaucracy in the national health service and put the money into front-line patient care. We would cut the cost of nuclear privatisation. We would look carefully at that extra £100 million for social security running costs which the Chancellor has put in his Budget. Our public expenditure amendment spells out that and much more.

The welfare-to-work programme that we need to get especially the young and long-term unemployed into jobs with training would be funded by the windfall levy. The phased release of local authority capital receipts for social housing would cut bed and breakfast costs. We would boost front-line patient care and cut class sizes. Those are the choices which a fair Government would be making in a prudent Budget. How can the public believe the Government's claims of prudence when they see the neglect of public and private investment in the Budget? The climate of confidence for business to invest will not be created by a Budget which does nothing on capital allowances and nothing to encourage investment for the longer term, which increases VAT thresholds for small businesses by only half the rate of inflation and increases the business rate by 25 per cent. above the rate of inflation. No wonder the deputy director of the British chambers of commerce says:

> "Growth is not enough and will be unsustainable without investment . . . As a nation we are good at attracting investment from other countries but the question the Chancellor should be asking is why we are not investing in ourselves . . . If we are to become the enterprise centre of Europe, some redress of these spending priorities needs to take place."

The Government have taken one or two steps on the PFI that we have long called for. Training for civil servants who will negotiate the scheme will certainly be useful. The Government have failed to clarify the tendering process and the allocation of risk and to establish the new task force that is necessary to get things moving properly.

As for setting priorities for the PFI, we now have an A-list and a B-list of schemes. It is revealing that they are prioritised not according to their public benefit but according to commercial prospects. It is the privatisation not merely of provision but of the public interest in determining priorities for provision.

As the reaction of the construction industry shows, the whole history of the PFI has been one of reality falling far short of Government rhetoric. It is no wonder that, since the Budget, the chairman of the Confederation of British Industry of Scotland has said of the PFI plans that he is

> "deeply anxious . . . When the PFI came out in 1993, it was additional to Government spending. In fact what we now have is replacement funding."

Of course, the reality is even worse. The Chancellor's own projections show a real cut of 17.8 per cent. in public capital spending, reduced only to a real cut of 8.4 per cent. when the private finance initiative wish list is included. According to the Red Book, we are faced with the certainty of a £3.9 billion cut in direct Government capital spending, offset only by the hope that the private sector will make up £2 billion of the difference.

Let us not forget either that PFI spending carries with it revenue consequences and contingent liabilities for the future which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness pointed out in an excellent speech, will count against the public sector. I challenge the Chancellor in his reply to say how the public sector accounts will deal with that because not to account for the future consequences of present commitments is not prudent either.

The reality is that under the Government, public assets—the infrastructure of competitiveness and fairness—are being run down to pay the costs of economic and social failure. How can this be a prudent Budget when it not only increases public borrowing projections substantially but does so not for productive investment but to cover the shortfall on current Government spending.

It is bad enough for this year's PSBR to be £7.5 billion greater than forecast last year; for next year's to be £9.9 billion greater; and for the year after next's to be £10 billion bigger. However, for that to happen at the same time as public investment expenditure is being cut by £4 billion over the next three years is imprudence embedded as economic dogma.

In place of the golden rule that borrowing should be for investment across the cycle we now have Clarke's leaden rule: that investment must fall as far as necessary so that borrowing across the cycle can sustain a current deficit. It is the economics of remortgaging the house and forgoing repairs simply to pay the housekeeping bills.

I do not think that it has yet sunk in how serious the position is. If the Chancellor's projections turn out to be accurate—and they are based on what the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) called an optimistic growth forecast—the Red Book shows that the Chancellor proposes to borrow between now and the end of decade twice as much as he said that he planned to borrow last year: an extra £39 billion Tory borrowing plan between now and the millennium.

To put it in perspective, even if the Chancellor's forecasts are accurate, Britain will, over the 1990s, have taken on an extra £200 billion of borrowing as compared with £31 billion in the 1980s. Central Government debt interest payments alone will add an extra £33 billion in interest payments on to the shoulders of the British people. *[Interruption.]* I got that figure from page 69 of the Chancellor's own Red Book statement. He ought to read it.

It is the old, old story of Conservatives borrowing for their Government before an election that which they would force the people to pay for afterwards. The truth is that the Government are prisoners of their economic failure. It is the same failure on investment, growth, training and unemployment that has plunged Britain down the world prosperity league from 13th to 18th place: 7p up, 1p down—taking with one hand more than they give with the other and borrowing, borrowing all the way. No—for a strong economy, a fair society, sound public finances and quality public services, Britain needs a new start with Labour, a strategy for productive investment and skills to unite a country so divided by the Conservatives and a welfare-to-work programme which will enlist the talents, skills and energies of all our people in common success.

When it comes down to it, it is all about unfairness with the Tories and fairness with Labour: unfair taxation with the Tories and fair taxation with Labour; an unfair Britain with the Tories and a fair Britain with Labour. That is why the House should vote to cut VAT on fuel and vote for a public expenditure programme to build a fair society and a strong economy.

For now, all that we have is a Government who have run out of ideas and who are getting by on borrowed money and living on borrowed time. With their credit with the British people exhausted, and the day of reckoning approaching, they know that the Budget cannot save them, and it will not.

9.34 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) called for a new start with Labour, but unfortunately he said that with 30 seconds to go in his speech, so he had no time to explain to us what that new start might mean in particular. We have had that type of speech every day throughout the Budget debate. The trouble is that the Labour party has introduced all the new American public image approaches to electioneering, and it has begun to reduce politics to the level of light entertainment.

The Labour party has given an illustration this evening, yet again, of an official Opposition party that has decided that, when faced with real problems, it will not oppose, it cannot oppose and it certainly will not propose anything to deal with them. I accept that the hon. Member for Oxford, East touched on those problems with some vigour, but he produced no pledges or polices. He certainly produced nothing—quite remarkably—that disagreed with any of the Budget propositions that I have brought before the House.

There is no Labour alternative, for which in some ways there is much thanks, but it is the vacuum that the Labour party represents that poses the greatest threat to the present strides that the British economy is making towards, I believe, being one of the strongest economies in western Europe.

The Opposition have retreated before a Budget that combined a reduction in taxation, balanced by a reduction in public spending, while still protecting increased spending on the key services of health, education and the police. The Budget has also kept borrowing firmly under control, so that, outside the House, I have a won a reputation for responsibility, honesty and sound finance. I am happy to be accused of all those things, which frankly no Labour Chancellor would ever be accused of in a thousand years.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): In his Budget speech, the Chancellor said that the Government would provide resources to appoint 5,000 extra police officers. The resources they have given to North Yorkshire will provide just 30 extra police officers, leaving North Yorkshire police force still 70 below establishment, and eight police officers below the number in post under the last Labour Government, when the crime rate stood at 20,000 crimes a year. That crime rate is now more than 60,000 crimes a year, and in my county it is still rising. When will the Chancellor make good his pledges to provide the policing that people in North Yorkshire need to protect them and to catch the criminals?

Mr. Clarke: The increase of 5,000 officers is spread over a number of years. The hon. Gentleman is talking about the first year. *[Interruption.]* No, of course it is spread over a number of years, and was clearly expressed to be so. The money is there to provide for that increase in police manpower. The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) delved back to the days before civilianisation. Now we have more policemen, we have more officers engaged in the targeting of crime, such as the successful operation about which we heard today. Additional real resources will go to the police service.

I must point out to the hon. Member for York what I have pointed out to other Labour Members frequently throughout the debate. There was not a word in the Opposition winding-up speech tonight, or a word from any the shadow Treasury Front-Bench team about an undertaking to spend any more than we are undertaking to give in increased spending on the police services. That is true of all our tax provisions and spending plans.

On tax, we have achieved great progress towards the 20p basic rate. We have widened the lower rate limit, raised the threshold and cut the basic rate to 24p.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will do so in a second, but I cannot give way too much in my short winding-up speech. Let me make some progress.

The various reasons that have been given for not voting against the cut in basic rate make no sense at all. Labour Members use the litany that "the people have suffered too much". When that was given to them by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), they might have asked him to explain how it answers the question, "Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing to reduce the rate to 24p?" After five days of debate, the Opposition Treasury team cannot make up their minds on that difficult question. They abstain.

We have reduced taxation for savers. The hon. Member for Oxford, East was clearly in favour of that. The cut in the small companies' corporation tax will greatly benefit many small businesses. I am not sure about the Labour party's abstention on that.

I heard the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) busily denying that there was any correlation between economic success and low rates of corporate taxation. He was worried about that, and anxious to demonstrate that there were successful countries that had higher rates of taxation. To what level does the Labour party intend to raise corporate taxation? The right hon. Member argued that raising corporate taxation does not affect economic success. I am rather

[Mr. Clarke]

suspicious about Labour's abstention on that. We have also provided relief on the uniform business rate. The Labour party has no view on any of those tax proposals.

The Liberal party, however, does have a view. Liberal Members will agree that it is absolutely pathetic for the Labour Front Bench to have a so-called shadow Chancellor and a so-called shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury who cannot even tell the hungry masses behind them what opinion they have on any tax proposal in the Budget.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is in favour of a penny increase in income tax, which has become a vote against my penny. It was a penny increase at the last election. The Liberals have spending commitments of almost £5 billion. They keep spending the same penny over and over again. It is a Liberal party windfall tax.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Chancellor knows that that is not true, and that our spending commitments were fully costed. He started by saying that he had a well earned reputation for sound finance, and he knows that I have given him credit for that. How can he explain to the House the fact that, last year, when forecast borrowing was £21 billion and growth was 4 per cent., the position was so serious that he had to increase taxes? This year, when borrowing is forecast at £22.5 billion and growth has slowed to 1.6 per cent. apparently there is room to cut taxes. Is that sound financial management?

Mr. Clarke: I agree that last year's forecasts have not proved correct in the outturn, not because we have lost control of public spending, but because the revenues from the taxation to which the Opposition appear to object have fallen short and because of a slowdown, particularly in our key overseas markets.

The Budget has reacted to that by keeping borrowing on a firm downward course towards balance in the medium term. It is absurd for the Liberals first to go in the opposite direction to the Labour party and say that they are a tax-increasing party, and then to claim to outdo me in achieving a balanced Budget in the medium term—which I am not sure is their objective. The Liberals are pretty free with their spending pledges, as they would spend a 1p increase in income tax several times over.

We have controlled public spending. The shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Oxford, East, complained about that. Some of my hon. Friends raised small objections. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) mentioned the British Council. It is clear that we have to make some cuts in our overseas expenditure. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has distributed public spending restraint between the diplomatic service, the British Council and the BBC overseas service. It is for him to judge the respective priority of those services and where the costs should properly fall, but one cannot exempt any area if one is to achieve public expenditure control.

It is that which has paved the way for the tax cuts that I have just described. The tax cuts were targeted in the way I described at areas that will help the country's performance, but they were financed by the public expenditure cuts to which the hon. Member for Oxford, East objected.

At one stage, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) described as "peanuts" my tax cuts of £3.5 million, which is one half of 1 per cent. of GDP—without jeopardising our fiscal aims. Over three Budgets, I have taken £53 billion out of public spending plans, and almost all those measures were opposed by the Labour party. We have done that in a way that allows an extra £878 million to be spent on schools. We will increase national health service spending by more than £1 billion next year.

It is no use Labour Members trying, as several did, to hold up as a cut a switch out of publicly procured capital spending to current spending on patient care, disregard the £650 million already built in on top for savings in bureaucracy in the health services, and disregard the funds that the private finance initiative—which Labour supports—will undoubtedly bring in.

The Budget has allowed for an extra 5,000 police officers and 10,000 closed circuit television cameras.

We are a reforming Government. Some people outside doubt our ability to deliver the tight spending plans that we have produced. They ignore the fact that, to achieve cuts, we have not gone in for a routine candle-ends public spending round. We now have a Cabinet Committee that examines priorities. That is how we can cut overall and still increase spending on health, schools and the police.

That obviously throws Opposition Members completely, because they do not understand how we do that. We are also moving to resource accounting and modernising the civil service. The modernisation of government and the introduction of measures such as the private finance initiative and contracting out—which Labour often opposes—make credible the delivery of essential public services costing less than 40 per cent. of GDP.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Chancellor has tried to convince the public that his tax cuts are worth £9. What assumption did the right hon. and learned Gentleman make as to the level of earnings increases to arrive at that figure of £9?

Mr. Clarke: Last year and in many previous years, the Opposition asked a great number of questions about the effect on the average family of Budget assumptions and changes. That is a perfectly fair question, and the Treasury has a standard methodology. It involves making assumptions about the growth of earnings, inflation and the economy, and setting those against all taxes and charges.

We have done that again. That reflects reality. My Budget statement made clear the difference in tax. The Opposition are deliberately being stupid when they pretend that the figure of £9 per week was ever held up by anybody as a £9 per week reduction in taxation. It is the increase in spending power of the average family as a result of economic growth, the success of our policies, the low inflation that we have achieved, the growth in earnings that we expect and reductions in taxation. An Opposition who are silent about all the Budget measures are in no position to deride or gainsay them.

Mr. Andrew Smith *rose*—

Mr. Clarke: Of course I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but will he bounce to his feet and say what proposal he has that would affect that figure of £9? The hon. Gentleman does not seem to deny in the slightest that the average family will expect to be £9 a week better off next year—£450 a year—as a result of the success of this Government's policies.

Mr. Smith: Will the Chancellor answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth)? Of that £9, how much is earnings, and what assumption did the right hon. and learned Gentleman make about the rate of earnings increase? A figure will do.

Mr. Clarke: A whole set of assumptions are set out in the Red Book, as the hon. Gentleman perfectly well knows. One assumption is a $1\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. increase in earnings—which is not the same as pay settlements. That assumption is alongside a lot of other well-founded assumptions about inflation and growth based on the Budget, which add to the increased purchasing power of the average family.

Take-home pay, after tax and after inflation, will be about £450 higher next year. We have never tried to conceal any of this; if the Labour party would quote my Budget speech accurately, all of it would be perfectly clear.

I return to my theme, and make no apology for doing so. We have heard not a word from the Opposition that would affect this figure in the slightest: not a word on taxation, not a word on spending. No one on the Labour Front Bench has committed the Labour party to spending a penny more on the national health service than we propose. Indeed, when we suggested that the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), a Labour Treasury spokesman, had talked of increases in spending on the NHS only 12 months ago, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East demanded that the Chief Secretary withdraw his heinous allegation.

Not a penny more for the police has been pledged by any Labour Front-Bench spokesman. Nor has a penny more for education been pledged—which is surprising, because this morning the party came up with some half-baked but expensive-looking proposals in this respect. I quote the general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, who said this evening:

> "Labour's plans add up to a curious concoction of the good, the bad, the idealistic and the unrealistic. There is not a snowball's chance in hell of realising these plans without substantial additional expenditure".

The Labour party stands accused of not offering a penny piece in support of any of their proposals.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I am just coming to the hon. Gentleman's point about VAT on fuel.

The Labour party says that it will not vote against anything. Voting against the Budget simply means voting against the resolution changing the law—totally meaningless. The Budget is a combination of tax proposals and, nowadays, of spending proposals. The Opposition ain't going to vote for any particular tax or against any particular tax. They do not have a spending proposal—yet they are going to vote against the Budget. Meanwhile, they appear to be going to join the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and his Scottish nationalist friends, although not actually in voting for lower VAT on fuel. They are just sticking their noses out of the burrow, and they appear, just possibly, to be wavering towards a policy that might pave the way to reducing VAT—

Mr. Prescott: What about last year?

Mr. Clarke: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what happened last year. The idea was proposed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan last year. Then, the Labour party could not say how it would pay for the idea, which is no doubt why the Opposition retreated last year, in a faintly insulting fashion, from the very thing they are now going to vote for.

Let me repeat what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said then about the very matter which this evening constitutes the one vote of principle on which the Labour party says it will take a stand:

> "This nationalist amendment is another cynical ploy from an increasingly opportunist and desperate party. The nationalists know that the amendment has no chance of succeeding because there has been no campaign behind it . . . The nationalist amendment has been tabled for them to be able to play party politics with people's VAT bills. It is a cynical ploy from a party that sees its support slipping in the Scottish polls."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 1995; Vol.253, c.49.]

The hon. Member for Oxford, East tried to invent a reason to explain why the Labour party is standing on its head on this issue within the space of 10 months. Rather fatuously, he suggested that there was otherwise a risk of not getting the 8 per cent. through last year. But a few moments before in that debate, the Paymaster General had made it perfectly clear that there was no such risk. So Labour has ended up tonight supporting the Scottish nationalists in what Labour described but 10 months ago as a cynical ploy.

Mr. Salmond: Let us test the Chancellor's consistency. Does he remember, in his last Budget speech, and in other speeches, defending the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel on the grounds that there were increased resources for the home energy efficiency scheme? Now that he has cut that scheme by 30 per cent.—£30 million—200,000 fewer homes will be insulated. Would he care to revisit his arguments for VAT on domestic fuel?

Mr. Clarke: The home energy efficiency scheme is hugely successful, and I am second to none in my support of it. Expenditure on the scheme had reached a total of £100 million a year, and it has insulated many thousands of homes. It is a great breakthrough in energy efficiency, and it is also helping many people on lower incomes with their bills.

The reason why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced that he is cutting back from our peak of £100 million last year is that, as it stands, the scheme is open to people above retirement age, regardless of income. In principle, it is open for applications from people who happen to be fortunate enough to have retired with considerable resources of their own. It was never intended that the grant should be available to people of better-than-average incomes when they retire. Therefore, it will be more selectively offered to retired people.

I invite the hon. Gentleman to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for the details that lie behind the change in estimates for that scheme.

[Mr. Clarke]

I have not heard a member of the Labour party commit to having any view one way or the other on that, either. I have some sympathy on this occasion with the Scottish National party for pressing the matter, because only in Scotland does the Labour party have a taxation policy at all. In Scotland, everybody would have to pay 3p in the pound more. Income tax will be higher than it is south of the border. It is no good the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East looking uncomfortable. No policy has come forward. He tried one—a 10p rate. We have heard very little more about that rate. The £8 billion that it would cost has somehow never been explained.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East gives no other rates. Earlier, when I asked the deputy Leader of the Opposition why he would not give any other tax rates, and repeated the question that I asked the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who is also on the Front Bench—whether she could name a tax cut in this Budget that she is against, and whether she could give me a spending limit that she should raise—he could not answer that, either. He says that we have to wait.

If it is too difficult for the Opposition to read the Red Book, and if, in the mass of statistics, there is some nugget of information about the British economy that is holding them back from propounding the policies that they are so anxious to introduce, I would like to know what it is. But if there is something missing, why is it possible to give a 10p rate at the bottom and yet not say what rate they would put at the top? Why do they need to look at the books to say that 10p will be the bottom rate, if they cannot say what rate they would contemplate for the higher-paid? We all know perfectly well that they are the only Front Benchers in history to have a split when they have no policy.

But the right hon. Gentleman want to puts up the tax on the higher-paid. I have known him for 25 years. His idea of the higher-paid is not very high at all in the opinion of many—*[Interruption.]* Many frustrating things appear to happen on the Opposition Benches. Perhaps we should have had the shadow Foreign Secretary come in and try to give us a policy, because somebody should.

When the right hon. Gentleman was asked a question by the Deputy Prime Minister, he, being an honest and candid man, for one moment paused and gave a rather endearing smile. I think that it was the smile that must have inspired the poetry that my right hon. Friend quoted, and of which Conservative Members are all so deeply envious. When the right hon. Gentleman gives that sweet smile, he is meant to use the words "New Labour". They have absolutely nothing else to say.

As I said when I began, there is a serious problem in all this. It is a problem for Opposition Members. They all went on and on about cuts in public spending—the hon. Member for Oxford, East quoted an absolute litany. He had a better reply when I asked him what the Labour party was promising to increase spending on. He did not give me an answer, but everybody cheered while he announced a list of cuts that either added up to nothing or were giving up a lot of privatisation proceeds, which will not do very much about the borrowing requirement, on which he claimed that he would do better than me. He has no answer. He did not promise a thing, and he is not going to vote against the tax cut.

Has the great Labour and trade union movement come to this? Well, it has. The Opposition are not new Labour, they are not one-nation Conservatives, they are not ex-socialists; they are nothing on policy. Handing over to them a great economic recovery would take us back to recession in a very short time indeed.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 307.

Division No. 6] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret

Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. John Cummings.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael

Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 285.

Division No. 7] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward

Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Rev Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna *(Perth & Kinross)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert *(North Down)*
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Glasgow, Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. John Cummings.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation otherwise than by—

(i) zero-rating or exempting supplies of goods which are, or are to be, subjected to a fiscal or other warehousing regime; or

(ii) zero-rating or exempting supplies of services on or in relation to such goods;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax otherwise than to persons constructing or converting buildings in cases where the construction or conversion is not in the course or furtherance of a business;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.

MADAM SPEAKER *then, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means Motions), put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the further motions.*

2. SPIRITS (RATE OF DUTY)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 5 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979, for "£20.60" there shall be substituted "£19.78".

(2) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

3. Wine and Made-Wine (Rates of Duty)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In the Table of rates of duty in Schedule 1 to the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979—

(a) in Part I of the Table for "200.64", where it appears as the rate for wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 15 per cent. but not exceeding 22 per cent., there shall be substituted "187.24"; and

(b) in Part II of that Table, for "20.60" there shall be substituted "19.78".

(2) Sub-paragraph (a) of paragraph (1) of this Resolution shall come into force on 1st January 1996 and sub-paragraph (b) shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

4. Cider (Rate of Duty)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the rate of duty on cider under section 62 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979.

5. Hydrocarbon Oil (Rates of Duty and Rebate)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) In section 6(1) of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979, for "£0.3614" and "£0.3132" there shall be substituted "£0.3912" and "£0.3430", respectively.

(2) In section 8(3) of that Act, for "£0.3314" there shall be substituted "£0.2817".

(3) In section 11(1) of that Act, for "£0.0166" and "£0.0214" there shall be substituted "£0.0181" and "£0.0233", respectively.

(4) In section 14(1) of that Act, for "£0.0166" there shall be substituted "£0.0181".

(5) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 40.

Division No. 8] **[10.30 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Amold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Amold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Bums, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishbum, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gamier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordem, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensboume)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bemard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCrea, The Reverend William
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Margaret Ewing and
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd.

Question accordingly agreed to.

6. HYDROCARBON OIL (REBATE ON UNLEADED PETROL)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 13A of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979.

7. HYDROCARBON OIL (RELIEF FOR MARINE VOYAGES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made repealing sections 18 and 19(1)(a) of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979.

8. TOBACCO PRODUCTS (RATES OF DUTY)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the Table of rates of duty in Schedule 1 to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 there shall be substituted—

“TABLE

1. Cigarettes	An amount equal to 20 per cent. of the retail price plus £62.52 per thousand cigarettes.
2. Cigars	£91.52 per kilogram.
3. Hand-rolling tabacco	£85.94 per kilogram.
4. Other smoking tobacco and chewing tobacco	£40.24 per kilogram.”

(2) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

9. GENERAL BETTING DUTY (RATE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 1(2) of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981, for “7.75 per cent.” there shall be substituted “6.75 per cent.”

(2) This Resolution shall apply in relation to bets made on or after 1st March 1996.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

10. POOL BETTING DUTY (RATE)

Resolved,

That in section 7(1) of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981, for “32.50 per cent.” there shall be substituted, in relation to bets the stake money on which has been or is paid on or after 3rd December 1995, “27.50 per cent.”.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

11. AMUSEMENT MACHINE LICENCE DUTY

Resolved,

That provision may be made about amusement machine licence duty.

12. EXCISE DUTIES (REPAYMENTS, ALLOWANCES AND DRAWBACKS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made restricting the repayments, drawbacks and allowances that may be made or paid in respect of excise duties on goods.

13. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (INCREASE IN GENERAL RATE)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) In Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, in paragraph 1(2) for "£135" there shall be substituted "£140".

(2) Paragraph (1) of this Resolution applies in relation to licences taken out after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 41.

Division No. 9] **[10.43 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Ht Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*

Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville

Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCrea, The Reverend William

Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Hughes and
Mr. Don Foster.

Question accordingly agreed to.

14. Vehicle Excise Duty (Electrically Propelled Vehicles)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, in paragraph 2(1)(a), after "150 cubic centimetres" there shall be inserted "or the motorcycle is an electrically propelled vehicle".

(2) In paragraph 4F of that Schedule—

(a) in sub-paragraph (1), after "electrically propelled vehicle" there shall be inserted "other than a motorcycle (within the meaning of Part II of this Schedule)"; and

(b) sub-paragraph (2) shall be omitted.

(3) In section 62 of that Act, after subsection (1) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1A) For the purposes of this Act, a vehicle is not an electrically propelled vehicle unless the electrical motive power is derived from—

(a) a source external to the vehicle, or

(b) an electrical storage battery which is not connected to any source of power when the vehicle is in motion."

(4) Paragraphs (1) to (3) of this Resolution apply in relation to licences taken out after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

15. Vehicle Excise Duty (Steam Powered Vehicles, Etc.)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, after paragraph 4E there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"4EE. A steam powered vehicle is a special concessionary vehicle."

(2) In paragraph 3 of that Schedule, in sub-paragraph (2)(b), after "excepted vehicle" there shall be inserted "or a special concessionary vehicle".

(3) In paragraph 4(2) of that Schedule, for "and is" there shall be substituted "which is not a special concessionary vehicle and which is".

(4) In paragraph 5 of that Schedule, after sub-paragraph (5) there shall be inserted the following sub-paragraph—

"(5A) A vehicle is not a recovery vehicle if it is a special concessionary vehicle."

(5) In paragraph 6(1) of that Schedule, after paragraph (b) there shall be inserted—

"and which is not a special concessionary vehicle."

(6) In paragraph 7(2) of that Schedule, after "Part IV," there shall be inserted "IVA,".

(7) In paragraph 16 of that Schedule, in sub-paragraph (1)(a), after "Part II, IV," there shall be inserted "IVA,".

(8) This Resolution applies in relation to licences taken out after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

16. Vehicle Excise Duty (Vehicles Capable of Conveying Loads)

Resolved,

That—

(1) Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 shall be amended as mentioned in paragraphs (2) to (8) of this Resolution.

(2) In paragraph 4(2), immediately before paragraph (c) there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"(bb) a vehicle falling within sub-paragraph (2A) or (2B),".

(3) After sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 4 there shall be inserted the following sub-paragraphs—

"(2A) A vehicle falls within this sub-paragraph if—

(a) it is designed or adapted for use for the conveyance of goods or burden of any description; but

(b) it is not so used or is not so used for hire or reward or for or in connection with a trade or business.

(2B) A vehicle falls within this sub-paragraph if—

(a) it is designed or adapted for use with a semi-trailer attached; but

(b) it is not so used or, if it is so used, the semi-trailer is not used for the conveyance of goods or burden of any description."

(4) In paragraph 16(1), paragraph (b), and the word "or" immediately preceding it, shall be omitted.

(5) In paragraph 9(2), after paragraph (b) there shall be inserted "and

(c) to any rigid goods vehicle which is used loaded only in connection with a person learning to drive the vehicle or taking a driving test,".

(6) In paragraph 10(1), after "exceeding 12,000 kilograms" there shall be inserted ", which does not fall within paragraph 9(2)(b) or (c)".

(7) In paragraph 11(2), after paragraph (b) there shall be inserted "and

(c) to any tractive unit to which a semi-trailer is attached which is used loaded only in connection with a person learning to drive the tractive unit or taking a driving test,".

(8) After paragraph 18 there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

19.—(1) In this Part "driving test" means any test of competence to drive mentioned in section 89(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

(2) For the purposes of this Part a vehicle or a semi-trailer is used loaded if the vehicle or, as the case may be, the semi-trailer is used for the conveyance of goods or burden of any description."

(9) In section 7 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, in subsection (2)—

(a) after "goods vehicle" there shall be inserted "or a special vehicle"; and

(b) after "goods vehicles" there shall be inserted "or, as the case may be, special vehicles".

(10) After subsection (7) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(8) In this section "special vehicle" has the same meaning as in paragraph 4 of Schedule 1."

(11) Subject to paragraph (13) of this Resolution, paragraphs (1) to (8) of this Resolution apply in relation to licences taken out after 28th November 1995.

(12) Paragraph (13) of this Resolution applies where a vehicle licence is taken out—

(a) on or before 28th November 1995, and

(b) at the rate applicable (at the time it is taken out) under Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994.

(13) While the licence is in force duty shall not, by virtue of this Resolution, become chargeable under section 15 of that Act.

(14) Paragraphs (9) and (10) of this Resolution apply in relation to applications made after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

17. Vehicle Excise Duty (Old Vehicles)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In Schedule 2 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, immediately before paragraph 2 there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

1A.—(1) A vehicle of a description mentioned in sub-paragraph (2) is an exempt vehicle at any time if it was constructed more than 25 years before the beginning of the year in which that time falls.

(2) The descriptions of vehicles are—

(a) a vehicle in respect of which no annual rate is specified by any provision of parts II to VIII of Schedule 1;

(b) a motorcycle which does not exceed 450 kilograms in weight unladen.

(3) In sub-paragraph (2)(b) "motorcycle" has the same meaning as in Part II of Schedule 1."

(2) In Schedule 1 to that Act, in paragraph 1—

(a) for paragraphs (a) and (b) of sub-paragraph (1) there shall be substituted "the general rate"; and

(b) sub-paragraphs (3) to (5) shall be omitted;

and, in paragraph 2, sub-paragraph (2) shall be omitted.

(3) In section 2(4) of that Act, for the words from "whichever" to the end there shall be substituted "the general rate currently specified in paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 1".

(4) In that Act—

(a) in section 13, in subsection (3)(b),

(b) in section 13 as substituted under paragraph 8 of Schedule 4, in subsection (4)(b), and

(c) in section 36(3)(b),

for "1(1)(a)" there shall be substituted "1".

(5) This Resolution has effect in relation to times after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

18. Vehicle Excise Duty (Rebates)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 19 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994.

19. Value Added Tax (Value of Imported Goods)

Resolved,

That—

(1) Section 21 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2) of that section at the end of paragraph (a) the word "and" shall be omitted.

(3) For paragraph (b) of that subsection there shall be substituted—

"(b) all incidental expenses, such as commission, packing, transport and insurance costs, up to the goods' first destination in the United Kingdom; and

(c) if at the time of the importation of the goods from a place outside the member States a further destination for the goods is known, and that destination is within the United Kingdom or another member State, all such incidental expenses in so far as they result from the transport of the goods to that other destination;

and in this subsection "the goods' first destination" means the place mentioned on the consignment note or any other document by means of which the goods are imported into the United Kingdom, or in the absence of such documentation it means the place of the first transfer of cargo in the United Kingdom."

(4) This Resolution shall have effect in relation to goods imported on or after 1st January 1996.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

20. Value Added Tax (Fiscal and Other Warehouses)

Resolved,

That provision may be made imposing charges to value added tax in connection with regimes applying to fiscal and other warehouses.

21. Value Added Tax (Anti-Avoidance: Groups)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the application of section 43 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 in cases where things are done otherwise than for a genuine commercial purpose.

22. VALUE ADDED TAX (WORK ON MATERIALS, ETC.)

Resolved,

That—

(1) The Value Added Tax Act 1994 shall be amended as follows.

(2) Section 22 shall be omitted.

(3) After subsection (2) of section 30 there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2A) A supply by a person of services which consist of applying a treatment or process to another person's goods is zero-rated by virtue of this subsection if by doing so he produces goods, and either—

(a) those goods are of a description for the time being specified in Schedule 8; or

(b) a supply by him of those goods to the person to whom he supplies the services would be of a description so specified.".

(4) In subsection (5) of section 55, after paragraph (b) there shall be inserted the following—

"; or

(c) any supply of services consisting in the application to another person's goods of a treatment or process which produces goods a supply of which would fall within paragraph (a) above.";

and the word "or" at the end of paragraph (a) shall be omitted.

(5) Paragraph 2 of Schedule 4 shall be omitted.

(6) This Resolution shall apply to supplies made on or after 1st January 1996.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

23. VALUE ADDED TAX (SUPPLIES OF GOLD)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 55 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994, for paragraph (a) of subsection (5) there shall be substituted the following paragraph—

"(a) any supply of goods consisting in fine gold, in gold grain of any purity or in gold coins of any purity; or".

(2) This Resolution applies in relation to any supply after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

24. VALUE ADDED TAX (SMALL GIFTS)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In Schedule 4 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994, in paragraph 5(2)(a), for "£10" there shall be substituted "£15".

(2) This Resolution shall apply where a gift is made after 28th November 1995.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

25. VALUE ADDED TAX (PAYMENTS ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That provision amending section 28 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 may be made about the manner in which payments on account of value added tax are to be made.

26. VALUE ADDED TAX (PENALTIES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 67 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994—

(a) in subsection (1)(a), after "6" there shall be inserted ", 7"; and

(b) in subsection (3)(a), for "or 6" there shall be substituted ", 6 or 7".

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) of this Resolution, paragraph (1) of this Resolution shall apply in relation to—

(a) any person who becomes liable to be registered by virtue of sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994 on or after 1st January 1996; and

(b) any person who becomes liable to be registered by virtue of that sub-paragraph before that date but who has not notified the Commissioners of Customs and Excise of the liability before that date.

(3) In relation to a person falling within paragraph (2)(b) of this Resolution, section 67 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 shall have effect as if in subsection (3)(a) for the words "the date with effect from which he is, in accordance with that paragraph, required to be registered" there were substituted "1st January 1996".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

27. LANDFILL TAX

Resolved,

That provision may be made for charging a tax on disposals of material on or under land.

28. INCOME TAX (CHARGE AND RATES FOR 1996-97)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) Income tax shall be charged for the year 1996-97, and for that year—

(a) the lower rate shall be 20 per cent.;

(b) the basic rate shall be 24 per cent.; and

(c) the higher rate shall be 40 per cent.

(2) For the year 1996-97 section 1(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall apply—

(a) as if the amount specified in paragraph (aa) were £3,900; and

(b) as if the amount specified in paragraph (b) were £25,500;

and, accordingly, section 1(4) of that Act shall not apply for the year 1996-97.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House proceeded to a Division:—

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes) (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Some Labour Members who want to vote against this motion are being forbidden to do so by Labour Whips, who are blocking the entrance to the Division Lobby. Will you have the Serjeant at Arms investigate?

Madam Speaker: Members wishing to vote one way or the other in any Division are at liberty to do so. The doors are open.

Mr. Brown: But they are not getting in, even though they want to.

Madam Speaker: If any hon. Member wants to vote, there is a door open here.

The House having divided: Ayes 313, Noes 38.

Division No. 10] **[10.56 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, The Reverend William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*

Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Pickthall, Colin
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Hughes and
Mr. Don Foster.
Total: 18

Question accordingly agreed to.

29. LOWER RATE TAX ON SAVINGS

Resolved,

That the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be amended as follows—

(1) After section 1 there shall be inserted the following section—

["APPLICATION OF LOWER RATE TO INCOME FROM SAVINGS]

1A.—(1) Subject to sections 469(2) and 686, so much of any person's total income for any year of assessment as—

(a) comprises income to which this section applies, and

(b) in the case of an individual, is not income falling within section 1(2)(b),

shall, by virtue of this section, be charged for that year at the lower rate, instead of at the rate otherwise applicable to it in accordance with section 1(2)(aa) and (a).

(2) Subject to subsection (4) below, this section applies to the following income—

(a) any income chargeable under Case III of Schedule D other than—

(i) relevant annuities and other annual payments that are not interest; and

(ii) amounts so chargeable by virtue of section 119 or 120;

(b) any income chargeable under Schedule F; and

(c) subject to subsection (4) below, any equivalent foreign income.

(3) The income which is equivalent foreign income for the purposes of this section is any income chargeable under Case IV or V of Schedule D which—

(a) is equivalent to a description of income falling within subsection (2)(a) above but arises from securities or other possessions out of the United Kingdom; or

(b) consists in any such dividend or other distribution of a company not resident in the United Kingdom as would be chargeable under Schedule F if the company were resident in the United Kingdom.

(4) This section does not apply to—

(a) any income chargeable to tax under Case IV or V of Schedule D which is such that section 65(5)(a) or (b) provides for the tax to be computed on the full amount of sums received in the United Kingdom; or

(b) any amounts deemed by virtue of section 695(4)(b) or 696(6) to be income chargeable under Case IV of Schedule D.

(5) So much of any person's income as comprises income to which this section applies shall be treated for the purposes of subsection (1)(b) above and any other provisions of the Income Tax Acts as the highest part of his income.

(6) Subsection (5) above shall have effect subject to section 833(3) but shall otherwise have effect notwithstanding any provision requiring income of any description to be treated for the purposes of the Income Tax Acts (other than section 550) as the highest part of a person's income.

(7) In this section "relevant annuity" means any annuity other than a purchased life annuity to which section 656 applies or to which that section would apply but for section 657(2)(a)."

(2) In section 4, after subsection (1) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1A) As respects deductions from, and tax treated as paid on, any such amounts as constitute or (but for the person whose income they are) would constitute income to which section 1A applies, subsection (1) above shall have effect with a reference to the lower rate in force for the relevant year of assessment substituted for the reference to the basic rate in force for that year."

(3) In section 326B—

(a) in subsection (2)(b)(ii), for the words from "basic rate on" to the end of the sub-paragraph there shall be substituted "applicable rate on any interest or bonus paid on the account before that time;" and

(b) after subsection (2) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2A) In subsection (2)(b)(ii) above "the applicable rate" means—

(a) in the case of interest or bonus paid before 6th April 1996, the basic rate for the year of assessment in which the payment was made; and

(b) in any other case, the lower rate for the year of assessment in which it was made."

(4) In section 350, in subsection (1), for "basic rate" there shall be substituted "applicable rate"; and after that subsection there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1A) In subsection (1) above "the applicable rate" means the rate which is applicable to the payment under section 4."

(5) In paragraph (a)(i) of subsection (2) of section 582, for "basic" there shall be substituted "applicable"; and after that subsection there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2A) In subsection (2) above "the applicable rate", in relation to a year of assessment, means whichever of the basic rate or the lower rate for that year is the rate at which the person by or through whom the bonds are issued would have had to deduct income tax from the amount of interest in question if that amount had been actually paid by or through him."

(6) In subsection (1) of section 737, after "shall apply" there shall be inserted "(subject to subsection (1A) below)"; and for subsection (1A) of that section there shall be substituted the following subsection—

"(1A) The deduction of tax which is deemed to have been made under subsection (1) above shall be taken to have been made at the lower rate as if the deemed annual payment were income to which section 1A applied; and—

(a) the reference to the applicable rate in subsection (1) of section 350, so far as it has effect by virtue of subsection (1) above, and

(b) Schedule 16, so far as it so has effect,

shall be construed accordingly."

(7) In section 737C(6), for "basic" there shall be substituted "lower".

(8) In Schedule 3—

(a) in paragraph 1(c), for "basic" there shall be substituted "lower"; and

(b) in paragraph 6A—

(i) in sub-paragraph (1), for "applicable" there shall be substituted "lower"; and

(ii) sub-paragraph (4) shall cease to have effect.

(9) Paragraphs (1) and (5) to (7) of this Resolution have effect in relation to the year 1996-97 and subsequent years of assessment, paragraphs (2), (4) and (8) of this Resolution have effect in relation to payments on or after 6th April 1996, and paragraph (3) of this Resolution has effect as respects withdrawals on or after 6th April 1996.

(10) Where any subordinate legislation (within the meaning of the Interpretation Act 1978) falls to be construed in accordance with section 4 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, that legislation (whenever it was made) shall be construed, in relation to payments on or after 6th April 1996, subject to subsection (1A) of that section.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

30. INCOME TAX (PERSONAL ALLOWANCES)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the year 1996-97, the amounts specified in the provisions mentioned in paragraph (2) of this Resolution shall be taken to be as set out in that paragraph; and, accordingly, section 257C(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, so far as it relates to the amounts so specified, shall not apply for the year 1996-97.

(2) In section 257 of that Act—

(a) the amount in subsection (1) shall be £3,765;

(b) the amount in subsection (2) shall be £4,910; and

(c) the amount in subsection (3) shall be £5,090.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

31. BLIND PERSON'S ALLOWANCE

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 265(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, for "£1,200" there shall be substituted "£1,250".

(2) This Resolution shall apply for the year 1996-97.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

32. RELIEF FOR INTEREST (LIMIT FOR 1996-97)

Resolved,

That, for the year 1996-97, the qualifying maximum defined in section 367(5) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be £30,000.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

33. CORPORATION TAX (CHARGE AND RATE FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 1996)

Resolved,

That corporation tax shall be charged for the financial year 1996 at the rate of 33 per cent.

34. CORPORATION TAX (SMALL COMPANIES: 1996)

Resolved,

That, for the financial year 1996—

(a) the small companies' rate shall be 24 per cent.; and

(b) the fraction mentioned in section 13(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be nine four-hundredths.

35. GOVERNMENT SECURITIES, ETC.

Resolved,

That provision may be made about government securities and securities on which amounts are payable out of public revenue or out of the revenue of any government or of any public or local authority or institution outside the United Kingdom.

36. LOAN RELATIONSHIPS

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the purposes of corporation tax about relationships in which a company stands, or is to be treated as standing, in the position of a creditor or debtor in relation to a debt arising from the lending of money.

37. DISCOUNTED SECURITIES

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the purposes of income tax about securities issued at a discount.

38. LIVING ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYEES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the amount chargeable to income tax where living accommodation is provided for a person by reason of his employment.

39. BENEFICIAL LOANS

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 dealing with beneficial loan arrangements.

40. PAYE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS

Resolved,

That provision may be made for modifying the effect of the Income Tax Acts in cases where an agreement is made between the Commissioners of Inland Revenue and another person as to the amount in respect of tax on the emoluments of employees, or office-holders for which that other person is to be accountable to those Commissioners.

41. SELF-ASSESSMENT

Resolved,

That provision for the purpose of facilitating the operation of self-assessment may be made about the manner in which, the periods as respects which and the times at which—

(a) assessments may be made or varied, and

(b) matters may be determined for the purposes of the making of assessments.

42. PAYMENTS ON ACCOUNT OF LIABILITY TO INCOME TAX

Resolved,

That provision may be made relating to payments on account of liability to income tax.

43. CHARITABLE DONATIONS (PAYROLL DEDUCTION SCHEMES)

Resolved,

That, for the year 1996-97, section 202(7) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall have effect with the substitution of "£1,200" for "£900".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

44. SHARE OPTION SCHEMES

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made about share option schemes, rights obtained under such schemes and shares obtained by the exercise of such rights.

45. TAX RELIEF FOR CLASS 4 CONTRIBUTIONS

Resolved,

That provision may be made about tax relief for Class 4 contributions within the meaning of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 and the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992.

46. RELIEF FOR CERTAIN ANNUAL PAYMENTS

Resolved,

That section 347A of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall apply to any payment made on or after 6th April 1996—

(a) in pursuance of any obligation which falls within section 36(4)(a) of the Finance Act 1988, and

(b) for the benefit, maintenance or education of a person (whether or not the person to whom the payment is made) who attained the age of 21 before 6th April 1994,

as if that obligation were not an existing obligation within the definition contained in section 36(4) of the Finance Act 1988.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

47. GOVERNMENT PILOT SCHEMES

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the purposes of income tax about temporary arrangements made by the Secretary of State or any Northern Ireland department for the purpose of facilitating a decision as to whether, or to what extent, provision should be made on a permanent basis for or in relation to the payment of a benefit, allowance, grant or other amount.

48. FOREIGN INCOME DIVIDENDS

Resolved,

That provision may be made about foreign income dividends.

49. UNAUTHORISED UNIT TRUSTS

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the rate at which income tax is chargeable on income arising to the trustees of a unit trust scheme to which section 469 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 applies.

50. TRANSFER ON DEATH UNDER THE ACCRUED INCOME SCHEME

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 721 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

51. PAYING AGENTS AND COLLECTING AGENTS

Resolved,

That provision may be made about dividends falling to be paid or received by persons acting, or treated as acting, as paying agents or collecting agents.

52. MANUFACTURED PAYMENTS, REPOS, ETC.

Resolved,

That provision may be made about manufactured payments, about the sale and repurchase of securities and about the amount taken to be paid or payable in respect of any sale, repurchase or other transfer of securities to which a manufactured payment relates.

53. CANCELLATION OF TAX ADVANTAGES (TRANSACTIONS IN SECURITIES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending paragraph D of section 704 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

54. TRUST MANAGEMENT EXPENSES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the setting-off of trust management expenses against income.

55. INSURANCE AND CAPITAL REDEMPTION BUSINESS

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made for the purposes of corporation tax about the carrying on of insurance business and about capital redemption business.

56. INSURANCE COMPANIES (PROVISIONAL REPAYMENTS)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Schedule 19AB to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

57. QUALIFYING LIFE INSURANCE POLICIES

Resolved,

That provision may be made in connection with the requirements to be satisfied if a policy of life insurance is to be a qualifying policy.

58. LOANS TO PARTICIPATORS, ETC.

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 419 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

59. CHARGEABLE GAINS (NON-RESIDENT COMPANIES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 13 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992.

60. CONTROLLED FOREIGN COMPANIES

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Chapter IV of Part XVII of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

61. Directions Relating to Sales at an Undervalue or Overvalue

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made amending subsection (3) of section 770 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 and the provision re-enacted in that subsection.

62. Petroleum Exploration

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made about the disposal of assets consisting in, or connected with, a licence or other right to search for or win petroleum.

63. Inheritance Tax Reliefs

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending sections 113A and 124A of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984.

64. Banking

Resolved,

That provision may be made in connection with banking.

65. Quotation or Listing of Securities

Resolved,

That provision may be made for modifying references in enactments relating to taxation to the quotation or listing of securities.

66. Copyright, Designs and Artists' Receipts

Resolved,

That provision may be made with respect to sections 534, 535, 537, 537A and 538 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

67. Stamp Duty (Spoiled Instruments)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about stamp duty where—

(a) an instrument is inadvertently and undesignedly spoiled; and

(b) another instrument is made between the same parties and for the same purpose.

68. Stamp Duty Reserve Tax

Resolved,

That provision may be made about stamp duty reserve tax.

69. Schedule 2 to the Agriculture Act 1993

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made modifying the operation of Part I of Schedule 2 to the Agriculture Act 1993.

70. Relief From Tax (Incidental and Consequential Charges)

Resolved,

That it is expedient to authorise any incidental or consequential charges to any duty or tax (including charges having retrospective effect) which may arise from provisions designed in general to afford relief from taxation.

PROCEDURE (FUTURE TAXATION)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provision taking effect in a future year for amending section 186 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

FINANCE [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act of the present Session relating to finance, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums payable by the Secretary of State by virtue of provisions of that Act relating to vehicle excise and registration.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Dorrell, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. Michael Jack do prepare and bring it in.

Finance Bill

Mr. Jack accordingly presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, to amend the law relating to the national debt and the public revenue, and to make further provision in connection with finance: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 12.]

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE

Madam Speaker *then proceeded to put forthwith the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion relating to Public Expenditure, pursuant to Order [22 November].*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House welcomes the public expenditure plans announced by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget speech on 28th November; congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its continued firm control of public spending and its success in reducing bureaucracy, increasing efficiency and tackling fraud, while providing more resources for the delivery of key public services; applauds Her Majesty's Government's determination to reduce further the share of national income taken by the State; and commends the Government for the success of its Private Finance Initiative and the other innovative ways it is forming partnerships with the private sector to improve the efficiency and quality of public services.—[*Dr. Liam Fox.*]

Amendment proposed to the Question, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'rejects the waste, misallocation of resources, the wrong choice of priorities and the huge bills paid for an economic failure which has taken Britain under the Conservatives from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league and which has brought the real cuts in front-line services now contained in the Government's public expenditure statement; recognises the unacceptable levels and effects of unemployment including the cost to public finances now at £20 billion a year and the fact that it is because the Government is spending these huge sums paying the bills of failure that it is now cutting capital investment, cutting entitlements to social security and overseas aid and cutting the school milk scheme; calls for a welfare to work programme financed by a windfall levy on the monopoly utilities that will get people back to work, reduce the costs of economic failure and release resources for front-line public services; notes that the Government's Budget proposals are a sleight of hand, because what is given with one hand is taken with the other through increases in Council Tax, prescription charges, rent levels, postal charges and transport costs; calls for an approach based on fairness and progressivity, encouraging work and opportunity, with a strategy for long-term productive investment, skills, employment and regional development; on expenditure priorities, calls on the Government to release capital receipts on a phased basis to allow local authority building and employment creation as a result; calls for switches of resources to smaller class sizes from phasing out the Assisted Places Scheme, to front line patient care from the cost of National Health Service bureaucracy and to investment in transport from the cost of rail privatisation; and calls for the transformation of the failed private finance initiative which has become a back door for privatisation into genuine public-private partnership, with a new taskforce to get investment moving'.—[*Mr. Andrew Smith.*]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 310.

Division No. 11] **[11.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours D.N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian

Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Jane Kennedy and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George

Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 276.

Division No. 12] [11.25 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael

Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William

Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann

Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John

Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John

Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry

Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mrs. Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the public expenditure plans announced by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget speech on 28th November; congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its continued firm control of public spending and its success in reducing bureaucracy, increasing efficiency and tackling fraud, while providing more resources for the delivery of key public services; applauds Her Majesty's Government's determination to reduce further the share of national income taken by the State; and commends the Government for the success of its Private Finance Initiative and the other innovative ways it is forming partnerships with the private sector to improve the efficiency and quality of public services.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

HEALTH AND SAFETY

That the draft Health and Safety (Repeals and Revocations) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

That the Bristol Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1995, dated 6th November 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.—[*Dr. Liam Fox.*]

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94H(1) (Scottish Grand Committees (sittings)),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet:

1. in Edinburgh City Chambers on Monday 11th December; and
2. in Glasgow City Chambers on Monday 18th December.—[*Dr. Liam Fox.*]

Question agreed to.

Metticillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

11.37 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I welcome the Minister to his new post and wish him well in it. I am very pleased to have secured this debate on metticillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. That is the only time that I shall mention its full title. From now on I shall refer to it as MRSA. I declare an interest in that Unison pays me £500 towards my office allowance for payment of staff, but I am not raising this debate on its behalf. I also apologise for the cold that I am carrying. I look as if I am rehearsing for the role of Santa Claus with this red nose. For reasons that will become clear in my speech, I am not taking any antibiotics for my cold.

I decided to raise this subject after an article in my local paper, the *Waltham Forest Guardian Series*, on 14 September gave me quite a start. It said that Mr. David Chudley, a 44-year-old father of seven, was admitted to my local hospital, Whipps Cross, with a routine leg fracture after a road accident. Within a little while of being admitted with that minor leg injury, he died from the MRSA infection. His wife, Christine, is quoted as saying:

> "When someone says your husband has got a broken leg, you don't expect him to die."

The report then says that his is not the only death and that there have been two connected with the bug. A consultant at the hospital has admitted that the hospital has 20 or 30 patients carrying the bug at any one time. The other man who died was Mr. Kevin Cox from Chingford; he died in February from MRSA.

The bacterium has become immune to the strongest of antibiotic drugs. It sticks to the windpipe of its victim and infects the lungs. It forms pus and can cause pneumonia, according to the local paper. The coroner wrote to the Whipps Cross medical director suggesting that the hospital should set up special isolation wards to contain the bug. The article concludes:

> "MRSA is a problem in hospitals across the country but is particularly bad in the south of England.
>
> The first few cases of the bacteria were reported in 1991. Two years later there were 300 cases in more than 40 hospitals. Now 129 hospitals in the UK are reporting it."

That is an amazing figure which shows the rapid spread of MRSA. In the same edition of my local paper, Bryan Harrison of Forest Healthcare trust said that hospitals were not a healthy place to be in. He was clearly alluding to the MRSA bug.

The 1990s have seen a massive increase in MRSA infection in hospitals. The privatisation of cleansing services in the mid-1980s, worsening the standards of cleanliness in hospitals, has been a contributory factor, but I acknowledge other factors, especially the over-use of antibiotics. My mother's common-sense dictum to me as a child was that people should not take antibiotics unless they really needed them. If people did, antibiotics would not have the necessary effect when they had to have them. There has been indiscriminate and inappropriate prescribing, although probably less in this country than in other countries. That has resulted in more antibiotic-resistant bacteria such as MRSA.

In the 1990s, there has been a worldwide resurgence of bacterial and viral diseases. Virtually all major disease-causing bacteria seem to have acquired antibiotic-resistant characteristics. There has been a massive increase in the population at risk because their immune system has been compromised in some way. Examples are cancer and leukaemia treatments and transplants, AIDS high-dose steroid treatments, invasive medical intervention and the prolonged survival of patients with chronic debilitating diseases. That resistance has come about and MRSA has spread.

I thank Dr. Jane Cushion of the House of Commons Library for her excellent briefing on MRSA; I shall summarise some of it. Staphylococcus aureus is a common bacterium which may be carried in the nose; about 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. of healthy people may carry it. Less often, it is carried on the skin, usually in the armpit or in other warm, moist areas, or in the mucous membranes, such as the lining of the mouth and gut. A significant proportion of the population are reservoirs for the bacterium from whom it can escape and cause disease. Its optimum temperature for growth is 37 deg. C, which is roughly equivalent to normal body temperature.

MRSA causes infections and diseases which can result in the production of pus. The infection may be superficial, with boils, carbuncles and abscesses. Deep infections, although less common, are much more serious and include septicaemia, endocarditis—infection of the heart valves—osteomyelitis, pneumonia, toxic food poisoning, toxic shock syndrome and skin exfoliation syndrome.

Penicillin dealt a big blow to bacteria infections. In the 1950s bacteria developed which were resistant to penicillin. The antibiotic flucloxacillin was subsequently developed and kept down infections by such bacteria. There has been a large increase particularly since 1983-84 in staphylococcus aureus, which is resistant to the commonly used antibiotics. That is a serious problem. Some strains of MRSA possess the capacity to spread with ease. They have caused hospital outbreaks which have proved difficult to control.

Risk management programmes are clearly needed in hospitals to improve the quality of patient care and the occupational health of the staff. Hospital management has legal duties. The Government have introduced the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994, which cover disease-causing organisms. About 130 hospitals have reported cases of MRSA infection. The presence of MRSA has virtually become a fact of life in most hospitals. There have been larger outbreaks in the west midlands and at Southend hospital. It is a most serious problem.

The document "Hospital Infection Control" prepared by the hospital infection working group of the Department of Health and the Public Health Laboratory Service refers to the need to have in place infection control staff in hospitals. It says that some of the highly resistant strains of MRSA

> "are already resistant to most of the available antibiotics and are likely to create major therapeutic problems in the future."

It says that those strains of MRSA are

> "particularly hazardous in high risk units such as intensive care. Implementation of effective antibiotic policies . . . are necessary . . . Surveillance for rapid detection and the provision of adequate isolation facilities are important in every hospital . . . Every hospital should have an infection control team."

Such teams have expert membership and include an infection control doctor and consultant medical microbiologist. The document also said:

> "Every hospital should be covered by a Hospital Infection Control Committee."

Such committees include, as well as the experts in the infection control team, the chief executive and the consultant in communicable diseases control.

The Department of Health should require every hospital authority to implement the administrative procedure that I have outlined and check that it does so. MRSA is a major drain on resources. It is costly for hospitals because it means that patients have to stay in hospital for extra time. For example, when Kettering general hospital had a bout of the disease in 1991 it cost the hospital almost half a million pounds. The Government keep saying to health authorities and trusts that the cost of MRSA can be met from existing resources. Increasingly, they cannot. The Government should recognise that and compensate health authorities and trusts.

The hospital infection working group said of MRSA:

> "The total annual costs in the UK, although not yet fully quantified, are undoubtedly high."

The cost is not just to the health authorities but to the people affected and their family because patients are forced to stay in hospital longer.

The hospital infection working group said:

> "Overall we believe it is possible that currently about 30 per cent. of hospital acquired infection could be prevented by better application of existing knowledge and implementation of realistic infection control policies . . . It must also be recognised that infection control action will be constrained by the resources available."

Again, the pressure is on the Government to deal with the problem.

There is one other important feature—the danger that MRSA, which is currently a hospital infection, could spread into the community and especially into nursing homes. Time is short, so I cannot go into that in greater detail.

This is an important public health issue. I pay tribute to the work of the Public Health Laboratory Service, which includes the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre. It collects and analyses information on drug resistance. The Government should put in the resources to boost the service and the information that it gives to GPs and hospitals.

The British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, the BSAC, in a report last year stated:

> "the steady rise in antibiotic prescriptions needs to be reversed"

and that

> "failure to do so would increase the prevalence of drug-resistant bacteria."

The Office of Science and Technology has also given me information about the prevalence of antibiotics in foods. Some were brought in as scientific markers; others were introduced in animal feeds. Earlier this year evidence was given to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that there had been a big increase in

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

adult cattle with antibiotic resistance. There were something like 400 cases in 1990 in England and Wales, which increased to 1,600 in 1993. The cause was thought to be the routine feeding of low antibiotic doses to intensely reared livestock to boost growth and heavy doses to prevent heal infection.

Scientists have expressed concern that the increasing resistance to antibiotics could pass through the food chain but MAFF sticks to the 1969 Swann report, which says that new potent antibiotics should not necessarily be precluded from therapeutic use in animals. The Government should have a co-ordinated policy on MRSA. The MAFF line should not be independent of but subservient to the best interests of public health.

In the few minutes left, I will spell out some of the essential policies needed to tackle MRSA effectively. First, there need to be improved cleanliness standards in hospitals. That must include stricter enforcement. Those responsible, the managers, must be taken to the courts for neglect if they do not keep up with such standards. However, the Government must recognise that such higher standards of cleanliness need more, not fewer, resources.

Secondly, there has to be funding for extra capacity for hospitals where wards have had to be closed due to MRSA outbreaks. Ward provision has been cut right to the bone and there is not the extra capacity that MRSA requires. If such action is not taken, there will be problems right through the system. There should be smaller wards. The effect of MRSA when it strikes is far less devastating with smaller wards. Whole wards have to close when it does strike.

The Department of Health must take a proactive role in ensuring that every hospital has an effective risk management programme, which should include isolation facilities, infection control teams, and appropriate-use-only antibiotic policies.

Appropriate-use-only antibiotic policies should also apply to GP prescribing and the Government should institute an immediate programme of education for GPs. With such widespread ignorance about MRSA, a programme of education should be introduced for all health workers who are likely to come across it.

The possibility of MRSA spreading from hospitals into the wider community is a real danger that requires active consideration and policies to deal with it. Increased use of day surgery and early discharge from hospital may increase the risk of MRSA, and those practices should be monitored.

A higher priority should be given to research into the causes of and cures for this killer bug. The Government should get their act together across Departments so that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food does not merrily continue pumping antibiotics into animals, so spreading antibiotic resistance through the food chain. The interests of public health should take precedence.

More needs to be done to combat the increased incidence of virulent MRSA, which killed Mr. Chudley and Mr. Cox, who were referred to in my local paper. I hope that the Department of Health will now devote far more thought and action to combating it.

11.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I thank the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) for his kind welcome. I am sorry that he is not in perfect health, but despite that, and the seriousness of the subject, I am glad to se that he has retained his cheerful demeanour. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised the important issue of metticillin resistant staphylococcus aureus—like the hon. Gentleman, I hope I have passed the test of pronouncing it—commonly known as MRSA, and that I have the opportunity to respond to the debate.

This is an issue that causes considerable concern to many people, but I must emphasise that it is not a new problem. The NHS has spent many years controlling it. I must say that in most countries the spread of that micro-organism has now been accepted as more or less inevitable. It is only because our health service offers high quality infection control systems that we are in a position to control it.

Perhaps I might start by setting the record straight on what MRSA actually is and how it causes infection. MRSA is a relatively antibiotic-resistant form of the bacterium staphylococcus aureus. Staph. aureus, the alternative way of referring to it, is one of the commonest and most ubiquitous of all the bacteria with which we are surrounded. As the hon. Gentleman said, normally it does us no harm.

About one third of us carry the bacteria on our skin or in our nose and throat and it causes us no problem. But if the skin is cut, or if resistance to infection is lost for any reason, the germ can multiply and set up an infection. Mostly, it is a trivial infection of the skin, but in patients who are in hospital it can sometimes become more serious. Many hospital patients have catheters and drips of various sorts going through the skin, which give bacteria like staph. aureus an easy route into the body. Many patients have had operations, so they have a wound that can become infected; some have poor resistance to infection because of their illness or their treatment, and are vulnerable to serious infections such as septicaemia or pneumonia. Staph. aureus can cause all those problems—a range of infections from the trivial to the life threatening.

MRSA, which is the antibiotic resistant variety of staph. aureus, acts in exactly the same way and causes the same range of infections. Again, the majority of people who carry it come to no harm at all, and if it does cause an infection, the range of problems is just the same—the infections are no worse than those caused by the ordinary bacterium.

The reason why MRSA is seen as more of a problem is that if an infection develops it is more difficult to treat because many of the commonly used antibiotics are not effective against it. There are antibiotics that can be used—the infection is not untreatable. Those antibiotics are, however, more difficult to use, they have more side effects and, of course, they are more expensive.

Some strains of MRSA show a greater tendency to spread easily from person to person than others. The first three of those strains appeared in the early 1980s and patients in many hospitals were affected. Those strains became less common after a few years, thanks to the efforts of hospital infection control teams to prevent it from spreading, and for a time the spread of MRSA appeared to have receded.

Now we have two new strains which spread particularly easily and again many hospitals are having to take action to control it. We think that that is an effort worth making, although, as I have already said, in many other countries, where antibiotics are available much more freely than here and infection control arrangements are less effective, the majority of staph. aureus in hospital patients is already antibiotic resistant. That has simply been accepted as inevitable, and requiring no particular action.

The Department of Health takes the whole subject of infection control in hospital very seriously. We issued comprehensive new guidance to the NHS earlier this year, covering the structure and activities of infection control services, surveillance of infections—including those due to antibiotic resistant organisms—and the control of outbreaks. It suggests that every hospital should have an infection control team, consisting of a medical specialist—usually a consultant microbiologist—and one or more trained infection control nurses. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is the case at Whipps Cross.

The guidance covers the role of the team in leading and co-ordinating infection control activity in the hospital. We also give advice to commissioners of health care about what infection control arrangements they should be looking for in trusts.

The guidance to which I have just referred deals with control of infection generally in hospitals. More detailed guidelines on the control of MRSA in hospitals have been produced by two of the interested professional organisations—the Hospital Infection Society and the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy.

The first of those guidelines was produced in 1986, but they have since been updated. The Department of Health gave them its formal support last September and is now working with the same organisations to produce a further revision in the light of advancing scientific knowledge and experience in controlling the micro-organism.

The Public Health Laboratory Service provides specialist strain-typing facilities and expert advice to help hospitals affected by MRSA. It carries out surveillance of the prevalence of the organism and can provide information, for example, when a patient is transferred from abroad to a hospital here. The PHLS is presently carrying out a special study of hospitals affected by the two main epidemic strains of MRSA to determine the epidemiology and most effective method of control of the organism.

The hon. Gentleman is particularly concerned about the problem locally and he also made a number of important points about the national position. It stems in part from comments made at the inquest into a tragic death at Whipps Cross hospital last winter. I am assured that the NHS trust concerned—Forest Healthcare—has made a high priority of its efforts to prevent the spread of MRSA. Patients known to be carrying MRSA are nursed in isolation, and those admitted to the intensive care unit are screened regularly for the bacterium. The effectiveness of those measures is kept under review and we are confident that the situation in Whipps Cross is being controlled satisfactorily.

On the national position, the hon. Gentleman mentioned a point on which I would like to comment. There has also been concern among owners and managers of some of the nursing and residential nursing homes that MRSA may been a problem for their residents. It is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the bacterium and the type of infection that it may cause.

Residents in most of those community settings are at no greater risk of infection than the general population. They do not have medical devices such as drips penetrating the skin and they do not have surgical wounds. There has never been an outbreak of infection due to MRSA in such a home, nor is there likely to be one.

Last year, the Department of Health worked with the professional organisation representing consultants in communicable disease control to produce guidance on infection control in nursing and residential homes. The guidance advised that a person carrying or infected with MRSA was not a risk to other residents in most of those homes and that routine arrangements designed to prevent all types of infection, such as good personal hygiene, are sufficient to deal with it.

The Department, however, recently held a seminar for insurers of such homes to inform and reassure them about MRSA. It will also take part in a further seminar for owners and managers of homes and for local and health authority staff responsible for the registration of homes and will issue further guidance to those groups in the new year.

It is important that we maintain a balanced view of the problem of MRSA in hospitals. The majority of cases of all types of infection in hospital patients cannot be prevented with our current knowledge. MRSA does not cause more infections than other types of staph. aureus with which we are surrounded. Despite the huge increase in the complexity of medical treatment and in the number of patients with reduced resistance to infection treated in our hospitals in the past 10 or 15 years, there is good evidence that hospital-acquired infection, including MRSA, is no more common now than it was in 1980. That evidence is based on a wide survey including hundreds of thousands of patients in at least 200 hospitals. MRSA is not untreatable and nor is it a new scourge, but it is a problem worth considerable efforts to control. Doctors and nurses in hospitals in many parts of the country are working hard to do just that.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton for raising the subject, and I hope that I have assured him about the position in Whipps Cross hospital. The total situation is much more satisfactory than the hon. Gentleman might have thought.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 December 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Common Agricultural Policy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I regret to say that I have an interest to declare. I am a shareholder in a company which, among other things, owns what I think in Europe would be called a large farm but in Britain is a small farm. I receive subsidies through the common agricultural policy.

I understand that a resolution was passed in the House recently—I voted against it—whereby, if one has such an interest, one is not allowed act as an advocate for that interest. I will do my best and be very careful, but I am in fear and trepidation of the parliamentary beak, he who has been appointed to supervise those of us who have been elected.

Northampton, North is an urban constituency, and my constituents might well wonder why I am on my feet talking about the CAP. Some hon. Members may remember that I and some of my hon. Friends were rusticated from the Conservative party for a period earlier this year. That was a desperate and deeply worrying situation, if for only one reason: we were deprived of the tender loving care and advice of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary.

We therefore had to think for ourselves, which was a very dangerous thing. We looked at the various areas of policy, and we tended, one by one, to look at particular areas of policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) concentrated on fisheries, and I looked at agriculture, which is one of the reasons why I have some limited knowledge of the subject.

I would submit to my constituents and to the House that the CAP is very important to them, as I will go on to prove, as it is to the rest of the country. Why is that? First, there is the cost. This country spends each year on European policies some £10 billion. Over half the money that is spent on programmes—up to 80 per cent.—is spent on the CAP. We will spend this year and next year a likely net £3.5 billion—that is money into thin air, money for nothing. One of the main reasons for this expenditure is the CAP. The CAP is the wrong policy, and it affects everybody in the country through their pockets.

The CAP also affects people through their pockets because of the very high level of consumer prices. There is an artificial price level in Europe, above the world market price, which means that everybody has to pay more for their food than they would otherwise have to. Since the MacSharry reforms, and since world market prices have gone up, that is not as marked as it has been, but it could become marked again in the future.

Thirdly, we lost our Icelandic waters, and were not allowed to regain fish in our own waters because of the common fisheries policy. We had a bad deal on fish. We had a bad deal on the budget, the net payment that we have to make. As with fisheries, we have also, with regard to rest of Europe and despite some brilliant work by Ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—not least by my right hon. Friend who is now Secretary of State for the Environment—a bad deal for agriculture, even within the bad CAP in Europe.

The CAP also, as everybody in Europe is increasingly coming to recognise, gets in the way of the sort of Europe that we in Britain want. We want an enlarged Europe—enlarged to the east for its own sake, for security, for the well-being and decency of the people of eastern Europe, and for the security of Europe. Also, an enlarged Europe will have to have a variable geometry, which is very much in the UK's interest—otherwise, we would have a federal European state, which we do not want. We want an enlarged Europe, but that is impossible with the existing common agricultural policy.

The consumer pays higher than necessary prices; the cost to the taxpayer is higher than necessary; and we are paying for an agricultural support system that discriminates against efficient UK agriculture and in favour of less efficient continental farmers. The CAP is a system of agricultural support that is wrong for the United Kingdom, was wrong in the past for Europe, and is certainly wrong for the future Europe for which we should be aiming.

Why do we need a system of agricultural support? My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) has often said that, given the right subsidies, he could grow tomatoes profitably at the north pole. There is a certain Powellite logic to that argument, but it is not right to apply it to agricultural support.

We need a system of agricultural support for various reasons. First, the risks in agriculture are much greater than in any other business. There are not only risks involved over what might happen to the market and prices, but climatic risks. Without the limited level of certainty that is provided by a system of agricultural support, no farming community would have sufficient confidence to invest in and maintain—as British farmers do—one of the world's most efficient and cost-effective agricultural industries.

What should a good system seek to achieve? First, there has to be an element of self-sufficiency for strategic reasons—one never knows what will happen in the wide world, so we need the ability to feed ourselves. Secondly, we want an attractive countryside—we have not achieved one by developing a rural theme park throughout the UK. An attractive countryside has been developed through the activities of our farmers over hundreds of years. We shall continue to have an attractive countryside if it is farmed well and properly.

Thirdly, we need a system of agricultural support that optimises the balance of output, profitability, sustainability and value to the taxpayer. The system must also supply the cheapest basic food commodities, which has the added benefit of reducing the cost to the taxpayer of many of the programmes that he and she has to provide.

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

Those who are less well off typically spend 25 per cent. of their budget on food; those who are better off spend perhaps 10 per cent. of their budget on food. The social security budget is massive, but in real terms it would become less of a "burden" on the taxpayer if we had a policy of cheap rather than expensive food. As we consider the various systems of agricultural support, any calculation of the cost to the Exchequer has to take account of the fact that cheap food would reduce that cost.

What is wrong with the existing system of support, the CAP, for the United Kingdom? The first problem involves the overall cost: a £10 billion gross contribution, which is a lot of money, and a £3.4 billion per year net contribution. The second problem relates to the specific cost of some of the programmes, such as the tobacco—the poison weed—regime. That regime costs Europe—and we contribute—£1 billion a year; half the tobacco is virtually unusable, cannot be smoked in Europe and has to be dumped on the world market. Why should we subscribe to that regime?

The olive oil regime costs, on average, over five years, £1.5 billion a year. In addition, the regime means that the price that housewives and shoppers in this country have to pay for olive oil is more than they would otherwise have to pay in the world market. There is a wine regime—is there a hops regime? Why should Britain contribute to the annual £1 billion cost of shoring up the vineyards of Europe?

The third problem involves bureaucracy. I do not know if hon. Members follow "The Archers", but poor old Brian Aldridge seems to be in a bit of a hole at the moment because he filled in his forms incorrectly and is losing tens of thousands of pounds—

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Nine thousand five hundred pounds.

Mr. Marlow: I am sorry—£9,500. I said "tens of thousands of pounds", when I should perhaps have said "nearly" tens of thousands or "fractions of" tens of thousands of pounds. Someone follows these matters more closely than I do.

I am not particularly sorry for Brian Aldridge and people like him, but farmers have to become more skilled in filling in forms than in agriculture—looking after their crops and animals—which is bizarre. Many farmers who are not trained in such skills find it difficult to cope. They are concerned that they put the wretched forms in the post in April or May, no one tells them whether they have completed them properly and will receive their money until December, when they receive no cheques either because they have been lost in the post or because the forms were not completed correctly. That system causes many people grave anxiety, and they find it difficult to cope; it is also bureaucratic nonsense.

Bureaucracy does not only produce costs for the farmer, who might have to pay for expensive advice: we have to pay for bureaucrats to look at the forms and try to make sense of them. Bureaucracy costs money and wastes time and space, and the system should be abolished.

Bureaucracy also encourages fraud. In Greece and Italy, the CAP has been ripped off by the Mafia and various other unscrupulous groups. It is estimated that there is currently £4 billion a year of fraud in Europe, and I am sure that much of the fraud occurs in the CAP. Greeks and Italians will not prevent fraud occurring in relation to a European policy in which they spend European money in their own countries—and neither will anyone from Brussels. The only way to prevent that fraud is to change the CAP.

The fraud partly explains why this country—and Europe as a whole—is becoming increasingly Euro-sceptic. We believe—I think with justification—that terrible things happen in other countries because their officials allow it, but our officials do not let us get away with anything. That is a deeply unhealthy by-product of the CAP and builds up a culture of cheating, which, mercifully, has not been part of our country's culture until now.

The United Kingdom also faces problems relating to the specific crop areas. We probably have—to borrow from the Carlsberg advertisement—the most efficient arable farmers in the world, yet we in Britain have to take more of our arable land out of production than any other country in Europe. We probably have the most efficient dairy producers in the world but, owing to the quota system, we are not allowed to produce enough milk products even to satisfy our own market.

The quota system is nonsense—it is a restrictive structure that is doubtless necessary under the existing regime, but if we changed that policy, perhaps we could abolish the quota system. The quota system is politically embarrassing, because people are paid to set aside land and grow weeds on it. Could we not devise a better system? Most people are irritated by the present system, and any wise Minister should take account of that.

What should we do? I shall grossly over-simplify what I know to be a complicated subject, and set out a few principles. I believe in free trade, and I should like to see free trade among agricultural products in Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world. There should be a common price level throughout Europe, as at present, but at world market prices. That would not only be suitable for the old and developing Europe, but, owing to the cheap cost of agricultural commodities in the east, it is essential if we are to expand Europe.

We must repatriate our system of agricultural support, so that each country has its own support regime and each country pays for its agricultural support. Agricultural commodities in Europe should trade at world market prices, without levies, without duties and without restitution. I shall discuss that in more detail, commodity by commodity.

Let us start with pigmeat and poultry. I do not want to upset the animal welfare lobby, but, these days, pigmeat and poultry have become effectively a manufactured commodity. It is possible to produce plastic from oil—one feeds in oil at one end and produces plastic at the other end. To a certain extent, one feeds in grain and proteins at one end and produces a poultry product; further down stream, one may produce a detailed product. One may produce a poultry commodity or a pig commodity at the other end. There is no system of agricultural support for pigs and poultry, and there needs to be no succinct system for support in the future.

Arable is a very important sector. We should go back—or go forward—to a new system of deficiency payments. I shall take wheat as an example, although, obviously, other cereals would tie in. One would have a reference price, and if the price in the market fell beneath the reference price, there would be a make-up between the market price and the reference price. The reference price would be calculated to be what arable farmers would need to receive, year on year, to have sufficient confidence to become effective and efficient, and to carry out their business.

There would have to be a cap on the tonnage for which that support could be paid, so the total support would be the cap tonnage multiplied by the difference between the reference price and the market price, and the deficiency payment, in the event, per tonne would be the total support paid divided by the actual tonnage.

Capping would have three effects. First, it would limit Treasury expenditure. Treasury expenditure would be determined solely by the difference between the reference price and the world market price, and the cap would prevent the Treasury from having to spend any more money if there were a bonanza harvest.

Secondly, capping would enable such a system to comply with the GATT regime. As the House knows well, the GATT regime allows a system of acreage payments, and such a system of deficiency payments would accord with GATT, because it would not encourage increased production against GATT, or provide subsidies for exports, which would be contrary to GATT.

Thirdly, if there is a bumper harvest and superabundance, why should the Treasury pay? The farmers are doing quite nicely anyhow.

There should be a new system of deficiency payments for milk and dairy products. Before the farming year, a reference price would be agreed. Deficiency payments would be payable between the average achieved price and the reference price. There would be capping, such that, if production increased, payment per litre would reduce commensurately.

In the dairy sector—I know that this goes against all the market tenets—I believe that it is essential to safeguard the position of the small farmer. Socially and environmentally, it is essential that we maintain those prospects, to ensure that our rural areas remain vital and vibrant communities.

To achieve that, it may be necessary to give every dairy farmer a minimum gallonage, on which a full make-up could be paid. As marginal overall production increased and the marginal payment decreased, the lower price would increasingly fall on the larger farmer. If we get our figures right, I am sure that it would be right for the small farmer and for the large farmer.

For wonderful, tasty, lovely beef and lamb, we might also have a new system of deficiency payments. They may not be necessarily especially high, and they may potentially be at a reducing level, because there is a massive potential world market out there. At the moment, with quotas sitting on our sheep industry, we are discouraged from taking advantage of it.

That would be the system. As circumstances, needs, the world markets and fashions change, my hon. Friend the Minister would be able to play whatever tunes he felt were right for the country, for British agriculture and for the interests of GB Ltd. on the world market. He would be able to do it, and we would not have to go to Brussels to have it done; we would be able to do it here.

Can we do it? Can we get away with it? Is it possible? Who opposes it? I wonder what the position of the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association would be. The National Farmers Union is a good union, but it is a union, and unions—if Labour Members will forgive me—tend to be conservative. Unions like to bind in their members, and they like what they have at the moment. Everyone is okay at the moment.

I know that the NFU is saying that things might not be quite the same in future, and that we must think awkward thoughts about the future, but it likes to think of its members and tell them:

> "always keep a hold of Nurse
> For fear of finding something worse."

If the union frightens its members about such changes, and if its members are frightened anyhow, I am afraid that they will continue to be conservative. They like what they have, and they are frightened of change. They should not be frightened of change.

Farmers love quotas. Quotas now have capital value and are traded. One litre of milk quota sells for 60p or 70p. It costs 10p to trade or lease 1 litre of milk quota for a year. It is big money. A while ago, some farmers' milk quota was worth as much as the land and the cattle put together. It is nonsense, but people like it, and they are frightened of losing it.

Mr. Morley: Those who have it.

Mr. Marlow: As the hon. Gentleman says, those who have it. For those who do not have it, it is a great block, preventing them from entering the market. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees with the philosophy of Conservative Members that we should have flexible markets and allow people to enter them, and that we should not structure things in the way that they are at the moment.

There is fear of the Treasury. There is a feeling that, if we repatriated our agricultural policy and the Treasury were responsible for it, the Treasury would be mean and would bear down, and there would be no proper system of agricultural support, so all the other farmers in Europe would do better than farmers in the United Kingdom.

No British Government would turn their back on their own farmers. They have not done so in the past—we had an effective system of agricultural support before we joined the Community. I do not believe that any British Government would allow a system of agricultural support to devastate our countryside, which is one of the jewels of the United Kingdom.

Besides, given the potential savings if we were not making the massive contribution to Europe that we make at the moment, given the fact that we would have cheap food, and therefore the bills to the Treasury for social security would be less than they would otherwise be, there would be money for the Treasury to be more generous with agriculture than it is at the moment—not that that would be necessary—and at the same time to make savings on its existing expenditure.

It is a great world out there. There is a growing population. Some parts of the world have rapidly increasing living standards, but a decreasing ability to grow their own food. We have a powerful agriculture here, which is encouraging.

[Mr. Marlow]

Would our partners accept those changes? Some would not like it at all. Each Greek at the moment gets £285 a year from Europe. Each Portugese gets £391 a year from Europe. So be it; too bad. I do not see why they should. That must be stopped. The Irish are getting £447 a year. A new system of agricultural support might benefit Ireland, as it would us. Ireland has potentially a very prosperous agriculture. It could benefit from those changes.

France is a net contributor. Why should not France, in the long term—looking at the world market out there, France being an agricultural exporting country—go along with those changes? If Europe expands, there will be social payments to eastern Europe. Can we afford it? There will be agricultural payments to eastern Europe. Can we afford it? No; we cannot. So there have to be changes, and those changes will be of benefit to France.

Germany likes the common agricultural policy for one reason—that it must support its farmers, it feels. It has many small farmers. If those farmers were supported through German taxation, it would be politically unacceptable in Germany. As the support is routed through Brussels and comes out again, apparently the German public do not know what is being done in their name, so they are satisfied with it.

However, Germany now has the overriding priority to join up with eastern Europe, and the Germans cannot have both the CAP as it is now and a greater Europe, moving to the east. Something has to give. I suggest that the change in the common agricultural policy would do it. Germany makes a massive net contribution to Europe. Germany is getting increasingly restive about that net contribution to Europe. This is the way that German demands and desires can be satisfied.

I summarise the advantages of the changes that I suggest. First, we could do away with the iniquitous dock labour scheme type system of quotas, which would allow—with difficulty, but it is very difficult anyway—more newcomers to come into agriculture. That would allow much more efficient use of the land, because it would not be artificially structured as it is now. It would allow increasing opportunities for agricultural entrepreneurs, so that we could optimise agricultural output and production.

The changes I suggest would allow the Italians and the Greeks to pay for their fraud. That would be fair, and the British public would enjoy that. The British public resents keeping those states in the manner to which they feel they should be accustomed.

My changes would lower food prices. If, at any stage, there were low world food prices, the British consumer would be able to take advantage of them. The changes would be of great benefit to the Treasury, because lower food prices would lower the transfer payments that the Treasury has to make annually. My suggestions would lead to an opportunity for Britain to increase sales of agricultural products in a growing, wealthier world, and, as I have said before, they would increase the sovereignty of the House and the Government. We would once again have control over affairs that should not be controlled from across the channel.

Yesterday's events in Paris, with the declining probability of monetary union and a single currency, the political reaction to those events that is likely to follow, and the realisation that the Maastricht treaty has been imposed by an elite against the wishes and interests of the people, mean that there is potentially a new destiny for Europe that is yet to be moulded. Let us try this time to mould it in the interests of the people of Britain and Europe, not in the interests of the institutions. I have one piece of advice for my hon. Friend the Minister of State—courage, mon enfant.

10.1 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): My middle name is Archer, but I predate the programme. When my ancestors arrived in Cornwall in 1066, presumably with an unpronounceable Norman name, they were simply known by their occupation.

I have news for the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)—"The Archers" is make-believe. Incidentally, he seems to have seriously misread the plot by referring to "poor" Brian Aldridge. He has misunderstood what is happening in the British countryside. There is nothing poor about Brian Aldridge, because he is a cereal farmer on a big scale. However, the livestock farmers, good and bad, in Ambridge may share the concerns of the hon. Member.

Throughout the British countryside, there is a recognition that the status quo is not a long-term option. Back in 1992, when the Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was the Minister and he came to this House with his bit of paper—the "peace in our time" of the countryside—some of us expressed real concerns about the extent to which that reworking of the CAP could possibly be sustainable. I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Northampton, North, because he too was worried at that time, although his was a lone voice in the wilderness on the Government Benches.

Liberal Democrats represent many rural areas, and we were worried that the over-concentration on area payments and on set-aside revealed a degree of mismatch and mis-targeting that was agriculturally, economically, environmentally and politically unsustainable. We have been proved right.

We also felt that there were insufficient mechanisms for adjustment if world prices changed at a different speed or in a different direction to the forecasts. We have recently heard the frank confessions of large farmers, such as Oliver Walston, about the extent to which they are reliant on huge cheques from the public purse. Those confessions show that the lack of any efficient mechanism was a serious deficiency.

Most seriously, Members of all parties, and Commissioner MacSharry, were worried that those reforms were represented by the then Minister as the last word for the foreseeable future on reform of the CAP. Clearly that is not true, and today we know it not to be true. Those reforms were the first step, and the momentum had to be maintained.

The Government frequently tell us that they are in favour of reform, but that everyone else still wants to sin. Apparently we are the only country in Europe recanting our sins. I do not believe that to be so, and the discussions that I have had recently in other member states, new and old, suggest that that is not the common view of those who have a real appreciation of what is happening to the CAP. That is particularly true of the new members.

In the rural policy White Paper, there is an admirably succinct summary of what is wrong with the CAP. I draw attention to the fact, which the Minister recently repeated to me in the House, that

> "total transfer payments from EC consumers and taxpayers (including national budgetary expenditures) are estimated by OECD to have exceeded total EC farm income in 1993 by 50%".

In other words, half the total investment never reaches farm incomes, and farmers do not benefit. The leakage down the chain is comparable to, and exceeds, that of the water companies, about which hon. Members have been so critical. The investment that we hope will reach the countryside and the primary producers does so to the extent of only one half.

The other criticisms in the rural White Paper are valid and right. We now need to know how they will be communicated to our partners and be turned into real reform. On that issue, the Government's White Paper is sadly silent.

One would hope that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment would have some influence on the Foreign Office. The Minister of State has experience in the Foreign Office, so it will be interesting to hear his comments on the extent to which we can rely on allies and friends in Europe. I suspect that many in Europe wish to take the same route as ourselves, with adaptations to suit their circumstances. However, our record of making friends and allies is not good; nor is our diplomatic success in trying to ensure that specific British interests are well represented.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North referred to the milk quotas debacle, which stems from the negotiations by British Ministers in Brussels in 1986. They negotiated away 15 per cent. of our total national milk need, and we are now allowed to produce only 85 per cent. of our total needs. That is not a failure of the European Union, because one could say that it is a success for all the other member states in obtaining a quota higher than their national needs. Those negotiations were a direct failure of our Ministers to represent the industry effectively.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North would like to renationalise agricultural policy. He should know by now that our agricultural interest is comparatively small, and the influence it exerts over Whitehall is limited. We have huge problems in trying to ensure that the ministerial interpretation of European Union policies is to the advantage of British farmers.

Is opting out of the European Union realistic? We could not be a member of the European Union and be a semi-detached member of the CAP. There are two possible scenarios. The first, and I suspect the real motive behind the hon. Member's suggestions, is to cut our links with the European Union and float out into the Atlantic. Not only farmers but those who are concerned about the future of countryside would regard that with grave suspicion.

The second scenario would be for every other member state to repatriate its own agricultural policy. We know what would happen then.

Mr. Marlow: It is a little tiresome that, whenever anyone suggests any change, reform or differences within Europe—I am not just suggesting that Britain should repatriate its agricultural policy but that every country in Europe should—the Liberal Democrats' unique response is to say that one wants to leave Europe and drag Britain off into the Atlantic. I have never suggested that, nor am I ever likely to do so.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful. That view is not shared by all the hon. Gentleman's honourable colleagues, as I have heard in recent weeks. However, I take him at his word.

If his purpose is to encourage other member states to repatriate their agricultural policies, the immediate effect would be that those member states which count their agriculture industry and vote rather more highly in their lists of national priorities than do the British Government, will inevitably seek every way possible to make the present uneven playing field even less even.

For example, there will be no motive power, no momentum, to level up standards of animal welfare, either in terms of rearing methods or animal transport. That will go by the board. The already high burden that is carried by British producers would be made that much more difficult in competitive terms, because every other member state with a large agricultural community would do everything it could to ensure that we were at a competitive disadvantage. Repatriation of British agricultural policy means repatriation of French, German and Italian agriculture support. The effect on our position in the wider market would be disastrous.

The hon. Gentleman has rightly referred to Ministry of Agriculture red tape. At present, it is our most successful home-grown crop. The Minister himself has noticed that, over the past 16 years, it has grown apace—far more quickly, far more effectively than anything that is achieved in any other member state. Would that all be swept away by repatriation? I do not believe it for one minute. Consider the new consultation paper on the transport of livestock. It seems that nothing comparable is being produced in any other member state. We are binding our industry hand and foot in a way that is simply not experienced in other parts of the Union.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to say that his remedy was based on the old traditional slogan of the Conservative party, "Trust the Treasury". Anybody in agriculture, having seen last week's Budget, knows that to be moonshine. The Treasury cannot be trusted for one minute to look after British agriculture. If the Minister was in a quiet corner and was not on the record, I think that he would agree. Many former Ministers would also agree.

Consider last week's Budget. Incidentally, the Budget is now the only opportunity that the House has to consider in full the way in which agriculture and the rural community are being supported. All the schemes in the rural White Paper that are said to be beneficial or helpful to the rural policy of our country, to its development, to the enhancement of the environment and to employment prospects, are cut.

The hill livestock compensatory allowance will not be restored, against all the logic of previous Governments' positions. Dirty water schemes, essential for the pollution prevention schemes of the past, have all gone and will not come back. Farm and conservation grants have gone. Extensification and organic food supplies, which are being extensively supported by other national Governments in the union, for which purpose they can draw down European funds, have all gone.

[Mr. Tyler]

All the highly targeted and well thought-through schemes for British agriculture, supported by those who believe in its future, have gone. They are at the mercy of the Chancellor. He can wield his axe over them. If it were not for the representations that we all make to the European Union, I suspect that the situation would be even worse.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the Government are now faced with a choice. In the past, their strategy for the union has been enlargement rather than deepening, widening rather than intensification. In those circumstances, I hope that they will today be able to give us a considered response to the extremely important new paper that has been delivered in the past few days by the Commissioner, Mr. Franz Fischler, in which he says, quite uncompromisingly, that there is no way in which the Union can enlarge to the east, to the former Communist countries—Poland, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—until major structural reforms are made to the CAP's format. I understand that the Commissioner and other members of the Commission go further, saying that other structural changes of considerable importance will be necessary to the very institutions of the union itself.

Hitherto, Ministers have said that they can have their cake and eat it. They can delay reform of the CAP until a more propitious time, but they want to proceed with enlargement to the east as fast as possible. In an extremely important article in the *Financial Times* last week, headed, "No farm reform, no EU enlargement", it was made clear that that it is not just the view of the Commission, but widely shared among other member states, that radical reform is essential.

Let us not forget that that reform can be achieved by consensus as long as the structural problems are addressed at the same time, particularly the democratic deficit. The hon. Gentleman, and some of his hon. Friends—by whom I mean those who were rusticated in the recent departure into the countryside to which he referred—are fond of saying how important it is to retain the British veto. Retaining the British veto over social, economic, employment policy is all very well, but retaining the British veto over that means that the Greeks will seek to retain their veto over any real, deep-seated, far-reaching reforms of the CAP. The same will be true of the Italians and others.

I hope that we shall have an explicit commitment from the Minister today that, at the ministerial meetings that will be taking place in the next few weeks in preparation for the intergovernmental conference, the Government will make it a specific objective to put the reform of the CAP on the agenda for the IGC next year. That is of critical importance, not just for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but so that farmers can know that there is a long-term sustainable policy by which they can chart their course for the future.

10.16 am

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): As in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), the Register of Members' Interests will show that I too am walking on eggshells during this debate, so I shall be extremely careful in what I say and not speak with too much authority on those subjects about which I know a great deal because I have studied them. I shall speak with great caution.

I have total common ground with my hon. Friend, but I must disagree with what he says about repatriating the CAP and giving each country more control over its agricultural policy. If the United Kingdom were to do that, we would marginalise ourselves in the European Community. That is something that the British farmers do not want—nor, I believe, do the British public and all those who work in industries which add value to foodstuffs. It would be a disaster. Some countries, as we have already seen, would favour their farmers at the expense of other farmers in Europe—I cannot say "within the Community", because, if we were to repatriate our own agricultural policy, we would not be in the Community.

We have seen examples of how discrimination or subsidy by other countries can disadvantage our business. At least within the CAP there is some method of enforcing a level playing field and stopping other countries blatantly subsidising their own agriculture. The French gave a 120 per cent. capital grant for the construction of a turkey processing plant in Brittany in order to swamp the British market with oven-ready turkeys. We were able to stop that. The French have also given special subsidies to their pig farmers, which has also been brought to a halt under the CAP.

The Dutch Government have subsidised heat for their glasshouses, which the European Community, under its policy to treat all countries the same, has also stopped. The Irish have in the past given special help to their mushroom growers, and the Agricultural Commissioner has taken considerable interest in sorting out that mess too.

As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, animal welfare would not be standardised throughout Europe, which would go very much against the grain of those interested in animal welfare and rights.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend is talking about agricultural industrial products. There are in Europe and the single market constraints against some Governments subsidising their own industries while other Governments do not. I would imagine that the same principles would apply in future to agricultural industrial products, so my hon. Friend does not have to worry about that.

Mr. Marland: With respect, my hon. Friend is assuming too much. I assume that, if we repatriate agriculture to individual countries, there will be no controls whatever, and countries will be able to do what they wish with their own agriculture and agricultural production. That is the rub.

The CAP is expensive; it needs reforming and tightening up, so we are on common ground. That is happening, but not speedily. I agree with my hon. Friend that tobacco growing in Greece is utterly ludicrous and must stop. It is, however, important to keep matters in perspective.

The single market across Europe in agricultural products provides a great opportunity for British agriculture and those who add value to agricultural products in Britain to export into a free market. There are no tariff barriers against our exports into Europe. If we repatriated our own agricultural policy, tariff barriers might be erected against our exports. For example, the export of lamb has improved enormously as a result of the efforts of British farmers exporting into France, and we now export 30 per cent. of our cereal production and a large and growing proportion of our beef production.

Turning to value added products, we all know about the British manufacturer exporting pizzas to Italy, but there is a mass of other products. It is interesting to look at one or two sectors in which value is being added to raw agricultural produce and the manufacturing industry attached to agriculture is making profits, adding value and creating wealth in Britain as a result of those activities.

We can buy prepared bags of salad containing a number of different varieties of lettuce and other salad products, all washed and ready for the table. One has only to open the bag and shake it up. Those are being exported, and rightly so. There is no reason why only British housewives should take advantage of those products. Potatoes of different varieties—large ones for putting straight in the oven and roasting, and small, new potatoes—are being washed, packaged and exported from the United Kingdom. Eggs of different varieties, sizes and colours are also packaged well and exported to Europe.

One may think that bottled water comes to Britain from Europe, especially from France, but an enormous amount of bottled water is exported from Britain into Europe, and many farmers have bottled water enterprises on their farms as alternative earners. We do not only import yoghurt from France and Europe. Value is added to raw milk in Britain to make expensive, value-added dairy products, and we export yoghurt to France, especially fibre-added yoghurt, which is being sold as a health food. Our industry has created an excellent opportunity for export into France, creating wealth and opportunity in Britain.

Branded cheeses such as double Gloucester, which is manufactured in Gloucestershire, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) knows well, are also being exported.

Mr. Marlow: If we did not have such a ridiculous system of quotas, would we not be able to sell rather more branded cheeses in Europe and the rest of the world? My hon. Friend will forgive me, but I was saying that we should still have a free market for agricultural products in Europe. There is no way that there would be tariffs. Was my hon. Friend suggesting that I was saying that there should be tariffs?

Mr. Marland: My hon. Friend cannot say that for certain. In my hon. Friend's dream scenario, if we repatriate agricultural policy to individual countries, how will we know whether any country may decide in future to protect its own farmers and food manufacturers and erect a barrier so as to free exports of agricultural and fresh products?

Change is necessary to the common agricultural policy, but it should be gradual and fair, and should apply equally through all European countries. The present form of the CAP is working much better than it did in the past, and has reduced stocks of surplus food substantially. In my constituency in the Forest of Dean, an industrial estate in Lydney used to rent out massive warehouses for stockpiling surplus grain that had been bought in under the common agricultural policy and could not be sold.

Mr. Morley: It also happened in Scunthorpe.

Mr. Marland: It was bought in and stored at enormous expense, and exported at a knock-down price. That was even more costly than the current set-aside scheme, which seeks to reduce the output of cereals. I am not saying that the CAP is perfect—it needs reform—but there have been strides in that direction.

A balance is emerging in stabilised farm incomes in the United Kingdom, which have generally moved up in the past few year. That is a good thing for rural communities, because farmers do not sit on the cash; they spend it in the local rural community in which they are living and operating. That is good for maintaining population in isolated areas.

The overall budget of the CAP is now under stronger control than ever before, but fraud remains a serious problem, taking some 1 per cent. of the budget. It may be more than that, but that is a ball park figure. The Commission is determined to tackle the problem more rigorously than it has in the past, and we give it every support we possibly can. Perhaps Labour Members might have a word with Commissioner Kinnock, so that he might turn his attention to it when he has sorted out the air miles.

Further reform of the CAP is under way. That is inevitable, forced on by the enlargement of the European Union and another round of GATT in 1999. Increases in agricultural efficiency also drive forward the need for reform. Although we devote a smaller area to cereal production, improving techniques and methods of production, collection and storage make a terrific difference to the output in agriculture; whether it is an acre of land, a cow, a pig, or a flock of chickens, a variety of technical advantages are being made every year to make it more efficient. That represents another way of driving forward the reform of CAP.

The change in agricultural support must be given time to take effect, because agriculture is a business with a slow turnover. A cereal farmer turns over his entire stock only once a year, so notice has to be served on the producers of the products of what future changes will be made, so that they can plan ahead.

I am pleased that farm Commissioner Franz Fischler has confirmed that reform to the CAP is necessary, and that EU agriculture must become more market-oriented and closer to the market. That will undoubtedly lead to greater stability, security and dignity for farmers, and will enable payments for specific objectives to be targeted more accurately.

We are all in favour of more assistance for environmentally friendly schemes for environmental care, and for isolated areas to get special assistance for projects that may enhance the standard of living of the people in those communities.

I spent quite a bit of my holiday in isolated parts of the United Kingdom. On the island of North Uist, at a small town called Loch Maddy, there was a slaughterhouse that killed all the animals that were produced on the island. That had great appeal, as the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe will know, because the animals were slaughtered on the island and not exported on the hoof. I understand that the slaughterhouse had to be closed because of changes in hygiene regulations.

It is a travesty that that little business should fail as a result of hygiene regulations if there is no money to seek to put it right. I very much hope that there may be some

[Mr. Marland]

way of targeting money on such schemes, instead of building a dual carriageway round the island of North Uist, which is currently being undertaken using European funds.

Mr. Tyler: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the past 10 to 15 years, the number of abattoirs in England, Wales and Scotland has halved as a result of the imposition of regulations emanating from London rather than Brussels, while in Northern Ireland, where those regulations have not been imposed, there has been nothing like the same reduction?

Mr. Marland: In some instances, that is a good thing. Some slaughterhouses were definitely not up to standard. However, the slaughterhouse on North Uist should have been saved, so as to create wealth and opportunity on the island and to ensure that the animals were killed at home rather than having to make a journey on the hoof.

It would be a huge mistake to repatriate the common agricultural policy. Reform is vital, however, and agriculture must get closer to the market and become much more market orientated. We must support reforms and fight against fraud. As I have said, we must take a step at a time. The House must maintain pressure to ensure that the CAP is reformed equally for all countries within the Community.

10.30 am

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): It is a great pleasure to take up the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for West Gloucestershire (Mr. Marland). I congratulate him on his advocacy of British agriculture. He has illustrated the many great successes that British agriculture has chalked up.

My hon. Friend talked about farm incomes. British farmers are enjoying tolerably good incomes at present only as a consequence of the United Kingdom having been thrown out of the exchange rate mechanism on 16 September 1992. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in spite of the common agricultural policy, farm incomes were falling. My hon. Friend referred to other issues, and made various comments to which I took exception. I would take them up if time permitted.

I have interests on both sides of the farm gate. These interests are declared in the Register of Members' Interests. I hope that my declaration will be sufficient for the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) talked about the high cost of the CAP. Not least among my concerns is its wastefulness. It is wide open to fraud and abuse. I shall demonstrate that it is harmful to many interests. It is, of course, fundamentally socialist.

Members have already referred to the diabolical expenditure of taxpayers's money on growing tobacco in Greece that nobody can smoke. In the past, the CAP has encouraged enormous surpluses. Disposal of those surpluses has cost a great deal of taxpayers' money. The surpluses were a huge embarrassment to the Commission and to the Governments of member states.

FEOGA grants have created enormous problems in the abattoir industry, a sector of agriculture of which I know a little. The grants have created over-capacity. More than anything else, the abattoir industry suffers from over-capacity. Unfortunately, that over-capacity has been encouraged by the availability of FEOGA grants. It has been forced upon the industry also by legislation emanating from Brussels.

Many of the FEOGA grants given to agriculture have disappeared with the enterprises to which they were made available. Many enterprises turned out to be non-viable or economically unsound. There has been a huge on-cost as a result of taxpayers' money being funnelled into unviable businesses. The cost has resulted in the rest of the industry being put at a severe commercial disadvantage.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) referred to the relatively tiny amount of money that is paid out by the taxpayer that actually reaches the practical farmer. I agree with his analysis. That, however, is the extent of my agreement. I cannot possibly agree with his further thoughts on the subject. I do not share his optimism that remaining in the CAP will lead to a resolution of the present difficulties.

We do not know the cost of fraud in the Community, which last year was estimated to be anything up to £6 billion. When the Court of Auditors reported last month, there was speculation that it might be only £2 billion. A national newspaper stated that the only quantifiable amount of fraud was £400 million. When it comes to fraud, we pay our penny and take our chance. There is no doubt, however, that fraud takes place. Various initiatives have been taken to control it.

The burden of controlling fraud falls not upon the Mafia or the big-time fraudsters but upon my constituents. For example, it falls upon the farmer in the Corvedale who owned two farms and handed them over to his two sons to be farmed as two separate entities. To this day, he cannot persuade the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that the farms are two separate enterprises. Consequently, all his grants and subsidies are held up.

Control measures bear down heavily on a farmer near Bridgnorth, who has lost subsidy as a result of having made a mistake in his application form. He declared a heifer instead of a bullock. The cash would have been the same, but there has been disqualification because of the control measures that have been introduced. There are farmers in the Bishop's Castle area who have experienced enormous difficulties over their suckler cow subsidies, because the information they gave in their application forms was slightly wrong.

These are the people who are paying for the control measures which are introduced to counteract the fraud of the Mafia and the other big-time fraudsters who continue to defraud regardless.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is my hon. Friend aware that farmers in New Zealand had tremendous problems with form filling, and were being driven mad by bureaucracy? The New Zealand Government—incidentally, a Labour Administration—have dumped the subsidy system and returned to a free market. The New Zealand farmers are now doing wonderfully well without bureaucracy on their backs.

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. The New Zealand Government stopped subsidies. They also stopped many welfare payments. Why did they do so? They took that action because the money ran out. Having weaned the farmers and others off subsidies, the

New Zealand Government find that they have a much more vibrant economy than that of the United Kingdom or anywhere else in western Europe. They have a strong currency, low inflation and low unemployment. As I understand it, there is scarcely a farmer in New Zealand who wants to revert to the previous heavily subsidised system.

There are four reasons why the CAP is making things so difficult. As time is limited, I shall be brief in describing the harm that it is doing. It has had a disastrous effect on the pastoral economies of the third world. It negates the law of supply and demand. It is harmful to innovation in agriculture. It is almost immune to the real needs of the marketplace. It is socialist. It imposes quotas, specifies qualities and fixes prices. The end result was surpluses. We have tweaked the CAP again, with the result that there is more political interference and more of the planned economy, which is in great danger of creating shortages in the cereal market because of the introduction of set-aside.

I understand why the hon. Member for North Cornwall can support the CAP. Doubtless the spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), will jump to his feet to support it. They should support it, because it is a socialist concept. I cannot understand, however, why a Conservative Government can be such a willing accomplice to Soviet-style central planning. It is simply naive to believe that the system is capable of reform. It is fundamentally flawed. It is impossible to police and control. It is hugely expensive. The public pay twice: once as taxpayers, and a second time as consumers.

All that is in complete contrast to the old British system, the deficiency payments scheme, which had the advantage of redistributing money. Money was taken from the taxpayer. It subsidised the production of food, which reached the marketplace at a cheaper price, to the ultimate benefit of those on low incomes. It was a good system.

We were told that we would persuade our continental partners to adopt that when we went into the European Community. We lost on that count, just as we have on so many others. To believe that one can reform the CAP is a triumph of hope over experience. It is time for those who advocate reform to stand up and spell out exactly what those reforms are. The onus is on those people, because the farming industry cannot prosper in this present state of uncertainty, and it certainly cannot go on if it continues to go further and further away from the realities of the marketplace.

10.40 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) on securing the debate today, as these are important issues—there is no denying that. There are severe problems with the CAP that need to be dealt with. It needs to be reformed. That is the position of the Labour party. I have to say, however, that it is going it a bit to describe the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), when he came back in 1992, as some kind of red commissar presiding over a centrally planned economy within the CAP and the European Union. That is somewhat stretching the point.

Although I listened to the hon. Gentleman's argument carefully—indeed, the argument for repatriation is a position that has been taken by a number of commentators, and there are a number of options for reform—the concept of repatriation and a free market are a contradiction in terms. One cannot have repatriation of European funds to member states and allow them to subsidise different sectors of agriculture in different countries, and then hope to have a free market on a level playing field. That just could not be done. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that.

I have a constituency interest in the pig and poultry sector. Although there is a little truth in what the hon. Gentleman said about the poultrymeat sector, in the pig sector there has been a major move to extensive field systems, and that is a welcome change in terms of pork production. So he can eat pork with a clear conscience in terms of the way in which it is produced in this country.

I was also surprised with the storyline in "The Archers", which has been touched on. The story was that, although Brian Aldridge lost his £9,500, he was receiving an integrated administration and control system cheque for nearly £110,000, and that caused particular offence to another character, a business man whose business had gone bust in the recession.

As he pointed out, the whole idea of the changes in 1992 was to give compensation to the area payments for reduced prices, yet cereal prices have gone up. It is true that is partly as a result of the fallout in the devaluation of the pound—there is no denying that—but there is no doubt whatever that, in the arable sector at the moment, it is a win-win situation for farmers. Indeed, the monthly IACS cheques are just like monthly lottery wins in some sectors.

Mr. Marlow: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that it is the policy of the Labour party that large farmers should not get compensation for land that is taken out of production?

Mr. Morley: It is certainly the policy of the Labour party that we should move away from production subsidies. I want us to be absolutely clear about that. Although we recognise that there is a need for agriculture support in certain sectors, we believe that there are better ways of doing that. I will touch on those in a moment.

When approaching the issue, it does not help to take a negative isolationist view within the European Union. I notice that, in *Farming News*, Sir David Naish said:

> "Internal sniping by politicians is jeopardising Britain's chances to win allies before next year's EU inter-governmental conference".

He continued:

> "And that made it extremely difficult for the NFU to make its case for UK agriculture within Europe".

Although there is a perfectly respectable case for arguing the different ways of approaching reform of the CAP, it does not help to be in the Government's situation, split between the different wings—the Euro-sceptics and the Europhobes. That has paralysed their approach to the way in which it should be done.

To be fair, the hon. Members for Northampton, North and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) have won their arguments with the Conservative party in many ways. The Government are the prisoner of the right. They have moved towards the positions of other Conservative Members in the campaign that they have been running. It is the first time that a Government have gone cap in hand to a group of rebels rather than withdrawing the Whip.

[Mr. Morley]

The Labour party recognises the problems of the CAP, and they are also recognised in Europe. In a recent report, Mr. Fischler stated that there was a need for simplification of the CAP. He went on to say that it has

> "become quite complicated over time, and increasing complexity has made policy management increasingly difficult. In addition it has led to a negative image of the CAP in public opinion (complicated, opaque, bureaucratic, not understandable, open to abuse and fraud)".

He is absolutely right, and I am pleased to see that it is recognised at the highest levels of European policy-making. I very much want to see something stem from that.

I make it clear that we in the Labour party are committed to radical reform of the CAP. We are not afraid to argue for that, both in this country and within the European Union. But the difference between the Labour party and the Government is that we have allies in the European Union, and we can find consensus in terms of getting that agreement.

We want to uncouple agricultural support from production. We want an end to quotas. We believe that set-aside is a negative use of public funds, except when it is used for conservation purposes—long-term set-aside. We want to move towards world pricing for agricultural products.

We also recognise that there is a need for support, but, as part of the change within the CAP budget, we want to see the available funds redirected towards environmental support, and—perhaps as important—support for the wider rural economy, in creating jobs and supporting businesses. We want to recognise the problems of upland farms and their needs. Although we want to press for radical change, we believe that we can encourage and support the approach towards a better rural environment with the funds available.

If one contrasts that positive approach with that of the Government and their priorities on CAP reform, one will see that, according to their Budget statement, within the areas where they have some influence of reform, they want to cut the EC surplus food scheme altogether; restrict eligibility for the R3 carcases category—a stunning 3 per cent. reduction in the number of carcases available—withdraw from the school milk scheme; end the EC processing and marketing grants scheme; end the fisheries grants; and cut back on research and development, at a time when there is a great deal of consumer concern about food, and there is a pressing need for R and D in all areas of agriculture.

That is a glimpse of the Government's priorities for reform—snatch the milk from our nation's schoolchildren, mug our pensioners and poor for the cheap butter and mince, and invite redundancies from our major team of scientists who are doing vital work on research on the risk to consumers from bovine spongiform encephalopathy. At a time when everyone in the agriculture sector agrees on the need for increased marketing and added value, particularly in developing a high-value meat export trade and moving away from live exports, funds through European Union schemes are to be axed.

I have seen at first hand the advantages of the marketing and processing scheme in expanding food companies, both in my constituency and nationally, including Lincolnshire.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman says that he wants to do away with production subsidies. Does he count area payments for arable farmers as production subsidies? If he does, and he is to do away with them, what agriculture support will he offer in the arable area?

Mr. Morley: Area payments are a negative use of public money. I do not think that they are efficient. Indeed, they do not meet the hon. Gentleman's criteria. He was talking about money going to large farms instead of small farms, but the area aid system works against that.

I know that there are arguments both for and against modulation, as it is called, but the hon. Gentleman says that he wants more support for small farmers, and the present system of arable aid payments will not achieve that. We want a support system that is based on giving farmers the opportunity to opt into various environmental support and management programmes—and, of course, an extension of the existing environmentally sensitive area schemes, which we have long supported. We believe that they have a very useful role to play.

Reform must have a social and environmental objective. We must seek consensus and co-operation with our European partners in order to secure change of that kind. It can be done with good will and determination, but it will not be done if we act on the basis of opting out, adopt negative attitudes, criticise and insult foreigners at party conferences. That is why it cannot be done by the present Government.

10.50 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): I am genuinely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) for giving the House an opportunity to debate the important issues surrounding the common agricultural policy. We have had a thoughtful and informed debate, in which constructive speeches have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and a range of philosophical approaches to both agriculture and Europe have been aired.

The current common agricultural policy has few supporters in this country. It attracts much criticism. It costs taxpayers a great deal of money; it raises food prices for consumers, albeit not by as much as is sometimes claimed; it is vulnerable to fraud; and it imposes a number of bureaucratic restrictions and controls on farmers that increasingly limit their initiative. It disadvantages both our farming industry and the food industry that relies on its products.

For those reasons, we have long pressed for reform of the CAP. There has been some progress. First, owing largely to United Kingdom pressure, a ceiling on CAP spending has been in place since 1988, and only unanimity can alter it. That single change has helped the proportion of the EU's budget that is spent on agriculture to fall from nearly 70 per cent. in the late 1980s to 50 per cent. now.

Secondly, in 1992, CAP reforms dramatically reduced cereal and beef support prices, and reduced the reliance on intervention as a market management mechanism. Those changes have contributed to the almost complete elimination of the food mountains of the past. Intervention stocks of frozen beef in the EU stood at nearly 1 million tonnes early in 1993, and are now down to a minimal

12,000 tonnes. Intervention stocks of cereals in the EU totalled nearly 32 million tonnes two years ago; the total last month was under 5 million tonnes.

Thirdly, and most important for the future, the United Kingdom played a major part in ensuring a successful conclusion to the GATT Uruguay round negotiations, including a far-reaching agreement on agriculture. That agreement set world agricultural trade on a liberalising course, and paved the way for further market-led reforms of the CAP.

Fourthly, the United Kingdom has argued strongly and successfully for better controls on CAP fraud and financial mismanagement. We have secured the adoption of several tough pieces of legislation, including the CAP "blacklist" regulation. There has also been a 50 per cent. increase in the reporting of irregularities, and much tougher action by the Commission—in the form of disallowance of spending—when member states' controls are found to be inadequate. That is extremely welcome.

The United Kingdom is leading the debate in Europe on CAP reform. The report of the CAP review group has been widely read throughout Europe. We have set out our aims clearly in the rural White Paper, published in October. Our overriding objective is to secure an efficient, prosperous, competitive and outward-looking agriculture that can operate and compete in increasingly open world markets, providing high-quality raw materials at competitive prices and paying due regard to the environment.

I do not think that there can be any dispute with our aims. In the discussions that I have held with farmers and their representatives, there is a basic and general recognition that the CAP is bound to change, and that their interests—all our interests—lie in a more open, market-oriented policy in which UK farmers, because of their efficiency and competitiveness, will be in a strong position to do well.

Many farmers are understandably concerned about the number of bureaucratic controls that now seem to be part and parcel of the CAP. Some of those controls are necessary to protect public money and reduce the opportunity for fraud; others are there because of artifical constraints on production, and are more difficult to defend. Creating the conditions in which quotas, set-aside and other supply controls can be removed will lift a major burden of bureaucracy from our farming industry.

In our view, that must be the way forward. It will mean continuing the process of progressively reducing production-related support, bringing EU support much closer to world market levels. That would substantially reduce the economic costs of the policy, and allow the eventual abolition of supply controls.

It does not mean renationalising the CAP; nor can radical changes in policy be introduced overnight. Reform must be introduced steadily, at a pace with which farmers can reasonably be expected to cope, and it must be Europewide. It will be no less important under a reformed CAP than it is now to ensure that member states cannot give their farmers national subsidies to snatch illicit competitive advantage: a level playing field is an imperative.

We do not seek to do away with a common policy for agriculture in the European Union. That would not be in our interests. It is also clear that cuts in production-related support will not be negotiable without some compensation for the farmers who are affected. Our aim will be to ensure that such compensation is fully uncoupled from production, is time-limited, and does not discriminate against United Kingdom farmers.

Mrs. Gorman: Does my hon. Friend agree that absent from this feast of information about the CAP is any mention of our urban population, whose taxes are paying for all this? Because of the CAP's inefficiency, they are being forced to pay through the nose for their food, to the tune of around £25 a week. Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend clearly was not listening to what I said at the beginning of my speech. I said that the CAP had few supporters in this country, that it cost taxpayers a great deal of money, and that it disadvantaged both our farming industry and consumers—and that, for those reasons, we had long pressed for its reform, which we intend to secure.

A reformed CAP will also need to place more emphasis on environmental concerns, although we must always remember that the primary purpose of farming is food production. The 1992 reforms introduced several important environmental elements, most in response to United Kingdom pressure. Future reforms will need to build on those, reflecting the importance that the public attach to the conservation and enhancement of our farmed environment. Such a package of reforms is coherent and logical, and the right way forward.

Alas, our approach is not yet universally shared by other member states, many of which are broadly happy with the way in which the CAP operates at present and would prefer to consider that the 1992 reforms were upheaval enough. It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that, as we move towards the 21st century, pressures for change will intensify.

The EU's existing GATT ceilings on subsidised exports will exert pressure on the policy, and without reform, growing surpluses could again begin to emerge. The next round of negotiations in the World Trade Organisation, which are due to start in 1999 and are designed to take further the process of trade liberalisation and subsidy reduction, will increase those pressures.

The forthcoming enlargement of the EU to include the countries of central and eastern Europe will also be an important factor. Extending the current CAP to those countries would be prohibitively expensive for the EC budget, and would further increase the danger of growing surpluses; it would also be contrary to the interests of the aspirant countries, whose economies could not afford the high prices and economic distortions associated with the CAP.

Against that background, I welcome the European Commission's new report on agriculture and the accession of the central and eastern European countries to the EU. That report is to be presented to the European Council in Madrid later this month.

Although it does not go as far as it should have, the report marks an important change in policy, recognising the validity of much of what we United Kingdom Ministers have been saying for some time. It makes it clear that prolonging the status quo is not a feasible option, and that further reform of the CAP must come. Our task now must be to build on that important step, and persuade our partners in Europe of our vision of reform. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be urging

[Mr. Baldry]

his colleagues in Madrid to ensure that the European Commission's work is taken forward expeditiously. Inevitably, it will take some years to achieve the sort of CAP changes that we think are necessary, but I strongly believe that the changes that we are promoting are in the interests of farmers, consumers, taxpayers and the country as a whole, and we shall continue to fight for the interests of farmers and consumers whenever we can.

Young People Leaving Care

10.59 am

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): This morning's bitter weather is a reminder that many people in this city and throughout this land will be sleeping on the streets tonight. Sadly, a high proportion of them will have been in care.

Three reasons make this debate crucial and timely. The first concerns the reminders that we have had in the West trial. The pitiful vulnerability of young, defenceless people was exposed to us all in the stark horror of that trial, which has invaded all our imaginations with fearful images of young people who were unprotected and who faced people such as the West family. We know now that 10,000 people leave care every year. Many of them disappear into the urban jungles of our cities. No one would notice if they discontinued their existence in this world. No one cares about them. That position was well recognised before the Children Act 1989 was passed.

The second reason, and it is the urgent one, is the cold cynicism of yesterday's Budget cut in the already paltry income of young impoverished people. In future, they will have to share accommodation, possibly with complete strangers, robbing them of what they need: safety, privacy and the stability of life. The Government should hang their heads in shame about the reasons that they came to that decision. We have read the leaked published correspondence from the Secretary of State for Social Security, in which he has announced his despair, talked about the chaos in his Department, but identified a housing benefit cut for young people as an easy option. They are a soft target. In a giveaway Budget, where billions of pounds were given to people who were well off already, the Government put in that mean cut against people and against all the evidence that the House and its Committees have heard of how the abolition of income support entitlement for 16 and 17 year-olds damages that group of young people.

The third reason is the encyclopedia of evidence that the Children Act is not working. Dozens of organisations—and I thank them for the help that they have given me in relation to this debate—have prepared searching reports on the Act's effects. It is now six years since it passed through the House and four years since its implementation. There were high, idealistic and practical ambitions for that Act, which was supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House, but the shadow of failure falls between that dream and the reality. There has been some success—of course, there are examples of good practice. There is a fine after-care team in my constituency, but it is one of the few: only two operate in Wales—but there are also huge deserts of Great Britain in which there is little happening with the Children Act. We must rethink it, because the cause of its failure will be multiplied by yesterday's Budget cuts.

The third problem is the shift of spending from national to local government, which will mean an horrendous problem in Wales, where we are going through local government reorganisation, with an already fragile system is passing from eight county councils to 22 unitary authorities. We must ask: where will after-care support come in the list of their priorities? I have written to all the authorities in Wales and I fear that, despite the great ocean of good will that exists there, with the problems of finance, the after-care of people leaving foster homes and care institutions is a low priority.

Every year, 10,000 people leave care. Many of them are denied adequate support, adequate money and decent accommodation. Often, they are bewildered and damaged by their experience and are pitchforked from full-time care into little more than full-time neglect. Their experience is different from that of the children of most hon. Members. They leave our family homes at an average age of 22 and often they come back. There are often strong links there, but how on earth can we expect 60 per cent. of these young children, who have been hit with every misfortune that life can offer, to set up a fully independent life at the age of 16 to 17?

Those young children take on such adult responsibilities at that immature age at the same time as they are moving from school to a job, unemployment or a training scheme—another traumatic move. They are moving from an institutional life where they were financially dependent in all their decisions to responsibility for managing a woefully meagre budget. At the same time, there is a collapse of their network of friends, teachers and acquaintances when they go into an alien environment in which that support is not there. In addition, they face what all young people face: all the bewildering problems of adolescence.

Only the strongest characters can come through that. Many of them do so unscathed, but that says a great deal for them. This morning, I met a group of six care leavers for the first time and they are all bright, highly intelligent and highly articulate young people, but they share another characteristic: they are full of anger at a system that has robbed them of part of their childhood and of their early adolescence, and that has heaped unreasonable burdens on them when they should be enjoying the prime of their lives.

Remarkably, many such young people go into care work. I am sure that those who have experienced care themselves are the most able in such work, so I do not want to add to the negative image of care leavers. There is a problem involved in that: the public perception is poor. There is a great wall and a cliff of public prejudice against such people, who are reluctant to say that they have been in care, but many come out of this and we want to take a positive line and rejoice in those who, unscathed, have come through the problems that we as a society have heaped on them.

The figures are startling and depressing. Thirty per cent. of single homeless people have experienced care. A study of homeless care leavers by Centrepoint found that more than half of those surveyed became homeless immediately after leaving care, and that nearly all of them had on some occasions slept rough. Imagine doing that yesterday evening or tonight.

A study by Leeds university found that more than a third of its sample had incomes of less than £30 a week and that only 7 per cent. earned more than £70 a week. The research also found that, in 1993, 22 per cent. of males and 16 per cent. of females aged 16 to 19 in the general population were unemployed. However, between a third and a half of its sample of care leavers were unemployed, so they are suffering disproportionately.

A survey by Save the Children found that more than half the respondents were not encouraged to continue with their education, and that 40 per cent. had no help in finding a job with curriculum vitae, application forms and letters, in an increasingly competitive world of job search for young people.

Care leavers are at greater risk of offending and of getting into other activities than other young people. According to First Key, 23 per cent. of adult prisoners and 38 per cent. of young prisoners said that they had had experience of local authority care as a child, although less than 1 per cent. of them were taken into care because they were offending. If people are not stirred by our pleas on the grounds of common humanity and compassion, perhaps they will accept the argument on the ground of the damage that we are doing to society by providing inadequate care. The Minister has the uncaring, flinty exterior of all Conservative Prime Ministers, but inside there is a warm, compassionate human being fighting to get out. I hope that he will succeed.

The Minister knows about the lack of preparation and support for those leaving care. I have no wish to give instant remedies and condemn everyone. Many marvellous people whose life's work is care devote their time, energies and skills to it and achieve great things. But the general picture condemns us all. There is inadequate preparation for leaving care, and the lack of support is revealed by the Save the Children survey. It showed that 60 per cent. of respondents lacked life skills on leaving care. Half of them did not know how to manage their money, and nearly a quarter did not know how much things cost. We are failing in that vital area. Although all those matters were identified during the passage of the Children Act six years ago, according to the whole catalogue of research that has been published, we have not succeeded in changing the system to any great degree.

According to the Save the Children survey:

> "The amounts young people received ranged from nothing to £1,800 with most receiving under £1,000 . . . from 'Don't know'—gave me £5 and some sandwiches and said I don't want to see you again".

The young care leaver received some money in the form of vouchers.

Through savings while young people are in care, by postponing the age of leaving care, to which I shall shortly come, and by ensuring financial responsibility through running a budget, people should be taught, not in one fell swoop but over a long time, the great skills of managing their finances. A report from Leeds university states that a survey of 102 local authorities found that only 42 per cent. offered an automatic leaving care grant. Of the remainder, some operated a discretionary system. Matters can only get worse following the shift of spending from central Government back to local government and the enormous challenges that local government will face in the next financial year.

There are positive aspects, because good preparation and support has plainly had a wonderful effect. The research by Leeds university showed that leaving care schemes are beneficial to young people when they are properly organised, especially in securing good accommodation and improving life skills. One care leader from west Glamorgan made plain the difference that decent accommodation made to her when she said about her new flat:

> "It is the best property I have ever had. It makes me feel proud of myself."

Public prejudice on the issue must be tackled. A MORI poll found that almost all those who were surveyed would not risk employing someone from a care background.

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

More than half of the young people surveyed by Save the Children said that they rarely told anyone that they had been in care. That is the truth, ugly as it is, and the Government and the country must work to get rid of the foolish and damaging wall of prejudice. It makes no sense and greatly hurts the life chances of young people who have already faced so many challenges in life.

I have made some study of the position in Wales. I wrote to all the local authorities there and read all the reports that have been made, especially that by Dr. Hutson of the university of Glamorgan. She points to the unevenness of the situation in Wales and mentions the two excellent teams in Wales. There were cases of great distress among the young people whom she interviewed.

The feature of all these reports, most of which have been published within the past year, is the evidence from young people. It was not a case of academics telling us what was going on or laying down theories; the reports contain practical quotations about what has been happening to young people. That is the strength of every report. Leaping from the pages are pictures of young people's faces, and their words are used to describe what has happened to them. All of them talk about running out of money because of lack of organisation. There are images of young people sitting in the dark because they have run out of tokens or money and have no gas or electricity.

Welsh care leavers were dumped in unsuitable accommodation. One young care leaver from west Glamorgan said of private rented accommodation:

> "The other bloke in the room was a rapist"—

and also apparently drunk most of the time—

> "I couldn't take my girlfriend there . . . It's a dump. The windows are coming out. The walls are damp. The electric fire is expensive."

A young woman who wanted a flat in Pontypridd where she had been in care was told by the council to take a flat in the Rhondda. Three months later the council knocked the flat down.

I wrote to the Minister in August about these matters and about the need for mandatory monitoring. The Government and local authorities do not know what happens to care leavers or where they have gone. We could well be replicating the West tragedy many times over and nobody would know. There is an overwhelming case for a check, because we have to know the whereabouts of everyone who has left care.

It is said that young people have gained A-levels and degrees and now say, "We are adults now and we do not want to be mothered." One such young person said to me, "I would like someone to knock on the door now and again to ask me how I feel and whether I am all right." Care even on that basic level would be an improvement. The Minister said that some young people might not welcome it, but it is not compulsory for those who make it clear that they are managing perfectly well on their own. The problem is with the many young people who have disappeared from the system, and unless there is mandatory monitoring there will be no major improvement.

In his letter, the Minister said:

> "Whilst we would expect local authorities to adopt an active stance on this issue, the introduction of a statutory requirement would be inappropriate, because there will be those care leavers who do not seek, wish, or require continuing support services from local authorities."

That may be true and such young people do not have to accept those services, but they should at least be available, and at present they are not: it is up to local authorities to do their own thing. The Minister's argument is not at all convincing and I hope that his thoughts have advanced a little since August.

In his fair-minded way, the Minister states:

> "I fully accept that there is some way to go before we can be satisfied with the level of provision in all local authorities."

That is as much of an admission of failure as one is likely to get from a Minister, and I welcome it. The Minister's letter continues:

> "progress is being made and I am sure this will be maintained."

We all have one chance of life, youth and adolescence and we cannot continue in this leisurely way by saying, "Things are getting better, they are slowly picking up." By the time that young people leaving care today have reached adulthood, their lives could be damaged irreparably by lack of provision. We cannot rely on a slow evolutionary improvement. Action has to be taken now. One new development is the requirement that health education services contribute to the planning process to help children who are leaving care. That was mentioned in a recent paper, and perhaps we can debate that.

Many hon. Members who are in the Chamber made creative and productive contributions to the Children Act, and it was felt that progress was being made when the Act was passed. However, in many areas the situation has not improved: it has deteriorated. A recent survey by the social services inspectorate found that more local authorities now have leaving-care teams, and at least, 50 per cent. of social services departments have some form of monitoring system.

That is fine, but a national survey by the Aftercare Consortium, which attempted to assess the situation after the implementation of the Children Act, came to a much more negative conclusion. Although most of the people working on care projects reported that there was a leaving care policy in their area, they said that it was not always followed up. The survey also found that only in the affordability of supported lodgings and the availability of leaving-care grants had any real improvement been made between 1992 and 1993 in the provision for care leavers, and in the case of leaving-care grants, improvement had only been slight.

Significant deterioration was found in nine areas of provision: housing, benefits, income support for under 18-year-olds, community care grants, social fund loans, education grants, financial support during vacations, youth training, and employment and financial support from social services. That is an horrendous list of areas in which the provision has not improved—it has not increased as the Minister has suggested. It has in fact deteriorated according to the Aftercare Consortium report.

One of the main problems with the Children Act is the fact that is does not ring-fence funding. Also, the provision of services is very much at the discretion of each authority. According to First Key,

> "The Children Act provisions need to be amended to give strength to the current duties to prepare young people for leaving care and to advise, assist and befriend them once they have left care.
>
> The primary reason for the failure and poor quality of preparation for leaving care is that the provision of services relies on discretionary interpretation of powers. Local authorities"—

now more than ever—

> "faced with the demands of child protection services and more recently community care legislation are prioritising their constrained resources and leaving care services are losing out. Consequently, there is a credibility gap",

between the rhetoric and the reality, between the belief in what is being provided and the considerably lower level of services that result.

The Act was supposed to improve things for care leavers—that was its whole purpose—but it has not done so, due to the position of local authorities. As we know, under the Act local authorities are required to provide befriending services for care leavers up to the age of 21, but that is very rarely done. If local authorities fail to provide such services, they are breaking the law. The Act has failed, and the Minister must accept that. There should be a statutory duty on local authorities to provide services for young people leaving care.

We know all about the various problems with social services departments and the difficulties that they have in so many other areas of work, but I wish that the Government would consider reversing the planned housing benefit change. If it cannot be reversed—unfortunately, it seems that it cannot—the Government should instruct local authorities to interpret it in such a way that every after-care leaver is automatically considered a hardship case. That seems to be one of the only ways in which one can guarantee that progress will be made and young people will get a fair deal.

We are seeking some undertakings from the Minister on improvements that should be made to that Act. We want to hear that he will introduce mandatory monitoring for local authorities, they he will decide to say to them that the money they receive is ring-fenced and that it must go towards services for those who leave care. We want some indication from him that he recognises the failure of the Act and the need to introduce reforms.

Many areas of reform are being pressed on him by *Community Care* and concerned groups, which would ensure that people who leave care do not enter a period of steep decline in their fortunes and Members could look with pride on their work. Images of young people such as the haunting one of the young lady who said that she was virtually expelled from a community care home at the age of 17—with all her possessions in a black plastic bag, a fiver in her pocket and the message, "We hope never to see you again," ringing in her ears—is shameful to the House and to the country. We must do far better

11.25 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful to be called in this important debate. I am sorry that, at this stage, only the Minister and the Whip are on the Conservative Benches. Certainly, Opposition Members are concerned; they believe, rightly, that the subject of this debate has to be addressed. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on his passionate and well-researched speech.

My thoughts are based on a number of experiences, partly to do with my background as a Front-Bench spokesman over three years. For part of that time, I shadowed the Minister, whom I respect. I recognise that he is interested in and cares about this issue. Although I would not say that about many of his hon. Friends, I think that he has genuinely attempted to look in detail at the matter and to listen to people's concerns.

Like me, he has met many young people who have been through the care process and has addressed conferences of young people. Indeed, I pay tribute to the articulate voice of the young people who have left care and have organised themselves in a number of ways to press, quite rightly, for changes to the circumstances that they have experienced and that others are still experiencing.

As the Minister and my hon. Friend knows, I also have personal experience of social work—over almost 20 years before I entered Parliament. It is very interesting to meet as adults people whom I took into care as babies. Talking to them about their life experiences in the care system is very traumatic. When I was a very young man, I was responsible in some instances for taking decisions about their lives. They were taken into care as babies on the assumption that the care system would offer them something better than they would otherwise have had. From meeting the one or two whom I know now and listening to their experiences, I have to say that I am afraid that the system has let many of them down very badly. I feel deeply about that because clearly I have some responsibility for their lives and the way in which they have been treated. Many have undergone all sorts of appalling experiences that should not happen to anybody.

The issue is brought home to me regularly by my wife, who works for an organisation in Leeds called Caring For Life, which is concerned with addressing specifically the needs of young people leaving care and attempts to care for them for life. That is a key factor, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West demonstrated, once they leave the system, many are dropped, forgotten about and allowed to undergo appalling experiences. Some go into the penal system, to disappear for ever—sadly, sometimes in such circumstances as the recent events in Gloucester.

Many others have gone through very bad experiences—not perhaps as bad as those in Gloucester—and have ended up in an environment that is totally unacceptable in this day and age. My wife's work has brought home to me the need for immense improvements along the lines of those mentioned by my hon. Friend.

On entering Parliament in 1987, I had the great privilege of being involved in the passage of the Children Bill. It was one of the first major pieces of legislation on which I worked. There was all-party consensus that that Bill offered a major improvement in protecting children and in alleviating the plight of people leaving care. Despite that cross-party support and the whole-hearted endorsement of the House, one or two reservations were expressed about the Bill.

One reservation mentioned by my hon. Friend was the limited time and responsibility that the Bill devoted to care leavers. I served on the Standing Committee and I remember the attempts by a number of Opposition Members to persuade the Government to extend those responsibilities in the way referred to by my hon. Friend. In that respect, and despite the great success of the Act in many other ways, our concerns have proved justified.

Another fundamental weakness, which is much more difficult to overcome, is that the Act fails to require a co-ordinated approach, both nationally and locally, to child protection and to services for children and young persons. One department, at either Government or local level, should not be able to initiate something that has not taken into account the responsibilities of other departments. The benefit changes initiated by the Departments of Social

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

Security and of Health are examples of that. I do not believe that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), acceded to the benefit changes—I know him too well. He understands as well as I do the impact that those changes will have on young people leaving care.

A classic example of a lack of policy co-ordination between Government Departments can be seen today. After this debate, I shall be serving on a Statutory Instrument Committee discussing a Government proposal to remove the social work training element from the qualifying courses for probation officers. That might appear to be irrelevant to what we are discussing this morning, but it is not. Unfortunately, a number of the people with whom probation officers have to deal have offended as a result of difficulties which they faced very early in their lives and which, sadly, have led them to end up in the penal system. I am sure that, privately, the Minister would not disagree with a word of what I am saying.

I become angry when I hear the latest proposals from the Home Office—the tough approach, going back to the short, sharp, shock treatment that was such a miserable failure. I know that because one of the experimental camps was in my constituency. Now, the Government want to bring in boot camps. The same kids will be going through those camps—they are the kids who have gone through the care system. Sadly, I see some of them in Wakefield prison serving life sentences.

We must tackle the problems much earlier. If we fail to do that, we will have to try to deal with them through the penal system, which is a much more expensive process. I appeal to the Minister to fight his corner against some of the nonsense that we hear from some of his colleagues in the Home Office. He knows that it will permanently damage some already damaged young people.

That point will be made in Committee this afternoon. I hope that we carry the day, but I fear that we will not. The Minister understands why social work training should be part of the probation officers' brief. They are dealing with social work issues and with some very damaged people who need skilled intervention. I mean no disrespect to ex-police officers or ex-Army officers, but I cannot accept the suggestion that authoritarian-style people, marching up and down and shouting like a serjeant-major can deal with very damaged people. The Government's own figures prove that. We have a very effective probation service with social work training which steers people away from the penal system.

No doubt other hon. Members will want to expand on the implications of the income support changes on young people. I know of many examples where they have resulted in immense difficulty for young people leaving care. The housing benefit changes that are due to take effect on 2 January next year and the restrictions on hardship payments will specifically impact on care leavers. The Minister should tell his colleagues at the DSS, loudly and clearly, what the Chancellor's proposals will mean for the sort of people about whom we are talking.

I am not simply pointing a finger at different Government Departments; I am aware that there is a lack of collaboration and co-ordination locally. In October 1991, two years after the implementation of the Children Act 1989, I did a survey of all English local authorities. I discovered that, at that stage, only three of them had developed cross-departmental strategies on family policy. It is not just Government Departments but local authority departments that do not talk to each other, and even sometimes contradict each other.

There is a lack of clarity about the role of social service departments and housing departments, especially in relation to the definition of "vulnerability". I wish that I had a pound for every case that I have come across of a dispute between a housing department and a social services department about whether a young person is vulnerable. It is my view that, by definition, if a young person has been through the care system and is leaving it, he must be vulnerable. People must be vulnerable if we have intervened in their lives and placed them in the care system. They are disadvantaged and worthy of additional support and care when they leave the system.

Many local authorities have worked hard to overcome the problems. I know that many of them have tried desperately to improve the plight of young persons leaving care, but they have to wrestle with the local consequences of Government policy. Housing policy is probably the most important area, and there has been a complete rundown in investment in social housing. Whether it be housing associations or local authority housing programmes, there is no doubt that the housing stock for people in social need has been markedly reduced. That has impacted on young people leaving care.

Of course, it is easy for the Opposition to argue that the Government do not invest enough money and that there is a lack of resources. However, the Minister talks to local social services departments and he will have been told of the way in which the child care budget has been raided to prop up the huge demands resulting from the community care changes. There is a ring-fenced community care budget, but not a ring-fenced child care budget. Social services departments have told me that they have had to move resources away from care leavers and child protection to meet the massive demands of the community care changes.

The Minister should consider education policies and their impact on young people in care and leaving care. There has been a huge increase in the number of exclusions of young people from schools. Many of them have been through very difficult home circumstances and some have ended up in care, yet they are excluded from school. There is now a climate of league tables. They show academic success, but they do not show the nature of a school's clientele. They do not highlight the difficulties faced by schools and the admirable way in which they deal with them. Unfortunately, in some cases schools are only too happy to exclude certain pupils. I know that some of those within the care system are easily excluded because the difficult circumstances that they have experienced occasionally show in their behaviour at school.

It is sad that the current education environment is not conducive to supporting many of the young people about whom we are concerned in this debate. There has been a move towards local management of schools and grant-maintained status. Social services departments and teachers have told me that that has resulted in less willingness to participate in collaboration on child protection and the care of vulnerable young people. Those are wider policy issues that need to be considered in this debate.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's points about education. However, is it not true that within the care system there may be provision for young people to have leisure and television rooms, but no place that they may use for study? That point must be within the remit of the Department.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. The educational needs of young people, especially those in the care system, are often overlooked. We look after the more basic caring needs, without really considering other needs. I know some people who, despite all the disadvantages, are highly academic and have gone to college or university and done very well. We must give them credit for having overcome those disadvantages.

There are three specific points which summarise the present position and, in making them, I am very much reliant on my wife's experiences and on her feelings about where we need to go in respect of young persons leaving care.

First, there is the question of preparation. We still do not properly prepare young people in the care system for the kind of life that they will face when they leave care. Hon. Members should think about what they were like when they were 16. Could they cook or sew? There are some of us in our 40s who still cannot cook or sew.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Some people in their 60s cannot do that.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend is right. If hon. Members could not have carried out those tasks at 16, why should we expect young people who have gone through far worse experiences in their childhood to be able to do so? Cooking, budgeting, use of leisure time and choosing the right company are all important. It is easy to be placed in accommodation in certain areas where the company is not particularly positive, and we must look at that issue.

Suitable housing is the second crucial point, and it is not just a case of putting somebody in a flat. In many instances, that person needs supervised lodgings, or perhaps a motherly landlady. The third and final point is that the person leaving care needs somebody in loco parentis. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West mentioned, we need to pinpoint somebody who will follow the young person through after leaving care.

My wife's organisation, Caring for Life, cares—or attempts to care—for life for the many people who will always need on-going care. Many people do not need on-going care throughout adulthood, but many others do. We need a person to be pinpointed who can provide that support.

My main point is that we clearly lack a national strategy of co-ordination which can resolve all the boundary disputes which result in people falling between the different agencies. More than ever, we need collaboration between local authority departments. We need a Minister whose remit ranges across Government Departments to ensure that there is a national strategy for young people in these circumstances.

I believe that the Children Act was a very important move forward, and I commend the present Minister's predecessor—the right hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor)—who was very much involved in the passage of the legislation. He listened to the concerns of many people, and amended the legislation accordingly. That Act was a major step forward, but—as the Minister will be aware—there is still a long way to go in addressing the needs of young people in care.

11.41 am

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on creating the opportunity for the House to consider these matters today. He has done a remarkable job, and I commend him on his complete, well-measured and well-prepared speech. I must also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on following the matter up so effectively.

Indeed, if we put the speeches of my hon. Friends together, there is not a hell of a lot left for Opposition Front Benchers to say, and I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), who winds up for the Opposition. My hon. Friends the Members for Newport, West and for Wakefield made astonishingly complete, compassionate and considerate contributions, and I am very pleased that I was here to hear them.

I must also register my gratitude to the Chairman of the Defence Committee for liberating me from the need to hold witnesses under scrutiny upstairs and allowing me to add to some of the points which have been made. I must declare an interest, in that I was a consultant and parliamentary adviser to the Gracewell Institute until it went out of existence.

Currently, I am a trustee and director of the Faithfull Foundation. I must add that I was pleased that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis)—who is to reply to the debate today—came to the launch of that foundation in the House of Lords some time ago, and made an excellent speech. I know of the machinations that he went through to make that presentation. I am not supposed to know, but I do, and I commend him for making that speech. It confirmed in my mind the Minister's commitment to the issue. I shall not declare any details of the incident now, and I have no intention of doing so elsewhere. Our secrets are safe.

My involvement in this matter goes back to Cleveland, the Butler-Sloss inquiry—in which I was involved—and my experiences since then. When I told my soulmate in my office, Christopher Kelsey, that I was going to try to contribute to the debate today, he asked whether I had prepared anything. I replied that I had not, but he said that that was all right as I knew all about the issue. I said "No, Chris. No one knows all about it. We are still scratching the surface." We have barely embarked on a journey that we really must complete because, to date, we are making a dog's breakfast of it.

Perhaps the starting point is that everybody—regardless of who we are or what station we occupy in life—seeks approval and recognition. In order to gain that approval and recognition, we respond inevitably to example. It does not matter whether that example is good or bad, because when we start to receive it we are incapable of judging whether it is good or bad. If we receive that example from the people who are caring for us and feeding and clothing us, we naturally assume it to be proper. No matter what a person shows us to do or how he shows us to do it, we expect it to be the right manner in which to behave. If we are later

[Mr. Frank Cook]

subject to the shock of realising that we are badly in error, we have huge feelings of guilt, remorse, confusion and regret which put us at a disadvantage.

A person is put into care usually because he or she is in some kind of danger, be it from mental or emotional cruelty or from physical or sexual abuse, although someone can be put into care if there is no one else to care for him or her. Generally, children are put in a form of what we hope is positive custody, but they are placed with other youngsters who have had similar unfortunate experiences. In doing that, we add to the series of unfortunate experiences that have been visited on them.

We make that error not only at that stage, I have to say. We make the same error with the people whom we find guilty of abuse, because we usually put them into some kind of protective custody in a penal institute. They are banged up with people who have been guilty of similar transgressions, and once again there is an almost organic cycle of amplification and multiplication.

We must try to break that cycle, and break the relentless repetition of damage that we are allowing to be visited on future generations. I was greatly taken with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, who called for a change in ministerial remit, as that was a point that I wanted to raise.

In my work with the obscene publications department of Scotland Yard, one thing seemed to me to be profligately wasteful. We would place a fairly experienced police constable—male or female—in the department, and would allow him or her to be trained in somewhat distressing circumstances. Some of the stuff that the department must examine, scrutinise and evaluate is so bloody foul that the effort to stay sane while observing it stretches the mind. Just when the constable was becoming mature and seasoned in that work, he or she would be moved to traffic because otherwise that person's career prospects could be damaged. That is fine from the point of view of career development, but it is not much bloody good in terms of taking care of children.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about the matter, but I would ask him to moderate his language somewhat.

Mr. Cook: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for using the term "bloody", if that was the word that caused offence. Was there any other?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not yet.

Mr. Cook: I had no intention of causing offence, I promise you, and I promise the House. I apologise for using the term "bloody"—but I still feel as strongly as that, or even more strongly.

It does not make much sense to train people, to give them that degree of expertise and then to remove them from the position of responsibility. The same applies to Ministries. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield referred to the plethora of departments that have to cope with the problems that have been described. Health, education and social services are all involved, as are Home Office responsibilities such as probation and the police.

Somehow the poor individuals fall down the cracks on the keyboard. We are trying to play a minor tune on a keyboard capable of performing only in a major key. My plea, extending those that have already been recorded, is that we should create another kind of agency. I have pleaded for some time for such an agency, to concentrate on family matters. What would we call it? Perhaps a support availability agency.

What we need is a police force that is not police, social services that are not social services and probation services that are not probation. Such an agency would need the responsibility and authority to stretch further than other bodies and, as a single agency, to care for the particular needs of every individual who required such attention.

Every family should be able to call on such services as and how it sees fit. The courts, too, should be able to identify people whom they consider to be in need of such attention. I could talk at great length on the subject, but I know that other hon. Members want their turn. I hope that my comments have been of help to the House.

11.51 am

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I begin by declaring an interest as a practising barrister, and the few remarks that I shall make will relate purely to that sphere. I have spent about 30 years in court in one form or another, and in that time I have seen thousands upon thousands of children and young persons who have ended up before a court simply because they have been neglected.

None of us chooses his or her parents, but for most of us life is quite happy; our parents care for us, guide us and see that we are educated, housed and eventually launched upon the sea of life. But for some, that is not to be.

For some the path is care, or even custody. That sometimes happens because of the death of parents, leaving their children alone in a society in which there is no one to care for them. Over the years, much good work has been done by various adoption societies, children's homes, and so on—but that can never replace a parent. All of us who have children know that.

For instance, if my sons want advice they can ring me up today, wherever they may be. They may not get especially good advice from their father, but at least they have someone to whom to turn. When, for whatever reason, a child has been in care, to whom can that child turn? Can he or she go back to the matron or whoever else ran the home and say, "Please, what do I do?"? The answer is inevitably no, because the throughput is so great, as is the pressure on space and time, and the lack of resources.

Other children end up in care because they have broken the law. We have all seen youngsters such as the young tearaway who is put into care, unless he ends up in one of the more contained establishments run—although "run" may be too kind a word to use—by Her Majesty's Prison Service. In such units there is little education, little support and little, if any, after-care.

The various agencies such as the probation service and social services have done a superb job over the years. But what happens to such children now? They are contained and restrained. And now the Government want to take the social service element out of probation training. How stupid can they get? The idea is negative and stupid and will actually be costly.

When children in care are 16, we say to them, "Where now?" Some authorities give them £1,000, and some the proverbial sandwich and a fiver. Then they are supposed to find their way in the world. It is not their fault that they do not have parents or that they grew up in a broken home in a destroyed society. They did not ask for that. Tell me of one child who wants a life of misery. There would not be many volunteers.

None the less, there those children are at the age of 16. What do we do with them? And now we are to tell them that they cannot have as much housing benefit or support as before. Yet those are the very children who need support and benefit. Ten years ago in America, in Boston and other places, there was the Massachusetts experiment in which, with the aid of the probation service and social services, children who came out of the penal system were fed back into society.

They lived in almost sheltered accommodation at first, but they could work their way up the ladder and get a better flat, and were helped and advised about getting jobs. They were gently cared for and led back into society. Why can we not do that? I do not say that every child who leaves a children's home this year will fall into the problems of criminality, but it was found that there was not much offending among the children in the Massachusetts experiment.

When is a child most vulnerable and most likely to be caught up in the web of offending and reoffending? We know that the peak age of offending is 14, and at 16 one is not far away from that. Yet a young girl who leaves a care home is put into a bedsit. She may have her £1,000, but to whom is she to turn? Along will come some nice kindly person, as she thinks, and before she knows where she is, she will be in the wrong company.

How is such a child to judge the quality of the company that she keeps? She has no experience against which to balance it. Unfortunately, we do not have many wise people in government at present—except, of course, the Under-Secretary of State for Health who is here today, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis)—but if the Government were wise in such matters, they would consider the overall cost.

How much does it cost to put a 16-year-old into a secure environment, by which I mean somewhere warm, dry and affordable, where there is support and someone to whom to turn? Perhaps £100 a week. Contrast that with the £400 a week that it costs to put someone into a penal establishment. So, to save £100 a week, we risk spending £400 a week. That is the mathematics of the madhouse, but the Government do not take that fact on board.

We have a Home Secretary who seems to think that if we march people up the hill and down again often enough, we might achieve something, although all that he will find out will be what the rest of us found out 10 or 15 years ago—that the faster we march them up the hill, the more quickly they think of ways of getting away, the more crimes they learn and the worse they turn out at the end of the day.

Why can we not get away from all that and simply build and rebuild? It would not cost a fortune. I heard what was said about the Children Act 1989, and I know from professional experience that there are many holes in the legislation. However, I do not propose to trespass down that road now, because I am watching the time with great care, and watching my Whip, to whom I have to be nice, with even greater care.

Let me finish as simply as I began. When a child is vulnerable, we as a society should care for that child. And which children in our society are more vulnerable than those in care? Therefore, when they reach the age at which they must leave the environment that has looked after them hitherto, that is the important time when they need support. We do not give it. We do not try. We abandon them and, years later, say, "Gosh, how did that all start?" We have only ourselves to blame. To a Conservative Government this must come as manna from heaven and music to their ears, but sometimes there is benefit in investing. That is their motto. I merely ask that the Government should try investing in our kids; they deserve it.

11.59 am

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) deserves the thanks of the whole House for bringing this important subject to public attention. It is also important to pay credit to all the organisations that have mounted such a spirited campaign in defence of care leavers and their problems. I am thinking of organisations such as Save the Children Fund, Barnardo's, *Community Care* magazine, Centrepoint and many others.

Today's debate reflects the growing concern about a neglected group of some 10,000 young people a year who leave local authority care. We know where those young people came from and why they went into care but until recently we knew little about what happens to them once they leave it. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made the important point that there is a long way to go before we correct that information deficit, but, thankfully, a spate of recent reports has begun to unearth what has all too often been a hidden problem.

The picture that those reports paint of life after care for young people is bleak. We have heard about unemployment and homelessness. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) made the important point about the all too frequent appearances of young care leavers before the courts and how they eventually enter the prison system. However, the organisations that produced the reports are to be commended for involving young care leavers in their preparation and production. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, care and after-care services will only improve if we listen to the voices of those who have experienced them.

The stories that young care leavers have told in the various reports to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West referred will, I hope, help to shape a better future for the next generation of care leavers. It is easy to forget that all young people who leave care have exactly the same aspirations as any other young person. They want to raise families, to have homes, to prosper and enjoy the best that life has to offer. It is common ground that the aim of all policy, whether local or national, is to ensure that young care leavers make the transition from care to independence as quickly and easily as possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West made the important point that there are good examples of local, and national, organisations working together to ensure that that transition is made, but such experiences are all too limited.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

The reality is that, too often, young people leaving care find the path to independence blocked. As a consequence, young care leavers find the opportunities that are available to others denied to them. They face the worst of all possible worlds: an early ejection from a supported environment into an often prejudiced society with no stable family support system to fall back on when the going gets tough. Invariably, the going does get tough. They find themselves competing for jobs in a labour market where 600,000 young people are already out of work but face the additional handicap of public prejudice against care leavers and, often, lower educational attainment. The result, not surprisingly, is that a high proportion of young care leavers become unemployed.

Life without work, and on the breadline, is the biggest single obstacle to the search of young care leavers for meaningful independence. Unemployment and poverty also inhibit their search for appropriate housing. The Centrepoint study that was mentioned earlier in the debate found that more than half the young care leavers who were surveyed had been homeless, and nearly all had slept rough.

Without a job or an income, finding a rented flat becomes virtually impossible. To compound the problem, Social Security Ministers say that social fund payments cannot be used to pay rent deposits. That situation will be made worse by the Government's plan to have housing benefit paid in arrears.

The social security system is also set to militate against the development of what I think everyone is agreed is an excellent halfway house between care and independence—supported lodging schemes. They provide support services that are unavailable in any bed-and-breakfast accommodation but since housing benefit is to be capped against assumed shared costs, supported lodging schemes will be priced out of the reach of young care leavers. Already, organisations involved with running such schemes are warning that the latest planned changes to housing benefit policy risk throwing more vulnerable young people on to the streets. At best, the proposal to limit housing benefit for young people under the age of 25 will force them out of half-decent accommodation into inadequate, unregulated and potentially dangerous multi-occupation dwellings.

Already, 16 and 17-year-olds face exclusion from the benefit system with access to income support and housing benefit virtually unobtainable except in cases of exceptional or severe hardship. There is even evidence that social fund officers have refused community care grants to care leavers on the basis that social services have a power to make leaving care grants under the provisions of the Children Act 1989. They have that power, but, with the best will in the world, it is unrealistic to expect social services departments to pick up the tab for the Government's refusal to allow young people access to benefits that are available to everyone else. That is not their role and nor do they have the resources to be able to do it.

The Minister will have read the recent report from the Association of Directors of Social Services, which warns that already more than three in four social services departments are projecting substantial overspends on their 1995-96 child care budgets due to the pressure of rising demand. Indeed, the ADSS president Tad Kubisa explicitly warned last month that services for young care leavers could face cuts as a result. As with other matters, there seems to be total confusion between the objectives of different Government Departments.

The Minister will no doubt say that he wants care leavers to be able to live independently outside the care environment—and rightly so—but the Department of Social Security is engaged in an exercise of restricting choice and limiting independence. Unfortunately, the piggies in the middle are the care leavers, who find themselves bereft of support, and social services departments, which find themselves under more pressure to compensate for failures in national policy.

There is a need for national policy to reflect the best examples of local policy, where education, housing and social services co-operate together to ease young people's transition from care. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield pinpointed the problems and failures of the Children Act 1989 in ensuring proper co-ordination. I hope that the Minister will address that point.

Similarly, there is a need to build on best practice. The document produced by the First Key national standards working group is a welcome step in the right direction. National standards would considerably strengthen the existing guidance to the Children Act 1989 by defining the sort of after-care services that local authorities should work towards. However, if new duties are to be imposed on local authorities, it is clearly important that appropriate resources are identified to ensure that change happens. In that regard, work by the social services inspectorate is to be welcomed, especially if it helps to identify the cost of a comprehensive leaving care policy.

Crucially, there should be improved monitoring of care leavers. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West mentioned the almost unspeakable murders committed by Fred and Rosemary West. They are a tragic reminder of the failings of the current system and the dangers faced by lonely and vulnerable young people. I have listened carefully to the organisations which were most closely involved in the West case about the lessons that they think can be learned from it. The Bridge child care consultancy, which was appointed by the Gloucestershire social services committee—I understand, with the Department of Health's recommendation—has called for national action in relation to children who run away from care or their families or who place themselves at risk. The ADSS is calling for a national register of young runaways, and the British Association of Social Workers is calling for a register of convicted abusers. I should be grateful to know the Minister's views on those proposals.

Will the Minister also tell us how the monitoring of young care leavers in general could be improved? Frankly, there are some problems with mandatory monitoring, but I think that it is possible to consider a number of important improvements that could be made.

First, we could ask local authorities to collect factual information when young people leave care, which would provide some basic data on their accommodation, educational attainment, employment and training prospects. It is important to monitor the first moves that young care leavers make when they leave their care placements. We could ask the social services inspectorate to monitor more of the long-term outcomes for care leavers, perhaps by studying a selected sample of experiences from individual local authorities. Will the Minister give us his views on those proposals?

The particular difficulties that young care leavers face call for a twin-track approach from the Government. One track would involve the pursuit of policies to improve young people's general opportunities and prospects. One policy would involve a jobs and skills training programme that would use the talents of the young and, incidentally, help to cut the benefits bill. Another policy would entail a housing investment programme that would use the locked-up capital receipts from council house sales to create badly needed and innovative social housing schemes. A rejuvenated economy would provide resources for essential social services.

The other track of the programme would involve more specific action to ease young people's transition from care to independence. It would necessitate co-operation rather than conflict between Government Departments; a resolution of the benefit anomalies that currently frustrate independent living; earlier and better preparation for leaving care; new standards of after-care services; improved monitoring of young people's progress when they leave care; and the involvement of young care leavers in the process of improving support in future.

Improved support is necessary and is long overdue. Young care leavers have to contend with a range of difficulties. Such young people lack the bedrock of a stable family background. In care, they often have to contend with a traumatised personal history and, not surprisingly, they often feel marginalised from society as a consequence. After leaving care, they all too often become unemployed and homeless. As we have heard this morning, many of those young people tragically turn to crime. Having rightly assumed responsibility for their care, society cannot simply wash its hands of them immediately they leave the protected environment of care: the costs, both to care leavers and to society, are too great for that.

There have been some excellent contributions to this debate and they have pinpointed some problems in the aftercare services. More positively, the contributions have clearly suggested how the problems can be resolved. I hope that the Minister will, in turn, respond positively to those suggestions.

12.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): This is the moment when I have to try to expose my flinty exterior for what it is. I welcome the introduction to the debate by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). I also welcome the contributions by the hon. Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) and the brief but important contribution by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

I have heard much during the debate that I welcome. The tone of it was right. We are here to seek to care for people who need our care in a particular and continuing way. If I have one quarrel with the subject of the debate chosen by the hon. Member for Newport, West it is over a matter for which he cannot be blamed: the fact that we talk about "leaving care." That is the wrong terminology. We should not talk about young people leaving care; we should talk about young people moving, over a period, from care to independence. The concept of leaving contains the notion of a cut-off, which the hon. Gentleman and I reject—I think that we all rejected it today. Our message is that there should not be a cut-off point, certainly not at the age of 16.

When he and I talk to young people who have left care recently, and who often contribute to our debates and conferences, we do well to listen to their message. They ask, "Who was getting to know me while I was in care? Who was preparing me for the moment when I would leave or move out of care? Who kept in touch with me once I had made that move?" That is the theme of today's debate and it is certainly the theme of my response to it.

We have to use the phrase "leaving care" as a convenient shorthand and I shall prove as guilty of doing so as anyone else, but it is only shorthand. The phrase is familiar to all those involved with the provision of services and opportunities for young people who are looked after by local authorities, many of whom, as we have heard, will have come from disadvantaged backgrounds—the hon. Member for Stockton, North listed some of the disadvantages. The shorthand phrase does not and cannot describe the wide variety of circumstances in which young people are looked after, nor the individual needs that they present as they move from care.

A number of hon. Members have acknowledged the Children Act, which I welcome. That Act probably gave the greatest ever impetus to the provision of leaving care services. We can argue whether the Act is perfect, whether it needs amendment or whether it could be better implemented, but it give local authorities a clear responsibility—particularly under section 24—to provide a range of services and assistance. It also gives local authorities the discretion to provide additional help for young people where appropriate.

Under that Act, the local authorities have the new statutory responsibility to prepare the young people they are looking after for the time when they leave care. They have the power to provide after-care support in certain defined circumstances until the young people reach the age of 21. They also have the power to provide financial assistance in appropriate circumstances.

The Act requires local authorities to advise, assist and befriend young people with a view to promoting their welfare when they cease to be looked after in the legal term. Local authorities also have the power to provide financial assistance connected with a young person's further education, employment and training—that assistance can extend beyond the age of 21 to enable the young person to complete a course. Comprehensive guidance for local authorities and voluntary organisations on all those matters was issued to accompany the legislation.

Section 24 is the key to the Act. The hon. Gentleman referred to the amendments that he would like to see implemented. I sought to intervene towards the end of his speech and I should be grateful if he would give some thought, not necessarily now, to the ways in which he would like the Act to be improved. I shall be happy to listen to his suggestions. The message that I heard today was that hon. Members want the Act to be better implemented, not necessarily changed. However, we can all consider that together.

I believe that the duty placed on local authorities to prepare children for the day that they leave care is of fundamental importance. Whenever I am asked to speak

[Mr. John Bowis]

on the subject of so-called "leaving care", I make a great effort to emphasise the fact that the arrangements for leaving care are not matters that can be left until a few weeks before the young person leaves care.

The day that a young person arrives in care should ideally be the day when preparation for leaving care begins. In one sense, the best preparation is to ensure that the young person receives the highest quality of care and education while being looked after. Special attention may need to be paid to equipping him or her with the skills required for living on their own. That should be integral, not a stand-alone element in the programme of help. I want a seamless range of services—that has been mentioned—to be available for each young person. Leaving care arrangements must be evolutionary and must be put in place, quite often, over some years, but that can be achieved only if the young person receives good quality care. That is why we have taken several initiatives to make residential care a more positive experience for them.

Mr. Flynn: The main recommendations that we would make are to strengthen duties of local authorities in the Children Act 1989, to make them mandatory on local authorities, to ring-fence those funds for the financial provisions for care leavers and to raise them to an adequate level. I want measures of choice to prevent young people leaving care too young. They will have a great deal of say in that. Most important of all, there should be measures to iron out those disparities that exist between local authorities or care services. We want national co-ordination, to ensure that the level of care provided does not depend on the address of the person who applies for it.

Mr. Bowis: As I suspected, much of that is to do with implementation rather than changes in the law. I acknowledge that that is what the hon. Gentleman appeared to be saying in much of his speech.

The requirement in section 24(1) of the 1989 Act is mandatory, not voluntary. That section says:

> "it shall be the duty of the authority to advise, assist and befriend him"—

the child being looked after by a local authority—

> "with a view to promoting his welfare when he ceases to be looked after by them."

That requirement is certainly mandatory.

I believe that the hon. Member for Newport, West is asking for other things to be made mandatory, such as monitoring. As the hon. Member for Darlington said, that might not be as simple as he suggests. Nevertheless, I will listen if the hon. Member for Newport, West suggests possible improvements. However, if—although I should be surprised if they are—local authorities are telling me that they will do what they are required to do in law only if we make those things mandatory or if we require them to do what is best practice, I shall listen to them. Similarly, if local authorities want us to top-slice the money that otherwise would be given to them to be used at their discretion—to ring-fence a budget for those aspects—we shall listen, but they have not so far asked us to do that.

Mr. Flynn: It would be impossible to iron out those difficulties in the final eight minutes. Will the Minister agree to meet a delegation consisting of myself, some other hon. Members, representatives of some of the organisations and some care leavers, so that we may explain and discuss the fine details of what we propose?

Mr. Bowis: I am always happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and people involved in that sector. I meet them and have met them. I have attended conferences and seminars with them and sat down and chatted to them. I am happy to take that a stage further, if the hon. Gentleman wants to do so.

Some interesting and justified arguments were made about the reputation of residential child care. It is important that we do not allow its name to be muddied by highlighting examples of things going wrong. Too often, perhaps, it has been regarded as an option of last resort, and if people regard it in that way it can become self-fulfilling. I am keen that we improve the standing, status and quality of residential child care. That is why our residential child care support force has travelled throughout the country, under the leadership of Adrianne Jones. It has worked with about 76 agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors to try to improve the quality of residential child care.

There is evidence from that exercise that authorities are making solid progress in implementing many of the good practice recommendations from the Warner and other reports. In relation to foster care and residential care, we have promoted our looking after children project, which is being implemented in 39 local authorities and has attracted widespread, indeed international, interest. That provides a complete system of planning and decision making, reviewing and monitoring the care of children away from home with the aim of improving day-to-day standards and thereby offering a better chance to a child to fulfil his or her potential in life.

In spite of those improvements, it is true that substitute care can never entirely replace the benefits of a child being brought up in his or her own family. Many of the children in care enter care at a very early age and already have a disturbed and disadvantaged history. Many will experience multiple placements, including perhaps a mixture of foster and residential care. Some, as the hon. Member for Stockton, North said, may have suffered emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect, or a mixture of those.

Such young people have different backgrounds and have few of the opportunities that may be afforded to young people brought up in what may be termed a "normal" family environment in which, even after children leave home, they continue to look to their family for support, help and advice. That is why I urge local authorities—and I shall go on doing so—to ensure that there is a continuity of relationship between the young person and key individuals to provide that essential continuum in managing the transition between being in care and adulthood.

Above all, those young people need adults to stand by them; to be committed in the way that we expect parents to champion their own children. "Key workers", social workers or volunteers may play that role, which we consider to be so important for individual young people.

When I visit local authorities and speak to staff, I ask them to consider what they would expect for their own children. It is a simple, effective question, and I have witnessed some immensely positive outcomes from it. Not so long ago, I visited a London borough that had a policy of positively encouraging young people to return to their children's home for advice and support or to stay for a short time, remembering birthdays and so on. It is all part of that continuum of care, which is a very important message that we bring.

Listening to young people is crucial. The conferences in Bolton and London that the hon. Member for Wakefield mentioned, which attracted 1,000 people from social services and elsewhere, were especially valuable, because, not only were we launching the training pack and the Leeds research, but they showed how important it is to listen to young people and hear their perspective.

Young people contributed to those conferences, and we intend to go on listening to them, not least by including them, as we are doing, in some other social services inspectorate work. They form part of the inspection teams that we send out, and that is part of the monitoring, which I hope is acknowledged and recognised by hon. Members. I know that First Key and other organisations such as the Who Cares Trust and the Save the Children Fund place great store by direct consultation with young people. I know, from meeting First Key, of young people who are members of consultancy teams brought in by local authorities to help them plan their services.

In all those aspects, we need to, and we shall, liaise closely with local authorities and other statutory agencies to effect the changes that are seen to be necessary. Many authorities have developed imaginative, effective schemes for supporting care leavers. That is why I have confidence that we can do better nationally.

However, we need to recognise that provision varies throughout the country. We need to reduce that variation by monitoring and development, and our social services inspectorate is currently preparing a set of standards, which has been asked for, for local policy and good practice, as a basis for its inspection of local authority leaving care services next year. That will be published as part of the report of the inspection and will provide a benchmark against which all local authorities will be able to measure their existing policy and practice.

In addition, we issue guidance for our children's services plans. That will give us another opportunity to enable local authorities to develop their services in that sector, and I take the point that, just as Government Departments must talk together, so local authority departments must talk together and work with education and other agencies. Education should be part of young people's experience in care. There are many other points that one could make. We have had an interesting range of contributions.

I welcome the debate and I thank the hon. Gentleman for initiating it. We are agreed that we need to do more to support young people as they move from care to independence. We need to support them not as an intrusive and unnecessary exercise, but in the way they tell us they want. If we listen, we find they want what we as parents would want for our own children. If we keep asking whether the provision is good enough for our own children, we will begin to find the right answer for children leaving care or, as I prefer to put it, moving from care to independence. That will be good for society as a whole.

Planning (Public Participation)

12.30 pm

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): I am pleased to have the opportunity of raising a matter that has interested and concerned me for many years—public participation in planning.

Nearly 500,000 planning applications were lodged in England in 1993-94. Of those, only 99 were "called in" for decision by the Secretary of State for the Environment, or 0.02 per cent. of all planning applications submitted in England in that year. In the 1995 annual report from the Department of the Environment, entitled "This Common Inheritance", I was pleased to note that the United Kingdom's green belt has been increased in size.

The protection of the green belt is essential, particularly in densely populated areas. Sheffield used to be known as a dirty picture in a beautiful green frame, but that is no longer the case. Since the Clean Air Act 1956, the vision that people had of Sheffield belching out filthy black smoke is no longer accurate. Without the smoke, Sheffield still produces more steel each year.

Planning policy guidance 12 requires planning authorities to test all their policies against the statements in "This Common Inheritance". The Government confirmed that permission can be refused or restricted on grounds of demonstrable harm to the policy, even when the particular case does not cause such harm. "This Common Inheritance" adds that sustainable development means not sacrificing tomorrow's prospects for a largely illusory gain today.

In my constituency, trees have been chopped down that should not have been; sites have been developed that should not have been; and token consultation has taken place and then been ignored, which it should not have been.

Mature trees have been chopped down at Willow Croft in Fulwood. Sheffield city council acted only after the trees had been felled, and following a huge public protest. Thankfully, those trees were not chopped down in vain. The council has now decided to place tree preservation orders on sites it sells off, and has appointed members of the public as watchdogs to monitor such matters.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) was most helpful in responding to my questions at that time, and that helped to bring about the change in council policy. However, we were locking the door after the horse had already bolted, because the powers to prevent the loss of the trees already existed.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is only too aware of the problems with three sites in my constituency, because of the barrage of letters from and lobbying by residents and myself. The planning actions on those sites are the reason for the debate.

The secure unit at Limb lane, Dore, in Sheffield is a prime example. Sheffield city council owned the land and proposed to develop the site, funded by the Department of Health. The council acted as prosecution and defence, judge and jury, as it granted itself planning permission. However, as the site was in the green belt, the case had to be referred to the Department of the Environment. As the development did not conflict with national policy, the planning permission was not called in, even though it was

[Sir Irvine Patnick]

advertised as a departure and accepted as such by my hon. Friend. He acts in a quasi-judicial role, and cannot be involved in lobbying on such planning matters. His ear was hardly burnt, let alone bent.

There was a six-month consultation period on the Limb lane site. However, one questions what notice the council took of the objections. The original publicity resulted in 334 letters objecting to the development. A petition objecting to the building of the unit contained more than 1,600 signatures, and a further petition contained nearly 1,800 signatures—all objecting on the grounds that there were no exceptional circumstances to warrant an exception to green belt policy being made.

I fully accept that planning permissions are generally called in only if they involve issues of greater than local significance, or give rise to substantial national or regional controversy. Despite all the objections, the council's planning committee granted itself planning permission.

The implication is that councils can nibble away at the green belt, while paying lip service to public consultation. That may result in large chunks of the green belt, which the Government are preserving, being eroded by stealth.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I do not know whether my hon. Friend is aware that, yesterday, a significant planning application was granted by the Cotswold district council for a supermarket on the highest point of the Cotswolds area of outstanding natural beauty. Gloucestershire county council has an interest in that application, because it is likely to receive £1 million from the sale of a residential care home.

The county council sent me an extraordinary letter yesterday. It has objected to every application for planning permission on that road on highway grounds, and I had asked why it was not going to object to this application for the same reasons. I shall paraphrase the council's letter. It said that it was aware that it had objected on previous occasions on highway grounds, but that it could find no written evidence to that effect. In other words, it has lost the records. Would my hon. Friend care to comment on that application, as the circumstances seem to be similar to the example he has raised?

Sir Irvine Patnick: The circumstances are similar, and prove that the problem is not confined to Sheffield but is happening throughout the country, as I have always believed.

I shall highlight yet another example in Hallam. A piece of land on the former bus terminus site is bordered by Terminus road, Abbeydale road, Pingle road and Hartington avenue in Millhouses, Sheffield. Despite many letters expressing overwhelming opposition, planning permission has been granted by the city council. Many shops visible from Abbeydale road south for over 50 years will be hidden by the development on that site.

The application to develop land at Abbeydale Grange school playing field also met overwhelming opposition, and yet was granted planning permission by the city council, which owns the land. Two public meetings were attended by a total of 300 residents. A motion was passed stating:

> "we deplore the intensification of use of this school sports fields, and demand that a public inquiry be held before planning permission is granted."

I shall spell out the problem: the council owns the land; the council applied for planning permission; the council granted planning permission; and the council considered and ignored the objection. According to a brochure entitled "Planning—Charter Standards", should one have any complaints about the way the council handled an application, one can complain—no prizes for guessing to whom—to the council.

In August, Sheffield city council proposed, under the Sheffield unitary development plan, which will be subject to public inquiry under an independent inspector, that many parts of Hallam constituency be removed from the green belt. The city council has received 10 petitions, representing just under 4,000 signatures, objecting to the 47 sites identified by the council, including an objection by the Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside.

Val Malthouse, whose name will be indelibly engraved on the Minister's heart as a result of the Limb lane discussions, advised me by fax only yesterday:

> "one of the local farmers only found out about the possible sale of their farmland through Radio Sheffield and subsequent reports in the Sheffield Star. No intimation of this was received from the Council.".

She continued:

> "in our dealings with the planning department we have not found them helpful, in fact when we asked for a supply of objection forms"—

1,000 forms to object to the UDP—

> "we were told we couldn't possibly have them under any circumstances, and that only two forms were available. In the local libraries where they were supposed to be available there were in fact none. Everything seemed to be rubber stamped and objectors not taken any notice of. We intend to complain of our treatment in the new year."

There are no prizes for working out whom she will have to complain to—the council.

I can vouch for that condemnation of the planning system, as, when I originally wanted to object to the UDP, the forms were not yet printed, and when they were, obtaining one demanded skill, resolution and patience—as a former Whip, I would add, cunning. It was worse than a treasure hunt, without the clues.

All three of those examples do not fit the NIMBY—not in my back yard—criteria. People are concerned that their views are being dismissed out of hand, with no way of bringing them to anyone's attention. Accordingly, people say that it is the fault of the Member of Parliament, the Government—or, indeed, the Minister, who just does not care. That is not true, but it is a typical expression that people use. The planning system does not appear to have satisfied them that their views have been heard, considered and acted upon.

My understanding is that Sheffield city council has interpreted PPG2 incorrectly and that the cavalry—in the shape of the Government—may be on the horizon. The planning committee in Sheffield met only yesterday to recommend amendments to the further proposed changes to the UDP that will be presented in evidence to the unitary development plan public inquiry, and there may be a change in the council's position.

I wonder whether the fact that the inquiry is to take place in public and not behind the closed door of a planning committee meeting influenced the council's decision. How much was it affected by the fact that the Government Office in Yorkshire and Humberside fired a warning salvo? My hon. Friend the Minister may wish to comment on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) disproved the possibility that the problems that I have outlined do not arise in shire counties where the council owns the land and the county council has planning powers.

Let me make it abundantly clear that I am not advocating the return of the metropolitan counties or the GLC, but there should be a way to ensure that a city council owning the land and applying to itself for planning permission seeks public consultation and takes notice of it.

Although the majority of planning applications are not opposed, an independent system of scrutiny is required. It could be based on the public inquiry system without the cost, or by written submission to an independent inspector appointed to examine the proposals. That would enable the objectors' case to be examined by an external source.

I have given some examples of where a local authority owns a site and plans to develop it and grants itself planning permission, albeit by a planning committee with delegated powers. Despite overwhelming opposition to proposals, and because of the lack of skills, facilities and funds, many objectors feel that their views are totally and utterly ignored.

Although the Minister has been most helpful with the many planning matters that I have raised with him, I consider that the objectors' case requires raising at the highest possible level, which is why I raise it here.

Not all councils act in such a cavalier manner—nor does Sheffield, on every occasion—but the anguish they cause by holding public meetings and then apparently ignoring the wishes of the overwhelming majority of residents cannot be right, and it should not continue: a method of dealing with these matters must be evolved.

In one sentence, the debate seeks to ensure that objectors such as those to Limb lane, Terminus road and Abbeydale Grange have a right to be heard, during and after consultation, and have their views judged by an external examiner. I look to my hon. Friend the Minister for assistance to ensure that is done soon.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick), in his usual style, has emphatically raised matters that have concerned us both since our days in local government. He is correct to say that far and away the majority of local authorities are fair, clear and open, and, as he said, so is Sheffield in most cases. However, we are aware of the possible difficulties of which some local authorities may be justifiably accused along the lines that my hon. Friend has described. I shall consider the points that he has raised, and touch on some of the safeguards that are already in place.

My hon. Friend is aware that the planning system must provide a means of ensuring that development and growth are sustainable. A new development has to be provided for and should be accommodated sensibly. At the same time, we have to take proper regard of the need to conserve our natural and built environment.

The town and country planning legislation provides a comprehensive framework for the planning system so that the future use and development of land can be debated at an appropriate level—that is locally, regionally and nationally. There are opportunities for public debate and involvement in planning decision at all levels.

In contrast to other countries not too far away, Britain has a strong tradition of public participation in planning matters. That is extremely important and very welcome. It is important that people should have the opportunity to contribute to decisions that will influence the shape and appearance of their environment for many years to come. We have built on that tradition, and we seek to foster and encourage public participation in many different ways.

Many planning decisions require the consideration of opposing views about the best use of land. The planning system allows those differing views to be considered within a clear and structured framework. However, when there are contrasting opinions, one side of the argument may not agree with the ultimate decision.

In the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, we introduced the plan-led system of planning. Since September 1991, decisions on planning applications—the great majority of which are taken by local planning authorities—must accord with the development plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The statutory procedures governing development plans make clear provision for the public to be involved in the plan preparation process. That is done through the pre-deposit consultation and the public local inquiry mechanism, which represents an important opportunity for my hon. Friend and many of his constituents. The local planning authority can take into account the differing views that have been expressed before adopting their plan proposals and, because of the significance of the development plan for the future use of land, it is important that all those with an interest in the planned proposals should participate actively in the formulation of local authority's plan for the area.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is aware that there are a number of major supermarket applications in my constituency. One was granted yesterday, and others are in the pipeline. The large residential supermarket companies are deliberately targeting the smaller market towns in my constituency and putting in applications prior to the local plan hearing by the planning inspectorate. Can my hon. Friend comment on the possibility of refusing those applications on the grounds of prematurity?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. Such a decision is normally delayed on the grounds of it being too early in relation to the plan. That happens quite often, unless there are exceptional circumstances. It might be appropriate for an application to go ahead, particularly if it affects the likely outcome of the plan. In some circumstances development should not be delayed, but I am not necessarily applying that approach to the individual case that my hon. Friend has presented. He will recognise, of course, that I am not in a position to discuss that case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hallam mentioned that Sheffield city council proposed further changes to the unitary development plan, seeking to identify 47 "major developed sites" in the green belt. Annex C of my Department's planning policy guidance note 2—that is, PPG2—advises that, subject to certain criteria, redevelopment or limited infilling of sites so identified in

[Sir Paul Beresford]

an adopted development plan is not inappropriate development. I believe that my hon. Friend has raised objections to the identification in the plan of these sites, 11 of which—surprise, surprise—are in his constituency.

As my hon. Friend may know—indeed, he referred to this—the Government offices for the regions scrutinise closely all development plan policies and proposals, to ensure that they accord with the published national planning policy that is set out in PPGs and circulars. As my hon. Friend has said, the Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside has formally objected to Sheffield's proposals to identify 47 "major developed sites" in the green belt, on the ground that they conflict with national green belt policy. My hon. Friend's interpretation is being followed as well.

It is for the city council, as the plan-preparing authority, to consider the objections that it receives in respect of its plan proposals. In the light of responses received to public consultation, including the formal objections of the Government office, the city council's planning and economic development programme committee yesterday resolved to withdraw all 47 sites, subject, as my hon. Friend said, to ratification by the full council this afternoon.

I am sure that the council will ratify the decision, especially given the pressure of my hon. Friend. It is obviously an important issue, which I am sure the council will consider carefully before taking steps towards adopting its plan.

The Government firmly believe that those likely to be affected by a proposed development should have every opportunity to express their views before decisions are taken on planning applications generally. Where these raise issues relevant to planning, the local planning authority has a duty to take them into account when determining the planning application.

In 1992, we introduced arrangements for compulsory publicity for all planning applications. As a minimum, councils now have to notify neighbours directly, or place a notice on or near a site. For major applications—including, for example, the erection of 10 or more dwellings—a local newspaper advertisement is additionally required, to canvass views more widely on the likely impact. All notices and advertisements should give a date by which comments should be submitted to the council.

As well as setting statutory minima, the publicity provisions are designed to allow planning authorities maximum discretion to use any additional methods of publicity which they consider necessary in the light of local circumstances. There might be a cynical sigh from those on the Benches behind me, but I hope that we can encourage authorities to use that discretion.

We are not content to set statutory provisions in place and leave it at that. We are keen that wider participation should take place, and that the public generally are able to make a positive contribution to the quality of new developments. Along these lines, the Department has issued a circular to planning authorities giving advice on best practice for publicising planning applications and involving interested parties.

As I have explained, development plans provide the keystone of our planning system. It is therefore only right that planning applications that depart from the plan should be brought to the attention of local residents. We have amended planning legislation so that all departures have to be advertised, giving the public a chance to comment on them. That procedure applied to the development proposed at Limb lane, Dore, to which my hon. Friend referred. It was effectively planning permission to develop a site that was historically already developed in the green belt.

My hon. Friend referred also to other applications which were decided by Sheffield city council. He will understand that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on detail on the way in which the council has handled particular applications. As he has expressed concern about the general procedures governing local authority development, however, it might be helpful to examine more closely how the procedures work. They were revised as recently as 1992, and are now contained in the town and country planning general regulations of 1992.

The procedures which the regulations replaced—those set out in the 1976 regulations—had been criticised on the ground that local planning authorities could not act impartially when they were plaintiff and jury in their own cause. It was suggested that, because a local authority may gain financially when disposing of land with the benefit of planning permission, planning permission might be granted, which would be refused if the applicant were not the authority. The fifth report from the Select Committee on the Environment for 1985-86 concluded that the regulations had a built-in conflict of interest without balancing safeguards, and recommended that the Department should review the existing procedures.

As my hon. Friend will understand and expect, the Department took the recommendations to heart, and published a consultation paper proposing reforms in February 1990. The proposals, revised to take account of consultation responses, were implemented through section 316 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 and the 1992 regulations made under that section. The general principle underlying the 1992 regulations is that local planning authorities must make planning applications in the same way as any other person, and must apply for planning permission. Except in special circumstances, they must follow the same procedures as would apply to applications made by anyone else.

County and district councils may grant themselves planning permission for their own development on land in which they have an interest, but that ability is subject to several important safeguards. For example,the proposals must be advertised and decided in public by a committee that is not responsible for land management. The public cannot be excluded from committee meetings at which local authority development proposals are discussed—as my hon. Friend suggested, that could have had an influence on some recent decisions.

To avoid a conflict of interest, applications may not be determined by a committee or officer responsible for the management of the land concerned. Local authority development proposals or development on its land must also be notified to the Secretary of State if it is not in accordance with the provisions of the development plan in force in the area, so that he can consider whether to call in the application for his own determination. It is worth stressing the importance, as the UDP is being developed or revised, that local residents, including astute local Members such as my hon. Friend, keep a close eye on proceedings, especially if they have suspicions about the local authority.

Unitary authorities can grant planning permission for their own development on land in which they have an interest, or for development by others on their land, but they are subject to the same safeguards of accountability and publicity.

I have no doubt that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, local authorities are scrupulous in following the procedures to which I have referred. In a decision of the sort that we are discussing, where there are two sides, not everyone will be entirely satisfied. Local authority development proposals, like those of other persons applying for planning permission, must be decided in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Sheffield city council is no different from any other local planning authority in that respect. Nor, indeed, are its proposals any different from those submitted by other developers. They must all be judged against the same criteria. In reaching their decisions, local authorities must also take into account relevant objections by local residents.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will remind Sheffield city council of that if he feels that there is a need to do so. Only genuine land use planning concerns are material. In some instances, there may well be positive reasons in favour of development that may outweigh local objections. My hon. Friend will understand that, given his days in local government.

I can understand that some of my hon. Friend's constituents may be disappointed by decisions that are made on their behalf, as every planning decision has difficulties, but it is important that the 1992 regulations are followed. Coupled with the requirement to refer the departures to the Secretary of State, the regulations provide the right balance between the local planning authorities' need to carry out their statutory functions and the importance of safeguards on accountability and publicity.

It is worth reminding my hon. Friend that it is open to any third party who is aggrieved by a local authority's decision to grant planning permission to apply for a judicial review. Although that is a frightening course, my hon. Friend is very experienced and could guide them. In addition, the local government ombudsman can be called on to investigate if they consider that an injustice has been caused to them as a result of maladministration.

This has been an opportunity to raise concerns that a number of hon. Members, on both sides of the House, have on planning matters. It is also an opportunity to remind local authorities that they cannot and should not ride roughshod. I believe that, in the main, they do not.

Agriculture (Wales)

1 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I welcome the opportunity to debate agriculture in Wales. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for attending, because he has just finished responding to the debate in the Welsh Grand Committee. I gave him an idea of the issues that I intended to raise in the debate, and I hope that he will be able to respond positively to a number of my suggestions.

One of the important issues is the difficulty that many young people experience in entering the industry. The Minister is aware that agriculture makes a vital contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of rural Wales: indeed, it is the backbone of the rural economy. There is considerable concern about the difficulties faced by young people in entering the industry, bearing in mind that the average age of farmers in the United Kingdom is about 51, and there has been an upward trend in recent years.

Although the matter has been discussed for generations, very little has been done to address the problem. As far as I am aware, the Government have not suggested any solutions. As a member of the Agriculture Select Committee, which investigated the tradeability of milk quotas, I was struck by how little progress had been made in assisting young people to enter the milk sector. Some of the farming unions proposed a siphon system, whereby quota is sold on the open market. That proposal is currently being considered, among others. I must criticise the Government, because although they said they were prepared to consider initiatives made by the industry, they have not been able to give any idea which initiatives might be acceptable.

Another way to assist young people to enter the industry would be to introduce low or interest-free loans. The capital cost of entering the industry is a problem, and subsidised loans would be a way of cushioning the impact of crippling loans in the early years. Historically, the Government have refused to accept that proposal, preferring to provide capital grants to the industry as a way of investment. In recent years, the value of capital grants has reduced dramatically. I want to know whether the Government are more receptive these days to the idea of subsidised loans. Young people need some idea which initiatives the Government would be prepared to consider.

Another area of immediate concern to the farming industry, as the Minister heard in the debate in the Welsh Grand Committee this morning, is the hill livestock compensatory allowance payment. Two years ago, the Agriculture Select Committee held an inquiry into the cash cuts that were made at that time. I share the view of many in the industry that the Government are quite happy for HLCA payments to wither on the vine. Year after year, there is either a cash cut or a freeze, which, in effect, is a cut in real terms. Over a decade or more, the value of HLCA payments has been eroded year after year. That might fit well with the Government's intention to introduce a more market-oriented approach for agriculture.

How committed are the Government to maintaining HLCA payments? The Minister must be aware that the payments are much more important in Wales than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Less-favoured areas cover 80 per cent. of the land mass of our country,

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

whereas the figure is 53 per cent. in the rest of the United Kingdom. Net farm incomes in less-favoured areas in Wales are less than £11,000 a year—hardly an income for a young family. Low incomes and cuts in HLCA payments have led to a gradual reduction in the number of people employed in rural areas.

In England and Wales since 1987, the number of people employed full-time in agriculture has decreased by 35 per cent. The purpose of HLCA payments is, first, to maintain incomes and, secondly, to maintain the number of people in employment in rural areas, but the Government are effectively contributing further to the depopulation of rural areas in Wales by constantly eroding the value of the payments. We want to hear from the Minister that the Secretary of State for Wales is prepared to stand up to his colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and in the Treasury and demand measures to protect those who live in our countryside.

It is worth noting that the Government are out of step with other European Union member states on the issue of HLCA payments. This year, for example, France has increased its payments. Finland, Austria and Sweden pay the maximum available under EU regulations. No other member states cut HLCA payments in 1993-94.

The Government's proposals to reduce the maximum number of ewes on which HLCAs may be claimed in disadvantaged areas is fiercely resisted in Wales. The cut from nine to six was slipped in surreptitiously in the general debate on HLCA payments in October. The Minister will be aware that farms in disadvantaged areas are quite small, and average incomes are even lower than in the upland areas. The average income is about £8,000 a year. These are small farms, and their economies are fragile.

Will the Minister listen to representations on these changes, having tried to slip them in through the back door in October 1995? The Government say that, effectively, they are trying to get rid of an anomaly between disadvantaged areas and severely disadvantaged areas, but it is an anomaly of their own creation, because they cut HLCA payments in 1993-94. There is a simple way to correct that anomaly: by returning the payments to their 1992 level. As I understand it, the European Commission has not demanded that this anomaly be addressed in the way that the Government propose.

Welsh farmers are also concerned about the possible threat to the transfer of their sheep and suckler cow quota from the Welsh LFA ring fence. I am aware that the Government have to reassess all the applications for developers' quota from the 1993 reserves, but any move to pinch quota from the Welsh LFA ring fence will be fiercely resisted. We know that the Government are under pressure to pay compensation in other parts of the country, but the Welsh LFA quota is not for transfer, and we demand an assurance that the Minister will stand up for the interests of Welsh farmers on this issue. If any quota is under-subscribed in the Welsh LFA, it should be used to assist young entrants in Wales. The Government could face a challenge in the European Court, because they may breach European Commission regulations if they act in the way that I have described.

Over the years, farmers have come to accept that agri-environmental payments will play an increasingly vital role in support mechanisms for the industry. Any reform of the CAP must be seen in the context of further aid for uncoupling from production and increasing payments to farmers as stewards of the countryside. Such payments are entirely consistent with the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Agri-environmental schemes have had mixed success in Wales. There is no doubt that Tir Cymen has proved much more successful in its pilot phase than environmentally sensitive area payments. In my area, for example, ESAs have not been as successful as predicted, and fewer farmers have joined the schemes than I expected. Will the Minister assure us that, when the Tir Cymen scheme is being evaluated and the pilot scheme is being concluded, the Welsh Office will consider the introduction of an integrated agri-environmental scheme operated by a single organisation? Such a scheme could involved tiered payments; farmers could participate at whatever level they wished. That would save on administration, make the scheme easier to understand and ensure a consistent and coherent approach throughout the country. Wales could be a pioneer.

The Minister will be aware that the European Commission will shortly consider further reforms to the CAP. As agriculture is so important to Wales, I hope that the Secretary of State will play a leading role in the discussions, and will attend the Council of Ministers to ensure that the voice of Welsh agriculture is heard in the forum where real decisions are made. Eighty per cent. of decisions affecting agriculture are made not in Westminster but in Brussels. I am sure that I need not remind the Secretary of State for Wales that he is also Minister with responsibilities for agriculture in Wales. He should not take his lead from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or from anyone else; he needs to understand that we in Wales have different needs and concerns.

In the past few days, the European Commission has produced a paper on CAP reform and enlargement. It proposes incremental reform rather than a radical programme for change. We need to consider the issue differently in Wales, because our economy has a different agricultural base. We are primarily a livestock-producing country; we have small and medium-sized family farms, and few opportunities for diversification. Wholesale reform of the CAP in a short time, which the Government seem to be proposing, would be disastrous for our rural economy.

In the early 1990s, when these matters were last discussed, the Government attacked the MacSharry proposals for reform on the basis that they did not go far enough and seemed to protect small and medium-sized family farms. It must be said that the Commission and MacSharry understood the problems of Welsh agriculture much better than the Minister of Agriculture in the United Kingdom. As it happened, when the package of proposals was agreed, it was, on the whole, well received in Wales.

We feel that any proposals for change must build on the MacSharry proposals. The Minister must remember that most Welsh farmers work in an inhospitable climate, with difficult land and—as I have said—little scope for diversification. We cannot afford to introduce overnight drastic changes that would threaten an already fragile rural economy. Support measures are vital if the economy is to prosper.

As the Minister knows, the way in which support is given may change. The structure of payments may alter, and more emphasis may be placed on agri-environmental payments than on aids to production. Nevertheless, maintaining support is crucial, and the Welsh Office must argue that case where it counts.

I am aware that one of the reasons that the Prime Minister has given for wanting expansion of the European Union is the fact that it gives us an opportunity to revamp the CAP. That means radical change. It means cutting the budget, and it means that Welsh farmers will be affected. In its proposals for change, the Welsh Office must argue the case for Welsh farmers, the Welsh countryside and the Welsh rural economy. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us.

I am sure that the Minister will wish to pay tribute to the tremendous contribution of Welsh farmers to the Welsh economy. I have highlighted some of the problems that we face in the short, medium and long term; I feel that the industry needs a clear indication of the Government's attitude. As I have said, those farmers have made a tremendous contribution to our economy over generations. The Minister should recognise the contribution by offering not just words of praise, but a detailed programme of action and support.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) on securing this important debate. I thank him for his acknowledgement of what was necessary to enable both of us to appear here this morning—the unusual coincidence of the Welsh Grand Committee's sitting ending just as this debate was due to begin—and for giving notice of the matters that he intended to raise.

The hon. Gentleman's concerns and my opening of the Royal Welsh winter show in Builth Wells yesterday seem to have coincided. Indeed, I was struck by the similarity of what the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of agriculture to the rural economy with what I said yesterday, to which this morning's *Western Mail* has helpfully given full coverage.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the support that the Government give to people entering the agriculture industry. Both the quota schemes that currently operate in the beef and sheep sectors include special arrangements allowing new entrants access to quota from the sheep and suckler cow scheme national reserves. The introduction of farm business tenancies will help to ensure that more land is available for new entrants to rent.

A wide range of courses is available to prospective new entrants through agricultural colleges. New entrants can also take advantage of the extensive range of training courses that are available through ATB-Landbase and other training providers. We are working with ATB-Landbase to raise awareness of skills gaps and deficiencies, and the benefits to both new and established businesses of strategic business planning and training.

The agricultural element of the objective 5b programme is partly financed by the European agriculture guidance and guarantee fund, which provides opportunities for the farming community in relation to business development, agri-tourism and countryside enhancement. Young farmers have been identified as a priority group to receive benefit from that programme. Training and enterprise councils also have a role to play through business start-up activities, and business links will be an important contact point for new entrants seeking advice on business set-up and development matters.

I can tell the hon. Member for Ynys Môn that, at the end of 1994, bank borrowing advances were lower than they were in 1993. That reduction reflects the improvement in incomes that occurred in 1992-93 and 1993-94. Last week, we announced that the 1996 rates of hill livestock compensatory allowance would be maintained at 1995 levels. That is a positive step, which demonstrates our continuing commitment to upland farmers, despite another tight public expenditure round this year.

Net farm incomes are forecast to increase by an average of 13 per cent. in the less-favoured areas as a whole in 1995-96 compared with 1994-95. Notwithstanding reductions in HLCA rates in 1993, real-terms incomes in 1995-96 are still 27 per cent. above the average for the difficult years of 1990-91 and 1991-92. That economic data, which form the basis of the autumn review, did not support the farming industry's call for a restoration of the amount cut in the previous year. The forecasts do not take account of the recent devaluation of the green pound, which will result in a further increase in sheep annual premium rates from 1995 and an increase in suckler cow premium scheme and beef special premium scheme rates from 1996.

Going beyond our determination to sustain current hill livestock compensatory allowance payment rates for a further year, I am aware of the anxieties that have been expressed about the recent statutory instrument relating to a number of eligible sheep in the disadvantaged region. I reiterate what has already been said in the Welsh Grand Committee: that was a technical amendment necessary at the time in order not to prejudice the outcome of the autumn review. The final decision on the stocking rate will be taken once we have a clearer idea of the exchange rate that will apply for the 1996 scheme. Meanwhile, producers should understand that the exchange rate fluctuations that have forced that amendment mean that the payment rate will be at least that of 1995—£2.44—and probably higher.

It must be remembered that hill livestock compensatory allowances are neither the only nor the most financially significant of the subsidies being paid to farmers. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales explained at the Welsh Grand Committee, planned expenditure in the next financial year on the three main market support schemes—the sheep annual premium, the suckler cow premium scheme and the beef special premium scheme—is £43 million, 28 per cent. higher than expenditure only two years ago.

Concerns over the safety of beef have increased recently. I think that the hon. Gentleman would join me in saying that we must not overreact to that issue. There is no scientific evidence of a link between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The latest report from the national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease unit confirms that there has been no change in the epidemiological or clinical characteristics of CJD since the occurrence of BSE. The incidence of the disease is similar to that in countries with no BSE or scrapie.

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

All the available evidence continues to confirm the Government's view that the feed ban will lead to the disease's end. The number of suspect cases of BSE reported up to October 1995 was nearly 43 per cent. lower than the same period in 1994. The Government have introduced a comprehensive range of measures, based on the best independent scientific advice available, to safeguard the public from any remote risk to human health from BSE. Beef is recognised as safe by the Department of Health's chief medical officer, and I freely say that I find that advice totally reassuring. I am more than content to continue eating beef on a very regular basis.

I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me about the considerable inroads that we have made in Wales in implementing schemes approved by the European Commission.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The greatest step that the Minister and the Government could take would be to introduce an early retirement scheme, favoured by the European Union and in fact, to a large extent, financed by it. Why will not the Government put their hand in their pocket and do the right thing?

Mr. Jones: As I have tried to explain before to the hon. Gentleman, when making spending decisions, one must make choices about priorities. I was going to acknowledge later that his party is the exception in that it is committed to increasing taxation on the people of Wales. *[Interruption.]* The people who had to go to the High Court or wherever else may also be in favour of it, but he and his small party say that the people of Wales should pay higher taxation.

I know that, if his party's policies were followed through to the ultimate and we were separated from the rest of the United Kingdom, we would pay very high taxation, but decisions must be made: either we put taxation up—and I believe that we are absolutely right in responding to the public demand to return to cutting taxation—or we must take money from elsewhere. I invite the hon. Gentleman to volunteer whether we should take it from health, from education or wherever else to fund such a scheme, if we do not increase taxation. I acknowledge that there is a difference between us on that matter. He is in favour of increased taxation.

I remind the House of the considerable progress that we have made in Wales in implementing schemes approved by the European Commission. Schemes for Wales encourage farming methods that will help to protect the Welsh landscape and habitats, and provide opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside. New measures approved by the European Commission include an organic scheme launched on 1 September 1994, a countryside access scheme launched on 8 September 1994, a habitat scheme launched on 9 January 1995, and a moorland scheme launched on 1 May 1995.

Wales has six environmentally sensitive areas, covering about one quarter of the land. On 1 March this year, new payments to promote public access were launched for all Welsh environmentally sensitive areas. The environmentally sensitive areas scheme is innovative, in that it was the first to adopt a "whole farm" approach rather than to target individual habitat types. It has been approved by the European Commission, along with the Countryside Council for Wales's pilot Tir Cymen scheme, which also has a strong agricultural and environmental focus. Taken together, environmentally sensitive areas and Tir Cymen schemes cover about a third of the agricultural areas in Wales.

I think that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn will have heard me say at Welsh questions on Monday that Tir Cymen is to be reviewed at the end of its planned five-year life. I am confident that the review will consider all the points that he has in mind.

We are paying 99 per cent. of management agreement claims within the two-month charter target, but we are taking longer than I would wish to process new applications. That is partly because we are providing farmers with more help in preparing their applications, which takes time, but in the end it will lead to a better arrangement.

It is in the long-term interests of farmers, consumers and taxpayers that there should be a fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy. At present, other European Union member states remain to be convinced of that, but the European Union's commitments under the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the potential accession of eastern European countries make change inevitable. We need to move away from a production system to a market-driven one. Any change must allow a period of transition during which farmers can adjust, but now is the time for producers to consider how best to meet the market's demands. The industry in Wales is well placed to meet the greater challenges of a more competitive market.

In leading the Welsh Office trade mission to Australia and New Zealand, I was struck by comments about what New Zealand had done in its agriculture sector. That was initiated by a Labour Government who have revolutionised the approach. One comment that I recollect from my visit to New Zealand—which was far too brief, and I do not claim to be an expert on the matter there—showed that the relevant standing of farmers had been increased. That appeared to be acknowledged on all sides.

This is not the stage to say that what has been done in New Zealand must be done here, but it shows that there is room for study. The hon. Gentleman drew some European comparisons, not all of which were strictly relevant, as it is always difficult to take things in isolation, but what happens in some other countries could be examined to find out whether they apply here. I give no more commitment than that, other than to state my interest in the revolutionary approach in New Zealand—a country that has many similarities with Wales, including size and devotion to our national game.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: It is much better than us in that.

Mr. Jones: Only at the moment. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we won the last game.

The Government continue to provide substantial support for the agriculture sector in Wales. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced earlier today, planned expenditure will rise by £9 million—a 3.4 per cent. increase—to £271,500,000 for the next financial year. I should have thought that this morning's debate in the Welsh Grand Committee would have established the point that we are responding to an overwhelming demand—it is coming from practically everywhere except Plaid Cymru—that we should return to cutting taxation.

Mr. Llwyd: In a very wide poll in last Sunday's edition of *The Sunday Times*, 70 per cent. of respondents said that they were not in favour of tax cuts. Conversely, they wanted more public spending.

Mr. Jones: There are lies, damned lies and statistics, if I am permitted to make that observation in this place. I certainly hear those demands from constituents and others throughout Wales, and I should be surprised if the hon. Gentleman did not hear substantial demands. As I have said, his party is one of the rare exceptions in not calling for more tax cuts.

We do not know where the official Opposition stand in Wales, because they will not come clean on the subject. Their only approach to the debate on taxation is that they do not know. However, they broadly agree that we should return to cutting taxation. That is evident from their not voting after the Budget debate last night. We are responding to the public demand to cut taxation and, in our honest way of managing Government business, we are ensuring that that is balanced by expenditure. In so doing we have placed a high priority on farmers.

Health Services (Barking)

1.30 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I am pleased to have this opportunity to set out my real concerns about the state of the health service in my constituency. Two weeks ago I published and sent to the Minister a document entitled, "Health in Barking: Getting a Raw Deal?", a dossier of the worst health cases that have come to my attention during my 18 months as a Member of Parliament. I have been deeply shocked by the poor quality of health care that is encountered by all too many of my constituents. A Member of Parliament's surgery is the last resort for many people, yet we see probably only the tip of the iceberg because, as we all know, many people do not know who their Member of Parliament is, do not know that we hold surgeries and do not think that we can help.

Of course there are many highly skilled and dedicated professionals in the health service in Barking, and I know many of them. But too many of my constituents are being short-changed by the national health service. Too many of those who have come to see me have suffered unnecessarily and for the wrong reasons. Their stories are partly about under-resourcing, but they are also about bureaucratic bungling and unacceptable standards of care.

What about those who do not come to the surgery? I spend a great deal of my time visiting the old people's luncheon clubs in Barking where I meet the people who are most dependent on the health service. Elderly women with chronic conditions often say to me, "I can't get to my hospital appointment any longer and the GP is just too busy." For those women the hospitals are too far away, ambulance services have been cut, public transport is hopelessly inadequate and they cannot afford the taxi fare, so they do not go. Their health is not regularly checked, so they lose out and will probably never know the impact that that will have.

Barking is served by the Barking and Havering health authority. My constituency is the area of greatest need in that district, yet it has the poorest services. We have the highest concentration of elderly people. Infant mortality rates are twice those in the more affluent neighbouring Havering, and 10 per cent. higher than the average for England and Wales. However, the hospitals are all concentrated in the areas of lesser need. That is happening in the knowledge that 40 per cent. of local people do not have access to a car.

The area is changing. The Barking reach development will not only increase the population but will mean an expanding number of children. By the year 2001, the number of under-14s in Barking will have increased by 10 per cent. Those changes will bring new challenges tomorrow to a health service that is already failing to meet the challenges of today.

Barking has long been denied its fair share of health resources, and decisions in recent years have made a bad situation even worse. There is no hospital in my constituency: Barking hospital was closed. There is no hospital in the borough. Rush Green hospital in Dagenham has gone and, despite protestations from all local Members, the Government recently condemned the nearest hospital at Oldchurch to a slow death by deciding to close its accident and emergency unit.

Unbelievably, within months of deciding to close Oldchurch, the health authority has decided to conduct a new review of acute services in our district. The acute

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

services have been reviewed and re-reviewed, and are now to be reviewed again. What bungling incompetence. Hardly is the ink dry on the Minister's signature on a document to close yet another accident and emergency unit than the authority realises what we have been telling it for months, that the other hospitals simply cannot cope.

I shall briefly reflect on the miserable story of Barking hospital. Shortly before the first world war, local people collected money to build a hospital to meet their medical needs. The hospital was built by the voluntary efforts of local people. New blocks were added in the 1930s and 1960s. In the 1980s, some £6 million was invested in a new maternity wing which opened in 1987, and further moneys were spent on a nurses' training centre. Just four years later, despite a vigorous campaign that was led by my predecessor, Jo Richardson, it was decided to close that hospital.

Anyone who visits that site today would see a shocking testament to the Government's health reforms. Perfectly sound buildings are lying empty, windows are smashed, and forgotten beds are strewn over empty wards. Money has been wasted while patients suffer. Little remains on the site. There are four acute elderly wards and a minor injuries unit which, ironically, is housed in the £6 million purpose-built modern maternity unit. It is a tragic waste of hospital resources.

The withering away of Barking hospital is just one of many causes for concern in my constituency and, taken together with the decision to close the accident and emergency department at Oldchurch hospital in Romford, it is a disaster. It means that poorer people in Barking will have to travel to the richer edges of Essex, which is 12 miles from the centre of Barking, to be treated in what is now their local district hospital. Many of them have never heard of Harold Wood hospital, nor have they been to it. They cannot even find it. Public transport is dire and they cannot afford taxis.

I have long argued that one accident and emergency unit serving 400,000 people is just not enough, and that is evident from the cases that I describe in my dossier. The majority of those cases are of people who have been let down by the various local hospitals and they include several which, tragically, ended in death. Each case is unique, but there is a pattern consisting of a mixture of long waiting lists, under-resourcing and occasional incompetence. I shall illustrate that with just one example, which is by no means the most extreme in the dossier.

Mrs. T, a constituent, went to King George hospital a year ago. She had very high blood pressure and her heart was beating erratically. In the casualty department, she was left without help for hours. She complained, and was finally given an ECG. After that, she was again left for 35 minutes waiting to be examined by a doctor. Mrs. T is diabetic and has to have a regular eating pattern. She felt so ill that she left the hospital without seeing a doctor. Six months later, she was admitted to King George hospital with acute pancreatitis. She was told that she needed a gall bladder removed, and an appointment was set for a month later for an internal camera investigation.

On the morning of her appointment, Mrs. T rang to check that a bed was available, and was assured that there was. However, later that day the hospital rang to say that no beds were available and that her admission would be delayed by another month. Subsequently she was put off twice again because of a lack of beds. She was so appalled that she and her husband reluctantly joined a private health scheme.

I know of dozens of similar cases, but I have to say that I expect that they are only a small proportion of the total. The people of Barking are remarkably reluctant to complain. That was brought home to me by the stark contrast between the campaign over the closure of the A and E service at Oldchurch and the massive campaigns around St. Bartholomew's and Guy's. I am seeking to give voice not only to the 60 or so constituents who have taken the trouble to come to see me, but to the hundreds of people in Barking who have not had the confidence to do so.

Much of this might not matter so much if the primary health care service were good. It is not. Some dedicated and skilled practitioners work in Barking, but the infrastructure is not sufficiently robust to cope with the additional pressures brought about by the hospital closure programme.

Recently, the family health services authority conducted a survey on the quality of premises in Barking. Patients have to see their doctors under unacceptable conditions. Of the 55 GP premises in the borough, almost three in four are classified as poor, only three are considered to be good, and none falls into the best classification.

If one then considers the statistics on GP case loads and GP support, one finds equal cause for concern. One in four GPs in Barking work as single practitioners. The average list size for GPs is almost 2,500 patients—it is 2,464. If one compares that with the national statistics, one finds that only 8 per cent. have a list of more than 2,500 patients. Barking residents are again getting a raw deal. Indeed, there is more cause for concern. One in 10 practices have no practice nurse, there are few training doctors, and professional training facilities for Barking GPs are not good.

All those factors show. My dossier does not simply describe cases in which individuals were given the run-around by their GPs: it includes two cases where, on the face of it, death might have been avoided if the GP had acted properly for the patient as a first point of call.

My constituent Mr. Ayling is still in regular contact with me. He lost his daughter Maria because nobody spotted early enough that she had a thrombosis as a result of taking one of the pills that we now know to be dangerous. Mr. Ayling is still fighting for an honest account of the treatment that his daughter received from the local health services. He has been forced to take legal action to obtain even a proper inquest into Maria's death. In the end, I think that he will receive some financial compensation, but we all know that nothing is enough to make up for the loss of one's child. It is in the memory of Maria and others like her that I am fighting in this public way for the Government's recognition and for action to give my constituents a fair deal from the NHS.

The local health authorities may not like this and may want to work behind the scenes. In a recent letter to me, the chairpersons of the FHSA and the district health authority stated that:

"the number of complaints are few."

Indeed they are, but that shows a lack of understanding by the authorities of Barking people. They do not easily complain; they are not comfortable in challenging authority. But since I have started raising the issues locally, I have been inundated with constituents' letters supporting what I am doing. My first duty is to them.

Barking is a wonderful part of east London, with strong, close-knit communities. It is an area rich in tradition, which is about to undergo major changes with the advent of the channel tunnel rail link and the massive new community of Barking reach. Our local health service is under strain. I want to be sure that we can meet the new challenges and opportunities that we face. I ask the Minister to respond to three specific issues.

First, I ask the Minister to halt any closures—including the planned closure of the A and E unit at Oldchurch—until two things have happened. We must have in place good primary health care that can cope with the legitimate demands of people in Barking, and the authorities must complete their latest review of the acute services for local residents, to ensure that we do not simply close facilities today and find that we have to create new ones tomorrow.

Secondly, I urge the Minister to instruct the authorities to expedite the review of the Barking hospital site so that our precious health resources are not left to waste and decay. We want that site used for health purposes, and brought back into use quickly. Thirdly, I ask the Minister to examine new ways in which we can recruit and retain quality GPs in urban areas such as Barking. We will never get the health services to which my constituents are entitled if we do not bring in effective measures to tackle the problem.

Those are practical measures that will offer reassurance to people in my constituency who are desperately worried about the state of the local health service. My constituents are not professional whingers. The complaints that I have compiled in my dossier are real, and an enormous cause for concern. There are many dedicated and hard-working people working in the health service in my constituency. There are also many elderly and deprived people whose needs are not being met. We owe it to both groups to make things better, so that, once again, people feel safe and certain that they will enjoy the first-class service to which they are entitled.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) and I congratulate her on securing time to debate the very important topic of health care in Barking. Although it is obviously important to her, it is important to all of us. I listened carefully to her points, including the three final issues. I can confirm that I have read her report, which she kindly passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Obviously it is always regrettable when a patient has to wait for a lengthy period for necessary treatment under the national health service. It is equally regrettable when operations are postponed at the last minute—the hon. Lady cited the case of Mrs. T, which was certainly regrettable—or when the care provided falls below the highest standards. However, the hon. Lady failed in her report and in this debate to take account of the very real improvements taking place in her area, as well as nationally, under the NHS.

In any part of the country there will inevitably be problems from time to time in an organisation as large as the NHS, but what is rarely mentioned by Opposition Members is the huge proportion of patients—I am sure that that must include patients in Barking—who are more than satisfied with the service that they receive.

In the majority of cases quoted by the hon. Member in her report, the main cause for complaint has been a delay in treatment being received. I certainly agree with her wholeheartedly that people have had to wait too long for treatment. That is why reducing waiting times has been a priority for the Government in their handling of the NHS.

In 1979, more than 185,000 patients in England were waiting more than a year to enter hospital. Today, that figure is down to 28,000 and falling. I am sure that that drop has affected Barking. That statistic alone demonstrates the scale of the progress that we are making. Admittedly, progress in reducing waiting times has varied—and still varies—throughout the country. It is undoubtedly true that some patients in the North Thames region, which includes Barking, have had to wait longer than patients in other parts of the country, and I consider that unacceptable.

I am glad to be able to tell the hon. Lady that concerted action is therefore being taken by health authorities in North Thames precisely on that point, so as to reduce waiting times for its patients. That action is already producing results. Over the past year, the number of patients waiting for treatment in the North Thames region has fallen more quickly than the national average, and the number waiting for more than a year has fallen by more than 21 per cent.

The hon. Member's local hospitals are at the forefront of those developments. In the past year, Havering hospital's NHS trust has seen a fall of almost three quarters in the number of patients waiting more than a year—that is a huge improvement. The number waiting for more than a year at the neighbouring King George hospital has fallen by more than a quarter in the three months from June, and that improvement is continuing.

I am also pleased to report that, from 1 April 1996, Barking and Havering health authority expects and hopes that no patient will have to wait longer than nine months for treatment from the time that they are placed on a waiting list. That is obviously its intention and aim, and I certainly hope that it fulfils it. Indeed, we shall be seeing whether it can.

Decisions about how and when to treat patients are of course made by clinicians—not by politicians or by managers. A doctor decides whether a patient is not yet ready for treatment or whether he needs treatment immediately, and his decision stands. Of those patients nationally who doctors judge can wait for treatment, the figures show that fully half are admitted to hospital within six weeks and almost three quarters within six months.

The hon. Lady complained about a lack of resources being devoted to the health service. Obviously, it has escaped her notice that the figure for 1978-79 was £6.5 billion, since when there has been a 70 per cent. increase. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced further substantial increases immediately after the Budget. Current spending on health will grow by £1.3 billion in the next financial year, equivalent in real terms to 1.6 per cent. Therefore, the Government have every reason to be extremely proud of

[Mr. John Horam]

their record on funding and support for the NHS. In fact, the Barking and Havering health authority has received a increase for next year of 3.79 per cent.—about £171 million.

Obviously, I fully accept that, as the hon. Lady said, historically primary care in London, and especially in her area, has been underdeveloped and in need of substantial improvement. That goes without saying. However, welcome improvements are taking place as a result of the Government's efforts. The hon. Lady made a point about quality general practitioners. That is being tackled through current measures. Therefore, I take exception to her comments that over the past few years all the decisions have been the wrong way. The decisions in this area are profoundly in the right direction.

An example of that is the London initiative zone, which was established to concentrate effort and investment in those areas of London where primary care services are weakest. As a result, almost £4 million has been allocated over the last three years to improve the primary care facilities in the Barking area alone. The number of general practitioner practices in Barking and Havering classified as poor has fallen from 72 per cent. in 1992 to only 31 per cent. this year. That is a staggering improvement.

During the past five years, three purpose-built health centres have been opened. Indeed, the hon. Lady performed the opening ceremony for one of them. A further four health centres have undergone extensive refurbishment or been extended in the same period. More than 20 other GP practices have received funds to improve their premises.

Other improvements to primary care services include the near doubling of the number of practice nurses working in Barking and Dagenham since 1993-94 and an increase from 37 per cent. to 93 per cent. in the level of computerised GP practices since 1992-93.

The hon. Lady referred to the problem of GP recruitment and spoke about the quality of GPs in her area. There is a high proportion of one or two-doctor practices in Barking. The Government are well aware of the problems and, from September this year, introduced a series of special allowances for London to help deal with them. They are designed to attract new GPs into London, to encourage high-quality GPs to stay, to create capacity for practice improvement and to encourage GPs in single-handed practices and partnerships of two doctors to meet to work together on the development of primary care services.

All those allowances are payable only if progress is made in improving patient care through better practice organisation and training. They will encourage collaborative working and help to overcome professional isolation, which is a problem in areas such as Barking and which can be experienced by some GPs in small practices.

Those initiatives complement new educational opportunities for London GPs, which we announced in October last year. They were drawn up with support from the London FHSA management and the local medical committees. We are making £15 million available for 1995-96, increasing to £20 million for 1996-97, to support that programme.

All the initiatives and improvements that I have cited demonstrated the great progress being made in primary care in particular, both in Barking and nationally. Obviously, in no way would I wish to play down the highly regrettable individual cases that featured so largely in the hon. Lady's speech. However, as I said, there is very firm progress in reducing waiting times still further, and, equally important, in improving primary care in an area that historically has been very deprived. The hon. Lady can be assured that I have absolutely no doubt of the Government's determination to achieve that.

I believe that, in the hon. Lady's part of the world, the local health authority, NHS trusts and GPs are working together very effectively. I hope that she will pay regard to that in any future remarks. She mentioned the letters of complaint that she had received about her remarks from the chairmen of the health authorities and from local doctors. I understand her position—a Member of Parliament must raise these matters. However, she should remember that it is right to be fair and to remember the effect of her comments on the morale of those working in the health service. Therefore, I hope that she will always present a balanced report. I assure her that progress is being made in the way that I have outlined.

It being six minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BILL PRESENTED

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (PROPERTY AND ENDOWMENTS) AMENDMENT ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Forsyth presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Amendment (to be presented under section 7 of the Act).

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Public Sector Research Establishments

1. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the recent efficiency scrutiny of the public sector research establishments. [2599]

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): The scrutiny was carried out by the efficiency unit within the Cabinet Office. As stated in the report, the cost of undertaking the scrutiny was approximately £157,000. The Office of Science and Technology is co-ordinating the action resulting from the scrutiny.

Mrs. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that, quite apart from the efforts of the scrutiny team, an enormous amount of fact finding had to take place in the institutes themselves, leading to scientists carrying out administrative work rather than scientific research? Those involved are now to be rewarded with yet another departmental review, which could lead to threats of redundancy and privatisation at institutes such as the one at Babraham near my constituency. Are the Government really aware of what efficiency means?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Lady needs to know that it was exactly in response to the scrutiny process and the extensive consultation period that we entered into the prior options reviews. Many laboratories need to be looked at to see whether they are best positioned to serve the customer. One fifth of the Government's research expenditure is spent through research establishments, and it behoves the hon. Lady to join the Government in making sure that that money is properly spent.

Natural Gas Reserves

2. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has for the length of time that proven reserves of natural gas will last; and if he will make a statement. [2600]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): Reserves which have been fully tested and proven would last 10 years at current rates of production. Other UK reserves and known geological potential could raise this to some 58 years.

Mr. Mullin: No doubt more gas will be discovered, but with the benefit of hindsight does the Minister not consider it folly to have collapsed a large part of the coal industry, to have encouraged gas-fired power stations and to have made us dependent on a fuel of which there are only 10 years' of proven reserves left?

Mr. Page: I thank the hon. Gentleman for providing me with two golden opportunities. First, I must point to the success of the gas industry. The hon. Gentleman may remember that, back in 1975, all the pundits and experts were saying that this would be the year when all the supplies would run out. As I have said, however, proven resources will last for at least 10 years, while others could potentially last for up to 58 years. Looking at the hon. Gentleman, I can say that that will see him out without any difficulty whatsoever.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman's question enables me to say that production levels in the coal industry—now that the industry has moved into other hands—are up by some 9 per cent. That is a huge tribute to privatisation. I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for allowing me to state that.

Mr. Battle: Who does the Minister hold responsible for the locked-in, take-or-pay, long-term North sea gas contracts? Should not the Government be acting now to sort out the mess before the new Gas Act comes into force and the whole gas industry is faced with full-blown competition?

Mr. Page: I should point out that the contracts were entered into when the industry was in its nationalised state. The Government have made it clear that some modification in British Gas's old contracts is inevitable, and we have called for serious and detailed discussions.

Confederation of British Industry Conference

3. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of his address to the CBI conference. [2601]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I have placed a copy of my speech to the CBI on 14 November 1995 in the Library.

Mr. Canavan: If the President insists that job insecurity is just a state of mind, is his own marginal majority of 2,468 just a figment of his imagination—or does he ever sense the reality that his own jacket is on a shoogly nail?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman misquotes me in order to misrepresent what I said about job insecurity. We all recognise that job insecurity exists; the important thing is to do something about it. The Government have created an economic recovery in which more than 500,000 jobs have been created since the end of the recession. Those increased jobs and the fall in unemployment represent the best way of creating job security for the future.

Mr. David Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the social chapter is not an à la carte menu? If so, will he tell that fact to the leader of the lot opposite, who when he addressed the Confederation of British Industry either told a pack of lies or did not understand the implications of the social chapter? And did that not show everyone how totally lacking that man is in the qualities necessary to become leader of this country?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In my speech in Birmingham, I pointed out how the CBI might have been misled by the speech of the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that the social chapter was just a set of principles and involved no detailed legislation, when in fact we would not be able to pick and choose which parts of it to accept and which to disregard: measures subject to qualified majority voting would be forced on Britain whether we wanted them or not—that is why we must not accept the social chapter.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Secretary of State recall that, when he went to the CBI, its message to Government, as to Opposition, was that it sought support for investment in industry, the sustaining or improvement of investment in education, and no cuts in infrastructure spending? Will he confirm that his speech, like the Budget, either ignored or rejected all those representations? As the Red Book shows that investment growth, predicted last year to be nearly 6 per cent., turned out to be a mere 1 per cent., is it not gross dereliction of duty for the Government not to heed those requests to support investment?

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Lady may like to know that the president of the CBI, Sir Bryan Nicholson, was quoted in *The Scotsman* on 15 November as having said, after my speech at the CBI conference, that the CBI was "appreciative and strongly supportive" of the Government. The CBI also warmly welcomed the Budget, and it was right to do so, because the business community recognises that the economic recovery now under way will be strengthened and carried forward by the Budget that the House approved last night.

Mr. Nicholls: As my right hon. Friend is placing a copy of his speech in the Library, will he also deposit a copy of an article by Stanley Kalms, chief executive of Dixons, who also attended the CBI conference? Stanley Kalms is a business man who knows what he is talking about, and he referred to a growing credibility gap for the Leader of the Opposition, with figures which do not add up without a massive increase in taxation. Finally, he asked who would look through the smokescreen that the Leader of the Opposition had tried to erect. Would it not be a good idea if a copy of that article, too, were placed in the Library?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. I am keen to have the Labour party's detailed policies fully exposed to the business community and to the rest of the country—for example, Labour's polices on the social chapter, on a national minimum wage and on the trade unions, all of which would cost jobs.

Rural Areas

5. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives his Department is pursuing to bring further trade opportunities into rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [2603]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): The DTI offers a range of export services which are integrated as Overseas Trade Services and include export services provided by the Welsh Office Industry Department, Scottish Trade International and the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland. A range of other services to assist in the development of rural areas is offered through Business Links.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that reply. He may be unaware of the vast rural depopulation of large areas of Wales and England. According to recent university research, there is a great deal of serious rural poverty. The initiatives to which he has referred will not even scratch the face of the problem.

Mr. Oppenheim: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's points, but his own constituency has benefited from no fewer than 11 inward investment projects over the past few years, and unemployment is down by a quarter over the past three years. While problems exist, it is wrong to suggest that Government policies are not affecting them beneficially.

Mr. Marland: Does my hon. Friend agree that, for anyone who wants to make trading opportunities in the countryside—whether in Wales, Scotland or, in my case, the Forest of Dean—what is required is that wealth creators go and set up in those districts? Does he recognise what a magnificent contribution the Rural Development Commission has made to helping businesses set up in rural areas?

Mr. Oppenheim: I entirely endorse the comments of my hon. Friend, and I would go further. Many companies which operate in rural areas are, of course, small companies. The Budget will help those small companies by cutting their rate of corporation tax, which will help 300,000 companies—many of which will operate in rural areas. The cut in the base rate to 24p will help 3 million self-employed people. That will make a further contribution to the fairly significant fall in unemployment in my hon. Friend's part of the country.

Mr. MacShane: The Minister is one of the glittering stars of the London social scene and has probably never had time to visit my constituency of Rotherham, where he will find that 65 per cent. of Rotherham metropolitan borough council is rural and a wonderful site for inward investment. Why, according to figures that I have just received, have the rateable values for businesses, factories and offices increased in the past five years by between 30 per cent. and 50 per cent. in Yorkshire but decreased in inner London? Could he do a little less for his cronies on corrupt city councils such as Westminster and a little more for industry and business in Yorkshire?

Mr. Oppenheim: It would be churlish of me not to start by thanking the hon. Gentleman for his heartfelt tribute, which I know was meant warmly. As for corruption in local councils, the hon. Gentleman may have thrown me a boomerang by mentioning that. Just down the road from his constituency is Derbyshire county council, which has been indicted for corruption many times. We do not have only to consider Derbyshire; we also have Lambeth—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question.]—and the failure of local government in Islington.

Mr. Allason: Does my hon. Friend agree that a key to inward investment, especially in rural areas, is communications? Will he consider the decision to put on to the long-term programme the Kingskerswell bypass, which is a key to prosperity south Devon? It is a key link in to all the constituencies of south Devon, which will rely for future employment on that road. Will he have a word with his colleagues in the Department of Transport?

Mr. Oppenheim: I will pass on my hon. Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, to whom those comments would be most appropriately addressed. My hon. Friend mentioned inward investment. There is a massive contrast with the late 1970s, when international companies were falling over themselves to move production from Britain, and when Germans were refusing to buy cars made in the UK plants of Ford and General Motors. Now we attract 40 per cent. of the inward investment into Europe from Japan and the United States—including Ford and GM, which are once again large exporters from Britain along with Toyota, Nissan, Honda and, I am pleased to say, Rover.

Mr. Harvey: Does the Minister recognise the importance to rural areas of the Post Office and the Royal Mail network? Why have the Government decided to impose a steeper external financing limit on the Post Office, which goes back on commitments given in the House by the President of the Board of Trade on 11 May? What does the Minister estimate the effect of that will be on investment in and the competitiveness of the Post Office?

Mr. Oppenheim: First, the price of sending letters has fallen in real terms over recent years. Even if the Post Office raises its prices, it is unlikely that they will be in excess of inflation over the three-year term. Secondly, the best way to ensure that the people who use postal services get the good service that they deserve is to ensure that the Post Office is efficient. We believe that there is further scope for efficiency improvements, as shown by recent reports.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend do his best to ensure that the Government maintain their present course in relation to unemployment in rural areas? Will he take it from me that my constituents do not believe the political rhetoric from the Opposition parties, because in my constituency over the past decade employment has increased at the rate of almost 500 new jobs per year?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is sometimes forgotten that, under the last Labour Government, unemployment doubled, manufacturing output fell and manufacturing productivity was stagnant. For the first time since the second world war, over the past 15 years we have closed three quarters of the productivity gap with Germany. That improvement contrasts starkly with the mess that we inherited from the last Labour Government.

Beer Orders

6. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had on the Beer Orders. [2604]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): Representations recently received by my Department include those on the guest beer provision; whether there would be a review of the brewing industry to consider the effects of the beer orders; the terms of leases offered to tenants; and the refusal to supply beer if a brewer suspects duty fraud.

Mr. Hughes: I welcome the Minister to his new job. The Chancellor's decision last week not to increase the duty on beer is clearly welcome, but there is still considerable concern in the brewing industry and particularly in the licensed trade that current arrangements for the licensed trade work against the survival of the local pub. I am not making a party political point, but this year could the Minister look again at all the interrelated issues to secure the future of British beer and of the British pub?

Mr. Taylor: The effect of the Beer Orders has been to weaken the tie, introduce greater versatility in financial matters and introduce guest beers, giving the consumer much more choice and binging competition into the trade.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that British brewers strongly welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer's action on beer in the recent Budget? Do not British beers remain the best in the world?

Mr. Taylor: My word, they certainly do. I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, but I stop short in my enthusiasm and will not comment on anything that falls within the province of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Hoon: I welcome the Minister to his new position. Does he agree that the Beer Orders have had a dramatic impact on jobs in the British brewing and licensed retail trade? Does he further agree that those jobs are threatened by the 1.1 million pints of beer flooding into Britain, mainly in the back of transit vans? Does he agree that at least 10,000 jobs have been lost in the industry already, causing uncertainty and insecurity? Does he accept the importance of tackling that job insecurity, or is it just a state of mind?

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps I may reciprocate the hon. Gentleman's kind opening comment by wishing him a happy birthday. As the ills of which the hon. Gentleman spoke concern duties charged on beers, they are not matters for me. If the hon. Gentleman is aware of fraud or criminal activity, he should tell the prosecuting authorities as well as the Government.

Mr. John Marshall: I join those who have congratulated my hon. Friend on his promotion to the Department of Trade and Industry, and I repeat what other colleagues have said: the greatest threat to the brewing industry is the level of tax. This year we welcomed the first reduction in whisky duty for a century. May we look forward next year to the first reduction in beer duty for many years?

Mr. Taylor: I am not supposed to comment on the last Budget, so I shall certainly stop short at commenting on the next one.

Export Opportunities

7. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to assist small and medium-sized enterprises to explore new export opportunities. [2605]

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Anthony Nelson): Through Overseas Trade Services, my Department provides a range of assistance to companies wishing to explore new export opportunities. We are also helping smaller firms by the creation of the Business Links network.

Mr. Lloyd: Does the Minister accept that there is a widely held opinion that the support in exporting that British small and medium-sized enterprises receive does not compensate for what is offered in countries such as Germany or Japan? Does he accept that it is vital that that sector of industry receives dedicated assistance which recognises its special needs? Does he accept that it is especially important that small firms should have access to decent language training and to the type of support that the larger firms sector can give them, if small firms are given the opportunity to take that in a way that they find user-friendly?

Mr. Nelson: I do not accept the first of those propositions. The Government do indeed attach imp[illegible] to helping small firms to export. That is precisely why we have given an export element to the business links. That is why we have established 100 export promoters. That is why we have set up some export development counsellors through business links. I agree with the second of the hon. Gentleman's propositions—that foreign language teaching is important.

The most important thing for small businesses is to keep their costs down and encourage them, through campaigns, to enter new nearby markets, such as those in Benelux and Ireland. In that way, we can bring about a much-needed substantial improvement in the number of small firms which export.

Mr. Budgen: Would it not be wise if my hon. Friend emphasised that neither wealth nor happiness nor employment will come from political action, and that he will not help the exporters and take away all their problems any more than the President of the Board of Trade will help all those people who have, sadly, been made unemployed as a result of technological change? Otherwise, if we continue to pretend that all those things will be cured by the politicians, the people may look to other politicians to solve their problems.

Mr. Nelson: All I can say to my hon. Friend is that that is not what business tells me. Businesses tell me that they would like a helping hand from Government, and that what we are doing, specifically through business links, is very valuable. I agree with my hon. Friend that whatever Government do by way of clever schemes and promotions is very little compared with the importance of macro-economic stability and sound economic finances and management. That is what the Government are doing, and that provides the firmest possible foundation for business and the expansion of small businesses.

Mrs. Roche: Given that Barclays bank told the Trade and Industry Select Committee that exporting for the first time represented a significant barrier to growth for many small firms, is it not about time that the Minister ensured that the export intelligence service used its time and taxpayers' money to help small and medium-sized enterprises, rather than producing large and very generalised reports for use by large companies?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Lady makes a constructive criticism. It is the case that we are trying to improve the dissemination of information to small businesses, and I will carefully consider the hon. Lady's argument. We want to make that information friendly to the companies which use it.

Barclays is well placed to recognise that as a bank it has helped not only nationally but in, among other places, the north-east of this country, where Barclays has a great tradition of helping exporters—many of which are small firms—to jump that initial barrier. It is difficult for many, and it is costly for them. That is why we have a range of schemes and programmes to assist them. Information is part of it; taking them by the hand to some of the closest markets in Europe is another.

I repeat that that is very little compared with the importance of a sound economic background against which such companies can grow and expand the base of the markets in which they operate.

Sir Michael Grylls: Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the measures in the Budget—reducing corporate taxation and helping on the business rate—are some of the best ways of helping small firms? That leaves more money in the business, and then those firms can afford to organise their exporting on their own. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) says, it is much better to take less money in taxation and let them get on with running their business with more money in the bank to expand overseas.

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is spot on. Of course most investment in the business sector comes from reinvested profits, and the extent to which one enables companies to reinvest those net returns is a big determinant, not only of their future expansion, but of their growth into export markets.

I would mention, however, that in addition to the arguments that my hon. Friend made about the Budget, one of the sectors of increased public expenditure that we herald and welcome is the extra provision for export promotion. That will be very good news for companies which will be left with more resources out of their profits to help themselves, and for companies that cannot help themselves but want to build up new markets. New facilities for export promotion and more money will be available, thanks to the Chancellor.

Yorkshire Water

8. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from companies in West Yorkshire following advice given by Yorkshire Water in respect of relocation. [2606]

Mr. Page: My Department has received no formal representations from companies in West Yorkshire on this point, but I am well aware of the concerns that the local business community has about the prospects of cuts in water supply. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration met local business representatives to discuss their concerns when he visited the area on 29 September and 14 November.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister understand that the suggestion from Yorkshire Water that firms should relocate outside West Yorkshire was one of the dafter ideas to come from the unfunny comedians running Yorkshire Water? Does he understand that many firms and businesses in West Yorkshire are extremely worried about the security of water supply for the indefinite future, and certainly for next year? Does he also support a wholly independent inquiry to consider all aspects of the management of Yorkshire Water, the activities of the water regulator and the involvement of the Government?

Mr. Page: I have been in the House long enough not to try to defend the indefensible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Gummer) has stated clearly that the company should have acted much earlier and more comprehensively. I understand that the prospect of cuts is extremely worrying for industry, and my right hon. Friend has said that cuts would be the last resort of last resorts.

I am able to give the House the good news that, from the low point of 11 November, the levels in the reservoirs have started to rise, and a £50 million-plus programme has been introduced to ensure that the situation does not happen again. That programme will be finished by some time in the middle to late spring.

On the question of an inquiry, the Government have kept in touch with two independent reports already, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced a wider-ranging review on 1 September to consider issues arising from the drought.

Sir Donald Thompson: Perhaps my hon. Friend cannot agree that it is not Yorkshire businesses that should relocate, but some of the managers and directors of Yorkshire Water who should find employment somewhere else—perhaps running a retirement home. Will my hon. Friend apply pressure on the Department of the Environment and his Department to ensure that the reservoirs are kept as full as possible, and that a proper, sensible grid system for Yorkshire is imposed as quickly as possible?

Mr. Page: I can tell the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) has been exceedingly active, both publicly and behind the scenes, in pressing the case for Yorkshire companies. I agree that perhaps the shareholders of Yorkshire Water may wish to consider other matters within the company at some time.

I have already mentioned that £50 million-plus is being spent to ensure that the situation does not occur again in the future. I hope that that gives comfort to many Yorkshire companies.

Lancashire Aerospace Industry

9. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will visit the Lancashire aerospace industry to discuss European aircraft collaboration programmes. [2607]

Mr. Lang: I visited the Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace last month, and had a useful meeting with representatives of that important industry.

Mr. Pike: I am glad that the Secretary of State has met the consortium. He will recognise that aerospace is a crucial industry in Lancashire. Would not the Lancashire aerospace industry be helped if British Airways bought more British engines and the Airbus? Will he do everything possible to ensure that Lancashire and Britain get their fair share of work from the European fighter aircraft?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The aerospace industry is extremely important to this country. It employs some 130,000 people, and is the third largest industry in the western world. British Airways' purchasing policy is a matter for that company. Engine makers have to sell their goods in a very competitive market. I am sure that the House will be as pleased as I am with the great success that Rolls-Royce has had recently by selling its Trent engine to Singapore Airlines, in a deal worth more than £1 billion.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that most of my constituents and many of my colleagues representing Lancashire constituencies know only too well how much the Government have done during the past 16 years for the British aerospace industry and will continue so to do? But can he also understand that there is some concern relating to Eurofighter about the proportion of the work share, and will he, along with the Secretary of State for Defence, continue to press his German counterparts to ensure that the British aerospace industry gets the right share for the number that it has purchased?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend draws attention to an important point. The United Kingdom has a good record of collaboration with other countries on aircraft projects of various kinds, starting from Concorde and going through Airbus, Tornado and others. It will be our purpose to ensure that there is a fully justifiable level of British participation in the componency of the Eurofighter.

Mr. Barry Jones: With regard to Airbus, when will the Government formally rejoin the future large aircraft project? Why cannot the Government persuade British Airways to buy Airbus? Will the right hon. Gentleman understand that answers to those questions will be carefully scrutinised by 2,000 of my constituents who work for British Aerospace? It is our greatest industry. Will the Government back it?

Mr. Lang: The Government have extensively backed the industry. As I said earlier, British Airways' purchasing policy is a matter for that company. Airbus is an extremely successful initiative. The 500th A320 was delivered last January and last year Airbus received more orders than Boeing. With regard to the FLA, the United Kingdom will rejoin that programme once certain conditions have been met, in particular the condition that the programme will be managed on a commercial basis.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most important aerospace project in Lancashire is Eurofighter? Does he further agree that the Opposition's defence policies would almost certainly mean that that project would be cancelled, and the industrial consequences to the county of Lancashire would be horrible?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Eurofighter is important not only for our defences but for our aerospace industry, and in both respects the Government's commitment to it is, I think, welcome.

Nuclear Privatisation

10. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to bring the date for privatisation of the nuclear industry forward. [2608]

Mr. Lang: The privatisation of the nuclear industry remains on track for the summer of 1996.

Mr. Clapham: I am pleased to hear that the Secretary of State is not bringing forward the date of privatisation of the nuclear industry. However, is he aware that the proposed two nuclear companies will provide 24 per cent. of the United Kingdom's electricity and that that will all be base load electricity which will be bid into the pool at zero? Therefore, those companies will be in an advantageous position if they are allowed to diversify into gas. If they do diversify into gas, their gas units will compete not with their nuclear capacity but with other gas units and other coal units, possibly pushing coal further down the grid. In such a situation, will the Minister ensure that there are restrictions on the new nuclear companies to provide only nuclear generation, or will they be free to distort the energy economy?

Mr. Lang: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that he seeks. This is a competitive industry and it is important that, both domestically and industrially, electricity is supplied at the most competitive price available.

Dr. Michael Clark: While we are discussing the nuclear industry and privatisation, would my right hon. Friend care to comment on the significant contribution of the late John Collier, latterly chairman of Nuclear Electric, and his significant contribution during many years to the nuclear industry in general and the privatisation of that industry in particular?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to pay tribute to the late John Collier, who served Nuclear Electric with great distinction and who worked extremely positively towards the nuclear privatisation and the successful future of that industry to which we all look forward. He will be sadly missed.

Mr. Hardy: What public liabilities will continue after privatisation of the nuclear industry?

Mr. Lang: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that the Magnox liabilities will be retained with the Magnox stations, and the other liabilities will pass into the private sector with the nuclear stations.

Heavy Electrical Product Exports

11. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated annual value of heavy electrical product exports; and what are the principal markets. [2609]

Mr. Nelson: Exports of heavy electrical products, comprising electrical equipment for power generation, transmission and distribution, were £130 million in 1994—up 47 per cent. on 1990. The principal markets are the United States of America and the far east.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that extremely encouraging reply. Clearly, British manufacturing industry is in good heart and very successful at selling abroad. Is my hon. Friend aware that GEC Alsthom in Rugby produces probably the finest heavy generating sets in the world? Will he join me in congratulating the management and work force on their exemplary record? Does he agree that the success of GEC has contributed a great deal to the splendid figures that he has just announced?

Mr. Nelson: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in the congratulations he gives GEC Alsthom. It is a great success story. I know that my hon. Friend visited the plant in his constituency recently, as did my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy. GEC Alsthom and other companies involved in power generation and transmission, such as Rolls-Royce and Davy, represent one of the great British success stories. We very much hope that it will continue.

Mr. Bell: We of course welcome the fact that exports of heavy electrical goods have increased to £130 million. That is good news for the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). Why is the Minister so complacent when, for every £100 we export, we import £110 and our manufacturing exports have been less than our imports every year since 1983? The French have an export surplus of £7 billion; we have a deficit of £11.4 billion as of August, and confidence in our exporters is at its lowest level since August 1993. That is not according to those on the Labour Front Bench but according to the Confederation of British Industry. Is it not a matter of perception and reality—the perception of the Government and the reality of our exporters?

Mr. Nelson: This Minister is not at all complacent about our export performance. I want Britain to be in the black on the visible account and the invisible account. I was simply pointing out a great success on which the House should be united, instead of constantly listening to the dreary litany of failures to which the Opposition would spuriously draw attention. That particular sector is leading the country in record exports. Last year, we had a substantial surplus of £8.9 billion, not just on the visible account but on the invisible account. We are making more money than we are spending on the capital account and in returns on our investments abroad. It is good news for Britain. Let us hear a little more of it from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend redouble the efforts, which are already extremely well appreciated by industry, to ensure that our exports are sold abroad, particularly in China, Nepal and Indonesia? Does he understand that it is important for the Government to give British industry that support, to counteract the negative vibes from the Labour party?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. It is important to support, advise and enable those companies to succeed abroad. We endeavour to do that through a range of support services, including domestic policies that enable them to expand investment in their own markets. Through assistance such as the overseas projects fund, we endeavour to help them with pump-priming to get the business in the first place.

In the United Kingdom, we have to export for our lives. That is not a party political statement but a statement of the obvious in truth and determination. The fact that we are exporting at record levels owes something to the economic and industrial policies pursued by the Government, but it is absolutely key that, if we are to retain employment at home and the prosperity that goes with it, we have to be big exporters, and our great companies have to lead the way.

Chinese Bicycles

12. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the effects in the United Kingdom of the dumping of cycles made by China; what actions have been taken to prevent this; and what assessment he has made of how effective the measures have been. [2610]

Mr. Oppenheim: The European Community imposed anti-dumping duties on Chinese bicycles on 5 March 1993, since when imports have fallen by 97 per cent.

Mr. Simpson: Has the Minister even understood the letter sent to him by the chief executive of Raleigh in my constituency on 10 November, in which he detailed criticisms of the Government's policies that have assisted the Chinese in dumping bikes in this country as a result of concessionary rates of duty? The Government have colluded with the Chinese in avoiding duties by importing bikes through third countries. Britain has been made the laughing stock of Europe by becoming known as the dodgy dealers' route into the European Union.

The Government have assisted in the process of duty evasion by allowing up to 800,000 Chinese cycles to come into Britain and the rest of Europe in kit form without any duties being payable. They have now grant-aided a Chinese firm to assemble the duty-free kits, after which the bikes will be sold within the British market. Is this yet another example of the Government peddling rubbish in its industrial policies?

Mr. Oppenheim: It may be a tribute to the rightward lurch of new Labour that yesterday, when I had the pleasure of debating against the hon. Gentleman at the university of London Labour club, I had the uncanny feeling that most members of the audience were closer to my position than to his.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the EC has some of the most draconian anti-dumping regulations in the developed world. Raleigh has already massively benefited from reduced sales of Chinese bikes. We have also to consider jobs that are created by companies which invest in Britain, the interests of bike retailers and the interests of those who buy bikes, who suffer poorer choice and higher prices as a result of any protectionist duties.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the cycles that the United Kingdom does not need dumped on it is the inevitable downturn in the economic cycle that would flow from the imposition of the social chapter and a minimum wage? Does he—

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must ask specific and relevant questions. The hon. and learned Member cannot get away with that supplementary question. We shall move on.

British Airways

13. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has made to British Airways following its decision to purchase the General Electric GE90 engine. [2611]

Mr. Page: None.

Mr. Spellar: Is it not remarkable that there is a major order for aero-engines and the Department is not even making representations to British Airways? Should the Department not be saying to BA that, if it wants to fly the flag on its tail, it should fly the flag on its engines?

Mr. Page: Naturally, I wish every company to buy British. The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question is that old Labour is alive and well and itching to intervene.

I do not have the confidence of the hon. Gentleman to run British Airways better than those who have spent a lifetime in it. The House might be interested to know that, since privatisation, BA has given £476 million in corporation tax to the Treasury. It has 53,000 employees now as opposed to 40,000. It now carries about 35 million passengers as opposed to 20 million. I do not think that I will second-guess BA's management.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Italians are constantly giving such orders to Alitalia, as are the Portuguese to TAP and the French to Air France? Does he realise that all these airlines are huge burdens on national economies and that tax moneys are going into them instead of being directed into education and health, as they are in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend makes a self-sustaining point that I can only endorse. I can only stress the huge success of privatisation and the contributions that have been made to the Treasury. It is interesting to note that, despite everything we hear from the Opposition, they have no intention of reversing any of the privatisations.

Steel Industry

14. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact on the British steel industry if Irish Steel Ltd. is allowed by the European Council of Ministers to increase its output; and if he will make a statement. [2612]

Mr. Lang: Any impact on the British steel industry of an increase in output by Irish Steel Ltd. would depend on the size of that increase, the type of products and where they were sold. The Government are determined that any decision to allow state aid for Irish Steel should not result in job losses in the UK.

Mr. McAvoy: The question remains how the President of the Board of Trade can actually deliver on that answer, because, bearing in mind the damage caused to the British steel industry by his Government and the European Union, is it not ridiculous that the European Union is considering a £27 million subsidy to the Irish Steel company? Will he give a categorical assurance that that subsidy will be vetoed by the British Minister at the Council of Ministers, and that he will stand up for British jobs?

Mr. Lang: I recall how hard the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues pressed me and my predecessor as Secretary of State to increase subsidies to the steel industry in this country. However, the hon. Gentleman asked me how we shall deliver. Article 4(c) of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty prohibits all state aids to EC steel producers. We cannot contemplate a situation in which jobs in Britain should be lost in order to save jobs in Ireland.

Manufacturing Industry

15. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on manufacturing industry. [2613]

Mr. Oppenheim: While manufacturing output fell between 1974 and 1979, it has risen by 12 per cent. since 1979 and grew by more than 4 per cent. last year. The reputation of British manufacturing industry with regard to quality and delivery has improved beyond recognition over the past 16 years.

Mr. Winterton: May I, as chairman of the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance Ltd., tell my hon. Friend that, in the absence of any progress in further capital allowances for industry, and in the absence of pegging business rates, if our manufacturing industry—which is the only source of on-going, sustainable, non-inflationary economic growth—is to survive, reductions in interest rates are vital so that we can invest in new technology and equipment? That is essential if we are to remain competitive. If the Governor of the Bank of England is in any way obstructing the Chancellor of the Exchequer and preventing him from reducing interest rates, will the Department of Trade and Industry recommend that he receives his P45 and gets his marching orders?

Mr. Oppenheim: Although I agree with parts of what my hon. Friend just said, I would not dream of second-guessing my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. Investment has risen six times as fast under the Conservative Government as under Labour, and there is one big difference with the investment now. Investment in Britain goes into high-quality, sustainable businesses, in contrast to the heroic days of Labour's industrial strategy, when huge chunks of Britain's investment were directed into dossed-out, low-grade, poor-quality industries, at the whim of politicians and bureaucrats.

Mr. Purchase: Does the Minister recognise that the words of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) found great sympathy with Opposition Members, as many people earned their livings for most of their lives in the manufacturing industry? Was it not a revelation to hear the voice of the old Tories when the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) rose earlier and advocated firmly the hands-off, laissez-faire, devil-take-the-hindmost approach to that industry—the very attitude that the Engineering Employers Federation called unhelpful, and went on to ask the then President of the Board of Trade to be the champion for manufacturing? Is it not time that we had a manufacturing champion in the current President of the Board of Trade?

Mr. Oppenheim: I do not disagree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says, because it is indicative of the rightward lurch of Labour that we had a Labour Member urging free markets in steel. That would not have happened 10 years ago, but Opposition Members have seen the success of Government policies in manufacturing. Since 1980, Britain's manufacturing productivity growth has been the fastest of all the industrial nations. In the 1970s, under Labour, it was the slowest, and those were the proud days of Labour's industrial strategy, when British Steel was the world's largest loss maker and British Leyland was the butt of international jokes.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware of the massive investment in our manufacturing industry in Yorkshire in the past 10 years? In fact, in my constituency of Batley and Spen, some £200 million has gone into new technology, jobs and factories. Will he take the opportunity to congratulate all those who have had the entrepreneurial spirit to put that money into manufacturing and into the future of this country?

Mr. Oppenheim: I endorse all that my hon. Friend has said. I also applaud her role in encouraging industry in her part of the world. It is becoming increasingly clear that—in contrast to the position in the 1970s—British manufacturing industry is a success story. We in Britain are now known for producing quality goods, delivered reliably and on time. That contrasts starkly with what happened when the lot opposite were in power.

Mr. Fisher: Does the Minister appreciate that, in saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) advocates a free market in steel, he misunderstands the true position? What is proposed in return for a huge European subsidy is an increased capacity on the part of the new owners of the plant, ISPAT. It proposes almost a doubling of capacity.

We are being asked to give a subsidy not in return for closure or a reduction in capacity but in return for an increase in capacity that will damage British Steel and jobs in Britain, particularly in my constituency. Does the Minister understand that, and will he guarantee—as his Secretary of State seems to be doing—that he will use his veto to protect our industry and provide a level playing field?

Mr. Oppenheim: I agree with most of what the hon. Gentleman has said. It is marvellous to hear a Labour Member speak so cogently in favour of free and open markets, and against subsidies. It is notable that, in the old days, when subsidies were poured into British Steel, the company was a massive loss maker. Since then, its position in the world has improved enormously: it is now the world's fourth largest steel maker. It is highly successful, exporting 40 per cent. of its production. That is due to the less hands-on, more free market policies implemented by the Government.

Mr. David Nicholson: I was born in Macclesfield, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to join me in congratulating our hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on his work and advocacy. He is right to contrast the recent growth of exports and investment with what happened in the 1960s and 1970s, and—if I may say so—in the first half of the 1980s. But will my hon. Friend and his colleagues concentrate on enabling smaller manufacturing businesses—I have corresponded with his Department on this matter twice recently—to be fully aware of the sources of advice and assistance that the Department and other agencies provide? Many are not aware of those sources.

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend's points are entirely fair, but it is also fair to say that the growing business links network will play an important part in that.

Dr. Howells: The Minister will recognise the enormously valuable role in investment and export earnings that is played by our pharmaceutical and manufacturing industries, but is he aware that those industries are in danger of losing markets as a result of the hawking of cheap copies of their medicines around Europe by companies based in Spain, where there is a complete lack of patent protection law?

Given that the process of developing a new medicine typically takes between eight and 10 years and costs £300 million, does the Minister accept the urgency of exerting pressure on the European Commission to ensure fair competition and to protect the patent rights of our pharmaceutical and manufacturing industries?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the success of the United Kingdom's chemical and pharmaceutical industry. I believe that it is now the world's biggest exporter, which is a great tribute to the work done by management and all who work in the industry, at every level.

I accept much of what the hon. Gentleman says. As he knows, negotiations are currently proceeding in Europe. The Government will take account of the interests of what is a fine example of British manufacturing, as well as the interests of consumers.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the economic fundamentals that we have pursued—low taxation, low inflation and low interest rates—have enabled British manufacturing industry to increase its investment by 11 per cent. over the past year? That is a huge figure. Indeed, the figure for plant and equipment was 14.5 per cent. Does my hon. Friend accept that, if Labour were ever to have a chance of gaining power, those fundamental rates would have to be increased to finance its spending plans? Would that not cause tremendous damage to the prospects of manufacturing investment?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is right. In the third quarter, manufacturing investment was up by over 12 per cent., and investment in plant and machinery was up by 18 per cent. British industry has undergone a productivity revolution over the past 16 years. We have closed three quarters of the productivity and competitiveness gap with Germany. That, not the minimum wage, is the best way in which to ensure good-quality, well-paid, secure jobs for our people in the future.

North Western Electricity Board

17. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had on behalf of consumers about the North West Water bid for Norweb from the National Consumer Council. [2615]

Mr. John M. Taylor: One such representation was received. The chairman of the National Consumer Council wrote to my right hon. Friend about the proposed merger on 13 September. She wrote in similar terms to the Director General of Fair Trading, who took account of the NCC's views in his advice to my right hon. Friend on the matter.

Mr. Rooney: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will of course be aware that the Office of Water Services is holding an inquiry into claims that North West Water, along with others, has charged for improvements that have not been carried out. In view of those extremely dubious management practices, what guarantees can he give to consumers in future?

Mr. Taylor: I am not sure about the dubious practices to which the hon. Gentleman refers. What I am clear about is that the privatised utilities have been a gigantic success. They have been more successful than projected and have done well. That is a matter for congratulation. They have proved, if it ever needed proving, that the best interests of shareholders and of consumers are not mutually exclusive.

Unfair Competition

18. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases of unfair competition have been reported by United Kingdom companies to the European Commission in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [2616]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I understand from the European Commission that, between 1 January 1992 and 1 January 1995, it received 260 complaints from the United Kingdom of unfair competition under articles 85 and 86 of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware of a complaint of unfair trading against a company employing disabled workers, and will he discuss with his colleagues how to avoid the risk of any further such charges arising?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, I will. In connection with the case of which my hon. Friend is aware, I should like him to know that the Government have demonstrated to the European Commission that the assistance that they give to disabled people or to Remploy in particular is not state aid in the context of competition policy.

Mr. Stevenson: Does the Minister accept that Shelton steelworks in Stoke-on-Trent is the most profitable and efficient rolling-mill in Britain and in the European Community, and that it is directly threatened by unfair competition and subsidies proposed by the European Commission in support of Irish steel? Does he understand that British Steel has identified directly the threat to Shelton steelworks as a result of that deal? Will he now give a firm commitment that the British Government in no circumstances will allow that deal to go ahead?

Mr. Taylor: I have nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said earlier this afternoon during questions.

Manufacturing Industry

20. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the President of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry. [2619]

Mr. Lang: Other Department of Trade and Industry Ministers and I regularly meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a range of issues.

Sir David Knox: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a major objective of Government policy is to prevent wild fluctuations in the exchange rate, as both upward and downward movements are especially detrimental to the manufacturing sector? Will he discuss that matter with the president of the CBI in the near future?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Obviously, we are conscious of the effect that such fluctuations can have on manufacturing industry. However, my hon. Friend will have heard the points made earlier in support of the great successes of manufacturing industry in recent years. Employment in that industry has risen by 28,000 in the past year alone. In the past two years, investment in manufacturing has risen by no less than 20 per cent. That is a sign of a flourishing and successful manufacturing industry, something that was never experienced during the Labour party's period in government.

Mr. Sheerman: The President of the Board of Trade and his team today have been extraordinarily pleased with themselves and terribly complacent. Why is it that, after 16 years of Conservative government, only 2 per cent. of British manufacturing enterprises are rated as world-class?

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are not complacent but proud of what has been achieved by our manufacturing industry in Britain in recent years. The Labour party is always ready to talk about the disappearance of this country's manufacturing sector. The fact is that manufacturing output is higher now than ever before. That is a measure of the progress that has been achieved in recent years.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend discuss with the president of the CBI the impact of the minimum wage and of the social chapter on on-costs in this country's industry, and how it would affect our at present successful export business, which exports mainly to the world's growing economies?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The only way our manufacturing industry will continue to survive and prosper is if we remain globally competitive. That is a measure of our achievements in recent years. The imposition of a national minimum wage would make our industry much less competitive. The CBI estimates that it would impose a burden of £4.5 billion on our industry. If only half the differentials were restored above a £4 minimum wage, it would cost about 900,000 jobs in this country. I am quite sure that a national minimum wage would be greatly to the detriment of employment and prosperity in the United Kingdom.

Trade (India)

22. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trade with India. [2621]

Mr. Nelson: Trade with India has increased by some 50 per cent. in both directions in the past three years. United Kingdom exports to India amounted to £1.5 billion in the 12 months to the end of September this year. UK imports from India in the same period amounted to £1.3 billion. The Indo-British partnership—set up following the Prime Minister's visit to India in 1993—has contributed greatly to the strengthening of trade relations between the UK and India.

Mr. Merchant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the major expansion in the telecommunications network in India offers exciting prospects for British exporters? Will he encourage his hon. Friends to do all that they can to back British industry in winning exports there, and will he also encourage his Ministers to emulate the excellent example of the Minister for Science and Technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), who is to visit India tonight to promote British interests?

Mr. Nelson: The answer is yes, yes, yes. As my hon. Friend knows, my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology is being dispatched to India this very night to do just that. Department of Trade and Industry Ministers are into India. It was my first port of call on my appointment. As I have said, my hon. Friend is going there tonight. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will visit India early next year, and they will both do exactly what my hon. Friend asks.

Fuel Bills (Elderly People)

3.30 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the urgent need for a different arrangement to assist the elderly in need with their fuel bills during the present very cold weather."

The matter is certainly specific, because of the present very cold weather all over the country. I submit that it is important, because of the immense difficulties faced by pensioners in particular in keeping their homes adequately heated because of the lack of money.

Under the social fund cold weather payments scheme, it has to be freezing for seven consecutive days and nights—seven days and nights—before the trigger mechanism applies. That is quite wrong, because this week it could be freezing for three or four days, as it is now outside, but if the weather changes, not an extra penny will be paid. That is why the scheme is a mockery.

There are no fewer than 59 weather stations all deciding whether, in their respective areas, the trigger mechanism should apply. I understand that in not one of the areas of those 59 stations has the trigger point been reached, despite the present cold, harsh weather.

It is disgraceful that, in a developed country such as ours, the elderly poor have to put their health at considerable risk—the risk of hypothermia and other dangers—simply because they are unable to pay their fuel bills. They are frightened; despite all the warnings by Ministers and the medical profession, they do not turn on the heat properly, because they lack the money to pay the quarterly bills.

Fifteen to 20 per cent. more elderly people die in Britain during the winter months than at any other time. The figure is higher than that in any other European country. In most such countries, which have harsher winters than ours, the figure is about 5 per cent.

Surely that demonstrates the immense hardship, misery and deprivation that so many elderly poor people have to suffer during the sort of cold weather that we are now experiencing. How they would like to be in the warmth of the House of Commons. I believe that the matter calls urgently for a debate.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member has said, and I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I therefore cannot summit the application to the House.

Points of Order

3.34 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you please give me some guidance on a very important matter? Are you aware that, under the Nolan rules, no Member of Parliament may raise in a debate anything that they have learnt on a fact-finding mission to an overseas country that has been hosted by that country's Government? As things stand, it would be deemed to be advocacy, even if the Member of Parliament had no contract with the country concerned. Therefore, he would be under an obligation—frankly—to stand down.

That affects all Members. We are all effectively gagged by rules that I hope will be discussed with Sir Gordon Downey. Perhaps there will then be a little sanity on this very important issue.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Lady has raised a most important issue. I am very understanding of her predicament and—perhaps—that of other hon. Members on both sides of the House. At the same time, however, I must remind her that the House has given the responsibility of making detailed judgments on what is and what is not paid advocacy not to me but to the Commissioner, and, importantly of course, to the Committee on Privileges and Standards. The hon. Lady must pursue the matter there—I know that she has already had some talks with the Commissioner.

In that connection, that I hope that the usual channels will find it possible to put Committee nominations before the House very soon indeed. We have been waiting long enough for the Committee. There is much urgent work for it to do, and Members who find themselves in a similar predicament to that of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) are awaiting its recommendations. We look forward to it being established very soon.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker—or it may be a point of taste. It is on whether the recently departed and dead are entitled to be quoted accurately from the Dispatch Box.

During Question Time, it may be within your recollection that the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), very gracefully and very properly, from the Government Back Benches raised the question of a tribute to the late John Collier, the former chairman of Nuclear Electric. From the Dispatch Box, the Minister used the occasion—I think a little tastelessly—to point out how enthusiastic the late John Collier had been about privatisation. Those of us who were privileged to work with John Collier know that his attitude was far more complex than that. I do not think that senior Ministers should use the Dispatch Box to make party points in relation to the dead.

Madam Speaker: That is obviously a matter of opinion, and not one for me. It is about the way in which all of us interpret such issues.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Earlier today, I raised with you in writing what occurred last night. Opposition Whips were standing shoulder to shoulder at the No Lobby, stopping Members of Parliament from exercising their right to vote in that Lobby. This bully-boy tactic—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I wish to hear the hon. Member.

Sir Irvine Patnick: This bully-boy tactic is not in keeping with the House of Commons, or with page 399 of "Erskine May". Speaking as a former Whip, although I have been intimidated by some of the former Opposition Whips—not the present crop—I have never known Whips, including a lady Whip, to stand shoulder to shoulder to stop Members of Parliament from exercising their proper duty of voting. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am quite capable of dealing with the matter—in fact, I dealt with it at the time last night. Let me say quite seriously that no hon. Member complained to me of being unable to vote. All those who wished to vote were able to do so. That is the important point.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): How do you know?

Madam Speaker: I will tell hon. Members how I know—because no complaint was made to me. As Members of Parliament complain to me if the air in this Chamber is not fresh enough for them, they would have certainly have complained to me if they could not vote—*[Interruption.]* Order. I have not finished yet. I stood here last night, and I saw the Opposition Whip standing by the Door. He was by no means intimidating. As a former Whip, I can tell the House that, when I wanted to keep Members out of a Division Lobby, it was a single Nelson; when I wanted them to go into a Division Lobby, it was a double Nelson—[*Laughter.*]

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): It is not funny.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to seek your guidance, as I take a serious view of what happened last night, as I am sure you do. Page 148 of "Erskine May" refers to the

> "assaulting, insulting or menacing of any Member of this House",

which is certainly what I saw last night. In fact, "Erskine May" describes it as

> "a most outrageous and dangerous violation of the rights of Parliament and an high crime".

"Erskine May" does not make it clear how that matter should be dealt with, but the fact is that last night was not the first time that I have seen such intimidation. What was done was done out of your eyesight, Madam Speaker, so that you could not see the intimidation that was taking place. I think that something should be done about that.

Madam Speaker: Last night, I drew the attention of hon. Members to the Door on my left, which was clearly open.

Mr. Duncan: That is not the Lobby.

Madam Speaker: The entrance to the Lobby is also here, and I drew—

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to speak when I am on my feet? I drew the attention of hon. Members to the fact that this Door was open last night, that they could proceed through it, and that, if there were any problems, I would take responsibility.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has raised a serious point. However, there was no violation. If there was, any hon. Member who sought to vote last night should have reported that situation to the Speaker, and it was my responsibility to ensure that that Member was able to go through the Door, which was open.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Is it the same matter?

Mr. Skinner: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I have dealt with the matter.

Mr. Skinner: You have listened to two Tories.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the matter.

Mr. Skinner: I was one of the 10.

Madam Speaker: Who voted?

Mr. Skinner: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I saw that; I looked at the Division list this morning.

Mr. Skinner: I spent 10 minutes with a Whip before I went into the Lobby, and I almost persuaded him to go into the Lobby with me.

Madam Speaker: That is a different matter.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that the House is grateful for the advice that you gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) about the Commissioner and the Privileges and Standards Committee, which needs to meet to clarify rules.

I understand that, within the next day or so, the Government will make a statement about the franchises on railways. As you will know, every hon. Member is entitled to claim free rail travel, for both his business purposes and his personal purposes, to and from his constituency and this place. Therefore, we clearly have a personal financial interest in the good running of the railways.

When the statement is made, will it be in order for hon. Members to press upon the Minister how important it is to have late-night trains, especially as such a facility affects hon. Members even more than their constituents?

Madam Speaker: I am afraid that late-night trains are not a matter for me. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point very seriously. It is a matter for the Commissioner and the Committee. As I have said, it is time that the Committee was established, because there is a great deal of work waiting for it to do.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This may be a mundane point, but it affects every Member of the House. It concerns the continuing use of a corner of Palace Yard by those who are tunnelling underneath the river and God knows what else. The result is that taxis cannot see when the taxi light is on, and therefore are not coming into the Yard.

All those who frequently wish to leave the Palace of Westminster—[*Laughter.*] I make this point quite seriously, because right hon. and hon. Members, in their daily business, have to come and go. Could not some arrangement be made so that taxi drivers would realise that taxis were needed?

Madam Speaker: I will refer the matter to the Serjeant at Arms. The hon. Gentleman's point of order recalls my earlier comments to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick), that Members who could not reach the Division Lobbies last night would have certainly complained to me about it. Hon Members complain to me about the quality of air in this place, and about whether lights are flashing on and off. Members who were not able to vote last night would certainly have approached the Chair immediately to complain.

Orders of the Day

Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.46 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is with some trepidation that I suggest that this is genuinely a non-controversial measure, but I believe that to be the case. The Bill is a small but useful piece of legislation, which relates to the functions of the Audit Commission for England and Wales. Two of the provisions also relate to the functions of the Accounts Commission, the equivalent body in Scotland.

The three measures are as follows—to give the Audit Commission powers to work alongside the Department of Health's social services inspectorate on studies of the performance of local authority social service departments, a measure which will apply in England and Wales; to change the financial years of the two bodies, so that, instead of having a financial year which runs from 1 April every year, they will have a financial year which runs from 1 November; and to enable local authorities to publish annual information about their performance in a free newspaper. At the moment, they are only allowed to publish the information in a paid-for newspaper circulating in their areas. The last measure would apply to England, Scotland and Wales.

The Audit Commission's main function is to arrange external audits for local authorities and health service bodies in England and Wales, a task it carries out very well. The commission has established a reputation for professionalism and independence. When the Audit Commission was set up in 1982, it was also given a specific remit to carry out studies to promote value for money in the provision of local authority services.

Over the years, the Audit Commission has produced a number of excellent reports, such as "Tackling crime effectively" and "In the line of fire", a report dealing with the fire service. The commission has also covered social services issues, most recently in "Seen But Not Heard", about planning services for children in need and improving co-ordination between agencies on health and social services.

Much of the Audit Commission's work is naturally of interest to the Department of Health. But as the commission at present has no power to charge the Secretary of State for its work in this field, it cannot help with studies commissioned by the Secretary of State. The Bill will enable the Audit Commission to do that, and to be paid by the Secretary of State for the work it does. We believe that it would be useful to have an independent assessment of the performance of the whole of a social services department. The assessment should cover the department's efficiency, effectiveness and economy, together with its attention to service delivery and to systems for ensuring quality.

We think that the best way to achieve that is to bring together the complementary skills of the Audit Commission and the Department of Health's social services inspectorate. The Government are planning to

[Mr. David Curry]

introduce a rolling programme of studies covering England and Wales, and every local authority will be covered during a five-year period.

The second provision in the Bill—to change the financial years of the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission—is a technical one. Both bodies organise their work programmes to run from November to October, because that is what fits in best with the annual cycling of auditing local authority and health service accounts. If the bodies line up their financial year with their operational year, it will be easier for them to budget and to plan their work. This is basically an efficiency measure. The Audit Commission would make the change during 1997 and the Accounts Commission would follow one year later, once it had dealt with the changes resulting from local government reorganisation in Scotland.

The third provision in the Bill relates to the publication of local authority performance indicators. Performance indicators tell people the basic facts about their local authority's performance. Equally importantly, they encourage local authorities to think about the standards they are setting themselves, and their performance in meeting those standards.

The Government wish to encourage people's interests in how their local authority performs. Public information must be readily available and easy to understand if it is to be useful. That is why we have accepted suggestions from the Audit Commission and from local government that the options for publication of performance indicators should be broadened.

The free newspaper industry has grown substantially in recent years, and for many people it is an important source of information. Free newspapers have the advantage that they are delivered directly into people's homes, and many authorities believe that they can reach a wider audience by publishing in them. The Bill will allow them to do so.

None of those measures can be regarded as controversial. They build on our existing policies in those areas, which centre on sound management, improving standards and promoting openness and accountability. In all cases, they will be welcomed by those most closely concerned, and I commend them to the House.

3.49 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Labour party broadly welcomes the intentions behind the Bill. We are deeply committed to having tough regulatory inspectorates to secure national standards from local authorities. That is why we would like the audit service's remit to be extended to provide for the establishment of a quality inspectorate in parallel with its investigations and reports on value for money.

However, we also want a rigorous audit service that protects public funds and combats fraud and wrongdoing, and it is our belief that, in many places, the audit service singularly fails to carry out that task. The basic problem with the Bill is that it does not go anything like far enough. First, I shall deal with what is in the Bill; as the Minister demonstrated when he introduced it, that will not take long. Then I shall tell the House what we believe should be in it.

The Bill's first provision is to make it possible for joint studies of council social services departments to be carried out by the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate of the Department of Health. That is a welcome proposition, but we have reservations about it, which we shall pursue in Committee.

The Audit Commission is, at least relatively speaking, a body independent of the Government, whereas the social services inspectorate is not. It is a straightforward part of the Department of Health, controlled by Ministers, and there may therefore be conflict between an independent body and one that, ultimately, simply has to do what it is told by its ministerial bosses.

Furthermore, the social services inspectorate does not have an especially good record in doing its current job. Several times in the past, it has investigated a council or a particular service provided by a council's social services department and has pronounced it okay; something has then gone wrong, and the inspectorate has been among the first to jump in and denounce the department that it had just given a clean bill of health.

There are many examples, but I shall give just one. A few years ago, the social services inspectorate reviewed Kent county council's social services department, and in particular its registration and inspection unit, which was responsible for registering and inspecting private residential homes for the elderly. The inspectorate gave that unit a very clean bill of health, commending it on the way it was run and on the job it was doing.

No sooner had that happened than there was a great scandal in Thanet, involving a residential home in which there was virtually organised granny-bashing. The social services inspectorate immediately leaped to join in the criticism of Kent county council's registration and inspection of private residential homes.

Inspectorates should never have to take responsibility for what other people do wrong, but they must take responsibility for what they themselves do wrong. If the inspectorate gives something a clean bill of health, it has some explaining and apologising to do if anything then goes wrong. We must ensure that inspectorates behave responsibly, and do not try to shuffle off responsibility on to everybody else when things go wrong.

I know that what is proposed in the Bill is not a set of investigations of that type, but joint studies. Nevertheless, we need to pay attention both to the status and to the generally irresponsible approach of the social services inspectorate in the past.

The Bill also provides, as the Minister said, for councils to be allowed to publish performance indicator information in free sheets. That is obviously a sensible measure, for which people have been pressing for some time.

There is one other item. The Bill provides for changes in the accounting year of the Audit Commission. I should like a guarantee now from the Minister that the change in the audit year will not be used by either the Department or the Audit Commission to make it impossible to compare, year on year, the growing staff numbers, costs and top salaries in the Audit Commission.

We all know that, when businesses or other parts of the Government start changing the way in which they present financial information, it is usually to mislead and obfuscate. If the Audit Commission is to maintain its credibility, it is crucial that its own figures are beyond reproach in presentation and content. I hope that the Minister will either get up now and give that guarantee, or that it will be given at the end of the debate.

Mr. Curry: Without for a minute accepting the implications of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, the intention of the change is simply technical. I will ask the Audit Commission to undertake that whatever figures are produced are absolutely comparable, so that there is no question about their transparency.

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Minister for that undertaking.

That is all the Bill does, so it is now a question of what it should it do. All over the country, people feel that the audit service is not doing its work properly. It is not coping with the major scandals which have arisen in councils of all political persuasions. I am not making a party political point. It has not coped well with scandals in Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat councils.

It is no good going on as we are. Not long ago, I listened to a former Environment Minister moaning on the radio about wrongdoing in Lambeth, which he was perfectly entitled to do. The interviewer then asked him what he was going to do about it, to which the former Minister replied that there was nothing he could do. There has been nothing they could do about Lambeth for a decade, or about Westminster for the past eight or nine years. There has been nothing they could do about wrongdoing in Wandsworth over the past few years, or in Brent over the past five years. "Nothing we can do about it" is no longer the answer.

If it is a truthful answer, it shows that the present law on auditing is not up to the job, because all the scandals have occurred under the present laws—laws that were introduced by the Government. Some of the major scandals have not even been dealt a glancing blow by the audit service.

Take the example of Lambeth council, which, until the last council election, was controlled by the Labour party. Its record was a disgrace, and what it did was damaging to the people of Lambeth. It now has a new chief executive, and, following the Appleby inquiry, and with a great deal of good will, generally speaking, from most councillors of all political persuasions, there is a commitment to sort things out. Some of that was done at the instigation of my hon. Friends the Members for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and for Streatham (Mr. Hill). Things are being turned round, but the council needs a lot of help.

Let us consider the role of the audit service in relation to a decade or more of things going wrong in Lambeth. The audit service itself has a lot to answer for. I make no excuses for what the council did. There were financial scandals, incompetence and fraud. Most of it was committed by officials of the council or by private contractors who had relationships with the council, but it continued for over a decade, and the audit service did little about it.

Scarcely anybody had their collar felt as a result of the audit service's activities. It produced a number of public interest reports but, once they had been produced, under the current law the council was not required to do anything in response to them.

Under the present law, as I understand it, the Audit Commission could not step in and do anything to correct what was wrong. There were limited powers for the Secretary of State to step in if he decided that something was wrong, but it is not clear in the current law whether the auditor or the Audit Commission can ask the Secretary of State to step in. It would be useful to know whether any approaches were ever made to Ministers. We may never know whether approaches were made, because the Government prefer to make Tory propaganda out of the problems in Lambeth, rather than promote public propriety in that borough.

The history of what has happened in Lambeth, and the present system's incapacity to deal with what is going wrong, is one reason why we believe that substantial change is necessary. Our document on the future of local authorities, "Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities"—which is usually mocked by the Secretary of State, if he can get to the Dispatch Box and if he does not rant on about something else—is committed to toughening up the audit service, so that it can deal with precisely the sort of situation that prevailed in Lambeth. Our document is also committed to tougher practices, and to giving the audit service more power.

All over the country, many hard-working councillors and council officials who are trying to promote public-private partnerships—which are, in theory, endorsed by the Government—find themselves obstructed at every turn by the district audit service, which ploughs through, asking them whether they have a statutory right to do this or that. While all that is happening, to the detriment of practically everybody, and at immense cost to local people and local businesses, the audit service performs poorly in picking up outright wrongdoing and fiddling, which is its primary purpose.

In future, councils should be required to publish plans for their services each year that set out cost and quality targets for each service. At the end of the year, councils would have to explain to the local people and to the audit service if they have not met the targets.

We suggest a new role for the audit service, if there are deplorable standards of service or things are persistently going deplorably wrong. Ministers cannot continue to say that there is nothing they can do. We believe that the law should be changed, so that, if the Audit Commission concludes that a service is continually and unjustifiably failing, it can require a council to prepare a plan to put things right, to set a timetable for them to be put right, to send in an advisory team to help the council to put matters right, and to check on the progress.

If the council is still failing, and if the Audit Commission recommends it to the Secretary of State, we believe that the Secretary of State should be empowered to appoint a management team to take over the service or services that are failing, and put them right. Far too frequently, the Government's answer to abominable management services is to put the services out to tender, thus endangering the jobs of the blue collar service workers, who are in no way responsible for the mismanagement that initially led to the problem. It is the management that needs to be sorted out.

It is not only in Lambeth that there have been persistent failures to do things properly and lawfully. Similar problems have been occurring in Brent for a long time. I shall leave it to my hon. Friends who represent that borough to spell out some of the things that have been happening there. Those improper practices have been unhampered by the audit service, because of the weakness of the present provisions in the law.

[Mr. Dobson]

It is worth while to draw to the attention of the House the fact that, under a Government who claim to be committed to open government, there has been a scandal in Brent involving the Ad Shop, as it is called, on which a report has finally been prepared.

I have in my hand a sheet of paper setting out the undertakings that an elected councillor in Brent must sign before they will be given a copy of that report on the scandal of what has happened to public money in Brent. It is scandalous. They must undertake that they will not disclose its contents to anyone else. They must undertake to return the document to the chief executive for disposal. They must undertake not to discuss it, reveal it or pass it on to anyone else. That is about a scandalous and corrupt misuse of public money, yet councillors who are elected to represent local people and bring people to book are expected by a Tory council to sign that disgraceful undertaking.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I have seen a copy.

Mr. Dobson: I believe that one or two copies have got about in spite of the undertakings, because, of course, fatuous undertakings are not binding on anyone; people should remember that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We could achieve socialism with the aid of a few leaks and one or two photocopies.

Mr. Dobson: What has happened in Wandsworth? The auditor reported that the council had acted unlawfully in relation to some of its housing duties. Nothing has happened.

That brings me to Westminster, which is a spectacular example all of its own. It has now descended into the depths of scandal, for three reasons.

The first scandal, which I shall return to, is the scandal of the political fraud and corruption that has been inherent in that council for a long time, and has resulted in the district auditor—we are discussing the audit service—currently investigating the misapplication of £106 million by Westminster City council.

Secondly, there is a scandal that does not relate directly to the district audit service, but should relate to the Comptroller and Auditor General. That is the grotesque scandal by which Westminster City council receives enormous sums, far above those that are received by any other comparable area, all on the basis of that preposterous idea to which the Government subscribe—that Westminster is the fourth most deprived place in Britain. No one in their right mind believes that Westminster is the fourth most deprived place in Britain.

Mr. Skinner: The Audit Commission has never had sufficient money and resources to do the job properly, and has always attacked Labour authorities, in the main, that might spend a bit over the odds, rather than Tory authorities that spend underneath the odds. In addition, I have always believed that, since rate capping was introduced by the Tory Government, in many ways that has undermined the auditor's authority, because the Tory Government have decided on a political basis which councils should be hammered, with the result that the Audit Commission is not able to make the proper judgment, because it is clouded by the political actions of the Government.

Mr. Dobson: There is a great deal of truth in what my hon. Friend says.

To give some idea of the preposterous nature of the ranking by which Westminster is placed fourth in the scale of deprivation, Rotherham—which has suffered severely from steelwork closures and engineering work closures in the past few years—is 284th in that scale of deprivation, and it is obviously a preposterous and unjustifiable position. Not only members of the Labour party say that.

Ministers claim that the list was produced independently, but it was nothing of the sort. It is produced in the Department of the Environment. Ministers have claimed that it has been accepted by the local authority associations. It has been accepted by them because they have no alternative, but they do not believe that it is right. Above all, the chief executive of Westminster—except that he has some other fancy title—has acknowledged that Westminster gets £20 million more than it is entitled to.

Westminster gets special allowances for the number of visitors who come in each day, but it also gets in a year about £20 million from those self-same visitors by way of parking charges. For some reason, the parking charges are not offset against the extra grants the council receives because of the number of visitors. That is basically a racket. That leads to a third consequence, directly related to what the district auditor investigates.

According to the figures on the cost of providing services in Westminster, it is the most profligate, expensive and inefficient council in Britain. For example, refuse collection costs £53 per head in Westminster. I shall compare not Westminster with St. Helens or Scunthorpe, but with Camden, which is next door and is exposed to roughly the same inflation and higher costs that are incurred in central London. Camden's refuse collection costs £24 per head of population. Westminster spends £36 per head on street cleaning—the highest in the country. Camden spends £14.42.

Another matter of great importance is the administration of benefits. Westminster manages to pay housing benefit within 14 days to 66 per cent. of the people who apply, and that costs £226 per transaction in administrative costs. Camden, next door, manages to pay out within 14 days to 95 per cent. of the people who apply, at a cost of just £104 per transaction. Camden is 50 per cent. more efficient—at less than half the cost—than Westminster. That shows how profligate and inefficient Westminster is. All those matters concern the audit service, nationally or locally.

But I come back to the main issue of the scandals in Westminster. Far from taking action on the scandals in Westminster—the misapplication of £106 million—the Government have done nothing. Far from condemning the wrongdoing in Westminster, the Government have done nothing.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): My hon. Friend might recall that I was the original objector in the late 1980s to the sale of the cemeteries by Westminster, and I went to the district auditor. One matter that concerns me arising out of the affair is the way that Mr. Magill was treated by elected councillors. Mr. Magill acted with great courage in the face of great adversity, and he was regularly insulted by councillors who obstructed him in every way. He must have been more than distressed on many occasions, but he clearly hid his distress and, one way or another, managed to produce a number of reports.

It would be good if we could enshrine in legislation some form of protection for public servants who diligently do a job even when they are faced with the kind of attacks that Mr. Magill suffered, particularly from Lady Porter.

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In particular, I commend him for the distinguished part that he has played in attempting to bring Westminster council to book. As an objector, he may know that, far from toughening up the law and strengthening the hand of objectors to prevent a recurrence of what has happened in Westminster, the Government are excluding Westminster from their investigation of the role of objectors and the functions of the audit service. The Government are studying every council and every audit service in the country except Westminster.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Bar one.

Mr. Dobson: As my hon. Friend says, they are investigating all bar one. Their official report says:

> "The study will exclude Westminster City Council which has already been the subject of a separate inquiry"—

they can say that again—

> "following objections to the council's 'designated sales policy' in relation to housing."

That is an inadequate description. There have been objectors and objections to about another 25 items of expenditure.

It continues:

> "The Department wishes to avoid the high profile and significant costs of this case from distorting the results of the current project, which will focus on the generality of cases.".

I bet it will focus on the generality of cases. The last thing they want it to do is focus on what has gone wrong in Westminster when they have done nothing about it for so many years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and other people who had to pay the poll tax or the council tax in Westminster raised formal objections. As I have explained, the district auditor is now investigating the wrongful misuse of more than £100 million of ordinary people's money.

It makes every other financial scandal that has ever occurred in English local government pale into total insignificance. Such figures have never been bandied about. What happened, the length of time it continued and the obstruction by officers and elected councillors in Westminster demonstrated just how much the audit service needs to be strengthened.

There have been five major scandals. In any other council, the other scandals would be major ones, but in Westminster there have been five major scandals. There was the "homes for votes" scandal in 1987-89. Originally, the district auditor said that it had cost £21 million. Lady Porter and her friends objected to the quantum of £21 million, and, having looked again at the matter, the district auditor agreed that £21 million was the wrong quantum, and that in fact £29 million had been lost.

The next item was the second part of the "homes for votes" scandal, between 1989 and 1994, involving losses of another £21 million. Then there was the council's failure to collect service charges and to bill many new leaseholders. It cost £13 million. Councillors knowingly did not collect service charges, because it might upset the voters. They knew that it was wrong. They were advised by their lawyers and finance officers that it was wrong, but they still persisted, and they are now being investigated.

There was also an indemnity and abatement scheme that was intended to help leaseholders, at a cost of £18 million. The district auditor is investigating whether the council even had the power to start an indemnity and abatement scheme.

The final scandal, which has cost a great deal of money and will cost more, was the absolutely scandalous decision to put homeless families into life-threatening, asbestos-ridden tower blocks. That was totally unjustified, and, once again, against the advice of the council officers.

In case anybody should think that is the sum total of the scandals in Westminster, I shall whizz through the others, as they would represent enormous sums of money for any other council. There was the scandal of the property disposal of Cheylesmore house—costing £3.5 million—and the Ambrosden hostel—costing £2.5 million; a scandal involving Monck street and Bishop's Bridge road cost another £1 million; the famous cemeteries reacquisition cost £3.5 million; MRS redundancy costs when Westminster privatised some of its services were £1.5 million; and what were described as "Quality of Life initiatives" and were probably unlawful cost £5 million. Some £1.5 million of local taxpayers' money was spent on propaganda in the run-up to the 1990 election, and another £400,000 was spent on consultants. Other capital grants, which may very well be unlawful, cost another £3.5 million.

On any other council, those would be absolutely momentous items of wrongdoing and misexpenditure, but they pale into insignificance compared with the really major scandals in Westminster.

One of the problems is that the inquiry has been extremely protracted. That is because the inquiry has been extremely obstructed, both by those who were charged with losses and by present councillors and council officers, who are trying to protect those who have been charged.

At one stage, the district auditor was told that some of the most important papers could not be found. They had been issued to a dozen or more people, but not one example of them could be found. The district auditor resorted to a dawn raid on some of the offices. Lo and behold, he found the papers. It was a bad mistake on the part of those who were trying to put him off, because he picked up as well many other papers that he did not know existed. I understand that the other papers were extremely illuminating, and put the council in an even worse light.

I am told that obstruction of the sort that I have described is not an offence under current law. If it is not, it clearly should be. I cannot believe that anyone disagrees with me on that.

It is clear also that both council members and officers have repeatedly lied to the district auditor during his investigations. It seems that, if individuals have said things that are plainly contrary to the written evidence

[Mr. Dobson]

of what happened at meetings or to written advice—for example, people saying that they were given legal advice that they could do something and that advice, when examined, revealing that they were told that they could not do what they wanted—that should also be an offence. There may be genuine difficulty in recollecting exactly what happened, but plain lying to the auditor should be an offence.

Enormous costs have accrued. The district auditor has had to run up an enormous bill in carrying out his work. The council is running up enormous bills in trying to obstruct him.

The obstruction has not stopped: as recently as 21 November, the district auditor complained to the council that it was not supplying him with material on the notorious cemeteries sale. He is investigating the council's decision to bring a legal action against its previous legal advisers on the sale. It claims that it has been wrongly advised by its legal advisers.

The decision to spend money trying to initiate a legal action against the council's previous legal advisers was against the legal advice of those advising the council when it took that decision—in other words, another lot of legal advisers. That is clearly a waste of public funds.

In other areas, Labour councillors had been told that, if they, against the advice of council officers, turn down applications for opencast coal mining against legal advice—this turns on certain principles that have been laid down in earlier cases—they will lay themselves open to surcharge. What is sauce for the Labour goose must be sauce for the Tory gander at Westminster.

The unique feature of the Westminster case has been the spending of public funds to mount political campaigns of vilification against the auditor, simply because he has been doing the job that Parliament gave him. The case is unique in another respect, because Members have been involved in it up to their ears from the start. That includes Cabinet Ministers, former Cabinet Ministers, current occupants of the Government Front Bench, Members who were on that Front Bench, and Back-Bench Members. They have all been involved as Members or councillors throughout the piece. That is one explanation why they are reluctant to criticise what has been going on.

For instance, councillors tried to get the official press officer of Westminster to plant hostile stories against the district auditor in the news media. They made a fatuous charge, and wanted to blame the district auditor for not stopping them not collecting the service charges. The problem with that charge is that the district auditor is on record repeatedly telling them that they were breaking the law in not collecting the service charges, so it is another lie.

It is quite clear, and it is becoming clearer, that that council knowingly moved homeless families into blocks that were known to be dangerously riddled with asbestos. The council has still produced no apologies. An independent inquiry was carried out, and a report is due to be published, but people familiar with Westminster council are becoming more and more concerned that the report may not be published.

The Minister here today has responsibility for housing—we know that he is excluded from all other things—in Westminster as well as the rest of the country, and this is a housing issue. I challenge him today to tell the House that he will insist on receiving a copy of the report, either as a Tory Member of Parliament or as Minister—I do not mind which—and to undertake to place it in the Library of the House, so that this wrongdoing and the official inquiry into it is not hidden away. I will give way if he is willing to get up and give that undertaking, but I can see that he is not giving any sign that he will do so—the usual thing.

It is a matter for the audit service and the Audit Commission, but I also think that it is a matter for the Health and Safety Commission, the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions. I have therefore written today to ask the DPP, the police and the Health and Safety Executive to investigate the scandal of people who knowingly moved children, women and men into places that were known to be dangerously contaminated with asbestos.

It is my view that, before the asbestos scandal arose, Westminster had dragged London politics into the gutter. It has now got it down into the septic tank. There is no excuse for anyone knowingly endangering the lives of other people's families. That is what it did.

Anyone with a degree of fairness would accept from what I have spelt out very briefly about all the scandals that have happened in Westminster in recent times that there is clearly something wrong with an audit service that cannot get a grip on this, deal with it quickly and get these people sorted out. That is why we are determined, as soon as there is a Labour Government, to strengthen the powers and practices of the audit service to sort out the fraudulent, to get rid of the wrongdoers, and to ensure that scandals are not allowed to drag on for decades, as they have been.

That is why we consider the Bill inadequate, and that is why my hon. Friends will be tabling amendments in Committee to strengthen it substantially. At the moment, it is a useful but trivial measure. We cannot make do with trivial measures. There are important matters that need to be sorted out.

4.29 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) started his speech by saying that he did not want to be party political, and recognised that Labour as well as Conservative councils were guilty of fraud, corruption and inefficiency, but he then spent almost his entire speech criticising pretty well the only Conservative council that has had difficulties in recent times.

Mr. Boateng: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware of the appalling abuses of power that have occurred in the London borough of Brent, bringing local government generally into disrepute? To pretend that Westminster is the only borough affected by scandal is to live in cloud cuckoo land. Brent is certainly among those boroughs, and so is Wandsworth.

Mr. Smith: There is, however, a much longer list of Labour councils that have been guilty of fraud, dishonesty, corruption and gross inefficiency. If we were a little more objective, we might recognise the existence of faults and difficulties in councils of all complexions. We should be concerned with trying to establish a system that will get to grips with those problems.

I agree with the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras about that, but I do not agree with his contention that the Audit Commission, or the district audit service, has been at fault. I think that, when the investigation into the current series of scandals has been completed, we shall need to establish what is wrong with the system, but I think that the present system and the present law are inadequate. The hon. Gentleman recognised that. The present system is not based on the Local Government Finance Act 1982; it predates that considerably. I believe that the right of objection to local authority accounts goes back to the last century, and I doubt that the present system is capable of dealing with the complexity of inquiries such as the one that is going on now.

Local government expenditure accounts for 25 per cent. of all public spending, so large sums are involved. We shall need to examine all aspects of these matters. For example, I think it wrong that the district audit service can—as it did in Westminster—reach a preliminary conclusion, and effectively find councillors guilty before they have an opportunity to put their side of the case.

Mr. Dobson: That is not true.

Mr. Smith: It is true.

Mr. Dobson: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that, before the district auditor reached his preliminary conclusion, he had innumerable meetings with those whom he subsequently accused of wasting money? They were heard, at enormous length—when they finally turned up in Britain to be heard.

Mr. Smith: I was aware of that, but I still consider the present arrangements inadequate. The findings were preliminary, but they were presented in a way that suggested that those councillors were guilty, period. The system is not satisfactory. A much more satisfactory system operates in relation to inquiries into companies: independent inspectors are appointed to whom, under the Maxwell rules, the case against those involved must be put on more than one occasion. It may not be appropriate to transfer that system in its entirety to local authorities; I am merely saying that I believe that the system requires thorough examination to establish what changes need to be made.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras did not seem to recognise the existence of a constitutional difficulty in relation to the independence, or autonomy, of local authorities. He advanced a series of proposals that might compromise that independence considerably. As it happens, I agree with what he said about the independence of the Audit Commission and the district auditor. It is important that that independence is preserved, and is not compromised by the provisions in the Bill which concern the social services inspectorate.

The fact that the Bill adds to the Audit Commission's obligations and duties is recognition of the fact that, since its establishment in 1982, the commission has done an extremely effective job. The district audit service has always conducted a regularity audit of local government accounts; it is the addition of a "value for money" element that has been so important. In 1982, for the first time, the Audit Commission was obliged to conduct value-for-money studies of local councils. It has done an enormous amount of good work and contributed substantially to the improvement in the quality of local government services.

In 1990, the health service was added to that. That was clear recognition by the Government that the Audit Commission had been doing valuable work in local government. Now the commission does a great deal of useful work in the national health service, examining what can be done to improve value for money, to establish performance indicators between one part of the service and another and between one hospital and another.

I pay tribute to the work of the first two Audit Commission controllers, Sir John Banham and his successor Howard Davies, both of whom went on to become director general of the Confederation of British Industry and both of whom came from Mckinsey and adopted a Mckinsey-type approach to the commission's management. That was important because the commission has no sanctions when it comes to trying to ensure that its recommendations are implemented. It was important therefore that it should have a high profile and obtain a lot of publicity for its recommendations. It has achieved that and succeeded in putting pressure on local councils to pick up the recommendations and implement them. There is no way in which it can require local authorities to do so. It must do so by force of persuasion.

I also pay tribute to Sir David Cooksey, who recently retired as Audit Commission chairman. His contribution to its work should not be underestimated either. Anyone who has read his valedictory report in the latest annual commission report will know that he had considerable command over the commission's work during the years that he served as its distinguished chairman.

The commission has brought an interesting and attractive new approach to value-for-money audit in government. Until its advent, we simply had the National Audit Office, which has a different approach. It tends to consider central Government from the top downwards, whereas the Audit Commission tends to consider local government from the bottom upwards, considering what goes on in individual local authorities and drawing its conclusion from many different examples.

I consider that to be an extremely constructive approach. It was well exemplified when, six or seven years ago, both bodies decided to investigate the management of police forces in England and Wales. The NAO concluded that yet more Home Office interference in the management of police forces was needed, that more obligations and more duties should be placed on Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, and that that would ensure that the quality of management and of service to the public by local police forces improved.

The Audit Commission, considering precisely the same questions, came to precisely the opposite conclusion, which was that there was too much interference by the Home Office and that, instead of the Home Office telling each police force precisely how many constables it could employ each year and so on, we needed to give chief constables far more management autonomy, to tell them to get on with the job and to assess their performance against whatever targets were set subsequently. That is the path that the Government chose. The law has been reformed so that police grant is paid in that way, starting from 1 April last year. As time goes on, considerable improvements in value for money will take place in local police forces. That was directly as a result of an Audit Commission recommendation.

[Mr. Smith]

There is a need for more co-operation between the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission. There tends to be rivalry, which is fine as long as it is healthy. The Public Accounts Committee recently considered an NAO report on the Metropolitan police's response to 999 calls.

It is anomalous that the PAC can investigate the Metropolitan police but no other police force in England and Wales simply because the Met is funded directly by the Home Office while other police forces are funded indirectly though local authorities. In this case there was some co-operation between the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission. Information was obtained from the Audit Commission about the response by other police forces to 999 calls. It could have gone further. The Audit Commission could have produced a report covering all other police forces at the same time, and that could have been considered simultaneously.

There is a question about parliamentary accountability of the Audit Commission. In an appendix to the Butler report on the commission it is stated that the commission is accountable to Parliament, and the appendix sets out various ways in which that occurs in practice. It would be a good idea for Parliament to take more interest in the commission's reports and to follow them up. We ensure that central Government is operating properly by allowing the PAC to investigate National Audit Office reports and to publish a report. The Treasury has to respond by saying what is being done to ensure that the recommendations are being implemented. In the context of the Audit Commission I am concerned that there is no similar mechanism.

For the reasons that I gave earlier relating to the independence of local councils, it would not be easy for Parliament to start investigating council matters. But we could make a start with the health service because there is no question of comparable local accountability. The Audit Commission produces excellent reports on the NHS and the Public Accounts Committee or some other committee could consider the reports and call the chief executive of the NHS management team to give evidence. It could produce a report and could try to ensure that some of the recommendations were implemented.

We should look at that, but before we do, perhaps the recommendations of the Nolan committee, which considered the whole question of audit, need to be followed up. I understand that the Treasury is carrying out a review in response to the Nolan committee's recommendation that arrangements for the external audit of public bodies should be reviewed with a view to applying the best practices to all. The Nolan committee seized on that point: that there is not the same automatic public scrutiny of the Audit Commission. It stated that that,

> "does seem to us to represent an anomaly."

The committee said that it was good that there were now two audit bodies. To some extent the NAO is a sort of public monopoly, and it is beneficial to have a bit of healthy competition between the two. The committee stated:

> "We are not here recommending an extension of the NAO's role as auditor. The existence of two bodies supervising the audit of different public bodies provides a valuable creative tension which can only serve to raise standards."

I certainly agree. When the review is complete the House should consider further how it follows up audit reports, whether they relate to central Government, local government or the national health service.

I certainly support the Bill, however modest its provisions, because it is further recognition of the Audit Commission's valuable work. That could be used to more effect by the House and by its Committees.

4.43 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I apologise in advance because I fear that I shall have to speak at some length. When I learned about this debate I realised that it gave me a chance to bring together several issues that I have raised, many of them when you, Madam Deputy Speaker, had the misfortune to be in the Chair. For that reason you may recognise some of the issues. Sadly, I cannot say that these matters have been resolved. I shall do my best to be brief, but hon. Members will see that I have a pile of papers about 9 in high from which I have extracted half an inch. If I were to go through my entire file on corruption in Brent council I fear that we would soon run out of time.

It is quite opportune that this debate is taking place today because yesterday members of Brent council were able to get round the most extraordinary conditions imposed on them, as reported by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Of course, completely ignoring the nonsense of forbidding the council to talk to anybody else, I immediately met members of the council, asked to see the report and shall now report its conclusions to the House since every attempt is being made to prevent that from being done.

Before I start down that route, I should like to support the comments of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). No one is suggesting that corruption solely concerns one party. There have been corrupt Labour councillors and corrupt Labour councils. There is corruption in all parties. The issue before the House is whether we are sufficiently engaged in rooting it out, not only among our opponents but on our own side, and whether we are interested in a district auditor having the powers to be able to react much more swiftly than has been the case.

Events surrounding occasions on which corruption has occurred—in both major parties—have tended to drag on for months. Now it is becoming the norm that they drag on for years—usually beyond the next election. The issues of corruption in Westminster between 1986 and 1990 may not be resolved until the next century. That is absolutely bizarre.

Therefore, in all that I say about Brent council—I am restricting myself to Brent council—I do not for one minute suggest that corruption is simply and solely a problem only of the Conservative party. I went to the Metropolitan fraud squad and asked it to investigate four Labour councillors on Brent council almost a decade ago. I regret the fact that the Metropolitan fraud squad was unable to find sufficient evidence to proceed, because I had not the slightest doubt that there was a real case to answer.

The problem with the Bill, as much as everyone welcomes it and will vote for it, is that it will not really help root out corruption. What I have discovered in endless sessions with Price Waterhouse and Co., the current auditors for Brent council, the district auditor, who was the council's auditor until recently, the Metropolitan police fraud squad, and in other communications with the charity commissioners and everybody else, is that there is not one body with which one can raise a concern which has the whole range of powers to get in there and sort it out quickly.

I have not the slightest doubt that corruption relating to public officials, whether councillors or Members of Parliament, and however small the sums of money, is more damaging than corruption in the private sector, because it corrupts the whole structure of government and the public perception of it. When people get away with corruption, the way is opened for people who want to get involved in politics in order to enrich themselves.

Therefore, I would like an audit service with almost a subsidiary police department that would be able to haul such people in for some pretty grim questioning and to keep them in custody, without any right of silence or legal representation, until the issue is resolved. A much tougher standard should apply to public figures than to the general public. When one volunteers to enter public life, one should be prepared to accept and work under such a constraint.

Given the amount of time that the Government spent investigating what went on at the Greater London council without ever finding any discrepancy or anything on which they could proceed, I make it clear that I had no objection to the work of the GLC being investigated and took considerable pride in the fact that nothing was ever produced to stain its 1981-85 administration.

I turn to the Ad Shop and the scandal on Brent council. I have tabled two early-day motions that summarise the report. It is a vast and bulky report which, in the way that it has been presented, has attempted to intimidate councillors and therefore prevent them from raising its contents. How bizarre!

The loss of £400,000 of public money by one small council department comes to light, and an independent police officer is appointed to investigate it. He conducts a detailed investigation and produces an enormous report—pretty much the size of a substantial English dictionary—yet it is not then given to councillors so that they can discuss it openly. Instead, the leader of council, Councillor Blackman, insists that it is dealt with in the closed session of the council meeting. He insisted that it was given to Securicor to distribute. Presumably, Securicor staff turned up with their helmets and batons in case the councillors turned nasty. Securicor was told by Councillor Blackman, "You cannot give it to the councillors until they have signed an undertaking that they will not talk about it to anybody"—including local Members of Parliament—"otherwise they will be at risk." There were all sorts of threats.

The report is printed on bright red paper so that it cannot be photocopied. To be doubly certain, every sheet of the report, which is several inches thick, has the name of the councillor receiving it woven into the paper. Can hon. Members imagine the cost of producing a report on that basis, in an attempt to suppress debate? It will not work because the report says that the allegations about corruption are true. It says that the Ad Shop, the semi-privatised section of Brent council that placed adverts and recruited staff, managed to lose £400,000. Why cannot the auditor investigate that? Why does Brent council have to go outside the normal audit service and, at additional expense, bring in a former police officer to investigate it?

Councillor Buckley, who was the chair of the Brent Business Board and therefore directly responsible for the Ad Shop, had what is now called "a clear and substantial non-pecuniary interest" in respect of Ruth Jackson, the officer concerned. I understand that, in *Private Eye*, it is to replace the concept of "Ugandan conversations".

The affair was reported to the chief executive—a change in local government procedure of which I was not aware. Apparently, when a councillor has an affair with a council officer it is one's duty, under the national code of conduct, to report that matter to the chief executive. The affair was reported to the chief executive in November 1993, a month after it began. Therefore, we must ask whether the chief executive told the leader of the council about the affair and whether he warned the councillor concerned that it would be unwise of him to chair meetings dealing with the particular area of council business where he had a personal involvement with a member of staff.

Now, the district auditor is to be called in. The former police officer, Derek Owen, says that he has found £23,800 of the expenditure—out of the £400,000 that has been lost—and which has been spent on alcohol, lunches and flying the entire department to Schiphol international airport, where it hired the VIP lounge for a one-hour business meeting of the department. We can only imagine what would have happened if Lambeth council had done that. Conservative Members would have been very unhappy. Of course, there could be no justification for any council doing that. I hope that the district auditor, even with the present limited powers, will investigate the matter and, if it is necessary, issue a surcharge.

The report shows that at every stage Councillor Buckley intervened to try to prevent the matter from coming to light. He had the support of the leader of the council, Councillor Blackman, who was complicit at every stage.

The final devastating point is that the report concludes that the problem arose because of the drive to privatise everything without proper thought and planning. I shall directly quote the report as it is another matter that should be investigated. It is clear that it has incurred considerable losses for the council, not just the Ad Shop. The report states that the drive to privatise Brent council into 170 separate business units was flawed by

> "the failure . . . to implement a sound infrastructure in support of the business units from inception, coupled to an almost total lack of positive or effective monitoring"

and that this

> "was the primary cause of the Ad Shop's demise and subsequent closure."

I hope that, as the auditor begins his investigation, other hon. Members on both sides of the House will sign the early-day motion calling on Councillor Blackman to ensure that the matter is debated in public and that both he and Councillor Buckley do not vote on an issue for which they clearly have a direct responsibility.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I should point out that we are debating the Second Reading of a

[Dame Janet Fookes]

Bill. The hon. Gentleman's comments are interesting and fascinating and while they may well have a bearing on the Bill, he has not established that for some time. Therefore, I ask him to relate his comments to the Bill.

Mr. Livingstone: I was about to refer to the Bill when I moved on to my second item, which is the range of investigations which are currently under way. I have seen the auditor, the old district auditor, Price Waterhouse and the Metropolitan police fraud squad. I have written to the Director of Public Prosecutions. I have been all over the place, and written to the charity commissioners and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, because VAT fraud is involved. At every stage, people have passed the matter on to somebody else, or said that if I had information, I should give it to somebody else.

I would like to see amendments to the Bill—I hope that they will be tabled in Committee—which will give the audit system total power to get stuck in to these matters. I have had endless correspondence with the DPP and the police, and both have said that they have looked at different parts of the matter. But we need someone who is able to look at the totality of corrupt practices in local government and someone who has enhanced powers to deal with the problem.

Nowhere is that more necessary than in the case of Brent council. I shall give a list of the present problems in Brent. Police investigations have taken place into Councillor Bill Duffin, former councillor Leslie Winters, former councillor Nkechi Amalu Johnson and former councillor Judith Harper. These investigations are on different matters. The ombudsman is investigating Councillor Duffin again, and Councillor David Tobert. The district auditor is investigating the council leader Councillor Blackman, and Councillors Cormach Moore—the Conservative chief whip—Alan Wall, Jack Sayers and Richard Buckley. An internal council auditor is investigating Councillors Buckley, Blackman, Wall, Moore, Sayers and Carol Shaw.

This is nonsense. There should be one body or one individual to whom members of the public, councillors and Members of Parliament can go to make their complaints. Such an individual would be able to draw all the matters together and come to the right conclusions, because—at present—that is impossible. I estimate that I have spent an entire working week in the past 18 months in the company of Price Waterhouse, the district auditor and the fraud squad. How many members of the public can do that? How many councillors have that time?

I have been ably assisted by two diligent councillors from Brent, Steve Crabb and John Duffy, who have spent virtually their entire time on the council digging into the files. That is not going to happen in most areas, as most people do not have that sort of time. What we have discovered in all this is an endless series of multiple and overlapping examples of corruption.

I have referred to the case of Bill Duffin. Although the Metropolitan police fraud squad recommended prosecution to the Crown Prosecution Service, the CPS—quite unwisely—decided not to proceed. Mr. Duffin was in the ridiculous position of being chair of the housing committee while working for a local landlord specialising in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Mr. Duffin took his employer to meet officials without revealing who he was. He did so to try to find out ways in which his employer could increase his take on housing benefit, a matter of immediate concern to the Government who are concerned about current housing benefit bills.

Fortunately, when the matter came to light—and despite the fact that the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed against him—Mr. Duffin was removed from his position by the whole council. Individual Conservative councillors, to whom I pay my respects, voted to remove one of their colleagues because they felt that corruption had been sufficiently proved.

The most serious example of what has been going on—I know that you will remember it from some Adjournment debates on the subject, Madam Deputy Speaker—is the Irish centre. This is the most distressing case, and the case on which I spent virtually all of my working week spread over 18 months with the auditors and the fraud squad. I was desperately trying to push everyone in the same direction so that we could reach a conclusion.

The simple facts of the case are that a council grant of £231,000 was paid for building works to be done at the centre. Not all the works were done, and not all the money was spent. Three councillors—Councillors Wall, Moore and Sayers, to whom I have referred—sat on the management committee of the Irish centre. They were present when it was decided not to proceed with spending the grant for the purposes for which it was given—namely, to provide access for disabled persons and changing rooms for actors, singers and dancers. Instead, it was decided to spend the money on building a bigger bar.

Those councillors felt no need to report that to the council. Instead they sat there and decided all sorts of other peculiar things. Although they were in receipt of public money they decided not to have a contract with a regular recognised builder, but to do a great big "on the lump" job, with people turning out day by day and being paid cash in hand without any real records or other checks.

I wrote to the leader, Councillor Blackman, asking what he intended to do about that, but I have never had a reply. Rather than trying to sort out what had been going on, Councillor Blackman had been trying to secure political support, and was prepared to pay out council tax payers' money for that purpose.

I have written to the present district auditor, and things are slowly trundling on. But we are talking about events that happened in 1992, 1993 and 1994, and I am still not in the happy position of being able to see a district auditor's report, because it is still being worked on.

Things are not yet as bad as in Westminster, which is the most serious case, but they are bad enough. We want a new set of powers to enable district auditors not only to proceed on such issues, but to move speedily, so that their investigations do not become almost historic. By the time the situation in Westminster involving Lady Porter is sorted out, she may well have died, in view of the length of time that it is taking. I see Conservative Members chuckling at that idea. Perhaps they are not fans of Lady Porter any more—although at the time they could not get enough of seeing her and advocating her cause.

What concerns me most is the length of time involved. Where there is a suspicion of fraud the issue should be resolved rapidly, so that even if the police decide that there is no case to take to court, and there will be no prosecution, the issue is resolved so that the public can make up their own minds. Even if there is no question of simple illegality, the issue is whether things have gone beyond the bounds of what is considered broadly acceptable.

I shall not go through all the details, because they have been the subject of various Adjournment debates. However, the key to the issue is the fact that when people started to raise concerns about the Brent Irish centre, rather than resolve the matter, Councillor Blackman covered it all up. When members of the public wrote to him saying that there was a problem and that things were going wrong, his supporters on the management committee voted to expel the people who were raising the concerns.

People have often come to me and said that they are unhappy about something being done by a Labour council or a Labour councillor, and my first response is to say, "Let me send the matter straight to the police. Let us call in the auditor." I do not have the resources to investigate such matters, and it seems bizarre that even with the new powers in the Bill there will be no real compulsion for a council leader to act decisively to bring matters forward. I hope that an amendment will be moved in Committee to give councillors a duty to go immediately to the appropriate authority, whether that be the auditor or the police, with any matter of concern. That duty should extend to Members of Parliament too.

The conclusion of the sorry tale of the Brent Irish centre is that while all that was going on, the 1994 elections hove into view. Brent would be a much sought-after jewel in the crown for either party. Brent elections always bring much welcome publicity for Front-Bench Members on both sides of the House, so it tends to be fairly bitterly contested. Clearly in 1994, with a hung council, that was going to be the case.

I have referred all the matters to the district auditor, but I am still waiting for him to resolve them. That is sad, but it is probably not his fault, but that of the present limited powers. As in Westminster, people have been tardy in agreeing to meet him, and it has been difficult to get responses from them.

In the run-up to the local elections, Councillor Blackman met the organiser of the Brent Irish centre privately, and on 17 March 1994 he agreed to give the centre another £70,000. Part of that money was to pay for the works that the council had already paid for, but which had not been carried out. I am not aware of any other example of a council paying twice a grant to do basic works, yet nobody raised a question. I would have expected the leader of the council to say, "Haven't we paid for this already squire?" But that does not seem to have crossed Councillor Blackman's mind. His only answer was, "How much do you want, and when can you take it?"

Another bizarre feature of the further £70,000 grant is that the application was too late. The council's cut-off date for new grant applications had passed, but an exception was made by Councillor Blackman and the deadline was overridden. What is more, when the grant was received the financial year had barely started. I often wait eight or 10 weeks for a reply from Brent council to a letter about a housing benefit case, yet here we have someone who asked for £70,000 in March and received it eight weeks later, with all the terms on which it was to be given changed without reference to a committee.

One aspect in particular depresses me, and we need to think about it in connection with the Bill. When I was in local government, as leader of the Greater London council, I could not move without a finance officer and a legal officer authorising every penny of expenditure by the council. If we wanted to spend money there had to be a report, and that report had to be seen by a lawyer. There had to be a concurrent report, and it had to have been seen by the treasurer, too.

Yet in Brent £70,000 was paid out, and the only monitoring was that the person who received it would tell the leader of the council what had happened to it. I am amazed that that is legal, and I hope that the Labour party will propose an amendment to the Bill to make it impossible. No council money should ever be spent until there has been an authorised report to a committee. I thought that that was already the law. Clearly there has been much damaging drift in the normal checks and balances in local government.

No sooner had Brent Irish centre received its £70,000 grant than an illegal leaflet—I have a copy of it here—was circulated in the main Irish areas of Brent saying, basically "Vote Conservative and defeat the Labour candidates". Lo and behold, the largest swing to the Conservative party anywhere in England took place in the wards where that leaflet was circulated, and control of the council hangs on the casting vote of the mayor. That was not simply a question of financial corruption, and the leader of the council bribing a community group for support. The corruption may even have determined the outcome of the election, so the case is very serious.

That was another issue that I raised with the auditor and the police. The police were very helpful, and made a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions, and I got back a nice letter saying that it had not been possible to identify who was actually behind it all. The DPP should have an overall report about the totality of the events, rather than the police investigating the narrow issue of who produced an illegal leaflet while the auditors investigate where the £70,000 has gone.

There should be one overall unit. Calling it the district audit service is meaningless to the public; it should be called the anti-corruption unit—a much more popular title, which people would understand and which would clearly define its remit. If one person had been overseeing the whole matter there would have been a firmer response.

I wrote to all the individuals concerned and raised the matter with Ministers, saying that I was worried because everybody was looking at separate little bits of the jigsaw and no one could see the influence of the Mr. Big, Councillor Blackman, who had been pulling all the strings.

I wrote to the councillors concerned—the three councillors on the management committee and Councillor Blackman—asking them a series of detailed questions. I shall not go through them all now, because I do not want to stretch your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, but there were three pages containing 13 questions in all. I asked questions such as whether they remembered agreeing the expenditure, whether they remembered seeing the monitoring report, why they had not pointed out the discrepancy to council officers, and whether they had told the leader of the council. I also wrote asking the leader of the council what he had done about it all. Silence. Not a peep.

[Mr. Livingstone]

In any new powers for the district auditor we should make certain that the power of prevarication is removed from corrupt officials, Members of Parliament and councillors. I want there to be somebody who can say, "I want those people in today," and they will come in—and if they do not, the police will feel their collars and bring them in.

The most obvious example is the delay by many members of Westminster council who wasted the district auditor's time month after month by finding reasons not to meet him. It is outrageous. We would not normally tolerate that. When people commit serious crimes, the police pick up them up and bring them in. Councillors should be grateful that they are invited in to meet the district auditor. Councillors should not have the right to negotiate about when they should meet the district auditor.

I have a letter from the Department of the Environment raising those issues. It says:

"Ministers have no general powers to intervene."

I have a letter from the Treasury Chambers. Customs and Excise had discovered that a lot of money had disappeared and there were irregularities. I asked for a meeting with Customs and Excise to find out where the money had gone. The letter said that, under its rules, Customs and Excise cannot discuss individual issues. That is fair enough in protecting the ordinary taxpayer or honest business from political intervention. However, when VAT fraud by Mr. Brendan Mulkere is part of an overall pattern of corruption, it should come within the district auditor's remit, which should not be narrowly defined.

I also have a letter from the Crown Prosecution Service about the leaflet, a copy of which I have here if anyone wishes to see it. The letter says that the CPS has decided not to proceed.

I did not, in the first instance, write to the chairman of the Conservative party but a resident in Brent did. That resident had been aware of what was going on with the fraud on the council and wrote to a Mr. Hanley, whom I assume to be the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), on 15 March 1995 detailing £137,000 of grant that was being imaginatively recycled and a whole range of other problems. I shall not mention the constituent's name in case that person does not wish to be pestered by the media.

The reply was a letter from Tim Rycroft, special adviser to the party chairman, dated 22 March which said:

"Thank you for your letter of 15th March 1995 on the subject of the London Borough of Brent. The Chairman has read it with interest"—

he did not do anything about it though—

"and asked me to thank you for taking the trouble to send it to him.

Since the Chairman raised the issue of waste, bureaucracy, mismanagement and corruption in Labour-controlled councils we have received a great many letters on this subject. All are passed to our Research Department who will consider how we might use the information you have given us in our campaign."

If I get a letter from a member of the public saying that there is corruption on the local council, I do not pass it to the Labour party and say, "Get a leaflet up about this." I send it on to the police. Why did not the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes pass all the allegations, which were clearly overwhelmingly about Labour councils, to the police immediately instead of holding them back for party advantage?

The letter concludes:

"Although our priority during this local government election campaign remains the promotion of the positive case for voting Conservative, we do intend to continue to expose the lamentable record of our political opponents in local government. Your letter will help us to do so."

This Mr. Rycroft was not even aware that he was talking about a Conservative council. He just thought, "It's another Labour council, let's bang out a leaflet." That is a complete negation of the responsibility of the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes to the law to pass damaging matters that have been communicated to him immediately to the proper authority.

Finally, I thank the House for having tolerated me. There is one last matter of interest, which I have also raised before: the role of the leader of the council, Councillor Blackman. By one of those accidental miracles that occasionally bring joy to politicians, Councillor Blackman asked if he could have a larger computer. It is right that councils should provide leaders of councils, and the leaders of the opposition groups on councils, with proper computer facilities so that they can conduct their business. No one objects to that.

At the same time the leader of the Labour group asked if his computer could be upgraded. One weekend, council officers came in, unaware that there might be a problem, and gave Councillor Blackman a new computer. His old one was so much bigger than the Labour group leader's computer that they decided that rather than waste the taxpayer's money—and I applaud that—they would give the old computer to the leader of the Labour group. It never occurred to them that anything dodgy was happening in the council, so they did not think that there was any point in deleting the files of leader of the council before passing the computer to the leader of the Labour group.

No one noticed anything for ages until someone touched the wrong key on the computer and a whole wad of the previous correspondence of Councillor Blackman suddenly spewed forth in great detail. I will not embarrass the Government by repeating that correspondence. Broadly, it was what you would expect: the leader of the council writing to the Secretary of State for the Environment and officials in No. 10 Downing street asking them to rig the rate support grant settlement because there might be a by-election in Brent and they did not want to lose the council. That is rather tasteless but it is not illegal, as I am the first to admit.

What was found afterwards was much more sinister—the transcript of a private conversation that a Labour councillor had held in his own home with a member of the public who had come to see him about the corruption at the Irish centre. It is clear that the leader of the council in Brent was worried that Councillors Duffy and Crabb—the people I worked with to expose this stuff—were getting close to exposing the corruption of Brent council and his corrupt use of council funds to bribe the electorate through the £70,000 paid to the Irish centre.

Councillor Blackman was involved—I cannot say that he originated it but he was certainly in receipt of what resulted from it—in sending someone to interview

Councillor Duffy. That person was wired up to make a clandestine recording, went to Councillor Duffy's house, had a long conversation and passed the tape recording to the leader of the council in Brent, who then no doubt used council staff to transcribe it on to his computer. Councillor Blackman then started a whispering campaign saying that Councillor Duffy might be sued about what he had said at the meeting.

I do not know about other hon. Members, but I find it hard to believe that any hon. Member would resort to wiring up members of the public to bug conversations in the homes of opponents. It is certainly not lawful to use council resources to transcribe, circulate and use such transcriptions.

I wrote immediately to Councillor Blackman asking for some justification. I have never had a reply. I am not normally one to invoke the *Evening Standard* in my defence, but it took up the matter up very well and ran a headline that stated:

"Computer secrets land Tories in rigging row".

That is an honest assessment of the situation.

After a long story, the article concluded:

"Mr. Blackman was not available for comment today."

Nor was he the day after or any other day since. Councillor Blackman has never once explained anything relating to the grants, the bugging of Labour councillors or his attempt to suppress the debate on the Ad Shop report.

I do not believe that corruption is a party issue. What has happened in Brent is that the corruption that people got away with in the last Labour council emboldened others to think that they could do the same. When that happens, people join the party to line their pockets. That has happened in my local party.

A local property developer who saw what was happening in Brent joined the local Labour party, signed up all his employees as members of the local branch, took it over and got two cronies selected to stand for the council. He then employed two Conservative councillors, and perhaps even a Liberal, and got them all on the planning committee so that he controlled it. In the time that he was effectively in control of the planning committee, 100 separate planning applications which the council officers had recommended against were granted. That caused some concern in the area.

That is why I say give us a district auditor with real powers, who can strike fear into the hearts of corrupt people in whatever party, and give him the powers so that those who abuse their public position cannot hide behind delaying techniques, such as the use of legal advice and so on, to avoid being held to account. Give the district auditor powers to seize documents and meet people immediately so that such matters can be dealt with in the financial year in which they take place, not after the books have been closed some years on down the road. Let us create an audit system with real powers which will mean that corrupt people will lie awake in their beds at night thinking that they may not get away with it.

At present, I fear, as what has happened in Brent demonstrates, that it is all too easy for corrupt local councillors to get away with corruption because those who investigate corruption are spread over so many different departments. I hope that by the time the Bill comes back for its Third Reading, we will have created a new national audit service with real teeth and strong police powers to get in there and sort things out a damned sight quicker than is happening at the moment.

5.19 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Hon. Members will be surprised to hear that my speech will not be about Brent but about the Bill, which contains some useful provisions and some measures that are, at the very worst, harmless. I have some concerns about the Bill that I wish to flag up. As the Minister has told us, the Bill falls into three main sections. I do not want to comment on the Bill's second section, which concerns the change to the financial year for the Audit Commission. That seems to be one of the more harmless parts of any Bill that I have seen since I was elected to the House.

I should like to make one or two comments on the third part of the Bill before I return to its heart, the first section. I welcome the third part of the Bill, which concerns the publication of performance indicators, and the fact that local councils now have some flexibility in how they publicise them. In so far as it goes, that measure is welcome. That is a comparatively minor change, however, and does not go far enough. I say that not so much because—as might have been expected—I am concerned about the possibility of local councils publicising their performance indicators in their publications as because I am concerned about the inflexible way in which those indicators will now be publicised in free newspapers.

The Bill allows publication in free newspapers so long as those newspapers are delivered to each dwelling in a local authority area. In some of our inner cities, in the more tightly bound urban areas, there may well be places where freebies genuinely are delivered to all the buildings and dwellings. But where a local authority has even a small area of rural countryside, freebies are unlikely to be delivered to each dwelling in that area. After all, it is unreasonable and unrealistic to expect the publisher of a free newspaper to spend money ensuring that his newspaper reaches every little farmstead, where a paperboy may take half an hour to cycle there and back. There are many areas of the country where the distribution of freebies does not extend to every house in the area, nor is it necessary that they should do so for our purposes.

Surely the important feature about the publication of performance indicators is that the greatest public breadth of distribution is achieved, the information provided is clear, the scope of the information is right, the information is relevant to local people, and that it is what they want to hear about. At present, we do not have a total distribution system. The problem with performance indicators being publicised only in newspapers that can be purchased is that, as is well known, not every household purchases the local newspaper. We do not have total distribution at present. Surely, we wish to enhance distribution to ensure that more dwellings—not necessarily every dwelling—receive the information. For that reason, this part of the Bill should be greeted with only a half cheer.

The heart of the Bill is contained in its first section: the extension of the Audit Commission's remit. The Liberal Democrats do not object to the principle of a commission, which is independent of government, examining the performance of local or national government for the purposes of a genuine audit. That would be valuable, and I support much of what has been said about the

[Mr. David Rendel]

enhancement of the Audit Commission's powers. The commission is useful in helping local people to make judgments about the performance of their local authorities and in exposing corruption and general malpractice. We should enhance the commission's powers if possible as it also keeps local councillors on their toes.

I should like to criticise some of the aspects of the commission's enhanced role which have been introduced by the changes contained in the Bill. Let me start with a few specific criticisms that worry some of our local authorities now. Over the past few years, local authorities' financial resources have been cut severely. They often have too little money to fulfil even their statutory responsibilities, let alone their discretionary responsibilities. As local authorities have so little money—largely as the result of Government cuts in the money provided—they may be unable to do what they ought to do, let alone what they would like to do. They are concerned that they may, quite unfairly, be blamed for any such failures.

It is therefore reasonable that local authorities should, where possible, be given a right to reply to any audit criticisms that are published about them. There is a strong case to be made for any reports based on the new procedures contained in the Bill to be handed to local authorities in draft form before they are published. The authorities should have the right to comment on the reports and to publish their reply to any criticisms that they contain at the same time as they are published.

Secondly, there is concern about over-inspection. The Government are supposedly keen on deregulation and on removing the bureaucratic controls that harm the organisations in this country. They seem to be concerned about deregulation mainly where it affects businesses, but local authorities also need to maximise their income and minimise their expenditure. There is no doubt that the inspections in local authorities which are now taking place with ever-increasing frequency take up a great amount of the time of officers, particularly middle-management officers and the management tier that has been particularly hard hit by Government cuts in local authorities.

Thirdly, I do not yet believe that the Government have given us sufficient assurance that they understand the need for confidentiality over some of the material involve. That is particularly true in the social services sector, which contains some highly sensitive material which would be seen if an audit inspection was carried out. It is important that the confidentiality of that material should be properly safeguarded. I hope that when the Minister winds up the debate he will give us further assurances that he recognises the importance of the issue and has considered all the difficulties that it may entail. There are some more general criticisms of the Bill that need to be aired. The central principle underpinning the concept of auditing local government is that the auditors are independent of central Government and of the governing political philosophy of the day. That condition has not been satisfactorily met, even under the present arrangements; but the Government are clearly determined to tighten their grip still further on the Audit Commission, which is one of the Bill's dangers.

The Bill goes some way towards transforming the Audit Commission into an instrument of the centralised state, in confrontation with local government—a significant danger. But of course we have come to expect such measures from the Conservatives. They have taken every opportunity to centralise power around their governing clique; they have undermined democracy at every turn and they have even pulled the rug from under their own Back Benchers and the House. We no longer have even Cabinet government; we have bureaucratic government through quangos—that is the Conservatives' way and they now seem to be seeking to impose an ever-more centralised bureaucracy on local authorities.

It is interesting that the Labour party is now taking very much the same track. It also intends to bureaucratise local government in a way that might even make Conservative Members wince. The Labour party is convinced that it will soon be pulling the Whitehall strings and it finds centralised bureaucratic government all the more attractive now that it believes that it may have the pleasure of inflicting it. We all know why the Tory and Labour parties are so keen to increase central Government's control over local authorities: they are both terrified—we have seen examples of it this afternoon—of the way in which some of the councils in their control may carry out absurd policies that destroy their reputations as political parties. However, neither of those parties is prepared to set up a new democratic system for local authorities that could return real control to the local electorate and ensure that those councils were made properly accountable once again. That is what the Bill needs; it needs the local electorate to be in charge, not just the auditors.

The problem is that sober auditing of government at any level is all very well, but in the end the only real test of the performance of government or of local councils is the judgment of local people—the judgment of the electorate, expressed through the ballot box. That judgment can be properly expressed only if we use a fair and representative voting system. That is not nowadays self-interest from the Liberal Democrat point of view. Liberal Democrats benefit from the present voting system in local elections. It is the Conservatives who have been annihilated in local government, in spite of the fact that they retain a certain share of the vote.

I have no doubt that the over-representation of Liberal Democrat councillors at the expense of the Tories does produce better local government; nevertheless, it is unfair and reduces accountability—unfair, that is, to Tory voters.

I am sure that local people are better judges of the performance of their local authority than the local auditor. Arming people with properly audited information can only enhance local people's judgment. However, let us have the courage to ensure that, when people cast their vote, that vote counts and makes a real difference. That is what gives people control over wayward local authorities.

The Bill further shifts the balance of scrutiny of local authorities from local people to central Government, and that cannot be right. The Bill compromises the financial independence of the Audit Commission, and that cannot be right. The Bill changes the commission's reporting function so that it is an instrument of Ministers, destroying the arm's-length relationship that is intended to encourage impartiality, and that cannot be right. Those changes signify a fundamental shift in the role of the Audit Commission. They undermine the principle of local accountability. I do not expect many Labour or Conservative Members to give open support to that view, but they would be wise to contemplate what type of local democracy is being built.

With no written constitution, local democracy depends on Members of the House exercising restraint in seeking to consolidate their grip of local government. Local government is not meant to be convenient for the governing party of the day. It is meant to serve local people and to reflect their wishes. Auditing has a role to play in that process, but the Bill carries with it the danger that it may be used to strengthen the powers of central Government at the expense of local government, and that is something that the Liberal Democratic party, at least, will do anything that it can to prevent.

5.32 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The Bill is broadly to be welcomed, and I join my hon. Friends in doing so. However, I am worried that, unamended, the Bill does not tackle the significant problems that confront us in Brent in my constituency, alongside that of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), or take into account the considerable anxiety that constituents throughout the country have about the quality and probity of local government.

In my borough, the well of local government has been poisoned by the ruling Conservative clique on the council. I very much hope that the Minister, in replying to the debate, does not seek to push to one side the anxieties expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East on the basis that they are purely partisan and party political. To do so would be not to do justice to the significant worries among all decent people, whatever their party, about what is going on in Brent.

Brent is truly a scandalous borough. We need the auditors to start work in the town hall as soon as possible, with a full range of powers, but Brent is a diabolical borough—diabolical almost in the literal sense—and there are some ways in which Brent town hall has as much need of an exorcist as it does of an auditor. It is as though, like something out of a movie by John Carpenter, a fog has descended on Brent town hall, and within that place all sorts of murky goings-on and doings occur, the fallout of which descends on the hapless people who are under its auspices and who dwell in the borough and rely on services under its control.

The stories relayed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East all have a basis in fact and all are a cause of concern, but the deepest on-going public scandal in Brent is the crisis in public services that affects each and every one of my constituents.

I shall simply outline that crisis in respect of one matter of genuine concern to all the people of Brent, South—a matter that should not be the subject of party political controversy, because, apparently, hon. Members on both sides of the House agree about it. Indeed, if the Prime Minister is to be believed in relation to that subject—nursery education—it is as much a priority for the Minister and Conservative Members as it is for Labour Members, because the Prime Minister made great play of his commitment to nursery education for three and four-year-olds in speeches that he has made this year.

However, in Brent, nursery education has been the subject of a massive continuing scandal. We are entitled to ask ourselves whether, if the Bill were in place, it would enable the citizens of Brent—those men and women worried about their children and about what happens to the nurseries that they attend—to be satisfied that the Secretary of State has given the Audit Commission the power to end the crisis that afflicts Brent nursery education.

The one great flaw in the Bill is the extent to which it relies on the willingness of the Secretary of State to make the referral to the Audit Commission—to make the request of the Audit Commission that is referred to in clause 1—before the Audit Commission is empowered and able to carry out the works necessary to produce a report on the condition of that aspect of social service provision. It requires the Secretary of State to be satisfied; it requires an act of will on the part of the Secretary of State for the Audit Commission to become involved.

My constituents are worried because they have little confidence in the Secretary of State. They have little confidence in his willingness to take account of their worries when that would require a criticism of a council controlled by members of the same party. In Brent, we live with, on one hand, a Conservative Government, albeit one supposedly committed to nursery education, and, on the other, a Conservative council whose actions threaten every voluntary nursery in Brent—every voluntary nursery in my constituency—with closure as a result of the cuts that are to be imposed by the council on the voluntary sector.

Young children are currently receiving high-quality nursery education within the voluntary sector. I received an anguished letter from a parent of a child at Stonebridge community nursery, in one of the most deprived areas of my constituency. It is so deprived that a housing action trust has been established on the local estate. Unless the Secretary of State for the Environment is prepared to intervene, parents and children from that nursery are faced with a cut of some £625,000 in the budget of the 12 voluntary sector nurseries in the borough of Brent. That cut will reduce the provision from the council to zero. With a cut of more than £500,000, there is no way that the voluntary nursery sector in Brent will be able to continue. People simply are unable to afford nursery education without the commitment of the local authority to its provision.

The council has received deputations and petitions. The Stonebridge community nursery had a tea party outside the town hall, with tuna sandwiches and orange squash—not perhaps the most appealing fare, but it tasted good on that particular occasion because the cause was a good one. Some Labour councillors turned up, but not one Tory councillor came to that tea party. Maybe the diet was not rich enough for them. Not one turned up, but those councillors know what the impact of their policies will be on voluntary nursery sector in my constituency. What they do, they do not because they do not know the consequences: what they do, they do because they are playing a nasty, political game.

The Tories are cutting the budget of the voluntary sector, with a view to setting a council tax figure that will act as a bribe—they believe—to the electorate in Brent to return them at the next local council elections. In that, they are sorely mistaken. People are not fools, and they will not be deceived. Nevertheless, the game is being played, and it makes nonsense of the Government's commitment to nursery education.

The citizens of Brent want to know that their interests and their children's interests will be protected by legislation that does not rely on the Secretary of State's

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

willingness to bring in the Audit Commission. They want legislation that creates a sufficiently robust, independent and vigorous process of audit which can highlight the sort of scandal and neglect of basic social service provision represented by that reckless budget cut. That assurance is simply not in the Bill.

The Opposition want the people themselves to be empowered. I want those mums who brought their kids to that nursery tea party outside the town hall to know that they do not have to rely on the Secretary of State to bring in the Audit Commission, or on me to request—as I do now—the Under-Secretary to ensure that the Secretary of State intervenes in the case of the scandalous attack on nursery provision in Brent. Those mums, of their own volition as citizens and electors, should be able to bring in the Audit Commission to expose the scandal. We need the sort of robust and vigorous inquiry that the Audit Commission is capable of applying to such a crisis.

Clause 1 recognises

> "the importance of improving the economy, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of performance in the discharge of social services functions by local authorities."

That is all that those parents want from nursery provision. They want efficient and effective nursery provision, and they want voluntary nurseries to be able to continue to provide high-quality nursery provision to their kids. They want the means themselves to be able to ensure that that happens.

My plea today is for the Under-Secretary to do two things, and I hope that he will respond specifically in his reply. First, I want him to agree to meet a deputation of parents from the nursery sector in Brent, with all the Members of Parliament for the London borough of Brent—Conservative and Labour alike. At such a meeting, we could discuss the crisis in provision that affects Brent's nursery education—the threat to the funding of the voluntary sector, and also the pressure on the local authority sector. That is a simple request, and it is one to which the Minister, if there is a genuine commitment on the part of Government to nursery education, should be willing to accede.

Many months ago at the start of this crisis, I asked the Conservative chairman of social services in Brent, Councillor Irwin Van Colle, to join a deputation to Ministers. He refused. I made that request in a totally non-partisan spirit to explore—*[Interruption.]* I see the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), chuckling. There are people who are willing and prepared to act in a non-partisan way. Very many parents, and workers in the voluntary sector, give their time voluntarily to provide nursery education. Their concerns should not be met by a chuckle from the Under-Secretary, the former leader of Wandsworth council.

We know how partisan the hon. Gentleman is, and what he did to Wandsworth. We know how he traduced local government. Just because he is temporarily the Under-Secretary, he should not believe that everybody in local government—of any or all parties—behaves in the same way in which he and his cronies behaved in Wandsworth and in Westminster and the way in which we see them behave in Brent. The Tory party in certain, but not all, of its aspects has made a mockery of local government. The reason why the Tory party is so riven and so split is that there are many good Conservatives who are sickened by what some Conservatives have done to local government. Let us have no more chuckles from the Under-Secretary. He should try to treat this issue with the seriousness that it deserves.

That is the first thing that I ask. The second is that careful thought should be given in Committee to the need to ensure that the Audit Commission is empowered and enabled to act at the behest not just of the Secretary of State but of the council tax payers. They have a vested interest in local government and the quality of services and we should be in the business of enabling and empowering the people whom we represent. That is the business of the House and I hope that, in considering the Bill, it performs that business with the interests of the consumer of local government services at heart, rather than those of the political masters who, all too often, in town halls throughout Britain where problems have arisen have acted in a way that is quite contrary to the interests of the people whom they supposedly represent.

5.50 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): We have had an interesting debate, which I suspect has been more wide ranging than the Government were expecting. However, it should not surprise anyone in the House that Opposition Members are concerned to find means of tackling corruption at every level wherever it may occur, in whatever party or local authority. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said, corruption and fraud undermine public service and politicians, so it is in all our interests to take whatever measures are possible to tackle them.

Opposition Members have raised some concerns about aspects of the Bill, but on Second Reading our main concern is that the Bill misses the opportunity to tackle problems in ways for which we have been calling for many a long day. The gaps in the Bill are serious and, in Committee, we shall table amendments to address those failures.

Clause 1, as the Minister explained, enables joint studies between the Audit Commission and social service inspectorate into individual authority's social services departments. The principle of that is to be applauded, but there are concerns about changing the role of the Audit Commission, which other hon. Members have expressed and which again we will want to explore in Committee.

It is interesting that the Department of the Environment's press release should tell us that the clause fulfils a manifesto commitment—a rare event in this Parliament on which the Minister should be congratulated. It would be niggardly of me to fail to recognise that it is good for Ministers occasionally to fulfil a manifesto commitment. I was last in the shadow Treasury team and we spent most of our time identifying a number of manifesto commitments, particularly with regard to tax, that had been broken. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the Government are at last addressing this matter, albeit that it is a small manifesto commitment.

If such joint initiatives between the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate are to succeed, joint underlying principles need to be behind such work. Not least, client carers and the local authority need to feel ownership of the process. Unless that happens, there will not be any real change or response to ideas generated by such an inspection. That has been a major problem with the reorganisation of the education inspectorate. The reorganisation addressed by the Bill should give the people involved a real feeling of ownership.

The outcome of the study in which the Government are engaged should assist in focusing on effectiveness and quality as much as on economy and efficiency. That is particularly relevant when we are considering some of the newer areas of social services responsibility and some of local government's new community care responsibilities. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South said—I am not a Londoner so I may confuse bits of Brent—with regard to education, it is not just economy of the service that is important but quality of opportunity and quality of the service. If economies undermine the value and quality of the service, we shall pay the price for many years to come.

The social services inspectorate and the Audit Commission should be able to work across the plethora of agencies involved. The role of the private and voluntary sectors in the delivery of service is important throughout local authority services. The Bill should provide much greater clarity on how that will work.

I think that most people agree that clauses 3 and 4 are technical changes. We welcome the Minister's response earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) with regard to ensuring that the transition to a new accounting year is transparent and does not hide any problems.

We have some concerns about clause 5, particularly those of us who live in rural areas where no newspaper covers the whole area. That is an issue that we shall take up in Committee. Again, it is dogma that is stopping the Government allowing or examining other means of ensuring that performance indicators are properly and widely distributed.

As I say, the Bill is a lost opportunity. The Government could have confronted the legitimate public concern that there are gaps and weaknesses within the current system which mean that allegations of maladministration, corruption and serious incompetence within local authorities are either not properly investigated or are investigated only after exceptional diligence on the part of individual councils and citizens.

When undertaking lengthy investigations, the district audit service has insufficient local resources and powers. Even when reports are written, leading councillors and officers have considerable power to prevent information from coming into the open. In that regard, I disagree with the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). There is a relationship between the centre and local government. It is important that we shore up and bolster local democratic accountability. That is why the Labour party has addressed in a document the importance of annual elections, of increasing the number of people who vote and of examining how local democracy can be made more effective so that local people feel that they have more influence on what is going on.

In addition, there should be the assurance that the relationship with the Government and external organisations, such as the Audit Commission and the district auditor, is such that when local people have a legitimate complaint which has not been properly addressed and which they do not have the power or the means to investigate, the power and the means exist for their complaints to be properly addressed.

We have heard some shocking examples of how the system has simply failed. I have been involved in local government for many years and I have disagreed with the actions of several councils. When I was on the national executive of my own party, I was involved in making sure that any concerns in the party or in Labour-controlled local authorities were investigated and addressed. I have always taken that view.

However, having recently become local government spokesperson, I have been shocked by the documents concerning the scandals that have been aired in the Chamber this afternoon. They reveal guile and obfuscation, and attempts to ensure that people do not find out about what is happening. Councillors have said, "Yes, I was at the meeting, I even chaired the meeting, but I did not hear the aspects that were discussed when the decision was taken to send homeless families into an asbestos-ridden property." Those scandals beggar belief.

Ministers had access to the same documents and did nothing. It is beyond my understanding that they decided to wait. They said, "We cannot do anything, we must put it off and we shall not ask any difficult questions about why this has occurred."

We all suffer when such scandals are allowed to continue without being brought to public account. We have seen what has happened in the House in the past year. People outside say, "If one of them is at it, they must all be at it", particularly when Ministers, who must have the right to intervene, decide not to do so.

We believe that the district auditor, as an external, independent officer, should have the opportunity properly to investigate and pursue allegations of corruption, fraud and maladministration. The Bill gave the Government the opportunity to pursue them much more vigorously.

We have heard examples in Westminster, in Lambeth and in Brent that do nobody any good and are a matter of shame for everyone in public life. That is why those of us who are in public life and who want high standards in public life are determined that there should be mechanisms for external independent assessment that can be followed up by action. The Government have dragged their feet and have neglected to give the Audit Commission or district auditors the power that they need.

The stories that we have heard about Westminster councillors being supported by their local Members of Parliament in vilifying the district auditor and the Audit Commission are a disgrace. The Minister should say today that such behaviour is not acceptable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras asked the Minister whether he would guarantee that the report on asbestos and sending homeless families into those two contaminated blocks would be published in the House so that we could make sure that it was available for scrutiny by the electors of Westminster. The Minister did not give that assurance earlier. I hope that he will do so now because there is every indication that the council does not intend to publish that report. That in itself is a scandal, and if it is true I hope that the Government will put it right. The Minister has an opportunity to do so today.

[Ms Hilary Armstrong]

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) mentioned the lack of openness in response to two reports. The first deals with the Brent Irish centre. Brent council intends that the district auditor's report, which includes the report on the Brent Irish centre, will go to a sub-committee that about eight councillors are entitled to attend.

In the past, Labour councillors have been refused the right to ask questions or raise issues concerning reports. They were told that they have that right only at full council meetings. The district auditor's report will go to a sub-committee on 20 December. It is clearly intended that it will disappear or nobody will notice it. Subsequently, it will have to be considered by the full council, although on past experience, because it will have been discussed by a so-called sub-committee, attempts may be made to say that the report or part of it has been agreed and therefore cannot be discussed by the full council.

No Minister would want to uphold that position. Therefore, I seek an assurance that the Minister will say that the district auditor's report should not be considered in that way and that he will promise to do what he can to ensure that it is considered openly and can be discussed.

The second report discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East is the subject of an external report by an ex-police officer. That report is now available, but is not intended to be made public. It will be discussed by a sub-committee, but great efforts have been made to ensure that councillors are intimidated and feel unable to discuss it, even with the people they represent. It appears that one of the main people named in the report—the chairman of the business committee—may well turn up at the meeting to defend himself, although the report makes it clear that he has a direct interest in the matter and should take no part in any discussion or decision. He has insisted, however, that the relevant part of the report be taken below the line although the advice from council officers is that it should be taken above the line. That is local government jargon for whether that part of the report is considered in secret, in closed session, or in open session. I believe that it should be taken in open session. It relates to serious allegations and concerns about the spending of public money in the borough. The electors of Brent have a right to know what has been found. They have the right to know what is set out in the report.

I hope that the Minister will say that he believes that the report should be discussed in public and that the electors of Brent have the right to know what is contained in its findings. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to support what the Prime Minister has said about the citizens charter and the free availability of information, especially when it relates to the public sector.

In many senses the Bill seems innocuous. In reality, however, it raises incredibly difficult problems and issues for us all in determining the probity of public office and what Parliament should do to ensure that public probity is upheld at every step of the way and that fraud and corruption are tackled seriously at every turn.

The Government and the Minister have the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to upholding the public service and probity within it. I hope that they will begin to show this evening that they will work with us, the Opposition, during the Bill's passage to ensure that everybody knows that we, hon. Members on both sides of the House, are determined that no one who is in public office will be colluded with or given the opportunity to wriggle, squirm or anything else. We must give the Audit Commission and district auditors every power to ensure that they are able properly to tackle any abuses.

6.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): As everyone is aware, it is a short Bill. During the debate I suddenly recognised that it was seasonal and was turning into a Christmas tree. When a plea was attached to it for proportional representation I thought that we had reached the pits. To use the phrase of the hon. Member for Durham, North-East (Ms Armstrong)—

Ms Armstrong: Durham, North-West.

Sir Paul Beresford: Retaliation has struck home early. I have in mind the hon. Lady's phrase "the bits of Brent".

I was intrigued by the points made by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). If we followed his suggested procedure, the auditor would be a policy maker.

The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) made a spectacular range of accusations. I hope and anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was notified of the accusations and the fact that his name would be mentioned. I assume that that is the position.

Mr. Livingstone: I overlooked that and I apologise to the House. I was dealing with the letter that was read out.

Sir Paul Beresford: I shall leave my right hon. Friend to respond to that. It is sad that the usual courtesies were overlooked in the light of the comments that have been made.

Much has been said about quality. It forms part of the drive of local authorities and the auditor and it is reflected in the various restrictions and pressures that are applied by Government upon local authorities. I was intrigued when the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) talked in one breath about quality and then about differences in costs for various services between Camden and Westminster.

I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong. If he checks them—I have yet to make a check—I suspect that he will find that there is a difference between collection on one side and collection and disposal on the other. If he examines quality of service, he will learn how often bin service and street cleaning goes round Westminster, especially some areas of it, compared with those services in Camden. It is a matter of paying appropriately for quality.

Mr. Dobson: The figures that I quoted were from the indicators of performance published by the Audit Commission. The Minister should not question them. If he has other figures, they cannot be right, or else the Audit Commission is wrong.

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman's intervention shows a lack of understanding. There is a difference between collection and collection and disposal.

Some constructive points have been made. Two of them were introduced by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and reiterated by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West. They were related to the distribution of a newspaper. There is a reference in the Bill to "all reasonable steps". That is one of the provisions that we may have to consider in Committee.

The district auditor system, which is an attachment, as it were, that provides rations to the Audit Commission, the police, the fraud squad and the monitoring officer, has had considerable success in reducing corruption, improving quality and bringing some of the malcontents or difficult people who have broken the law before the courts.

Perhaps the most obvious example would be Preston, which is a fairly well-known Labour authority where there was marked corruption by a combination of officers and Labour members. The proper forces took action. People were fined and others went to gaol. I understand that one gentleman is still being sought. He is in India. The authorities there are looking after him because he has been involved in drugs and drug importation.

I shall be succinct, bearing in mind the time that we have been discussing the Bill. Three measures were outlined by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. First, the Audit Commission should have powers to work alongside the social services inspectorate of the Department of Health. I think that everybody understands that. There is an independence of that inspectorate that has not been recognised to date by Opposition Members. I think that the power to work alongside will be generally welcomed.

Secondly, there is the change in the financial year. I think that that change is a correct one and is understood. An awkward question was asked, to which there was a response.

Thirdly, local authorities, as they have asked, will have greater freedom to publish annual information in the form of statistics in alternative free newspapers. We shall certainly reflect on what has been said about that.

In conclusion—

Mr. Boateng: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Paul Beresford: No, I shall not give way. The Bill is not a Christmas tree.

Mr. Livingstone: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you intervene to inform the Minister that many of the issues raised during the debate are worthy of consideration and that he should respond to them?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. The Chair is not responsible for the content of speeches.

Mr. Boateng: On a further point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a different point of order.

Mr. Boateng: It is, Madam Deputy Speaker. My point of order relates to the usual customs and courtesies of the House, of which you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are the sole arbiter.

We have been debating the Bill for about two-and-a-half hours. Important and detailed questions have been asked about specific clauses. I raised a question in relation to clause 1 about the independence of the Audit Commission and its right in publishing the figures that it produced recently on the funding of education in boroughs—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must come to the point of order.

Mr. Boateng: I raised a specific point in relation to the Bill, arising from the Minister's opening speech and from other matters that were raised during the two and a half hour debate. Is it in accordance with the usual customs and courtesies of the House, with which the Minister must surely be acquainted by now, to ignore completely those points in summing up, and to proceed willy-nilly without any reference to the debate that has taken place? Is not that treating the proceedings of the House with contempt, and should not that be deplored?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is the same point of order as before, because the Chair is not responsible for the content of speeches. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that if the Bill receives its Second Reading there will be ample opportunity in Committee to deal with more detailed points.

Sir Paul Beresford: I was trying to keep to the Bill—

Mr. Boateng: Then deal with clause 1, will you?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No seated interventions. I know that the hon. Member for Brent, South is very keen to observe the courtesies and conventions of the House, and that is one of them.

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no doubt about the independence of the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate, and its equivalent in Scotland. Its independence is quite clear, and I think that every hon. Member in the House sees and accepts that.

Local authorities need clarity in preparing the performance information for 1995-96. The Bill will help that. As I said, it looks as though it will become a Christmas tree, with extra additions, which should make its Committee stage somewhat more interesting than it might otherwise have been.

In general, I think that everyone in the House accepts that the clauses as outlined are for the betterment of the people of this country in relationship to the Audit Commission's role in producing a good quality service through local government.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Chemical Weapons Bill

Considered in Committee.

[DAME JANET FOOKES *in the Chair*]

Clause 1 to 19 agreed to.

Clause 20

LICENCES

6.23 pm

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 14, line 29, leave out subsection (5), and insert—

'(5) An order under subsection (4) shall be made by statutory instrument and shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 9, in clause 23, page 16, line 23, leave out subsection (6) and insert—

'(6) The regulations shall be made by statutory instrument, and no such regulations shall be made unless a draft of them has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments seek to change the powers vested in the Secretary of State to introduce regulations under clauses 20 and 23 by negative order and make them subject to the affirmative procedure.

We must be clear about the extensive powers that are given to the Secretary of State under the Bill. Clause 20 gives the Secretary of State substantial powers in the granting of licences to operate under the chemical weapons convention.

Clause 23 lays down the punishments, which include prison sentences, for those who fail to comply with the terms of the legislation.

The powers proposed in clauses 20 and 23, to which the amendments refer, were mentioned by a number of hon. Members on Second Reading. In response, the Minister said:

"if hon. Members are worried about it—

clause 23—

we shall listen to their concerns."—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 846.]

I think that all hon. Members who took part in the debate, and probably those who are prepared to take part tonight, would accept the underlying principles of the clauses, but on Second Reading they were described as "draconian". I do not think that I used that word, although I was accused of doing so. I do not think that I would use that word, but if I did I would not want to continue to use it. The word was used by at least one other hon. Member in the debate, and I can understand why, because quite extensive powers are vested in the Secretary of State to take action in relation to those who default on the legislation.

It is important that the powers should be open to proper scrutiny by the House, and that is the purpose of the amendments that we are considering. The best way to achieve that is by affirmative order. We do not say that simply for the sake of argument or to delay the House but rather because the scientific community, which will be most affected by the clauses, is somewhat apprehensive about what will be produced in the regulations. It is calling for more transparency and more direct parliamentary scrutiny of all aspects of the Bill, and we shall deal with some of the concerns later.

It is in the day-to-day running of the UK national authority—the function that the DTI will perform on behalf of this country—that the effectiveness of the Bill will be measured. It is essential, therefore, that the regulations are effective if we are to keep to the spirit of the convention. Increased parliamentary scrutiny will lead to more thought and debate on the minute details of the regulations, and therefore ensure that they are more likely to be workable.

On Second Reading, the Minister gave certain assurances on appeal procedures, which will apply to licence applications under clause 20. His assurances are undoubtedly welcome, but why will he not accept the next logical step and allow them to be subject to the affirmative procedure?

Clause 23, to which amendment No. 9 refers, can be described only as being somewhat obtuse. Subsection (1) reads:

"The Secretary of State may make regulations requiring persons of any description specified in the regulations to inform him that they are of such a description."

If anything is an all-singing, all-dancing clause, this must be it. As was stated on Second Reading, it is a wonderful piece of parliamentary draftsmanship, but its precise meaning and implementation cause concern within the scientific community.

Amendment No. 9 seeks merely to ensure that when the Secretary of State finally decides who will be covered by the clause his decision should be subject to the open scrutiny of the House. Again, I would argue that the best means of doing so is by affirmative order.

Let me stress again that the scientific community generated the aims of the amendments. It is not a case of arguing for arguing's sake, or of advancing a negative view that should be positive. Those who will be directly affected by the legislation feel that the clauses will have a significant impact on their work in science and with chemical products. They believe that, in the cause of transparency and accountability, all aspects of the Bill should be dealt with openly by the House. The best and most effective way of doing that is not to slide regulation in through the back door, in the dark of the night, by means of the negative procedure: it should be done by affirmative resolution.

The Minister has shown a willingness to listen to some of the reasoned arguments that have been advanced in our debates on the Bill. I hope that he has now given more thought to the points that were made on Second Reading, as well as what I have said. I ask him to respond positively, and to accept the principles and spirit of the amendments.

6.30 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Clause 23(1) is important as it stands. It is not in the least confusing. It is because of such provisions that we have such high standards: it is because of the wording of subsection (1) that we can expect the entire scientific and industrial community affected by the legislation to accept the responsibility to say, "This applies to me. It applies to my scientific institution, and to my company."

It is because such standards can be guaranteed as a result of the Bill that Britain will be at the forefront of countries promoting the convention. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will feel able to suggest that I might be right about that, and will robustly defend the way in which the legislation has been framed. We are talking about only one sentence. Like the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), I am opposed to parliamentary gobbledegook—I like crystal-clear English—and I believe that we have it here.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. I hope that he will not think it offensive of me to ask him whether he speaks for his constituents in Porton.

Mr. Key: I hope that I do. I have not conducted a referendum in my constituency, but my constituents have not said that they are concerned about this provision; nor have they asked me to promote the idea of a positive resolution of the statutory instrument or regulation that will follow.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman may not have received such representations, but does he accept that representations to that effect have been made in the scientific community? We are now speaking not just for our constituencies but in the wider scientific interest. Does he accept that such concerns have been raised in the wider community, and does he accept the reasons for that? The concern is less about clause 23(1) than about the way in which the regulations will apply, and the need for the House to exercise proper accountability and scrutiny by using an affirmative rather than a negative procedure.

Mr. Key: Of course I accept that. According to the briefing on the Bill that hon. Members have received, a body of opinion is in favour of it, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will argue his corner. Later, when we deal with another part of the Bill, I shall seek to demonstrate that some of the "scientific advice" that we have been given is flawed.

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps we should wait to hear what the Minister says, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) that there is concern about transparency. The Royal Society of Chemistry is not alone in asking for a proper, well-defined and transparent advisory structure within the Department of Trade and Industry. We shall listen carefully to what the Minister has to say in answer to the question that has been asked.

In regard to transparency, it is not just this Bill with which we must be concerned in the long term. I believe that 1996 is the time for the review of the 1972 convention on biological weapons. Transparency may be even more important in that connection.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I support my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). In fact, amendment No. 9 was tabled in my name. I am pleased to have had the support of the Leader of the Opposition and the rest of the Front-Bench team, but it happened merely because I got in first.

Both amendments are simple. They call for an affirmative procedure when the regulations are made. Clause 23 confers wide-ranging powers. Those powers will clearly be necessary if the convention is to be enforced properly, but there will be civil liberty implications and I do not think it unreasonable to demand an affirmative rather than a negative procedure. That will allow much more accountability.

I have consulted a Library paper, which suggests that the system is basically the same as that applying to early-day motions. No time has been fixed, and in regard to the majority of cases no time is likely to be available for a debate. The affirmative procedure involves more stringent parliamentary controls: legislation must receive parliamentary approval before it comes into force. That does not necessarily mean that there must be a debate, but it gives us an opportunity to examine objections based on civil liberties if many Members of Parliament submit them.

I believe that Parliament will pass the provisions come what may, provided that their impact on civil liberties will not be devastating, because we want the principles of the convention to be enforced, but we need accountability to Parliament.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I understand hon. Members' concern that the appeals process should be fair, independent and transparent, and I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) for his comments. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key): it is intended that the Secretary of State will use the order-making power in the clause to adopt the model appeals provisions that are seen to be prescribed by order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. That Act requires model appeal procedures to be prescribed by order, so that they can be incorporated in legislation with or without modifications. We intend to adopt the model appeal procedures with modifications, should that prove necessary.

As I think hon. Members accept, it is important to standardise appeal procedures wherever possible to achieve some consistency—particularly in cases such as this, in which we expect appeals to be relatively infrequent. An appeals committee will need to be established. Its members will be drawn from research, academic, medical and other disciplines. We want to ensure that the committee has the breadth of knowledge to judge the types and quantities of chemicals to be licensed against the intended use, be it academic or industrial. It is open to the Opposition to pray against a negative resolution. In an extreme case where a Government tried to implement a procedure that was especially odious to the House—I suspect that if a Government sought to do that it would not be only the Opposition to whom it would be odious—the Opposition could pray against a negative resolution, so an important safety valve is in place.

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of the committee, do the Government have a chairman in mind yet? Can they announce that to the House?

Mr. Oppenheim: No, we do not have a chairman in mind yet. The hon. Gentleman raised not only issues relevant to the clause, but the question of an advisory committee in the context of transparency, which we shall, I think, consider later. It is important to separate the issues.

[Mr. Oppenheim]

Clause 23 must be read not in isolation but with clause 22. Clause 23(2) restricts the scope of the regulations to persons covered by clause 22. That is the important point. The effect of clause 22(1)(a) is that the scope is restricted to persons likely to have information needed for the purposes of the convention. That power is therefore clearly restricted. It is not an open-ended power and I would be uncomfortable if it were open-ended and unrestricted.

The convention is explicit about the information needed. As we know, there are four categories of chemicals—schedules 1 to 3 and discrete organic chemicals—and declarations are required for activities beyond the specific thresholds outlined in the annexes. Those must be reflected in the regulations.

It is fair to say that the regulations must also reflect some detailed technical points, some of which have not yet been resolved. For example, if a chemical has been diluted, the question arises whether the concentration of the chemical is such that the dilution has put it beyond the requirement to be declared. That and other similar technical issues are currently under discussion internationally. They could change with the experience of the regime when it is under way. To ask the House to confirm all such changes by positive resolution would be onerous and unnecessary.

I return to the fundamental point that if a Government tried to impose something by negative resolution that was onerous and odious to the House, it would be open not just to the Opposition but to Government Members to pray against it in extreme circumstances, which I do not think would arise.

We need this power because the convention requires that all sites covered by declaration requirements must be included in the United Kingdom declaration. Inspections will take place to check declarations and the UK is, of course, open to challenge inspections if other states believe that we have not declared any site or that we have misdeclared any site.

It is fair to say that other states' experience is that industry's response can be poor where there is no statutory requirement to give information. The experience in Australia was that 36 per cent. of companies failed to respond to a carefully structured convention-related survey.

Mr. Dalyell: I want to ask about the challenge inspections. Do we have the guarantee, in so far as the Government can give it, that any challenge inspection, even if it seemed frivolous, would be accepted? For example, we are challenging—or Ralf Ekeus is challenging—the Iraqis, not that they are members yet, on the question of VX, which is worse than the sarin that was used in the Tokyo underground. Rightly or wrongly, we might be angry if we were challenged by some Arab nation on a tit-for-tat basis. Do we have an undertaking from the Government that, however irritated they might be, they would feel it incumbent on themselves to accept such a challenge? The Minister might say that it is a hypothetical question, but it is important.

Mr. Oppenheim: I would not say that that question is necessarily hypothetical. One would hope that it might be, but in the world as it is, it might not be. The only answer that I can give the hon. Gentleman is that, if there were a challenge inspection within the terms of the convention, we would be obliged to accept that. If a challenge were outside the terms, obviously we would not be so obliged. I think that is the best answer that I can give him.

I understand the feeling behind the two amendments, but they are unnecessary and would restrict the convention's application. The powers that we are taking are not draconian, but the House's ultimate defence is that, if the Government did try to propose any regulations that were especially odious to the House, it could pray against the negative resolution.

Mr. Ingram: It is a matter of regret that the Minister is not prepared to move on this matter as clearly there is a point of difference between us, although we are trying to reach the same objective: to ensure that the convention is properly implemented in this country and, more important, internationally. To try to achieve that, however, there must be openness, although the Government have moved substantially on what they were originally proposing as a result of representations received from a wide body of opinion.

6.45 pm

That same body of opinion—the Royal Society of Chemistry and other experts in this sector—is making the point about the need for an affirmative approach in relation to these two clauses. As I said, I am arguing not about the underlying principles of the clauses, but about the need for proper parliamentary scrutiny of some of the details and of the way in which the legislation will apply. Although powers are vested in the Opposition to pray against negative orders, that puts the onus on the Opposition to oppose. The onus should, however, be on the Government to be open, but they appear to be unwilling to be open about the application of the regulations.

As it appears that I shall be unable to persuade the Minister, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 20 to 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 25

RIGHTS OF ENTRY ETC. FOR PURPOSES OF INSPECTIONS

Mr. Cohen: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 17, line 9, after 'the', insert 'Convention and the'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also No. 7, in clause 35, page 22, line 19, after 'Convention', insert 'and its annexes'.

Mr. Cohen: I am happy to move my amendment No. 3, which is linked to amendment No. 7. Amendment No. 3 relates to clause 25, and amendment No. 7 to clause 35.

The amendments that I have tabled are mainly probing amendments, to obtain information from the Minister, or tidying-up amendments. Amendment No. 3 falls into the category of a tidying-up amendment. In one of those clauses, the convention is mentioned, but not the annexes to the convention; in the other, the verification annex is mentioned, but not the convention. I have tabled amendments that link the two, so that, on the face on the Bill, it would say, "the Convention and the annexes".

That relates to amendment No. 3 and the rights of entry for inspection purposes, which is tied up with article IX of the convention. Clause 35 gives the Minister powers to amend the Act if an amendment to the convention is subsequently agreed to by the various parties to it.

The amendment refers to both the convention and the annexes. It would stop anyone using the legislation as a loophole, perhaps, to avoid inspection. They could say that it related only to the convention and not to the annexes. It might also prevent any future legal dispute over that matter if the two were put together. It is a simple tidying-up amendment, and I hope that the Minister will accept it.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the Government's attitude to generic licensing? If the Minister would rather deal with that when we come to schedule 1 or later in his brief I should be prepared to wait. However, I have put down a marker now because generic licensing is important.

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall do my best to answer that, although it is not directly related to the clause or the amendment. We shall consider it where it is sensible and within the bounds of the convention. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman could expect me to say any more about that issue. If he would like to discuss the matter at some future time, I should be happy to do so.

I appreciate the spirit of helpfulness with which the amendment was moved, but, with respect, amendments Nos. 3 and 7 are based on a misunderstanding. The articles of the convention place certain obligations on state parties. The verification annex itself defines the verification procedures, and that contains the rights of the inspection teams. Article 17 of the convention makes it clear that all references to it include its verification annex, with all the powers and rights of the inspection teams. Consequently, a reference to both would be basically confusing and unnecessary, because the reference to the verification text as it stands is correct.

The same applies to amendment No. 7, which introduces a reference to the annexes to the convention in subsection 1 of the clause. The reference is again unnecessary, because article 17 of the convention states that the annexes form an integral part of the convention. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the spirit in which he moved the amendments, but, with respect, they are unnecessary.

Mr. Dalyell: I understand the Minister's answer on generic licensing, but the mind boggles at having to license every individual chemical, because that would be a gargantuan task. I suspect that, at the end of the day, generic licensing will have to be accepted.

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall try my best to respond to that. Licensing applies only to the most harmful and dangerous, and quite often complex, chemicals that are licensed, rather than to the reporting requirements. We are dealing here with chemical substances that are not used by many organisations, but obviously we have to try to look after the interests of those organisations that legitimately use them. I shall certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's point, and if it is possible to be helpful in the context of generic licensing and stay within the terms of the convention, I assure him that we shall certainly look at that.

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful to the Minister for his explanation that the convention also covers the annexes. Hopefully, there will be no loopholes. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 25 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 26

OFFENCES IN CONNECTION WITH INSPECTIONS

Mr. Cohen: I beg to move amendment No. 4, page 18, line 24, at end insert—

> '(d) knowingly makes a false or misleading statement to any member of the inspection team or of the in-country escort, or the observer, in the conduct of that inspection in accordance with the verification annex.'.

I am quite keen on this amendment, which is about offences in connection with inspections. At the moment, there are three main categories of offence—refusing to comply; interfering with any object, for example a container; or wilfully obstructing. There should be a fourth category, to deal with someone who knowingly makes a false or misleading statement to any member of the inspection team or to the in-country escort or the observer during the conduct of that inspection in accordance with the verification annex.

During an inspection, it is vital that the correct information is presented to the inspection team. The Bill would not make the giving of false or misleading statements an offence, and that is wrong. Clause 26(1)(c) covers only physical obstruction, and does not cover false or misleading statements.

I have looked up a couple of Acts in which this issue is raised. Section 33(1)(a) of the Food Safety Act 1990 refers to a person who

> "intentionally obstructs any person acting in the execution of this Act;".

That covers wilful obstruction. Section 33(2)(a) of that same Act refers to someone who

> "furnishes information which he knows to be false or misleading in a material particular;".

Plainly, earlier legislation drew the distinction between wilful obstruction and the furnishing of false information. That means that the distinction has been recognised by the Government.

Section 35(1)(a) of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 refers to any person who

> "intentionally obstructs an inspector or other person in the exercise of any powers conferred by section 31,".

That again relates to wilful obstruction, but section 35(1)(b) says that a person who

> "refuses or without reasonable excuse fails to provide facilities or assistance or any information or to permit any inspection reasonably required by an inspector or other person under that section,
>
> shall be guilty of an offence."

That again shows that we need to go beyond wilful obstruction in which false and misleading information is a factor. Clause 23 of the Bill would make it an offence for anybody knowingly to make a false or misleading statement to the Government. The same should apply to the inspection team. I was too late in suggesting that when the Act which implemented the treaty on conventional forces in Europe was going through the House. It did not appear in the Act, although the Minister responsible for the legislation said that he would look at it. It should have been incorporated.

[Mr. Cohen]

It is not right that anyone should be able to lie to an inspector from wherever he comes, or mislead him, and not be committing an offence. We should make it clear that such conduct is an offence, and if the amendment is accepted, that can be shown. I hope that the Minister will accept the logic of that, and the logic of previous legislation, and accept the amendment.

Mr. Dalyell: I am concerned about the role of the organisation at The Hague in all this, and about what is said to the central body. That issue among others was raised by the Royal Society of Chemistry. For the convenience of the Minister and his officials, I shall read from page 9 of the briefing of 28 November which I know has been sent to the Department. It states:

> "The regular returns of industrial data on Schedule-2 and Schedule-3 chemicals will take their place alongside various other declarations of data to the OPCW Technical Secretariat which the Convention requires of States Parties.
>
> Gathering the data and then transmitting appropriate aggregations to The Hague will be one of the two main occupations of the National Authorities. (The other main occupation will be preparing for, and liaising with, visiting OPCW inspectors who have been asked either to validate declared data by routine on-site inspection or to perform challenge inspections.)
>
> Some of the declarations are needed only once, for example the declarations of historical information on past chemical weapons activities. Other types of declaration, including the industrial data, are to be submitted each year . . . HMG informed Parliament as follows, in a written Defence Ministry answer on 22 November 1995: 'Details of UK's declarations required under the chemical weapons convention will be made available to the public when they are passed to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons."

The questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has rightly asked about the national situation I am sure also apply to the international situation. One wonders what powers, if any, the organisation of The Hague has to ensure that it is not being deceived or lied to.

7 pm

Mr. Oppenheim: That really resides with national Governments, who have an obligation under the convention to ensure that there is full and open reporting.

I agree with the logic of the argument of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). I think, however, that it is a matter of degree. I shall try to explain the different situations that might arise.

For example, it would be extreme to penalise a person who might just be a plant worker who knows little about the chemical weapons convention, and who may not have been warned formally not to make a misleading or false statement, especially bearing in mind that the inspectors may well be international and not UK citizens, which might lead to some confusion.

Also, given that the chemical industry competes internationally, plant workers might be keen not to breach commercial confidentiality, which is understandable. When genuine mistakes are made and they are not significant, we must have the scope and flexibility not to prosecute, especially where people will be making statements without being either under oath or under caution.

I emphasise that we would leave ourselves scope to prosecute any significant breach of faith, misleading information or covering up. We just do not want to be obliged to prosecute for every little technical offence, which might well be non-malicious.

In serious cases, the Bill clearly makes it an offence to give false information in response to a notice served under clause 22. In that case, it is quite proper that there should be a penalty, as the recipient will have been clearly warned that it is an offence to give false information in response to the notice. Where the provision of false information amounts to obstruction, an offence may also be committed under clause 26.

We do not want to have to prosecute every tiny, technical, insignificant offence. Quite clearly, we will prosecute major offences and instances in which misleading information has been given in order to mislead and is significant.

Mr. Cohen: I hear what the Minister says. I do not want to prosecute every minor matter, either, but that would not be the consequence of my amendment. Omitting the point about false and misleading information would open up quite a serious loophole. I am not going to press the amendment to a vote. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) is going to intervene.

I certainly think that the Minister should look at the matter, because it relates to inspections. He has taken the power for himself in an earlier clause about the provision of information about chemical weapons, and it is important that that same power should be given to the inspection teams, so that they can be assured that they are receiving information in good faith. They have a limited time under the convention to carry out their inspections. Any misleading information could point them in the wrong direction and take up that time. That would be very serious, in my view.

Although I shall not press the amendment, I will not withdraw it yet, either, because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride is about to comment. I ask the Minister to reconsider the matter. Perhaps, when he brings forward the regulations under clause 23, he will consider tightening up those covering inspections, while obviously granting himself the power not to have to prosecute in every case. I do not want that—nobody in the House wants that.

Mr. Ingram: Obviously the amendment has provoked a little interest. I was neutral on the matter, and waited to hear the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton has made a very strong case in support of his amendment, and has accepted some of the Minister's points about being careful to avoid punishing every slight indiscretion. But we should remember that that is not what is being sought.

The amendment says that a person is guilty if he

> "knowingly makes a false or misleading statement."

When someone knowingly does that, they have clearly done something wrong, and should not be allowed to do so, as the Minister was suggesting, because they were acting in the interests of their company's commercial confidentiality. That is a very dangerous route to go down.

Is the Minister arguing that, because commercial confidentiality is involved, people can tell lies on behalf of their company? I hope that that is not what he is saying in the context of the Bill, because it would have wide-ranging implications. I certainly hope that he is not saying, in the case of any Government legislation, that people can knowingly mislead or give false information which is tantamount to the perpetration of a crime. If the Minister is advancing that principle, it is totally wrong.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for not yet withdrawing his amendment, and for the fact that he has asked the Minister the right question. I suggest that the Minister take the amendment away and look at it. There will be time during consideration in the other place to take account of all the points made. But if the Government still feel strongly at that stage that they not do want to accept the amendment, they could argue their case if the matter is raised.

Clearly there is merit in my hon. Friend's arguments. I do not, however, think that the Minister's arguments are wholly satisfactory. The best solution is to put the matter on the back burner; let us consider it further. That would help the understanding and progress of the Bill in another place.

Mr. Dalyell: It may well be that the Minister is being only realistic when he says that it is a matter for the nation states. Do we then take it that, in fact, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has virtually no powers at all? If so, how does it set about trying to impose what it believes to be right? I think that it is very difficult.

Mr. Oppenhiem: There will be scope for the House of Lords to reconsider the matter if it proves to be a problem. The feeling that we have, though, is that the Bill has sufficient powers. It is a matter of degree. I think that I have made it clear that we would expect prosecutions to occur when significant misleading statements are made.

The hon. Member for Leyton should consider the scenario of a foreign inspection team visiting a factory, where someone at that factory is not under oath, is not given a warning, is asked a question that may not be very significant, and, yes, may, eve knowingly give a wrong answer without really considering the implications. We want the scope to allow people to do that, because people are fallible.

Someone who does not necessarily speak the best English may visit a factory and ask a plant worker questions. The worker may be a little concerned, not know the implications and not be totally au fait with every aspect of the Bill. Questions may even be asked about chemicals which the plant worker does not necessarily know are dangerous. Some of the chemicals in the lower schedules are not obviously dangerous. We want to allow scope not to prosecute under those circumstances.

I should, however, like to make it clear that, when people are under oath and have been warned, and then make knowingly misleading statements, they will be prosecuted. Even if a warning had not been issued, there would be scope to prosecute people who knowingly make misleading statements which are significant and detrimental to the working of the convention. Although I would like to leave it like that, there will be an opportunity in the other place, should there be genuine concern, to amend the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I again appreciate what the Minister has said. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride for reminding me that the amendment refers to people knowingly making misleading statements. Nobody wants to punish genuine mistakes to which the Minister has referred. But quite a dangerous loophole is opening up, which could undermine the inspection process. I do not think that we should let that come about.

I hope that the matter will be reconsidered in the other place and that, in the interim, the Government will think about it and agree to a suitable amendment—with wording of their own choice—that would protect those who have made genuine mistakes but deal with those who have made a deliberate attempt to mislead. If the inspection team or the management of the chemical factory explains the law under the Bill, matters could be further clarified.

Mr. Dalyell: It would be a good idea to have some sort of statement on the leverage that is available to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. I am afraid that I am not very clear about what it could do if it found that it was being deceived or if it faced other difficulties.

Mr. Cohen: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister nodded when I asked about some sort of statement on the OPCW. Nods are not recorded in *Hansard*—

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I do not usually work by nods or by interruptions when I am putting the Question. Is the hon. Gentleman referring to a matter that arises under clause 26 stand part?

Mr. Dalyell: Under clause stand part, I am simply asking that the Minister's nod be interpreted in *Hansard* as a yes. These things happen by alchemy. I hope that there will be some statement in the other place about the powers or otherwise of the OPCW. It is an important matter.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is nice to be thought of as an alchemist, although a nuclear weapons Bill would be more appropriate if we wanted to change one substance into another. I was nodding to show that I was listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman was saying. The international body has quite clear sanctions when a country is in breach of the convention. It may help the hon. Gentleman if I write to him outlining all the sanctions. Then, if he wants to speak further about it, I shall happily arrange that.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 27 to 30 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 31

OFFENCES: OTHER PROVISIONS

Mr. Cohen: I beg to move amendment No. 6, page 20, line 35, leave out 'section 2 or 11' and insert 'this Act'.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 5, in page 20, line 41, leave out subsection (2).

Mr. Cohen: The amendments relate to offences, as defined by the Bill. The clause refers to sections 2 and

[Mr. Cohen]

11, which relate to the really serious offences—for example, those with potential life sentences for possessing, using, developing, producing or transferring chemical weapons. They require the consent of the Attorney-General to any prosecution.

There is a split in the authority to prosecute offences under the Bill. The serious offences require the consent of the Attorney-General, but for the minor offences scattered throughout the Bill it will be for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to say whether there should be prosecutions. I am not sure why there should be such a split.

I am concerned that there could be a conflict of interest relating to the prosecution for smaller offences. I can give a topical example—although I do not do it to make the Minister irate—which is the Scott inquiry. It is possible that a Minister would want to block a prosecution if going ahead with it would cause some embarrassment to his Department. Currently, the Scott inquiry is examining the failure of export control procedures, which is a matter for the DTI. If a Minister were to be embarrassed by such a failure within his Department, he might not authorise a prosecution under the Bill because he would not want to advertise that embarrassment.

7.15 pm

The possible conflict of interest is serious. It is certainly not hypothetical because it is exactly what Lord Justice Scott is examining. The matter needs explanation and some assurances from the Minister that prosecutions will not be stopped just to cover up embarrassments.

There is the question of how the Bill applies to Scotland. The only Law Officer in Scotland who can bring prosecutions is the Lord Advocate. He is responsible for any prosecutions for both the serious offences and the other minor offences that are scattered through the Bill. If, in England and Wales, all the decisions to prosecute rested with the Attorney-General, that would be equivalent to the position in Scotland. I do not understand why there is a different prosecuting system in England and Wales from the one in Scotland.

These are probing amendments, but they raise substantial points that are worthy of consideration and answers from the Minister. Clearly, the Secretary of State will be responsible for securing Britain's compliance with the convention. There should not be any conflict of interest when it comes to prosecuting for offences.

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern and I have some sympathy with it. He made a fair point in saying that the Secretary of State would be both the regulating authority and the prosecuting authority. I hope that I can put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest by saying that with large and significant cases, the Attorney-General in England and Wales or the Lord Advocate in Scotland will be involved. It is only with the relatively minor cases that the Secretary of State will make the ultimate decision on whether an offence is worth prosecution. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

The position is fairly consistent with what happens in other areas. The Attorney-General really deals only with fairly major cases. He is not geared up to deal with all the minor cases. It would cause problems for the operation of the convention and the Act if we were to put all cases before the Attorney-General. It would clog up his office. If—to take the opposite end of the spectrum from the hon. Gentleman—it was thought that in certain cases the Secretary of State was taking action in a frivolous way, the courts would be the arbiter of that. Of course, the Secretary of State ultimately would be accountable to Parliament.

I hope that what I have said reassures the hon. Gentleman that the Secretary of State would not bring frivolous prosecutions for relatively minor offences. On the other hand, it is clear that the Attorney-General or the Lord Advocate would be involved in major offences. Therefore, I cannot imagine any cover-up in major cases because all such cases would be referred to the Law Offices.

Mr. Dalyell: I wish to draw the Minister's attention to the comments of the Royal Society of Chemistry, which has said that if the Department of Trade and Industry or the national authority were ever to have to confront a rogue agency—that is not a hypothetical question—it might need all the support and safeguards it could muster, including parliamentary protection. Presumably that parliamentary protection will not be a great problem under the legislation we are debating tonight. But such protection would be no bad thing under less apocalyptic circumstances, such as the Department of Trade and Industry merely seeking the assistance of other Departments or reminding them of their obligations under the convention. This could be a problem. While one does not expect frivolous prosecutions, it sometimes turns out that prosecutions are less well-founded than people acting in good faith once thought.

Mr. Oppenheim: I take on board what the hon. Gentleman says and, in the circumstances he has described, such prosecutions would be found out by the courts. I do not think that it would be sustainable for the President of the Board of Trade to go down that route too often, because ultimately he would be accountable to Parliament. Quite often prosecutions are started which are not considered to be frivolous, and presumably it should be open to the Secretary of State or the prosecuting authority to withdraw a prosecution when it becomes apparent that it has no real substance. I hope that that gives the hon. Gentleman some reassurance.

Mr. Cohen: I hear what the Minister says, and I have some sympathy with his point that the Attorney-General's Department would get clogged up if it had to deal with all the prosecutions. I understand that point, and I heard the assurances that he gave on the matter as well.

I am still concerned about the potential conflict of interest within the Department, despite the Minister's assurances, which I appreciate were important. I wonder if I could entice him further along the road in his assurances. Perhaps he could put on the record—although I know that he cannot bind any future Minister or any future Government to this—that any parliamentary question in this delicate area which relates to the role of Ministers in the prosecution of offences will receive a proper answer and will not be blocked, because I know that there is a procedure to block sensitive questions.

The public interest immunity certificate procedure is coming under scrutiny from Lord Justice Scott, and it may be that the procedure will change. But the fact that a PII certificate has been issued should not get in the way of answering a parliamentary question about the prosecution of offences under the convention. I know that the Minister cannot bind any future Government, but if he could give an assurance that he would like that to be the case, that would be another step forward and I would be happy to withdraw my amendment.

Mr. Oppenheim: I think that I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. First, it would be a matter of parliamentary accountability and scrutiny that, under those circumstances, such questions should be answered. The only example that I can think of where parts of questions may not be answered for such reasons is in cases where there is commercial confidentiality. But as the Minister responsible, I can give my assurance that we will do our absolute utmost to be as transparent as possible and to answer questions where it is reasonable and fair that we should do so without going outside the convention by breaching commercial confidentiality. I hope that that statement assures the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cohen: In the light of the Minister's further assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 31 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 32

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION.

Mr. Oppenheim: I beg to move amendment No. 11, page 21, line 35, at end insert—

'(2A) The reference to this Act in subsection (2)(c) does not include a reference to section (*Annual reports by Secretary of State*).'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government new clause 3—*Annual reports by Secretary of State*—and new clause 2—*Annual Report*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall prepare an annual report to be presented to both Houses of Parliament on his activities in relation to this Act.

(2) The annual report shall contain the following information for the year in question in pursuance of the provisions of this Act—

(a) the number of companies and other organisations that have provided information to the Secretary of State;

(b) the identities of chemicals that have been declared to the Secretary of State, and their aggregate quantities;

(c) the number of licences granted under this Act and their duration;

(d) the number of appeals against decisions made under the provisions of this Act;

(e) the extent of compliance of companies and other organisations with the provisions of this Act;

(f) the number of prosecutions for offences under this Act;

(g) the number of routine inspections of premises and the number of challenge inspections;

(h) an audit of the outcome of inspection of premises;

(i) the text of the report prepared in accordance with Article X.4 of the Convention, excluding matters of a confidential nature;

(j) the identities of any chemicals not listed in the Schedules that pose a risk to the purpose of the Convention;

(k) changes in export control regulations necessitated by section 2 of this Act and by Articles VI.2, VI.11 and XI.2(c) of the Convention;

(l) the names of the individuals appointed to serve on the Advisory Committee;

(m) any changes in the international administration of the Convention; and

(n) such other information as may serve to demonstrate UK compliance with the Convention.'.

Mr. Oppenheim: I listened extremely carefully to the points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House on Second Reading, during a debate which I thought was extremely useful. I understand the concerns that the work of the national authority should be subject to proper scrutiny, and I told the House at Second Reading that the national authority would issue an annual report. Clearly my assurance on that occasion was not enough for hon. Members, although I do not take any offence at that. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should.

We have consulted on the issue, and we came to the conclusion—rightly, I think—that to put this into statute was the right thing to do. I have no doubt that the annual report will enhance the process of parliamentary scrutiny of the work of the national authority. Therefore, we have no objection to the annual report being included in the Bill. I think that that reflects the wishes of the House.

I should add that the amendment means that those who compile the annual report will properly be subject to the requirement to safeguard confidential information, which I think is reasonable. I should also make it clear that our intention is for the report to be as informative as it can be within the clear requirements to protect commercial confidentiality and national security which are included in the convention.

It is fair to say that the report might include information on a number of companies providing information for the purposes of a United Kingdom declaration, the number of licences issued, the number of appeals, the number of prosecutions and the number of inspections. We also expect the report to contain a clear explanation of the national authority's work. But of course the report will be laid before both Houses, and hon. Members will have a duty to tell us if not enough information is being provided. If that is the case and the request is reasonable, we will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that the extra information is included.

Finally, we should not impose rigid requirements on the contents of the report. We should be flexible, as ultimately we are accountable to the House for the matter. The Secretary of State must decide ultimately what information will demonstrate to the satisfaction of both Houses that he has undertaken his duties under the Act effectively and efficiently. He obviously has a requirement under the convention and under the Bill, and he must balance that with the need to protect commercial confidentiality and national security. I hope that by putting the matter into statute, we will make the Bill more transparent and the national authority more accountable.

Mr. Ingram: I welcome the Government's conversion to agreeing that there is a need for the annual report to be written on to the face of the Bill. I do not know why they have had this last-minute change of mind, but clearly it is to be welcomed. I know that three ex-presidents of the Royal Society of Chemistry—Lords Dainton, Lewis of Newnham and Porter of Luddenham—had submitted a letter to *The Times* to be published this morning calling for the report to be included in the Bill.

[Mr. Ingram]

Those three are very weighty people in this field, and they were pleased to learn yesterday that the Government had tabled this amendment and new clause. Clearly they did not proceed with the publication of the letter. I do not know whether the Minister was aware of the level of support that was coming forward for the annual report to be put on the face of the Bill. If he was, it must have encouraged him to come to the conclusion that he did.

New clause 2—tabled in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends—was tabled in advance of the Government's tabling of amendment No. 11 and new clause 3. We sought to go further in new clause 2 than the measures announced by the Minister this evening. I take the point completely about the question of commercial confidentiality and those matters which affect national security. The items are covered within the convention, and the Opposition clearly understand the need to be circumspect if matters relating to such sensitive issues were to appear in any annual report.

I suggest that there is still a difference between the Government and the Opposition as to what is required in terms of the annual report.

I did not quite catch all the points that the Minister was saying he would like to see in an annual report, but I think that he mentioned the number of companies and other organisations providing information to the Secretary of State, the number of licences granted and the number of appeals against refusal.

However, new clause 2 is much more comprehensive than that. There is much merit in taking on board the points that it lists, because it is right that the House and the country should be told about the number of prosecutions under the Act, the number of routine inspections of premises and the audit of the outcome of those inspections. The text of the report prepared in accordance with article X.4 of the convention, which is to be sent to the central body in The Hague, does not exclude matters of a confidential nature, and that, too, could be included in the annual report. The information is to be sent off somewhere else in the name of the United Kingdom, so why should it not be included in the report produced for the consumption of hon. Members and others interested in the subject?

New clause 2 suggests other topics that could be included in the annual report, such as the identities of any chemicals not listed in the schedules which pose a risk under the terms of the convention. On Second Reading we talked about the annual report produced by Porton Down. That is comprehensive and highlighted certain activities connected with chemical weapons which caused concern, and rightly alerted the wider public to what is happening in the former Soviet Union. That is the type of information that would be of benefit to all interested parties. It would secure proper scrutiny of what was taking place, and make the report as comprehensive and detailed as possible.

7.30 pm

It would help if the Minister went further than simply listing three or four possible items for the report and saying that the Secretary of State would be keen to ensure that it was as comprehensive as possible. He has not taken on board some of the other suggestions in new clause 2. I have not listed all those, because they are on the amendment paper for all to see, but I have highlighted some of the more important areas of concern.

We are pleased that there is to be an annual report, but it must be as comprehensive as possible, while allowing for matters of a confidential nature and matters of national security. Has the Minister considered the points raised by new clause 2 and thought which of them he feels could be included in the report? It would be useful if he could notify us of the items that he believes could not be included, so that we could have a debate on the merits of all the points in the new clause.

The Government have made an important concession. First, they did not want to produce an annual report, then we had to rely on the Minister's word that they would produce one, and now we are on the point of having a statutory annual report. We are grateful for that, but let us take things a little step further and define properly what would be in the report. It would speed up the deliberations when the Bill is discussed in another place if the House of Commons were given a proper explanation of what the Minister and the Secretary of State have in mind. I should therefore welcome any comments the Minister can make about the points in new clause 2.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I too welcome the fact that the Government have decided to introduce a new clause and put the report on a statutory footing. It is entirely right that the requirement should be written on the face of the Bill. The Minister should not take offence that anyone might cast doubt on the assurances that he gave last time, because they simply do not have the same standing as words in an Act.

Tomorrow morning I shall give written evidence to a current judicial review which proves that assurances given by Ministers two years ago have been broken—in that case by a quango. The Government's change of mind reassures us that the same thing will not happen in relation to the Bill.

Although I welcome that fact, I echo the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) in saying that it would be helpful to see more specific details of what will appear in the report. I hope that there will be further opportunities to debate the matter during the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: As I made a so-called parliamentary song and dance a fortnight ago about the need for statutory implementation, it would be churlish of me not to acknowledge what has happened now. None the less, I echo what the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) said about Ministers' assurances. Assurances are frequently given in good faith but broken long after the ministerial incumbent has either been promoted or has left the House altogether, so the Minister need not be offended.

Mr. Oppenheim: Having been a Member of Parliament for 13 years, I find it difficult to take offence. I must tell the hon. Member for East Kilbride that we took the decision some time ago that there should be an annual report, and that we also decided to write that on the face of the Bill some time before we heard about the letter from their Lordships—although obviously we listen carefully to their views, because they are all distinguished chemists.

I see no difficulty in including some of the information suggested in the new clause, and certainly would expect much of it to appear in the report.

wever, the hon. Gentleman asked me which items I uld specifically exclude, so I must mention osection 2(b), which asks that aggregate quantities of lividual declared chemicals should be incorporated o the report. That could compromise commercially isitive information where only a few companies, or netimes only one company, produces a chemical. rtainly it would be in breach of the convention.

The whole spirit of the convention relies on our taining the co-operation of chemical and armaceutical producers, as well as of researchers and idemics. I genuinely believe that if producers felt that were going outside the convention and were likely breach commercial confidentiality, it could mpromise the proper working of the convention.

Another area that causes concern is subsection 2(j), iich would require unscheduled chemicals with the tential to be used in chemical weapons to be entified in the report. There is a danger that that uld help proliferators by alerting them to the fact that ere was something to look for. It could also lead to nfusion. The point of the convention is that there is schedule of chemicals, which can be added to. If we ilaterally added a whole lot more chemicals without eir going through the convention procedure, it could d to confusion and difficulties. Any information out chemicals with the potential for chemical weapons plications, especially information on novel mpounds, should be carefully controlled.

I would be concerned about the idea that those be cluded in an annual report. I accept the intention hind the new clause, and we intend to make the port as informative as is consistent with protecting mmercial confidentiality and national security.

As for the push behind our concession, or new clause, d the Government's present desire to make the quirement for an annual report statutory, the point of bates such as Second Reading, of the consultations d of the representations made by hon. Members on th sides of the House, is that we are all aiming at e same end; we are all trying to make the convention ork. It is most important, not only for us in Britain it for the future of the globe, that we succeed. We ere prepared to listen to what hon. Members said, and e have responded in a spirit of co-operation, to ensure at the convention will work as well as possible. I hope at if our positions were reversed, the hon. Member for ast Kilbride would do the same.

Mr. Ingram: "If" is a big word; we prefer to use e word "when". I entirely take the Minister's point, id I appreciate his explanation of the list of items in ew clause 2 that could be included in the annual port. I listened to what he said, and the details can e considered elsewhere, when the Bill goes to another lace. The Government will then be able to take on oard the points that we have made—hence our reason r raising the question in the first place.

There are 12 items listed in new clause 2 and the linister ruled out only two of them, so we are making onsiderable progress. I hope that the other 10 items will be included either in the form in which they are laid down in new clause 2 or in some variation of it. That would prove helpful in producing the annual reports. It would assist all those who want to ensure that the convention is being properly monitored and implemented by Britain. I recognise the spirit in which the Minister has responded.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 32, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 33 and 34 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 35

POWER TO AMEND THIS ACT

Mr. Cohen: I beg to move amendment No. 8, page 22, line 21, after second 'order', insert 'solely'.

This is the last of my amendments and I shall not take up much time with it.

Clause 35 deals with the power to amend the legislation when it is passed. Any major change of principle to the convention that would need a change in the Act must be dealt with by some form of primary legislation, such as a new Act or a statutory instrument under the affirmative resolution procedure, as we discussed in earlier debates.

There is also the question of amendments to the schedule that lists chemicals. It may well be that that list has to be amended in a hurry, and rightly so. A new chemical could come to notice which could be used as a chemical weaponry agent. Such a chemical would have to be added to the list as quickly as possible and a negative resolution statutory instrument seems appropriate, solely in that instance. My amendment would give the power to add a new chemical to the list quickly while changes of principle should be enacted after more thorough consideration by the House of Commons.

Mr. Oppenheim: I accept the intention behind the amendment. The power to make amendments to the schedule should not be used to make amendments to other parts of the legislation at the same time. That was certainly not our intention.

The hon. Gentleman has tabled so many amendments and made such a contribution to the Bill, both on Second Reading and in Committee, that it would be churlish of me not to accept his amendment. I am told by the parliamentary draftsman that this is only the second time in 25 years that an unamended Opposition amendment has been accepted. However, it was a close-run thing. The parliamentary draftsman suggested that we use the word "only" instead of "solely" and table a Government amendment, but it would have been churlish to go down that route.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his amendment. It is a small step for him and a large step for the Chemical Weapons Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I thank the Minister.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 35, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 36 to 38 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 3

ANNUAL REPORTS BY SECRETARY OF STATE

'The Secretary of State shall in each calendar year—

(a) prepare a report on the operation of this Act, and

(b) lay a copy of the report before each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Oppenheim.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

'(1) The Secretary of State shall establish a committee to give advice, either when requested to do so or otherwise on any matters relating to the control of chemical weapons in furthering the general purposes of this Act.

(2) In pursuance of subsection (1)—

(a) the Secretary of State shall appoint the members of the committee and appoint one of those members to be chairman;

(b) in appointing members of the committee, the Secretary of State shall ensure that all groups of persons likely to be affected by the Act are represented;

(c) the committee shall, at such time in each year as the Secretary of State may direct, publish a report with respect to the performance of the committee's functions;

(d) the Secretary of State may make provision by regulations with respect to the terms on which members of the committee may hold and vacate office, including the terms on which any person appointed as chairman shall hold and vacate office as chairman;

(e) the Secretary of State shall provide the committee with such staff and such accommodation, services and other facilities as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient for the proper performance of the committee's functions;

(f) the Secretary of State may pay to the members of the committee such remuneration (if any) and such allowances as may be determined by the Secretary of State with the consent of the Treasury;

(g) the committee shall not be taken to be the servant or agent of the Crown or to enjoy any status or immunity of the Crown;

(h) regulations under this schedule shall be made by statutory instrument and no regulations shall be made unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.45 pm

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

There is obviously a spirit of good will on the Government Benches.

Mr. Oppenheim *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ingram: The Minister indicates that there is not too much, but perhaps the power of persuasion can be applied.

We have made considerable progress with the Bill. We now have an annual report which, from the indications given in our previous debate, will be fairly comprehensive and satisfy many people. Some of the submissions in support of the annual report were from eminent individuals and bodies who were seeking improvements to the Bill. The Royal Society of Chemistry, which has been mentioned several times during the passage of the Bill, was one of the main bodies that had an input. It should come as no surprise that the Royal Society of Chemistry is supportive of the principles of new clause 1, which would introduce an advisory committee to assist the Government, as a national authority, in the implementation of the legislation.

The best arguments are those used by the Royal Society of Chemistry. We could all make our own interpretations of the matter, but, given the weight of the arguments advanced by the Royal Society of Chemistry, it would be useful to read from its briefing to place its concerns on the record.

The Royal Society of Chemistry states:

> "The DTI must also be held to account in regard to less tangible but no less central aspects of UK compliance with the Convention, notably: maintaining the integrity of the General Purpose Criterion; the accuracy of the Convention-required industrial data that it submits to the OPCW on behalf of the UK; the protection of UK national programmes related to protective purposes; the accuracy of the annual reports made to the OPCW on the UK protective programmes; ensuring, insofar as the UK is competent to do so, that the treaty regime is fully reflective of the latest developments in science and technology; and the protection of UK compliance against pressures to develop breakout options, such as ones which new technical developments might come to suggest.
>
> The DTI will be in no position to assure Parliament on these matters unless the National Authority has the active co-operation of both governmental and non-governmental organisations: CBDE Porton Down, private chemical industry, the wider scientific community, and others. Such support will surely not be forthcoming to the extent necessary if the National Authority falls short of modern standards of openness and accountability (having due regard to the necessary confidentiality of some categories of relevant information). Nor may the support be satisfactorily forthcoming if interests affected by the work of the National Authority are entirely unrepresented in the Authority itself or bodies associated with it."

The society makes a strong and irrefutable case for an advisory committee or body to work alongside the DTI as the national authority.

The Royal Society of Chemistry goes on in its briefing document to specify how an advisory board should operate. It states:

> "An Advisory Board should be constituted in order to receive reports from the National Authority. The frequency of the reports should be in phase with the roughly 180-day cycles that will direct the National Authority's routine reporting to the OPCW".

The report refers to details relating to that and continues:

> "The contents of the reports to the Advisory Board would be considered and discussed at meetings between the Board and staff of the National Authority.
>
> Representation on the Board would reflect the various domestic communities affected by implementation of the Convention, as well as sources of expertise essential to the work of the Authority. So there should be representation not only of CBDE Porton Down but also of any CBDE advisory committee involved in overseeing Porton's work for the National Authority. Membership of the Board should also include any UK expert there might be on the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board."

The society again makes a strong case. It is not an instance of the Opposition arguing for the sake of argument, trying to find some flaw or weakness. We have tried to take the arguments advanced by the Royal Society of Chemistry and others and put them into parliamentary language. That is manifested in new clause 1, which replicates the provisions which apply to the Food and

Environment Protection Act 1985 in relation to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. That advisory committee has existed for more than 40 years and became a statutory body in 1985. It is well respected and proved itself to be useful and helpful both before and after becoming a statutory body.

During our discussions on Second Reading, it was stated that the activities of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides had been favourably commented upon by the Select Committee on Agriculture in its fifth report to the previous Parliament. That raises the question: if such an advisory committee is deemed to be necessary for the control and regulation of pesticides, why is not a similar committee deemed necessary to regulate and control substances such as the chemicals mentioned in the Bill and covered by the convention, which are potentially more dangerous?

The Minister has shown a willingness to listen and to bend to expert opinion as the Bill has developed from its first draft to its second draft. Tonight—I think for only the second time in 25 years—an amendment presented by an Opposition Member has been accepted. That demonstrates substantial movement, particularly by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). He told us on Second Reading that he did not favour regulation, but I think that he has come to recognise the benefits of regulation in relation to matters as critical as chemicals and chemical weapons.

New clause 1 has much merit. As I have said, it replicates what is already laid down in statute in relation to the regulation of pesticides. Chemicals are potentially much more dangerous than pesticides, and great benefits could be obtained from an advisory committee working alongside the national authority. That is why I quoted in detail from the advice given by the Royal Society of Chemistry. I know that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that he would make a detailed contribution to the debate because advice that we had received was wrong or misplaced—I cannot remember his exact words.

Mr. Key: Flawed.

Mr. Ingram: Flawed—that is useful. Obviously, he will participate in this debate and we shall listen with interest to hear how he intends to contradict the Royal Society of Chemistry. He told us during the Second Reading debate that he taught the Minister during his A-levels. I do not know whether the cane—or, as we would say in Scotland, the belt—was still in use at that time and whether he had to use it on the Minister. I hope that I do not have to use it on the Minister tonight should he reject our position, and that we can, instead, reach agreement.

New clause 1 contains the last major issue that we must tackle in the Bill. If we accept the principle of an advisory committee, we will send out the right message to the wider scientific community. It would be warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated and received, and it would ensure full co-operation on the convention across the full range of scientific opinion in this country. An advisory committee would also, importantly, conclude the arguments about transparency and accountability in relation to the Bill.

Mr. Key: On the face of it, the new clause is tempting. The Minister will recall that shortly before midnight last night I was discussing it with him and trying to persuade him of some of its merits.

Before I explain why I have concluded that it would not be sensible to accept the new clause, I must express my gratitude to the Royal Society of Chemistry. Were it not for that society, we would scarcely have had any briefing and we would have had an extremely short debate today. I wish to make a serious plea to the scientific community of this country to recognise their interest in legislation that passes through the House. It is extraordinary that we had to rely so heavily on the Royal Society of Chemistry. We have not received anything—at least I have not—from the Chemical Industries Association in the way of briefing.

I say that the Royal Society of Chemistry has been briefing us, but it was in fact one man—a very talented man—who has been briefing us on behalf of the society. The briefings from other organisations—the science policy research unit at Sussex university and the international security information service—have come from one and the same man. That one gentleman has been quoted extensively in the briefing of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

I have managed to identify three scientists in this country responsible for briefing Parliament on the Bill. They are excellent scientists who have done us a great service. We receive criticism from the scientific community for not taking them seriously, but they could have given Parliament a better briefing.

Mr. Dalyell: A number of people in the scientific community say that the man in question, Dr. Julian Perry Robinson, who has spent 30 years of his life studying the problems, knows more about them than anyone else. If members of the scientific community think that one of their colleagues knows more about the subject, it is in their nature to say, "Get your advice from those who know most." There is nothing dishonourable or lazy about that.

Mr. Key: I have not suggested that, nor would I suggest that Nicholas Sims or Mr. Benn is any less distinguished. That is not the point. I would have expected more briefing on such a delicate subject—I shall leave the matter there.

When we discuss the new clause, I suspect that we are really talking about transparency and public confidence, which must be the two key issues. I think that the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) is seeking to establish that. If we had not had an annual statutory report, we would have needed some sort of advisory committee. Now that the Government have given us that statutory report, which is to be laid before both Houses and is to report to Parliament on the operation of the Act, we do not need the new clause. The new clause demands not a report on the workings of the Act or the convention but on the performance of the advisory committee's function. That would be bureaucratic, expensive and unnecessary.

I thought that we might have a small advisory committee because in July the Government announced, through the Ministry of Defence, that they would set up an animal welfare advisory committee to look into much of the work that is done at Porton Down and elsewhere within the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I thought that it might be a good model—it has only three independent members and is an important, tight, little advisory committee. But then I realised that the fourth term of reference of that committee stated that the

[Mr. Key]

committee's function was not to monitor the Act—the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986—but to monitor other committees, to monitor ethics, to monitor evidence on the reduction of the use of animals, to monitor statistics, to review training and education of DERA personnel, to review initiatives and to maintain high standards of animal welfare. Therefore, the committee's function was quite different and could not easily be read across to the Bill.

New clause 1 would clearly require a large committee. The hon. Member for East Kilbride should realise that establishing the sort of committee that he wants would require a large bureaucracy and be expensive. It would be a large committee, representative of all the interests. The compliance cost assessment of the DTI quotes the Chemical Industries Association as saying that there would be up to 2,000 plants to be declared twice a year. If the committee were to look at each of those plants twice a year, it would have to be a large committee, working full time. If I have correctly understood what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting, I cannot see it working.

Mr. Dalyell: I did ask the Minister about generic testing.

Mr. Key: I will allow the Minister to give his own answer, if I may.

One of the main reasons why I regard the new clause as unworkable is confidentiality. We know that industrial espionage is rife on an international scale and is a significant problem. Confidentiality is crucial, and it is an international issue in the convention. It is not only a matter for this Parliament.

The excellent Royal Society of Chemistry, in its excellent briefing, which I shall now quote, if I may, to the Committee, spoke of the chemical industries negotiating with the Department of Trade and Industry. It said:

> "The key to their accepting it was express recognition by the negotiators that the industry's intellectual property, which was often the product of great investment in research and development, would need to be safeguarded against abuse of site inspections and other controls . . . The bias towards secrecy which this device imposes on many of the operators of the treaty stands in contrast to the transparency mechanisms which the treaty in its domestic implementation also require. This, however, was the price which had to be paid for creating conditions within which the chemical industry would be willing to co-operate.
>
> So huge is the chemical industry and so multipurpose its facilities and feedstocks that there was never any real alternative to cooperation. If there were one, it would have had to be a control regime for chemical industry in which whole areas of chemical technology were subjected to prohibition and repressive surveillance."

That is terribly significant, and that is one reason why we cannot accept new clause 1.

8 pm

I wish to make one more argument—the argument to which I referred when I said that some of the advice that we had been given was flawed. It has been suggested in some of our briefing that the Bill—and the end of chemical weapons, which we hope will occur—is compromised by the constitutional, legal and commercial position of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down. I believe that that is simply not the case. ISIS briefing paper No. 48 has, I believe, mistaken that position.

I wish that people would not speak about "Porton". There is a large civilian community in the village of Porton. There are two distinct scientific establishments there—the CBDE and the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research, sponsored by the Department of Health. On behalf of my constituents, who work at both, I draw attention to the fact that they are different. I ask people please not to confuse them.

ISIS asks, where is the assurance that Porton, part of the next steps agency, will in future provide the Department of Trade and Industry with the assistance that it requires for the convention? ISIS alleges that assistance would be "of course" a public service, but then it declares that that would have to be

> "paid for out of someone's budget".

To make that happen, ISIS suggests that further legislation might be necessary, even in the Bill. Let me try to explain why that argument is flawed and try to allay those fears.

The assurance that ISIS seeks may be found in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency framework document. Every member of the staff at CBDE Porton Down is a civil servant attached to the Ministry of Defence and, through their Ministers, is accountable to the House. The activities of the agency are determined in that framework document, which is published.

CBDE operates with a trading fund. That does not mean that it tries to rob Peter to pay Paul, nor does it equate to private sector accounting. A trading fund is a discipline and a mechanism to introduce to the public sector the rigours of private sector budgeting, accounting and management. I believe that, together, the framework document and the trading fund encourage just the type of transparency that we all seek.

Mr. Ingram: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said. Can he confirm that the CBDE has advisory committees, and that those advisory committees work successfully alongside CBDE? We seek in new clause 1 something analogous and similar to that, using the expertise from CBDE to assist the DTI as a national authority.

Mr. Key: I have sought the advice of CBDE about advisory committees, and it is beset with advisory committees. Not only does it have advisory committees for the DERA establishments, but it told me that the international bureaucracy from The Hague will be very substantial. CBDE will spend its time coping with the international bureaucracy in The Hague and inspecting other nations, because we happen to be the best in the world at doing that. If we, on top of that, impose more committees to oversee the work of the committee that must look after them, it becomes absurd. I believe that CBDE will not be able to do its job properly as a result.

As for public confidence, which is so important, my constituents would wish to assist the Department of Trade and Industry under the legislation. Ever since CBDE was established, in the early part of the century, its mission has remained the same. It exists to provide the best scientific advice to protect the citizens of the United Kingdom from chemical and biological weapons and it will continue to do that, with or without another committee and whether it is regulatory or advisory.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman railed against extra committees, but I would not have bothered to interrupt him had he not been a member of the Medical Research Council—a lucky Member to be so, because it is a very important organisation. It has endless committees, because, if one is to have peer group monitoring, one must have all sorts of sub-specialist committees. If I may say so, it is a little glib to rail against committees which, as the hon. Gentleman should know from his Medical Research Council experience, provide proper peer group control.

Mr. Key: It was a huge honour to be a member of the Medical Research Council and I did not enjoy the day when I had to leave it because I was invited to form—to join—the Government of Margaret Thatcher. *[Interruption.]* Would that I had been invited to form the Government.

However, the hon. Gentleman is mistaken in that we are talking not about sub-specialist committees but about independent outsiders coming in to oversee the work. They are not comparable with the Medical Research Council's committees. Incidentally, it is possible to find scientists working in the Medical Research Council in their various projects who would have said how strongly they believed that all those committees were thoroughly overdone. Nevertheless, let us not argue, because I am trying to come to a conclusion.

The CBDE advises the Government. Ministers are responsible to the House for that advice, and for the work of the national authority, under the legislation. I hope that the House will reject the new clause.

Mr. Dalyell: First, I am overcome by the nerve gas of curiosity to know what was the other occasion in 25 years. Perhaps someone from the Box would come up with the answer to that.

I shall advance one serious argument. Julian Perry Robinson—we should all acknowledge our intellectual debt to a man who has worked for 30 years on that subject—argued time and again that what was important was that the institution should be able to cope with the new chemicals that were being developed every year. I return to the example—heaven help us—of the VX that, I am told by Professor Paul Rogers of Bradford, has been developed in Iraq, and which is worse than sarin, as a concrete example of how one has to cope with new chemicals as that field becomes increasingly more dangerous. Coping with innovation may be what the institution should be about.

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall not speak at length because there is little that I can add to what my hon. Friend and former teacher, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said. He covered the area fully. First, there is nothing in the convention that requires an advisory committee. Secondly, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) mentioned the advisory body for pesticides. Simply because there is an advisory body in one of the myriad areas of Government does not necessarily mean that we must have advisory bodies in every area of Government. It is also fair to say that the advisory body for pesticides relates to a different area in that it relates especially to the public, whereas the chemical weapons advisory body, as I understand it, would not especially relate to the public; it would very specifically relate to a very small, or relatively small, number of experts. As my hon. Friend says, the various advisory bodies relating to the CBDE are non-statutory bodies.

The problem is that implementing the convention rightly involves a lot of regulation and bureaucracy. But we do not want to over-egg it. That would lead to bureaucracy, a lack of flexibility, and it would undoubtedly be expensive. I make it clear that we would expect the regulatory body to take advice as widely and as flexibly as possible. We would not want it just to take advice from a statutory advisory body. We would expect it to seek advice as widely as possibly and would rely particularly on the expertise of organisations such as the CBDE.

I am sorry that I cannot extend further the spirit of good will and bridge-building which, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride knows, comes difficult to me at the best of times. I have stretched my good will as far as possible by accepting the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and I am sorry that I cannot accept the new clause.

Mr. Ingram: I am sorry that the Minister has reverted to type at the tail end of the debate, but he may change his mind at some stage in the future. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and the Minister do not appear to have read the new clause. It says:

> "The Secretary of State shall establish a committee to give advice, either when requested to do so or otherwise on any matters relating to the control of chemical weapons in furthering the general purposes of this Act."

Therefore, the committee is under the control and direction of the Secretary of State. The new clause continues:

> "the Secretary of State shall appoint the members of the committee",

and it goes on to detail from where the members of the committee should be drawn.

Therefore, the new clause leaves everything in the hands of the Secretary of State. It could be a small committee. I do not know why the hon. Member for Salisbury came to the conclusion that it would be a large committee. If the Minister had his way, it would probably be a committee of one and he would be the chairman of it as well. The committee is carefully limited by new clause 1. We are not opening up a whole range of new bureaucracy. The new clause is an attempt to ensure that a committee is available with which the wider scientific community can interface and from which the Government could take appropriate advice. That seems sensible.

We are dealing with an important area here. I regret the point made by the hon. Member for Salisbury in trying to diminish the expert opinion, advice and help that we have received from the Royal Society of Chemistry. Because a document is written by one man does not mean that it is wrong or flawed.

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman really is misrepresenting me. He knows that I did not say that. That document contained expert and excellent advice. What I was saying was that we should not talk about being briefed by the Royal Society of Chemistry when we know that we have been briefed by one expert, however expert he may be, and that it was a pity that there were not more people who were sufficiently interested in the Bill.

Mr. Ingram: It may be that the hon. Gentleman has read only one briefing document and spoken to only one person, if he has spoken to him at all, but I have spoken to many others, not just the person responsible for the one briefing document from the Royal Society of Chemistry. The fact remains that it was produced in the name of the Royal Society of Chemistry and that is what is important.

[Mr. Ingram]

That will obviously be taken account of in the other place where there are senior ex-presidents of the society and widely respected scientists who will consider our deliberations on this aspect.

I suspect that the matter will be debated at length in the other place because it stems from a wide body of opinion; it is not just one man reporting for one organisation. It is a matter of regret that the Minister is not prepared to move further forward on the matter tonight. But having heard what the Minister has said, there is no point in further advancing the argument, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments; as amended, considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.14 pm

Mr. Oppenheim: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I use this opportunity to respond briefly to an important point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) relating to generic licensing. I think that he is aware that we expect that the burden of licensing can be reduced for a number of users—perhaps almost all users—using the chemicals for certain purposes, by issuing an open licence up to a certain level. That level is likely to be small, such as 5 g. It would be difficult to issue open licences for larger levels such a 100 g because that would take us outside the convention's requirements to limit schedule 1 chemicals to 1 tonne. However, we are looking at ways in which to issue open licences, particularly in order to ease the burden on the academic community. If the hon. Gentleman wanted to talk about that at any point in the future, I would be happy to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank the Minister for that because thereby lies the way to avoiding a nightmare.

Mr. Oppenheim: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says.

I do not want to detain the House because I think that we are all moving in the same direction on this. Once again, we have had a good and interesting debate, as we did on Second Reading. I am particularly grateful to the Opposition for their co-operation. I am sorry that I could not accept all their amendments, but I am grateful for the spirit in which they were moved, and I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) for his contributions.

This is an important Bill. It is important not just for Britain's future but for the future of the globe. Without more ado, I commend it to the House.

8.16 pm

Mr. Cohen: I shall not delay the House long, but I want to make an important point. First, I thank the Minister for accepting my amendment and for the assurances that he gave during the Bill's passage in response to my various amendments. I congratulate him on the effective way in which he has steered the Bill through the House. He has shown a clear and thoughtful mind on the issues. But having given that bit of praise, I hope that he will not close his mind to some of the changes that might be proposed in the other place in order to make the convention and the Act work properly in due course.

I want to use this opportunity to make a brief point which I also mentioned on Second Reading, and that concerns how we might contribute to a voluntary assistance fund. I hope that the Minister will give some consideration to that, perhaps announcing a figure. The Minister said on Second Reading that that did not need legislation, and that is right, but it is important that that money is up front. It does not need to be a large sum, but it is important that financial considerations should not stop British inspectors going to a site where it is believed that chemical weapons have been used. I hope that the Minister will consider that.

I agree that this is a treaty of enormous significance, outlawing chemical weapons. I am sure that the House wants to see such weapons eliminated from the face of the world. The next step is for other countries to ratify the convention. I hope that the Government will put pressure on the United States and the Russian federation to ratify it as swiftly as possible and then get many other countries to do so and to comply with its provisions. It institutes a proper programme of inspection and transparency that is very much needed. As I said, I hope that we shall see the elimination of these despicable weapons from the face of the earth.

8.18 pm

Mr. Ingram: We have had a useful two days of debate on the Bill, one on Second Reading and one today. On behalf of the Opposition, I reaffirm our support for the Bill which we welcomed on Second Reading.

We recognise that it is an essential and important measure and we have had some informative debates on its key aspects. I pay tribute again to the Royal Society of Chemistry, Julian Perry Robinson, Alistair Hay of Leeds university and other experts who have provided assistance in the understanding of a complex matter.

It is important that the United Kingdom should be one of the first 65 signatories to the convention. Our chemical industry is a world leader so it is only proper that we should be one of the leading signatories.

The Government have moved substantially from their early draft of the Bill and that is to be commended. I regret that the Minister is not prepared to accept the establishment of an advisory committee. Clearly, that will be considered in another place and there may well be a subsequent change. Given the way in which the matter has been handled and addressed in the House, although it is not yet scheduled for debate in another place, it would be useful if the Minister could let us know when the Bill is due to be considered as we are operating within a time scale.

I conclude by thanking all the hon. Members who have taken part in the debates this evening and on Second Reading. We fully analysed the Bill and that analysis will stand proper examination elsewhere. It is an important aspect of our work in the House. We now wish the Bill speedy progress through the House of Lords.

8.21 pm

Mr. Oppenheim: With the leave of the House, I shall answer as briefly as possible one or two of the questions that have been raised. The voluntary assistance fund mentioned by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) is still being argued in The Hague. When a decision has been reached, we shall decide how far we can support it, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall be as generous as possible.

I was asked when was the other occasion in the past 25 years when an Opposition amendment was accepted unamended, but I require more notice of that question.

I join the Opposition spokesman in thanking the many experts, who I shall not attempt to name, who advised us on the Bill. Their expertise and help has been greatly appreciated. Finally, and possibly most importantly, we hope that progress on the Bill in another place will take place early in the new year. We are as keen as the Opposition to ensure that we ratify the convention, in full, as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

8.22 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I beg to move,

> That the draft Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

As hon. Members will recall, the passage last month of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995 paved the way for a new criminal injuries compensation scheme. The Act provides that a draft of the new scheme must be approved by affirmative resolution of each House. The draft was laid on 16 November and the House's task tonight is to decide whether it should approve it.

The criminal injuries compensation scheme was introduced in 1964 to provide compensation from public funds for blameless victims of crimes of violence and to those injured in attempting to catch criminals or prevent crime. Payment is made in recognition of the public sense of responsibility for and sympathy with the innocent victim.

Under the current scheme, compensation has been assessed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on the basis of common law damages. That requires finely judged assessments of the degree of suffering and financial loss, which tend to make speedy decision taking more difficult. They also make it hard to predict and control the costs of the scheme, which have been rising at an unsustainable rate while, despite the very best efforts of the board, the backlog of unsettled cases has been continuing to rise.

Against that background, we sought to introduce a new tariff-based scheme in 1994. The scheme moved away from common law damages and provided for payment to be made on the basis of a scale of awards for injuries of comparable severity, with the scale or tariff being based on previous awards made by the board.

In April this year, however, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ruled that the introduction of the tariff scheme had been unlawful. That judgment related solely to the method of the tariff scheme's introduction, not to its intrinsic merits.

The ruling necessitated the immediate withdrawal of the tariff scheme and the reinstatement of the former scheme, based on common law damages. It also meant that some applicants were disadvantaged because they would have been treated more generously under the tariff scheme than under the reinstated scheme. They included, for example, some relatives of murder victims.

The eligibility criteria in fatal cases were wider under the tariff scheme than under the common law damages scheme, allowing long-term unmarried partners of the deceased to qualify for an award, as well as the parents of a child of any age. Under the enforced reinstatement of the common law damages scheme, those applicants lost entitlement to an award—an unfortunate consequence of the withdrawal of the tariff scheme necessitated by the House of Lords' judgment.

We remain firmly of the view that a tariff-based approach was right. A tariff scheme is easier for victims to understand. It is easier to operate, so applications can be dealt with more quickly. It also enables costs to be controlled and predicted more easily.

The legal judgment gave us an opportunity to take a fresh look at the tariff approach. In doing so, we took careful note of the criticisms made of the earlier scheme

[Mr. David Maclean]

in Parliament and elsewhere. We noted in particular the concern that a too simple tariff scheme could have a detrimental effect on those most seriously affected by their injuries.

When, therefore, we invited Parliament to pass the Bill to give statutory backing to a new tariff scheme we sought to ensure that there were adequate powers to enable a number of significant improvements to be made. Parliament clearly agreed with that approach and the new enhanced tariff scheme proposed under the Act's new powers fully addresses the major points of concern that have been expressed.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): One point that the improved tariff scheme does not address is inflation. The Minister will be aware that common law damages are assessed not as at the time of the accident but at the time of settlement or trial and therefore take inflation fully into account. A degree of interest is added—usually 2 per cent. on personal injury damages. Since the tariff was devised, the award for rape in the civil courts has apparently reached £20,000. Under the tariff scheme, rape awards will be £17,500, so there is already a discrepancy between the tariff and common law damages. Will the Government give an assurance that the tariff will be regularly revised so that it does not lose pace with comparable levels of damages, which are low in the United Kingdom in any event?

Mr. Maclean: Of course we shall keep the tariff under constant review to allow for inflation and other factors. Without examining the individual example that the hon. and learned Gentleman has given, I remind him that the levels in the proposed scheme are already ahead of inflation.

When we introduced the tariff scheme, we rounded up the bulk of the figures, which are now set higher than the amounts usually awarded in the courts. In addition, when we built in the new loss of earnings provision for awards over 28 weeks, we did not extract from the tariff scheme, as we could have done, the element that is already included for loss of earnings.

The awards under the tariff scheme were the common law awards put through the computer to produce an average, which obviously included an element for loss of earnings. Loss of earnings is therefore taken into account in the tariff figures. As we are now introducing an element for loss of earnings over 28 weeks, we could have extracted the loss of earnings proportion from the existing tariffs. We decided not to do so, which shows that we are more than taking care of inflation.

I shall briefly rehearse the principal features of the new draft scheme. First, all successful claimants will receive a tariff award based on the injury suffered. In addition, in more serious cases, victims will receive extra compensation for loss of earnings and for special care. In fatal cases, payment will additionally be made for loss of dependency—the breadwinner's income—and loss of parental services. Reasonable funeral expenses will continue to be reimbursed.

We are doubling the upper limit for awards payable under the old tariff scheme from £250,000 to £500,000. We are making provision for recipients of higher value awards to opt for payment through the purchase of annuities. These arrangements are generally known as structured settlements. They can provide a stream of index-linked, tax-free payments, thereby considerably increasing the net value of the award.

There was a provision in the Act to extend the benefit of structured settlements to applicants under the current scheme whose claims have not yet been settled. The complementary change to the current scheme to permit that was made on 8 November, the day on which the Act received Royal Assent. The structured payment scheme has received widespread and warm support from members of the legal profession and from many others.

We issued a first draft of the new scheme in August. Those who studied it will realise that that was no small task. Given the additional features in the new arrangements—loss of earnings, loss of dependency and care costs, for example—we had to make it clear, in language understandable to the layman, exactly what was meant by the rather imprecise terms to which I have referred and what would therefore qualify under the enhanced tariff scheme and what would not. That is why the new draft scheme has, of necessity, to be rather longer and more detailed than any of its predecessors.

The first draft of the new scheme was circulated widely to Members of both Houses and to interested individuals and organisations, including the police, representative organisations, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Victim Support, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, the Trades Union Congress, the Bar Council and the Law Society, as well as to equivalent bodies in Scotland and to many others.

We had meetings with many of these organisations to discuss the proposals. We received much useful feedback in writing. The draft helped to inform debate during the Bill's consideration in another place where, as a result, discussion focused not so much on the Bill's provisions but on the terms of the draft scheme. That, too, gave us some useful feedback.

In the light of that wide and most useful consultation exercise we made numerous changes to the draft scheme. Among the most significant, perhaps, were the achievement of greater consistency in the terminology used throughout the draft scheme, the inclusion of a table of contents, the more logical presentation of the scheme's provisions, the clarification of the criteria for waiving time limits and provisions relating to loss of income, the cost of special care in fatal injury awards and appeals.

We circulated the revised version of the draft scheme on 1 November, in time to inform debate during the final stages of the Bill. That enabled Parliament to complete its consideration of the Bill in the full knowledge of the detailed terms of the scheme that would subsequently be proposed under the Bill's provisions.

In our view, the new draft represented a significant improvement on the earlier one. I am glad to be able to tell the House that that view seems to have been shared generally. We received little additional feedback, and most of that was in the nature of seeking clarification or suggesting minor amendments to small or technical points of detail. That feedback, however, helped us to make one or two minor changes to the draft scheme in the interest of clarity and to ensure that all the i's were dotted and the t's crossed. Essentially, the draft scheme that is before the House is the same as the one which was circulated last month, which Parliament had an opportunity to consider before it passed what became the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act.

The draft scheme now before us accordingly gives effect to Parliament's wishes as expressed in the Act. It puts the necessary flesh on the bones of that Act and spells out clearly and unambiguously who can qualify for an award, how that award will be assessed and paid and how dissatisfied claimants may appeal. It makes the administration clear and sets out the line of accountability.

Once the draft scheme has been approved and the scheme is established, the Act makes it clear that any subsequent change will require parliamentary approval under the affirmative resolution procedure if the change affects a key feature of the scheme, and under the negative procedure if the change relates to a more minor feature. Thus it is Parliament rather than the Executive that will always have the final say over each and every provision of the new tariff scheme.

We believe that the draft new scheme provides the right balance between the needs of victims and the interests of the taxpayer. It has the benefits of a tariff-based approach, which will enable most claimants to receive their money more quickly without undue fuss. It will ensure also that the more seriously injured are generously catered for by payments for loss of earnings, the costs of special care and for structured settlements. It will remain a generous scheme. I remind the House that it is by far the most generous scheme of its sort anywhere in the world. Accordingly, I commend the draft scheme to the House.

8.35 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The Minister has reminded us of the background to the statutory instrument from a view favourable to the Government's approach. The background to the statutory instrument was legislation that cut £700 million from the cash available to compensate victims of violent crime. We opposed that legislation vigorously from its earliest stages.

The Minister says that costs under the scheme were rising to an unsustainable level, but it is crime that has risen to an unsustainable level under the Government. That has led to increased costs in providing compensation.

The Minister said with some satisfaction that Parliament will decide on the features of the scheme as well as on the tariff, having ruled on the primary legislation. It is only fair to say that those are three steps towards which we pulled the Government over a considerable period.

Initially—the Minister glossed over this—the Home Secretary sought to act illegally by introducing a new scheme without any accountability to the House or to another place. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was found to have acted illegally. We insisted that there should be a proper affirmative procedure for the scheme and for the tariff. We won those concessions along the way. That is the background to the statutory instrument.

We should also remember that we are agreeing to the introduction of a scheme that will affect some of those who have been most damaged by some of the nastiest crimes. People will be affected by our decisions. There is still confusion and added pain for many victims because of the way in which these matters have been handled. There are still some anomalies for the Government to resolve. I hope that the Minister will listen and in developing the scheme further, or in making later amendments, will take account of some of the issues that are still outstanding.

In answer to a parliamentary question last week the Minister made clear how some people have been disadvantaged because the new scheme, which the Government introduced illegally, made allowance for payments to the relatives of murder victims. When that provision was changed that opportunity for compensation was lost. That compensation will be available again, of course, when the new scheme comes into force, but there will be a gap. Some people will receive compensation under the Government's replacement scheme, but there will be a period during which people in the same circumstances will not receive compensation.

I asked the Minister last week if he would make it his policy to allow the families of murder victims, parents of adult victims, the adult children of murder victims, the unmarried partners of murder victims and the fathers of illegitimate murder victims who apply for compensation under the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation, announced in 1994 and subsequently withdrawn, to make a new application under the terms of the new scheme that he proposes to implement from April 1996.

The Minister responded by saying that he was not willing to do so, and said:

> "To allow applicants in any particular category to withdraw a claim lodged between 1 April 1994 and 5 April 1995 and then reapply under the proposed new scheme would be wrong in principle and anomalous in practice."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. *652*.]

The fact is that we are trying to deal with a situation where some people, because of the ham-fisted way in which the original legislation was introduced, have lost out, and will lose out unless some mechanism is found to address that problem.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman mentioned certain categories of victim and asked me to try to make a special exception in those cases, which I think would be anomalous. Why does he limit his demand to those categories of victim? What about all the others who have suffered other injuries but are caught in the same trap as a result of the House of Lords judgment?

Mr. Michael: They are caught as a result not of the House of Lords judgment but of the Secretary of State introducing changes under an illegal mechanism and then trying to avoid accountability to the House. That was the source of the problem, so let us not have the House of Lords or those who uphold the law blamed for the errors that were made by the Home Secretary. I suggest that he is the source of the anomaly that affects those people, who feel tremendously damaged by it.

We are talking about a specific category and a specific set of injuries. Last week, the Minister said:

> "A total of 1,192 fatal applications were outstanding when the tariff scheme—

the original scheme—

> was withdrawn. About a third were from a parent or parents, some 30 per cent. were in respect of children under 18 years of age, about 20 per cent. were from children aged 18 or over, and some 15 per cent. were from spouses, whether formally married or regarded as a spouse in common law.—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. *654*.]

I shall not go into the detail of the Minister's replies, but it is important that when he gave an assessment he put a top ceiling at some £5 million and gave a more realistic estimate of between £1.5 million and £2.5 million as the total cost to correct the anomaly. I appeal to the Minister—he will know that people feel tremendously injured and damaged by the anomaly and that those affected by the most horrendous crimes feel very personally the hurt that has been done to them—to be generous in dealing with this anomaly. Surely, if there are individuals who would have been the recipients of compensation, as a result of a relative being murdered, under the interim scheme, which was found to be illegal, and who would receive compensation again after 1 April under the new scheme—*[Interruption.]*—it would be wrong for us not to fill that gap and to—

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you be indulgent and allow the hon. Gentleman to take his call and then resume his speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Certainly not. I have noticed many times recently that such electronic equipment seems to be operating in here, and it is not good for debate.

Mr. Michael: I accept that and apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is an electronic brain, not a means of communication.

The Minister has an opportunity to put matters right for the individuals who have suffered the worst pain—bereavement—and it would surely be just and generous if he—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but may I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker) that we are talking about the victims of bereavement, and that it is a most serious item?

It would be both just and generous if the Minister found a means of correcting the anomaly. I believe that he thinks that he does not have the powers to do so. Obviously, we have not seen the legal advice that he has been given, but a Home Secretary who sought to achieve injustice through the misuse of prerogative powers should surely have no hesitation in taking a risk for justice. If there is a doubt, let him introduce legislation to put matters right. Opposition Members are prepared to ensure that the legislation is not obstructed and goes through the House quickly to correct the anomaly.

If the Minister is unwilling to use Government time—it would allow him to take credit for setting right the anomaly, which has been highlighted most strongly by organisations that represent the victims of crime, and by Victim Support in particular—I have spoken to one of my hon. Friends who has secured a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills, and he has expressed a willingness to introduce a Bill under that system if the Minister and the Government will give an undertaking to allow it a smooth and swift passage. In that way, co-operation across the Chamber could achieve what the Minister must surely accept as justice and correct an anomaly that would otherwise continue to cause pain to the individuals involved.

We welcome the introduction of a tariff system to simplify the process of decision making and to speed it up. Many victims have wanted a decision quickly and not to have reminders of their suffering over an extended period, but there are still problems with the scheme and the tariff: for example, some settlements will be less generous than under the previous common law system; there is a less personal assessment in circumstances where more serious injury or damage may be involved; and payments for loss of earnings, which was a concession wrung from the Government, are still not generous and leave a considerable gap.

We are asked today to confirm the Home Secretary's proposed scheme, including the tariff that goes with it. I stress that the Minister almost suggested that the Government had gone away, during the minor delay that was caused by the Lords' ruling, and generously considered ways to improve the scheme. It has been a long, drawn-out procedure. I give the Minister credit for the fact that he was willing to publish his draft scheme at an early stage and allow it to be discussed in Committee. That is right, and it is only fair to acknowledge that he was willing to do that, and therefore enter into debate. It is also true that during discussions he has moved his position. As that is somewhat unusual, I pay tribute to him for doing so. On occasions, it has been like extracting teeth from a dinosaur, and there are still improvements that could be made. Concerns have still not been addressed. There are still problems to be overcome, and we hope that the Minister will acknowledge that aspects of the scheme can be improved in future.

Some of the remaining flaws will have to be dealt with by changes in the future, but others concern undertakings given by the Minister or lack of clarity on specific points within the scheme and the tariff. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that, where possible, such issues will be dealt with in the guide, which is to be published by the criminal injuries compensation authority, so that there is clarity and so that anything that is unclear is avoided? Some of the issues are matters of detail, but I wish to touch on some of the points, and I hope that the Minister will agree to continue to listen to the points that are being made and seek to provide clarification.

Will he draw the attention of the authority to these points and ask it to provide a positive response within the guide? It is clear that major concessions have been made, and when compared to the unlawful tariff, provision for loss of earnings, dependency in fatal cases, care costs and structured settlements are areas where there has been an improvement.

There are other anomalies in the scheme—in paragraph 38(c) in particular, where reference is made to the children of murder victims. It refers to

> "a child of the deceased, whether or not the natural child, provided that he was accepted by the deceased as a child of his family or was dependent on him."

The same anomaly may arise in other places, but the definition of a child is a person under the age of 18. It is quite clear from what has been said by the Minister at various times and from the scheme that it is meant to apply not only to children under 18 but to the adult children of murder victims, and murder victims above the age of 18. If that is so, and if the Minister agrees, will he record his agreement and arrange for it to be covered in the guidance so that there is no anomaly? The intention is clear, but more clarification is needed.

The provision for structured settlement in paragraph 52 is welcome, but, even if structured annuity payments are made on a tax-free basis, it is improbable that the amount likely to be generated by an award of £500,000 will be sufficient to make adequate provision for the more seriously injured—for instance, those suffering from major paralysis or severe brain damage.

Structured settlements are also to be voluntary. The Government have accepted the need to permit structural settlements for awards being processed under the common law schemes, but that has not yet been finalised. An amendment to the common law scheme to permit that in cases that are not finalised is expected. When will that amendment be made? The Minister gave us an undertaking when we discussed the matter in Committee. Does he intend the provisions to apply only from 1 April, when the new scheme is introduced, or will he agree to its operation immediately after the House has approved the subsidiary legislation that we are considering?

Surely there is no reason for delay, but I suggest to the Minister that some cases may be delayed to hit the date of 1 April if it is not agreed that structured settlements can be allowed under the old common law system, effectively from today.

Speed of decision making is supposed to be one of the important elements that follow the introduction of the tariff system. It does not seem that, in its year of operation, the original tariff system operated more quickly than the original common law scheme: I believe that, of 66,387 cases lodged, only 11,076 were determined—16.7 per cent.—compared with the resolution of 70 per cent. of cases under the last full year of the old Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. That figure comes from the board's annual report. Will the Minister undertake to ensure that there is proper monitoring, and that targets relating to speed of decision making are met under the new tariff system?

The loss of parental services in fatal cases also requires more attention. Will the Minister give an undertaking to re-examine the evidence with which he has been provided by a variety of sources?

The eligibility rules were debated in Committee. The scheme set a two-year limitation period. The Minister will recall that we wanted a three-year period. The time limit runs from the date of the incident, irrespective of the age of the victim, the nature of the injury or the extent of the victim's knowledge. The three-year period is very important for many victims, particularly those who are suffering from psychological injuries or who are the victims of sexual violence, especially children. Many such claimants do not feel able to make a claim in the immediate period after the incident in which they suffered injury. The Minister has allowed some flexibility in regard to applications that are made outside the time limit. Will he give an undertaking to monitor the position carefully, and to consider, in due course, extending that period from two to three years?

We are also worried by the more restrictive qualification rules in the tariff—for instance, for firefighters, who under the 1994 scheme had to show that they were taking an exceptional risk at the time of suffering accidental injury in fighting "arson" fires, an additional qualification beyond that required under the previous common law scheme. That requirement is to continue. The "exceptional risk" exclusion will prevent most firefighters who sustain injury in "arson" fires from recovering compensation—unless, for example, they enter a burning building to effect a rescue. The "exceptional risk" rule also potentially excludes citizens who suffer accidental injury in trying to catch offenders or prevent offences, or in helping police officers to do so—or, indeed, in helping firefighters to deal with "arson" fires.

Those aspects still give rise to concern. We do not believe that the passing of the measure should be delayed for that reason, but we hope that, where possible, the Minister will be generous in his guidance, and will undertake to monitor the position as time goes on.

One of the most difficult aspects is that of psychological injury. Victims who suffer mental injury alone, without physical injury, are subject to requirements that are basically similar to those applied by the courts in common law damages claims, although there are some differences. I understand that those requirements are very narrow, and the common law is currently the subject of review by the Law Commission. Will the Minister undertake to reflect on any recommendations made by the Law Commission in regard to the general principles applying to psychological injury? Obviously, he cannot anticipate the findings of the Law Commission, but will he at least consider the implications of the recommendations and, if appropriate, amendments to the scheme?

I referred to exceptional injury. With one exception, the scheme makes no provision for rescuers, who are now excluded but were not under the common law scheme. Professional rescuers, such as firefighters, police officers or unpaid rescuers—for instance, first-aiders or moors or mountain rescue teams, who provide a tremendous service—will receive compensation only if related to the primary victim of the offence. Simply witnessing the offence or its aftermath will no longer be sufficient.

It is easy to envisage circumstances in which problems could arise. Following a horrific incident such as a murder, people will be involved in the search for what turns out to be a body. I am sure that the Minister accepts that, in some instances, considerable damage can be done. Under the old common law system such experiences would have led to compensation, but that will not apply under the new scheme. Again, will the Minister be as generous as possible in his guidance, and undertake to monitor the possible exposure of anomalies?

The only exception to the rule that I have mentioned applies to railway staff who deal with the immediate aftermath of a railway suicide or attempted suicide. They have been treated as a special case. I do not argue with that, but other special cases are specifically excluded.

There are alternatives to the way in which the tariff has been introduced. I do not intend to go into them now, because they have already been put to the Minister, but I hope that the tariff will be monitored and that the detailed alternatives that have been urged on him will be considered in the future.

Certain special cases, although not large in number, are extremely difficult to value and perhaps should have been excluded from the tariff to permit individual assessment—children's cases generally, for which there were more than 7,000 claims, and cases involving, for example, child sex abuse, for which there were only 3,437 claims in 1993-94, psychological injury, sexual assault or scarring.

The other special case is the victim of rape who gives birth to a child whom she intends to keep. She will receive a fixed amount up to £5,000. The Government have not, however, recognised that any woman who becomes pregnant due to a rape should have an additional sum, whether she gives birth to a child who is adopted, miscarriages or has an abortion. In those three cases, she receives nothing. That seems to be an anomaly and I hope

[Mr. Michael]

that the Minister will maintain an open mind and consider ways of changing that in future if there is no scope for change now.

The other point about multiple injuries was made clear during a debate in the other place, when Lord Carlisle of Bucklow said:

> "there are two major injuries which of their nature are likely to be totally distinct. For example, to take level 12 in the tariff, it seems very hard to say that the person who is partially permanently blind in one eye and at the same time has a fracture of both femurs should receive only 10 per cent. of what would be reasonable compensation for the fracture of both femurs. The fact is, such an injury will be just as grave to him"—

or her—

> "whether or not he has been partially blinded in the same attack."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 31 October 1995; Vol. 566, c. 1384-5.]

That is an example of the anomalies that exist in the tariff.

Inflation was mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and it is a major cause for concern. There is no specific commitment to an annual uprating of the tariff to take account of inflation. The common law scheme, working to similar compensation rules as the courts, took into account inflation's effects and developments generally in the law of damages. I hope that the Minister will clarify that position and give an undertaking on the way in which the Government will deal with uprating due to inflation. By the time that the tariff comes to be reviewed in April 1999, the 1994 figures could still be in operation and would be well out of date by some seven or eight years.

It is a major concession by the Government that loss of earnings is covered at all in the scheme, but hardship is likely to be experienced by people who suffer loss of earnings for periods of up to 28 weeks. No provision is made for them in the scheme because reliance is placed on existing statutory sick pay entitlements. Although many employers make provision for contractual sick pay, many do not. The people who will suffer most will generally be those in low-paid employment whose terms of employment often have little or no contractual sick pay provision beyond statutory sick pay.

Such people are often in high-risk occupations—for example, take-away catering. Self-employed people such as taxi drivers who do not receive statutory sick pay will lose out altogether for that period. The position could be even worse for shopkeepers or sub-postmasters and mistresses. They may have to pay locum managers to run their businesses, thus losing income and incurring additional unrecoverable expenditure.

Those who have had a prolonged period of sickness before the criminal injury may have exhausted their statutory sick pay entitlement. That applies particularly where there is repeat victimisation. In the categories that I have mentioned, a victim can become a victim on a subsequent occasion. Where that happens, there could be considerable loss. Many people are likely to be affected by that anomaly.

The House of Commons Library has estimated that up to 12 million people could be excluded by the 28-week rule. There are 3 million self-employed people, 3 million people below the lower earnings limit, 1 million people on short-term or temporary contracts, 2 million people who work for employers with no sick-pay scheme and about 3 million people who do not qualify as they have not worked for their employers for long enough.

The Minister accepted at a late stage that loss of pension rights should be provided for, as in paragraph 31(c). It seems that the calculation of such rights will generally be similar to the old common law scheme. Will he confirm that that is so?

Problems arise from the definitions that care costs will no longer include "loss of services" claims, under which the common law entitlement compensated victims who are disabled from tasks about the home, such as decorating and gardening, for the performance of which tasks they now need to pay others. Will the Minister clarify that position?

A number of detailed anomalies arise under this scheme. It is perhaps inevitable that there should be some. I hope, however, that the Minister will be willing to undertake to continue to listen, to discuss and to take representations to take account of the difficulties that we have raised with him, either in Committee or in this short debate tonight, and to ensure that the new scheme is as effective as possible.

The Government announced on Report that performance targets for the administration of the new scheme will be set and that a complaints procedure will be instituted. The parliamentary ombudsman will not be able to investigate individual decisions but will be able to investigate administrative functions of the scheme. I hope that the details about that will be contained in the advice so that they are clearly available to those who seek information about the scheme.

It is clear that the Minister has listened to our debates and that progress has been made, but there are still anomalies and difficulties, some of which I have tried to cover and others that will be extremely difficult and damaging to individuals. Irrespective of statistics, we must not forget that it is individuals who receive compensation as a result of becoming the victims of violent crime.

It is rather sad that the Home Secretary's approach to the issue is an attempt to save money at the expense of victims of crime. Many victims will suffer as a result, although there will be benefits from the tariff scheme. In some ways the Government are making victims of the most horrific and damaging injuries pay for the Government's failure to stem the increase in crime and particularly in violent crime. Instead of cutting crime, the Government have cut the help that is available to victims.

With some cheers, but with some remaining concerns, we examine the statutory instrument, which, of course, we cannot amend but can only accept or reject. We shall certainly not vote against it because we want the new scheme to be as clear as it can be and to come into operation as quickly as possible. I hope that the Minister will undertake to clarify as many as possible of those remaining areas of doubt and that in future he will listen to suggestions about where improvement is needed for future statutory instruments.

9.6 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): There is a slight danger that the Minister will escape from the debate covered in plaudits and with a small halo, suggesting that the Government have achieved a great success in improving the lot of victims of crime. We should not forget the history of the scheme. Under it, as compared with the old non-statutory scheme, victims of crime will receive less money from the Government than they received before.

In the past, victims of crime received, broadly speaking, damages that they would have received in a civil court, taking into account all the elements that form the sophisticated law of damages that applies in a civil court. There has been a significant reduction, and it is quite clear that the sole purpose of the introduction of the scheme and its fated unlawful predecessor, the original tariff scheme, is to cut public spending.

The Library's best estimate is that, in the next financial year, there will be a saving of £200 million. That money is a reduction in what would have been payable to the victims of crime. For that reason, it comes ill from the Government to attempt to earn too much praise for what they have done for the victims of crime. The reduction shows that the Government have hardly striven to achieve greater justice for those victims.

We must not forget that the Government have been dragged kicking and screaming to this new improved tariff scheme. Its history includes the resignation of Martin Thomas QC, a distinguished practitioner on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. It includes complex proceedings for judicial review related to the use of the royal prerogative in unpredictable legal territory. It includes judges intervening, for which they are now being criticised. The Government do not seem to like judges upholding the constitutional rights of British citizens.

The history of the scheme includes having to abandon one that was extremely ungenerous and that would have created much greater unfairness for victims of crime than the present scheme. It also includes the anomalies that were mentioned by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). Those have been well highlighted by Victim Support, and are well documented.

The cost of rectifying those anomalies is small, as the hon. Gentleman said. I am very surprised that the Government, who seek to support victims of crime, or at least say that they seek to support victims of crime, are not prepared to pay up between £2.6 million and £5 million in order to redress what is seen—at least by many people—as an injustice.

Of course I appreciate that the whole area of awarding damages for bereavement is difficult—because it cannot be measured by compensation—and that the compensation paid for bereavement in civil cases is very small; nothing more than a token to recognise the feelings of bereavement suffered by the bereaved. It is therefore very disappointing that the Government have not been able to share those feelings of people who have been caught in what was a very small time trap—which, as has been said, could have been dealt with very quickly.

It is a disappointment, too, that so few Members are in the House to speak on such an important issue. I understand, however, that tonight is a big night for the Labour party. I believe that it has a greyhound meeting, which has attracted many of its Members. However, to suggest that new Labour has gone to the dogs would not be—perhaps—terribly fair.

To return to the motion, I raised with the Minister in an intervention the issue of inflation. I ask him to bear in mind closely the point that I made. Civil courts have always been able to award damages that are the right valuation at the time. Inflation in the civil courts has never been anything more than realistic. If one looks, as I have professionally, over the years at the way in which damages have developed, one sees that sometimes the courts have fallen behind inflation and then caught up later. But when particular types of injuries have been awarded in jerks, rather than in a steady rise to reflect inflation, injustice has occasionally occurred.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Given the hon. and learned Gentleman's experience in criminal practice and his work as a recorder, and given the new rules in the House about paid advocacy, has he taken the opportunity to discuss his involvement in this sort of debate with the new Commissioner for Standards?

Mr. Carlile: I have certainly not discussed with the Commissioner for Standards my involvement in this debate, nor would I. What I am doing now falls plainly within the rules.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): He is not initiating anything.

Mr. Carlile: I am not initiating anything; I am not advocating anything, except improvement of the law. That is what I am elected to do. I say to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) that if we are to be barred from speaking in the House on matters on which we happen to be reasonably expert, we have reached a poor pass in parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Simon Burns (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): You voted for it.

Mr. Carlile: Someone who is usually silent in this House said from a sedentary position that I voted for it. I certainly did not vote—nor did any of my right hon. or hon. Friends—to bar Members from speaking on matters on which they have professional and working expertise.

Mr. Rooker: The rules do not do that.

Mr. Carlile: If anybody is under the illusion that the new rules do that, they are wrong, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has just reflected, with all his experience and knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

To return to the point, we want this tariff scheme to work. It is important for the criminal justice scheme that it should work. It is important for the reputation of the House that the scheme should work. Therefore, it is very important that we should be given more than a vague commitment by the Minister that inflation will be taken into account by uprating the tariff regularly. It is bad enough to be a victim of crime, but it would be unforgivable if victims of crime were also made the victims of public spending cuts. We need the clearest of commitments on those issues.

I hope that the scheme will work. I hope, however, that the Minister will recognise that—many, many reasons have been given by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth—if further anomalies arise, the Government should be willing to address them. I trust that an element of flexibility will be applied over the years to the new scheme, which will mean that victims of crime will still be able to obtain justice for their injuries.

9.14 pm

Mr. Maclean: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This has been a short but interesting debate. I shall deal first with the point raised by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) about inflation. Of course we are committed to reviewing the scheme regularly. We want to keep all its aspects under constant review, and we acknowledge the need to take inflation into account. It would be politically unsustainable for any Government, of any colour, to run such a scheme without reviewing it for inflation—especially if inflation under another Government were to rise a great deal faster than at present.

Labour Members raised the issue of the treatment of fatal cases. I want to take a few minutes to make it absolutely clear what the position was and is. Under the common law damages scheme—the old 1990 scheme—compensation for dependants or relatives of those fatally injured was and is assessed in accordance with the Fatal Accidents Act and allied legislation. That produced some anomalies. For instance, the father of an illegitimate child could receive no award for bereavement, nor could parents when their child was over the age of 18 when killed.

As the whole House knows and agrees, death by accident is always a tragedy. In the light of the cases that arose under the 1990 scheme, we—this Government, who have been reprimanded by some hon. Members tonight—became convinced that there was a case for treating the families of homicide victims rather differently from the position under the Fatal Accidents Act.

Thus, when we devised the interim tariff scheme, we made it possible for the first time for parents and a spouse, whether or not common law, and the children, of any age, of a homicide victim to qualify for a share of the new fatal award of £10,000, which had replaced the common law damages scheme award for loss of dependency, loss of support, and bereavement.

We estimated that the change would result in more than 80 per cent. of claimants in fatal cases receiving more money than they would have done under the 1990 scheme. The enforced withdrawal of the 1994 tariff scheme and the reinstatement—as had to be done—of the 1990 scheme meant that the more restrictive eligibility criteria of the 1990 scheme had to be applied once more.

I wish that people had recognised that the interim tariff scheme that we introduced in certain areas was considerably more generous than the old scheme. It meant that those categories of relatives or dependants who had, for the first time ever under our proposals, become eligible for an award under the tariff scheme were unfortunately no longer eligible.

We have considerable sympathy for such claimants. The fact that they cannot now qualify for an award is an unfortunate consequence of the withdrawal of the 1994 tariff scheme, necessitated by the House of Lords judgment. Nevertheless, we still think that it is right that such categories of claimants should be able to qualify for a fatal award.

Thus, under the new tariff scheme before us today, the eligibility criteria for fatal cases are the same as they were under the earlier tariff scheme. Once the new scheme is introduced, such people will be eligible for a fatal award of £5,000—or £10,000 if there is only one qualifying claimant. In addition, under the new tariff scheme there will also be payment for loss of dependency—that is, reliance on the breadwinner's income—and loss of parental support.

I must tell the House that there is nothing that we can reasonably do for those who would have been eligible under the 1994 tariff scheme and who would again be eligible under the 1996 scheme, but who have been rendered ineligible by the enforced reinstatement of the old scheme. Applications must, in equity, be considered under the terms of the scheme in force at the time of application.

That means that, because the 1994 scheme was ruled ineligible, the cases to which I have just referred have to be dealt with under the 1990 scheme. It is not possible to treat such applicants as a special case, and allow them a payment under our more generous 1994 tariff scheme, or let them reapply under the generous 1996 tariff scheme. That would be wrong in principle, and anomalous in practice.

Let us not forget that between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. of applicants would have been better off under the 1994 tariff scheme than under the reinstated 1990 scheme. We cannot move to a situation in which any group of claimants—however strongly they may feel—are allowed to pick and choose their claim under whichever scheme they think would be the most advantageous for them.

Mr. Michael: I have been following the Minister's argument with care. If the House of Commons recognises not the loudness of the voices of those who argue that there is an anomaly, but that there is a case of injustice to be met, why cannot the House decide to correct that anomaly? Surely it is right that the House has such powers, and surely it is right that that can be done retrospectively. Many other measures have been carried out retrospectively by the Government, so all that is needed is the will.

I believe that ex gratia payments can be made, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has suggested. If the Minister is not willing to introduce such a scheme, will he recognise the justice of the claim and allow the House to decide on the matter? We have given him the means to do so.

Mr. Maclean: What an extraordinary suggestion. We were castigated by the Opposition for operating an ex gratia scheme, and they demanded that we introduce a statutory scheme. We have now introduced a statutory scheme, and the Opposition are now suggesting that we go back to making ex gratia payments to a certain group of claimants.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to suggest that we can pick out a narrow category of claimants. If we get into the business of trying to backdate payments for a special group of claimants, why should we limit it to those claimants? What about all the other claimants, including the non-fatal cases and the 50 or 60 per cent. of claimants who would have been better off if the tariff scheme that was thrown out by the House of Lords had stayed in place? In all equity, do they not have a right as well to have payments backdated?

Why should we stop there? Why should we not backdate awards to those judged in 1993, 1992 or 1990? The hon. Gentleman, I think, has a guilty conscience.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Mr. Maclean: Let me finish this point.

The hon. Gentleman tonight smells of a guilty conscience. When the Government lost the case in the House of Lords, he was crowing from the rafters about the tariff scheme being thrown out. He put out statements saying that a mean-spirited Home Secretary had been defeated in the Lords. But he has now discovered that one of the bits thrown out in that judgment was a new and generous scheme that we had introduced, which had not benefited victims before.

Now the hon. Gentleman has a little bit of a guilty conscience. The Opposition crowed when the scheme was thrown out, but now they want us to put back in a measure. However, they want that measure to be targeted on only one group of people. They want us to ignore all the other claimants who—if we were to make such an extraordinary decision—should, in all equity, be included as well.

Mr. Michael: That was a most extraordinary piece of wriggling by the Minister. The Government were guilty of trying to cut the cash for the victims of crime, and this scheme—which is better than the one they introduced illegally—involves a cut of £700 million in five years.

I will answer the Minister's point in this way—it is easy for us to identify a specific limited number of individuals who are damaged by being caught in the gap which results from the Government's incompetence. We want to ensure that there is continuity between the scheme that was introduced and then withdrawn and the new scheme. That would cost—at the best possible estimate—about £2.5 million, but it would be just and right to introduce it. That is one reason for suggesting to the Minister that he accepts our offer of help in the legislation to correct the anomaly. Surely he should accept our offer.

Mr. Maclean: The offer from the hon. Gentleman to help in the legislation is the best proof of his guilty conscience. He claims that these people are being caught in a trap, but they were not entitled to anything at all under the old scheme. We then came along with the best of intentions in our tariff scheme. The House of Lords asked us to withdraw that scheme, and that is where the problem came from.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to weasel out by saying that such a scheme would cost only £1 million to £2 million. He ignores all the other victims, who, in all righteousness and equity, would also be entitled to demand that they should have their awards backdated.

The other point that the hon. Gentleman is dodging is his boast of spending another £700 million on the scheme. Yes, he said that he wanted to spend only another £2 million, but that would be on top of the £700 million. Apparently he has had the permission of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to spend money on the new scheme.

I shall now move on and deal with the other points raised in the debate.

Mr. Rooker: I confess that I am not a lawyer, and I am in the Chamber only because I hope to listen to the Adjournment debate, but what strikes me about the present debate is the constant use of the word "anomaly". Over the past few days, I have been in the Library reminding myself of the case of Pepper *v.* Hart, and I wonder whether, when the Minister was preparing his speech, he took advice on the implications of that case for the anomalies, such as who has missed out and who is left in now that we have a statutory scheme.

Mr. Maclean: No, certainly not. Pepper *v.* Hart is one of those cases that has been grossly exaggerated, and it applies only where there is a clear misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the law. I have not bandied the word "anomaly" about. It is the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth who believes that he has found hundreds of anomalies. I am satisfied that what we are doing here is just and right, and that the scheme is as clear as we can possibly make it.

To return to the other questions that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth asked, of course we want the scheme to be as clear as possible. I assure the House that it is in the interests of the Government and of the civil servants administering the scheme, as well as in the interests of victims, that there is as much clarity as possible in the scheme and in the guidance. We do not want obfuscation any more than the next man does; it simply fouls up the whole system—*[Interruption.]*

If the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth were in an executive position, he would realise the sense in what I say. If a scheme is not clear, one has to deal with constant phone calls and is always filling in forms and checking up. That is, among other things, costly.

I give the House an absolute assurance that we shall monitor everything. We shall reflect on what the Law Commission says, and on what anyone else of any standing says—and even on what people of no standing whatever say. Of course we shall be given advice—from our appeals panel, among others, on changes that it may like to be made to the scheme. We shall consider what the panel says, and decide whether to make changes.

I can certainly clarify the fact that it was always the intention that the term "child" in the guidance would cover adult children. How else does one describe the 50-year-old offspring of a 75-year-old? Such people are still the children of their parents, and of course they will qualify.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth asked me to listen to a few points about structured settlements. I am grateful for his courtesy in saying that the Government have listened to many comments, but I must make one little point: he obviously did not hear me say earlier in my speech, in connection with structured settlements, that the complementary change to the current scheme to permit the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995 to extend to benefits for applicants under the current scheme whose claims have not yet been settled, was made on 8 November, the day that the Act received Royal Assent. We thought it sensible to do both at the same time.

As for firemen, they are now merely being put in the same position as policemen with regard to the excessive risk category. If police officers are injured while arresting a criminal, it is sensible that they should receive compensation. However, if a policeman on duty trips over his shoelaces, he should not get criminal injuries compensation.

If firemen were responding to an arson attack or other fire, they received compensation if they suffered injury as a direct result of the fire. However, they also received

[Mr. Maclean]

criminal injuries compensation if they tripped over their hosepipes. That was rather a generous interpretation, so we are removing that provision and putting firemen in the same position as police officers. That is a sensible thing to do.

Finally, I make the point again that the scheme that we have introduced under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995 that is before the House tonight remains the most generous scheme of any country in the world. I make no apologies for mentioning that, especially to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, who is a devoted and committed European. He will be interested to know, as the whole House will, that the scheme remains 236 times more generous than Austria's; 275 times more generous than Belgium's; 109 times more generous than that of the Netherlands; and 69 times more generous than Denmark's.

Let us consider some bigger countries. The scheme is five times more generous than France's and 27 times more generous than mighty Germany's. All told, little old Great Britain accounts for 33.5 per cent. of all criminal injuries compensation paid out in the world.

I have no qualms in urging my hon. Friends and the whole House to support the measures before us tonight, because victims of crime in this country will continue to get increasing amounts of money allocated to criminal injuries compensation schemes by the Government. The amount will go up year after year. Britain will continue, and rightly so, to treat victims of crime more generously than does any other country in the world. I commend the scheme to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Docks and Harbours (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

FAMILY LAW

That the draft Child Support (Compensation for Recipients of Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

FAMILY LAW

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft County Courts (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills relating to their principle)).

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Homeless People (Voting Rights)

9.31 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I beg leave to present a petition that aims to secure voting rights for homeless people. Homeless people have considerable difficulty registering to vote. It is presented by people associated with CHAR, the campaign for the single homeless, and *The Big Issue*, which is sold on the street by homeless vendors.

It is appropriate to present the petition now, because the final date for correcting draft electoral registers is 16 December and this is voters' rights week. It links with a petition that was handed in to Downing street earlier this week, which was signed by 7,500 people, 60 per cent. of whom had filled in coupons that had been placed in *The Big Issue*.

The petition states:

> "To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.
>
> The humble petition of the People and supporters of CHAR and The Big Issue sheweth that Homeless People do not have a clear right to vote in national, local and European elections and are thereby excluded from the democratic process. The petitioners request that the Representation of the People Act (1983) is amended to guarantee the vote to all homeless people.
>
> Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Prime Minister and the Government not to impede this petition.
>
> And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

The petition is in the names of L. Flounders, Caroline Holden, and Paul Himsworth, the last of whom is the author of the report produced by CHAR.

Good Hope Hospital, Sutton Coldfield

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.33 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I am grateful for the opportunity of this debate and for the fact that hon. Members in preceding debates have gone so swiftly through their business that we may be able to have a rather longer debate than we might have had otherwise. That enables the Minister's statement to be reported by *The Birmingham Post* tomorrow morning. It occurs to me that I should at this stage declare that the newspapers from which I shall be quoting are all published by Midland Independent Newspapers, of which I am non-executive chairman.

I welcome the parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) to his new job. In previous incarnations, we used to joust on transport. He used to sit on the Opposition Front Bench and I used to sit on the Government Front Bench. I hope that our experience will not set a precedent for our exchanges on the development of the health service.

The case that I shall advance on behalf of the Good Hope hospital in Sutton Coldfield is overwhelming. I have followed the development of the Good Hope hospital for more than 20 years and in that time it has faced some serious problems. In all fairness, the hospital's problems have not been confined to the past two or three years or even the past 14 or 15 years. One of the worst problems that the hospital ever faced involved the capital cuts of the 1970s which meant that the much-needed modernised new wards did not materialise. One of the great achievements of the Government in the 1980s, when I was Secretary of State for Health, was to make capital available so that the new wards could be built.

This evening I present to the House a problem which currently affects the Good Hope hospital and the public, and which requires urgent attention. The demand for beds at Good Hope hospital has always been high, but over the past month or so it has reached new peaks. Some patients who should have been admitted have been forced to wait nine, 10 and 11 hours on trolleys in the accident and emergency unit. The demand for hospital services is so high that there is currently about 97 per cent. bed occupancy at the Good Hope hospital.

On Saturday night I paid another visit to the Good Hope hospital without the press or official accompaniment, to see, on the ground, how the unit worked at a crucial time for the accident and emergency unit. Just before midnight there was precisely one bed available for patients in the hospital's regular wards. When that bed became occupied, treatment rooms and day rooms would have to be used to accommodate patients.

Over the past few weeks a number of well-publicised cases have proved that the facilities are inadequate. One of my constituents wrote to me to thank me for supporting the proposal to extend the accident and emergency unit at Good Hope hospital. The letter states:

> "Earlier this year I had direct experience of the shortcomings of the unit when I was taken seriously ill one evening . . . I was one of 15 people that night who were unable to be found beds and left on trolleys around the department."

The *Sutton Coldfield News* contained an interview with the deputy president of the Royal College of Nursing, who visited Good Hope hospital. She said:

> "We saw a 92-year-old who came to casualty at 9.20 am with a chest infection. When we came back in at 7.35 pm—just three minutes earlier they had found 'a bed' for her".

She said that the bed that had been found

> "could be in a treatment room 'surrounded by syringes' or in a ward day room".

That is correct.

On Monday November 6 the *Evening Mail* detailed the case of a 58-year-old lady who had spent 11 hours on a trolley waiting for a bed in Sutton Coldfield's Good Hope hospital and a further 10 hours in a day room before being found a bed on a hospital ward. There are other such cases.

The *Evening Mail* of 16 November described a case in which emergency patients, including heart attack and asthma cases, lay on trolleys for up to 18 hours while doctors and nurses treated them in the corridor. That is the problem that we are dealing with at the Good Hope hospital, and especially in the accident and emergency unit.

That accident and emergency unit currently works, under any definition, at full stretch. I pay tribute to the staff, especially the nursing staff, for the enormous contribution that they make. Nothing that I say this evening is a criticism of their care or their standards. Indeed, interestingly, when I receive letters, although there is criticism of the facilities of the unit, almost everyone goes out of their way to remark on and pay tribute to the quality and dedication of the nursing staff and the standard of care that they receive.

If we can achieve what I shall suggest, I believe that the quality of care can be improved at Good Hope.

Let me explain why I have been campaigning for better facilities in the accident and emergency unit.

From the patient's point of view, the accident and emergency unit is the face of the hospital. It is where many patients come for the first time prior to admission. It is thus a crucial unit at Good Hope and it can determine how a patient and their relatives—for one should not forget them—look on the hospital generally.

Several features of the accident and emergency unit are, I say bluntly, unacceptable. I believe that it is unacceptable that people entering the hospital through the accident and emergency unit should be kept waiting for hour after hour on a trolley. I acknowledge that that is exceptional but, exception or not, it should not be part of a modern health service.

It is unacceptable for the accident and emergency unit to be so obviously out of date, with facilities that are so obviously rooted in the 1960s—so clearly incapable of providing the modern surroundings that the public are entitled to expect.

It is unacceptable that the design of the unit is such that it is impossible to make better provision for children. It is an issue that has not been fully ventilated in the debate that we have had about the accident and emergency unit.

Modern practice and common sense demand that children be treated separately from other cases that come into the unit. Let me explain why. Last Friday night—the night before I visited—there was intense pressure on the

[Sir Norman Fowler]

unit. There was a series of road traffic accidents and there were some stabbings, which had taken place in fights. Any child who was there—two children were there—would see the injuries inflicted and the state of the people who came in. For children, that is obviously unacceptable.

Finally, it is unacceptable that staff, especially nurses, should be placed under the type of pressure that they are being placed under at the accident and emergency unit. Nurses are going home exhausted and sometimes in tears. The number of nurses on shift in the unit is obviously inadequate at times, and that problem needs to be urgently tackled.

I pay tribute to the devotion of the nurses because they work under difficult circumstances—I think that anyone who has visited the hospital will confirm that—but they work heroically under those circumstances.

Let us dispose of one other issue. The issue here is the demand for medical services at the hospital, not the efficiency of the hospital. Good Hope takes patients from north Birmingham, south Staffordshire and general practitioner referrals. Like the health service, the hospital is treating more patients than ever before in its history. That is a great success. It is treating more in-patients, more out-patients and more day cases. The accident and emergency unit is certainly taking in many more patients than at any stage in the past. In other words, the pressure is immense.

Here we come to a curious point about the financing of the cases coming into the unit. Good Hope is contracted to take in advance a particular total of accident and emergency patients for the year. That is set out in advance; a block contract is entered into. But the difficulty comes when the numbers coming to the unit go above that contract. One of the troubles at the moment is that the hospital is finding it difficult to get the resources needed to treat those extra patients. That is an issue of allocation of resources and needs to be tackled.

That is a precis of the problem. Good Hope is an excellent hospital. It has dedicated staff and there is a high and increasing demand for the services that it provides. The real irony with regard to the accident and emergency provision is that the position could be transformed by two relatively inexpensive steps which should now be taken.

First, the accident and emergency unit urgently needs to be modernised. There is no conceivable doubt about that, as anyone who has been to the hospital will confirm. We need to move from the old-fashioned world of curtained cubicles to something that better meets modern needs. As it happens, the reception area of the unit has already been transformed. I know that because I opened it myself two years ago. There is no doubt that, as a result, the reception area is much more welcoming now than it ever was previously. That has been a great step forward. The new capital works there have resulted in a transformation for those coming to the accident and emergency unit. But that is the outer facade. We now need to transform the area behind the reception where patients are taken, examined and treated. The unit itself needs to be modernised.

Secondly, at the same time, a new admissions unit should be built where patients can wait in a small purpose-built ward with permanent beds. That would make long waits on trolleys a thing of the past. Above all, it would give a sense of reassurance to the people being treated—men and women who may be in severe shock and who are certainly extremely concerned about their position. That is why they are so upset about waiting on the trolleys in the first place.

Neither of those proposals are exactly revolutionary. Many hospitals in Britain already have exactly what I am describing. Even more to the point—my hon. Friend may consider this—neither of those steps are exorbitantly expensive. We are talking of spending in the region of not millions and millions of pounds but hundreds of thousands of pounds. That includes not only the capital cost—that is obviously vital and I hope that I have made the case for it—but the revenue cost of the nursing staff who would be necessary to staff the unit.

If the regional and local health authorities examine the position, they will find that the necessary resources can be made available. I do not believe that it will require any new allocation from the Government or from Whitehall to the west midlands.

That is what I urge essentially on the Minister this evening. He will doubtless say that he is not directly responsible for the running of Good Hope hospital, but he has regular talks and regular contact with the regional health authority which is responsible for the allocation of resources. I am making an overwhelming case for the allocation of resources and what is now required is immediate and urgent action along the lines that I have suggested. The Minister will not find many people in the health service or in Sutton Coldfield generally who disagree with what I have said.

Let me add in parenthesis that I have concentrated in this short debate on one particular problem in one particular hospital. If we had a wider debate and more time I would go further. I should like to see an outside examination of Birmingham's hospital services. Above all, I would like an outside examination and evaluation of the demand for hospital care in Britain's second city.

I propose an outside examination because that would provide an objective view of what is required. There is not much to be gained by claims, counterclaims and swapping slogans. I would prefer an urgent examination to be carried out by one man or woman—perhaps with one or two assessors—not so much on the lines of Tomlinson, but more on the lines of the inquiry that I set up with Sir Roy Griffiths into the management of the health service. He carried out that inquiry speedily and produced a succinct report. It was an objective analysis followed by the action that was required. It was to the benefit of everyone in the health service and it settled a particular issue.

I very much welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has made it clear that he will debate health care in Birmingham in the new year. I would welcome it even more if he were prepared to carry out the evaluation that I suggest.

The figures that are now being given by the Department on the demand for accident and emergency facilities are understated—certainly in respect of Birmingham. If the figures are increasing by 3 per cent. per year, my hon. Friend will find that the annual increase of demand for accident and emergency facilities in Birmingham are substantially greater.

I hope that I have put a comprehensive case to the Minister. My purpose tonight in the Adjournment debate is, above all, to call attention to the accident and emergency unit at Good Hope. The Government make available the resources for the health service and the region allocates them more locally. Between them, they can take the decisions that will solve the particular problem that I have set out and which has caused so much justifiable public concern over the past weeks.

Good Hope is an excellent hospital. It provides excellent care and has a devoted staff. I do not want it to be known as the hospital where patients wait on trolleys to be treated. That is totally unjust to the hospital; it is totally unjust to the staff and, above all, it is totally unfair to the patients.

9.54 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): With the approval of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), and with the Minister's indulgence, I wish to say a few words.

Good Hope hospital is in Sutton Coldfield and Sutton Coldfield is in Birmingham. The Minister should be reminded of that because his constituency is several hundred miles away from the city. We are talking about a major Birmingham hospital that, as the right hon. Gentleman said, serves his constituency, a good part of north Birmingham, the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), a goodly part of my constituency and the southern parts of Staffordshire.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the issue has not arisen recently. It can be traced back to the 1970s. I was at a major meeting at Good Hope hospital which was attended by about 400 to 500 patients. It took place in about 1977-78. There was a major problem involving the orthopaedic surgeon, whose name escapes me for the moment. He increased the momentum and pressure for change. At the time, there was an horrendous waiting list in north Birmingham. There has been considerable progress since then.

I understand that a debate on the health service is to take place in Birmingham during January. I say to all political parties that will be involved that I want grown-up politics from every one of them. I do not want anyone sailing into Birmingham from my party, the Conservative party or the Liberal party preaching political sloganism. That approach does not help the citizens of Birmingham. We want a dose of grown-up politics in discussing the health service crisis in Birmingham.

The issue is clouded and I support the right hon. Gentleman's argument that an objective look must be taken. The pressure on Good Hope hospital has been accentuated by the closure of the city-centre general hospital. Despite all the reasons for that, which we understand, we have lost several hundred beds in a small district general hospital. That is bound to put pressure on the other district general hospitals.

We know that in recent months there has been a management crisis and a bed crisis at City hospital, Dudley road. That hospital serves a good part of the north and west of Birmingham. That has put further pressure on Good Hope hospital.

At 1.30 pm on 17 January, I was taking a phone call from a constituent. It was about Frances Grew, an 88-year-old lady. She had gone into Good Hope hospital with a major blood circulation problem that was affecting her feet. It so happened that Question Time related to health matters that day. I walked into the Chamber and was called to ask a supplementary question to the second question. I raised the issue of Mrs. Grew and my question appears in column 567. That was probably my quickest response to a constituency case during more than 20 years in this place.

I shall not go into the details of that case, but it related to the time that an 88-year-old lady had had to wait for a bed. She was dumped into a gynaecological ward, which upset her and her family. There had been a wait of five hours. As I have said, I took up the matter in the Chamber and in correspondence. I received letters from the region and the chairman of the trust that runs Good Hope hospital. On 23 March, I was told that the chairman of the trust was hoping for

"an improvement in the bed situation in the forthcoming financial year."

In other words, I was told in March that things would be a bit better in 1995-96. Since then, as the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Erdington will confirm, the situation has become far more serious. People are now waiting up to 11 hours on a trolley.

Good Hope hospital is not a mobile army surgical unit. It is taking mobility to extremes when people are expected to wait on trolleys and to be moved around on them to create space for other people. They are moved out of their beds after 11 pm from one ward to another because of the pressure that is created by people entering the hospital.

That situation has not just arisen recently. In the past couple of days, I was contacted by a former constituent, Janet Taylor. She told me what had happened to her husband, Theo Taylor, on 28 October 1991 when, unfortunately, he suffered a stroke at the age of 48 years. He was taken to Good Hope hospital at 11.30 am. He was on a trolley until 7.15 pm. Then it was found that there were no bed sheets in the hospital. They had to go to two other hospitals to get bed linen.

That tells me that there is a problem of management. As the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield also said, I have not had a single telephone call, constituency surgery visit or letter that has ever criticised the nursing staff of Good Hope hospital. It is the management of the hospital that people perceive is wrong. The situation with the beds and the trolleys is not new.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Mr. Rooker: I know that the top management have become a bit frustrated with the attacks on them in the press, and in that respect the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and the other newspapers have always taken a very pro view of our hospitals. If things are wrong, they have campaigned. It has never been a partisan issue for the press. The management has come in for some stick. Managers have became so short with one of my constituents that they wrote:

"if you thought about matters more deeply you would recognise"

that the staff are excellent. My constituent had not attacked the staff management; he attacked the management. He was told that the term "management" was old hat. It was old hat because it was not working at Good Hope. That happened in only February this year.

[Mr. Rooker]

There have been other difficulties and major problems, with elderly people being moved around late at night from one ward to another. I understand that a block has now been put on that, and no one, except in the most exceptional circumstances—for example, a clinical need—can be moved from one ward to another after 11 pm. That is the new rule. There is also a new audit so that people do not miss their meals because trolleys are in the wrong place. That issue was raised with me earlier this year. The consequence of people being moved around—not just the wait for treatment and the worry of relatives with the person waiting for a doctor, waiting for a bed or perhaps waiting for a drip—is that people do not get fed. The consequences of all that, subject to the personal circumstances of the individual, can be horrendous, and unfortunately it gives the health service a bad name.

I share entirely the views expressed by the right hon. Gentleman: solutions need not cost a bomb. I would have no problem in funding the public expenditure from the Government's balance sheet, because the expenditure is so small that we could get it to about the fifth decimal place when adding up a column of figures. I do not think that any of us is asking for massive amounts of public expenditure, but there is a need to look at what is happening in Birmingham.

The Minister is new to his position, and I congratulate him. Nevertheless, I invite him to look at hospital provision in Birmingham dispassionately. The problem is with not only the hospitals but the community facilities. There is a crisis in Birmingham; it keeps breaking out in different places at different times of the year, but it does not go away. There does not seem to have been any solution in the recent changes. I hope that the Minister will take on board what has been said in the debate and look at the position himself.

10.3 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I make it clear that I do not disagree with a word that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)—my neighbour—and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said. Good Hope is north Birmingham's hospital. The *Sutton Coldfield Observer* said everything about the state of the hospital when it reported on 13 October that a senior consultant at the accident and emergency unit at Good Hope was so fed up with what was going on that he quit. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned nine-hour—sometimes 18-hour—trolley waits.

Three weeks ago, the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, which I congratulate unreservedly on the vigour and strength that it has shown when backing the campaign to get decent hospital services in our city, reported that there was not a single bed available in the city. A crisis arose at Good Hope. Quite properly, it did a trawl of the other hospitals in the city, including Burton on Trent, and was told that there were no beds. The regional authority was quoted as saying that it did not know what the problem was. There were 25 beds available at Selly Oak hospital. The system clicks into action as soon as any hospital experiences trouble. It is a bureaucratic mess.

Perhaps I will be given some latitude at this point. It is difficult to discuss one hospital in isolation from the rest. I pin the blame for the acute bed crisis in our city firmly on the regional health authority: that is where the buck stops. The Minister will have found files inches thick on his desk—plans for a "better, healthy Birmingham". That regional health authority, however, has known for at least three or four years of the rising, steady demand for acute and emergency beds. It even set up a regional working party.

As the Minister will know, the same trend can be observed throughout the country. It was originally thought that GPs were using it to jump the queue, but one of the first things that the working party discovered was that that was not the case: more people were more ill and needing acute and emergency admissions, but there were no beds for them. That is the real problem: there are not enough acute beds.

Earlier this year, I tabled a question about the number of acute beds in Birmingham in 1979 and 1993-94. According to a written reply that I received on 18 April, in 1979 there were 4,391 acute beds in Birmingham; in 1993-94 there were 2,918. That represents a loss of 1,473. I understand that there is no magic in bed numbers; it is the use that is made of those beds that is important. The right hon. Gentleman said that there had been a 97 per cent. occupancy rate. However, the number of beds and the staff to run them properly become critical if the beds are not there when the crisis appears on the doorstep. That is the real problem in the city of Birmingham.

The regional health authority has shown itself to be totally incompetent. That is why the right hon. Gentleman and I have said that we shall never get the matter sorted out unless one or two independent experts from outside the city examine the position and produce an action plan. As the Minister will know, unless that is done the people responsible for the crisis will be the only ones asked to examine the reasons for that crisis, and they will not blame themselves; it will have to be someone else's fault. In fact, they were responsible for allocating the resources, and they have seen what has happened to bed numbers.

Along with my hon. Friends, I pay unreserved tribute to staff at all levels—and management—at Good Hope. I thank them for the work that they do under dreadful conditions. I mean that: I am not patronising those people. What I have said has been acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I must add, however, that it does not help to be summoned to a meeting in January this year and to be told that three or four departments are to be put out to private tender, and that the trust wants to build three new wards to take in private patients in order to increase its income. I do not want to get into an argument about private patients, but that is what those people were told.

Three months later, the trust announced that it could no longer afford those building operations. That is what drives people mad in the city of Birmingham. Plans are made and announced; then, all of a sudden, someone finds that there is no money. In the case of Solihull hospital, with which the Minister will be familiar, the building was constructed, equipped and staffed; a year later, someone said, "We are going to stop that." That drives people mad, but no one is ever responsible. Millions of pounds of scarce resources are squandered and frittered away as a result of the incompetence of the regional health authority along the Hagley road.

As for other pressures on beds, for reasons that I understand, under the system that the Government have introduced, all the pressure is on Good Hope and other hospitals to maximise the number of patients whom they treat from general practitioner fundholders, because the more they treat, the more money they receive. For non-fundholding general practitioners, there is a guarantee that no one will wait more than 13 weeks for an appointment or nine months for surgery. In reality, I suspect that that is a minimum in each case because of a quarrel with North Birmingham health authority over the details of the contract.

Someone who works in the hospital has written to me, incidentally asking me not to use his or her name because it could lose that person his or her job. Does that not say a great deal about what is happening in the health service? Someone could lose his or her job for speaking up on behalf of patients. That person says that the result of that pressure to treat more patients of fundholding GPs is that

"the wards are full, leaving no room for emergency admissions."

I want to Minister to understand this one. I know that he is not responsible for running Good Hope and that the main responsibility rests with those wretched incompetents on the regional health authority, but he has a duty to ensure that, within the money available, Birmingham gets a system that can guarantee that people needing acute and emergency treatment are able to receive such treatment.

Two or three weeks ago, in about mid-November, figures for emergency and acute treatment reached peak winter mid-February levels. The logic of that—because there is no sign of that demand decreasing—is that, when we really come to winter, a crisis will come about and lives will literally be put at risk. I do not want to be overdramatic about this, but it follows as sure as night follows day.

I want to ask just for a little more money than the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr. Because of the change in the basis on which funding is allocated to Birmingham and the west midlands, it is estimated that there is a shortfall of about £25 million a year in the money that the city hospitals need, and of around £5 million a year for general practitioners and primary health care services. Those are not large amounts of money. No one is necessarily expecting that, when the Minister goes to Birmingham—as I hope that he soon will—he will have such cheques with him, but this problem will not be solved unless there is extra early and new investment. The position demands it and I hope that he will accept the need for that.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am glad to respond to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on what is an important issue and I, too, hope that our relationship in health matters will be rather different from that which it once was on transport matters: although our relationship was always good in those days, it was somewhat adversarial. I know that he takes a keen interest in developments at Good Hope hospital and how they affect standards of services provided for residents of Sutton Coldfield and surrounding regions.

The hon. Members for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) both spoke with great passion. I was interested in what they had to say. They took the debate rather wider and I cannot reply fully tonight, but I took note of their points.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will allow me this opportunity to congratulate all staff working at the Hawthorns surgery at Wylde green, Sutton Coldfield on being one of this year's charter mark award winners. They won their award for the high standards of patient service, of which I am sure he is aware, and that is an excellent achievement and one of which they can be justifiably proud. We should not lose sight of the fact that many other first-class developments are taking place both at Good Hope hospital and throughout health services in Birmingham.

My right hon. Friend will, I am sure, be the first to confirm that Good Hope hospital has a strong and positive commitment towards providing high-quality service for its patients, which was reflected in his and other comments. I understand that the hospital recently received provisional King's Fund association accreditation and that it is one of the few hospitals in the country to meet the rigorous requirements of the King's Fund organisational audit programme. Both those benefits stand the hospital in good stead.

Although Good Hope hospital is not large it dealt with almost 220,000 patients last year. Well over 50,000 of those attended through the accident and emergency department, just under 130,000 were out-patients, 33,000 were in-patients and about 8,300 were treated on a day-case basis. That represented a 16 per cent. overall increase on the previous year, and I understand that numbers of people treated by the hospital continue to rise.

No west midlands resident waits for more than nine months for either in-patient or day-case treatment. That is an excellent record. It is better than the standards laid down in the patients charter which require all patients to be admitted within 18 months, while those requiring coronary revascularisation have to be admitted within 12 months of joining the list. Of course urgent cases are dealt with much more quickly. For those who require out-patients appointments the current maximum waiting time at Good Hope hospital is 13 weeks across all specialities.

I share my right hon. Friend's disappointment and concern about the recent spate of reports about patients admitted to Good Hope hospital through its accident and emergency department having to wait for an excessively long time on trollies before being found a bed. Plainly, such waits are totally unacceptable. The patients charter makes it clear that those who are admitted to hospital through an accident and emergency department can expect to be given beds as soon as possible, and certainly within three to four hours. That requirement was clearly not met on a number of occasions that have been cited. We expect all hospitals to work towards meeting this standard and Good Hope is no exception.

I am told that the majority of recent trolley waits at Good Hope occurred during a sudden and unexpected surge in emergency demand throughout Birmingham. Hon. Members will be well aware of the nationwide trend of rising emergency admissions. I understand that between Monday 13 November and Wednesday 15 November Birmingham hospitals coped with significantly more emergency cases than expected. In

[Mr. John Horam]

those three days 120 more emergency patients were seen by Birmingham hospitals than is normal in such a short period.

It was an exceptional situation and placed all of Birmingham's hospitals under extreme pressure. As a result it was not always possible for doctors to see some patients as quickly as they would have liked, nor, unfortunately, was it possible always to find appropriate beds for patients as quickly as usual.

That exceptional situation obviously required urgent action to relieve pressure and free beds to deal with the surge in emergency demand. Therefore, North and South Birmingham health authorities issued a yellow alert cancelling all non-urgent admissions for the rest of that week. That allowed the hospitals to concentrate their efforts and resources on treating emergency cases. I am told that the action that was taken was successful and that the situation in Birmingham was stabilised by the end of the week. However, I realise that for those who had operations cancelled at the last minute that action was perhaps less than welcome. I hope that they will understand the exceptional nature of the situation during that short period.

With the benefit of hindsight I have to agree that it would appear that Good Hope hospital experienced more difficulties than other Birmingham hospitals in coping with the problem. That is a matter of considerable concern and it is being addressed by West Midlands regional health authority through discussions between the trust and North Birmingham health authority. I understand that one of the reasons why Good Hope was unable to open more beds to meet demand, thereby cutting the use of trollies, was a shortage of nurses. That problem has already been identified by the trust which hopes that it will soon be resolved following a major recruitment drive to fill vacancies.

Contrary to the impression that has sometimes been given in local press reports, Good Hope is a forward-looking hospital. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health recently had the pleasure of opening the hospital's new £600,000, 15-bed day-case surgery unit. Advances in medical technology enable more and more patients to come into hospital, have operations and go home the same day. That is better for the patient, it means that more patients can be treated, and it reflects the enormous steps in medical technology in recent years. The new dedicated day case unit at Good Hope will allow more than 8,000 patients a year to be treated.

Also, as I am sure that my right hon. Friend will acknowledge, there have been other major capital developments at Good Hope which have either been completed recently or are planned. For example, £4.8 million has already been spent on refurbishing wards throughout the hospital, £2.7 million is being spent on a new dental and pharmacy suite, and £500,000 is planned for enhanced patient facilities.

None the less, the difficulties in the A and E department, which my right hon. Friend so cogently explained, are serious. In response to those problems, I have looked at the situation with considerable care since my appointment as a Minister. It is one of the things that has been at the top of my agenda during that period—a short period, but nevertheless one in which I gave the problems high priority.

I am therefore glad to be able to make two announcements. First, the west midlands regional office of the NHS executive has just approved a £1.4 million redevelopment at Good Hope to provide two additional emergency operating theatres. Those new theatres will reduce the strain on resources at times of peak demand in the accident and emergency department. That will mean better services for the patients who are accepted at Good Hope.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend mentioned at some length and with some fervour the problems arising from the out-of-date design of the A and E department and the extremely cramped and inappropriate facilities for children and, indeed, all people who attend the A and E department.

I am therefore very glad to be able to announce also a major face-lift to the Good Hope A and E department. That will mean structural changes within the department to create more space and thereby allow staff more flexibility to treat patients in a manner which my right hon. Friend would expect. Work will begin as soon as possible and be completed with a minimum delay.

That refurbishment has the support of the west midlands regional office, which will ensure that the trust finds the money necessary to meet the development costs.

Mr. Corbett: I am not trying to score points. Will the Minister make clear whether new money is involved in this welcome tidy-up of the A and E department?

Mr. Horam: I should make it clear that both the projects that I have announced are definitely being funded with new money.

In addition, my right hon. Friend brought up the suggestion of a new admissions unit. Although I cannot say anything specific about that tonight, I can tell my right hon. Friend that the idea has already been given much thought. I ask him to suggest to the people at Good Hope that they press forward with their business plan as rapidly as they can. The suggestion of such a new unit is clearly sensible and some work has already begun on it.

Those are two clear announcements. I hope that both developments will lead to a significant improvement in the performance of the A and E department at Good Hope hospital, to the benefit of the residents of Sutton Coldfield and the neighbouring areas of Birmingham.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 14 December.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Campbell Soups

1. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what correspondence he has received from Campbell Soups about location in Northern Ireland. [3029]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): I have no record of an approach from Campbell Soups.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the company, Campbell Soups, comes knocking on the Minister's door, he should not believe a single word that it says as all it does is tell lies. In my constituency, that US company with a turnover of $6 billion a year bought a highly profitable factory in Maryport. Within 11 weeks, it announced its closure, causing immense concern in my constituency. Will the Minister join me in asking the people of Northern Ireland to boycott Campbell Soups and Fray Bentos products in the supermarkets? The company used the market place to take its decision, and we should now let the consumers repay it for what it is doing.

Mr. Ancram: I have no intention of asking the people of Northern Ireland to do anything of the sort. If an application is made to my colleague in Northern Ireland it will be looked at on its merits.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that the Campbell Soups company has a large facility in King's Lynn in my constituency which employs many people and is an excellent employer? Obviously, the people who work in that factory have every sympathy with the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and the people who work in the factory in his constituency, but they are concerned about their jobs and future. Is the Minister also aware that if the Campbell Soups company wanted to invest in Northern Ireland it would be a good employer?

Mr. Ancram: I agree with my hon. Friend—none of us likes to see job losses, wherever they occur. I repeat to my hon. Friend what I said to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours): if an application is made to my colleague, Lady Denton, it will be looked at on its merits.

Peace Process

2. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on developments in the peace process. [3030]

4. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further meetings have been arranged to continue the peace initiative. [3032]

7. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest situation in the Northern Ireland peace process. [3037]

8. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about recent progress in the peace negotiations. [3038]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Last Tuesday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, Mr. Bruton, announced the launch of a twin-track process to make progress in parallel on the decommissioning issue and on all-party preparatory talks.

Senator George Mitchell has been appointed as chairman-designate of the international body by both Governments. The two other members are General John de Chastelain, chief of the Canadian defence staff, and Mr. Harri Holkeri, a former Prime Minister of Finland.

I wrote to the Northern Ireland parties on 1 December inviting them to begin the preparatory talks. The Tanaiste, Mr. Spring, has issued parallel invitations.

Mr. Stott: The Secretary of State will be more aware than anyone else of President Clinton's hugely successful visit to Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State will have heard, as I did, the President of the United States putting the weight of his office behind the twin-track proposals. What will be the terms of reference for Senator Mitchell's committee?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The terms of reference are set out in the communiqué, which I have in front of me, but which would take too long to read out now. The terms of reference are set out in paragraphs 5 to 8 of the communiqué, which I think the hon. Gentleman will find in the Library of the House of Commons.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Secretary of State explain how it is that the Government have recently signed a peace treaty in Bosnia and lifted an arms embargo, although there has been no decommissioning before the signing of the treaty? Why is it necessary in the dispute in Northern Ireland and Ireland for decommissioning to occur before a treaty is agreed? Why do the Government operate double standards on different peace treaties throughout the world?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is the hon. Gentleman who is uncharacteristically operating double standards. He regards himself as a good democrat. In a democracy one cannot expect people to sit round a table or in any other formation to discuss the future of part of their democracy unless they have full confidence that everybody claiming to participate is there exclusively by reason of the votes that he commands, and not by reason of any armaments that he can discard.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that some Conservative Members have not been at all happy with the American President apparently interfering in the Northern Ireland peace process? However, I acknowledge that President Clinton made an extremely positive contribution last week during his visit, particularly because of the timely and powerful message that he gave to all the terrorists there that their day is over. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the robust and sound stance that he has taken on the issue of terrorist weapons and decommissioning.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There had earlier been some misunderstanding as to whether the interest of the United States was, in some degree, interference, but that never was the intention or expectation. My hon. Friend is absolutely right in pointing to the deep significance of what the President said. Speaking to those who still wish to use violence for political objectives, he said:

> "You are the past; your day is over".

That has rather an interesting resonance. He continued:

> "Violence has no place at the table of democracy, and no role in the future of this land."

The sooner that that is accepted on all sides, the better.

Mr. Hain: Can the Secretary of State confirm that it is his view that some paramilitary arms need to be decommissioned before all parties can enter full and substantive negotiations? If an alternative is produced that engenders sufficient trust and confidence on all sides to bring all parties to such talks, will he study it closely?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: As the hon. Gentleman suggested, the key to this question is confidence that everybody who claims to participate is there on a solely democratic basis and in fulfilment of what paragraph 10 of the Downing street declaration required. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear time and again that we can see no means by which that confidence can be engendered, save by the fulfilment of the three Washington conditions that I stipulated in March this year. If some other means become apparent by which that confidence could be engendered, naturally we would wish to consider it. I emphasise that we cannot see any at present.

Mr. Trimble: If and when we move towards any form of talks process, there will be a more precise focus on the policies of the Government. In that context, can I refer the Secretary of State to the recent statement by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in which he said that the Government stood foursquare behind the Union with Scotland, and that that Union was a matter not only for the people of Scotland, but for the people of all the Union? How does the Secretary of State reconcile his position of disinterested neutrality and his close co-operation with a foreign Government who are subject to a constitutional imperative to destroy that Union?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman does less than justice to what was said at the time of the launching of the joint framework document in February this year, when Mr. Bruton made it clear that, as part of an overall settlement, he would put to the Irish people, in a referendum, proposals that would mean that there was no further territorial claim—such as undoubtedly exists at the moment in the Irish constitution—to that part of the island of Ireland that is part of the United Kingdom in international and domestic law. That is the first point.

Secondly, it is very important that all those matters should be available for discussion during the political track of a twin-track process. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—and I, for what that is worth—have made it clear time and again that we very much support the Union, supported as it also is by the majority of people living in Northern Ireland. The key to the understanding of the Downing street declaration is that both the Irish Government and our own stipulate in it that there will be no future change in the status of Northern Ireland, save by the wishes of most people who live in Northern Ireland.

Rev. William McCrea: Bearing in mind the Prime Minister's statement that his working assumption was that the ceasefire was permanent, has the Secretary of State heard or seen reports of the interview with Mitchell McLaughlin, Sinn Fein party national chairman, who, when asked about the permanence of the peace, said that it was not possible to say peace was permanent because the conditions that led to 25 years of violence still existed? When asked why the IRA would not decommission weapons, he said:

> "The reality is that nobody can say that these guns will not be used again".

What will the Secretary of State tell the people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I will tell them what I have told them on many occasions before: that we do not have a complete peace, by reason of the remarks that the hon. Gentleman has just recited, and many others. There is, for instance, a passage in Mr. Adams' book, published in May this year, in which he reasserts the right of the Irish people to the "armed struggle". That is why it seems to us, and to the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom, essential, if confidence is to be established, that Sinn Fein in particular be wholly committed to peaceful and democratic means.

Then a beginning must be made to decommissioning, to signify good faith and the start of a process. There must also be a commitment to the principle of decommissioning and a method of achieving it. I very much hope that the first track—decommissioning—of the twin-track process will help to allow that confidence to be engendered.

Mr. Mallon: The Secretary of State will be aware that much has been spoken and written about President Clinton's words during his welcome visit to the people of the north of Ireland. Not so much notice, however, has been taken of the words spoken, or perhaps not spoken, by the people of Northern Ireland during that visit, although they have made it clear that they want two things: lasting peace, and a new, agreed political dispensation in the north of Ireland.

Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to tell the House what dynamic the two Governments are going to instil in the multilateral discussions that are to precede the all-party talks? Can he confirm that such a dynamic, which is essential, will lead to real negotiations and will put the political process back on the subject of politics, not the question of arms?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: When the Prime Minister held a press conference last Wednesday week to announce agreement on the communiqué, he said that the twin-track process was intended to impart new momentum to the peace process. I am sure that it will; it is the means by which the Governments will achieve that.

Secondly, I warmly endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about President Clinton's visit. It was a most extraordinary and moving series of occasions. I certainly agree that the people of Northern Ireland, if not articulating what they meant, shouted—nay, roared—it.

Lady Olga Maitland: Has my right hon. and learned Friend made it absolutely clear to the chairman of the international body, former Senator George Mitchell, that his remit is purely to look at illegally held weapons, not at security weapons held by Government forces? I wonder whether my right hon. and learned Friend watched the "Newsnight" programme last week in which Mr. Mitchell leant back laughing in his chair and said that he would be perfectly happy to look at Government weapons too. Surely that is not what we have in mind?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I can assure my hon. Friend that the communiqué uses language which accurately reflects what both Governments intend—that the arms and armaments which shall be the subject of study and advice by the commission relate to those held illegally by paramilitary organisations and do not include constitutionally held arms north or south of the border. I am aware of the "Newsnight" programme; my hon. Friend will, I think, agree that it was broadcast only a very few hours after the agreement had been reached. It may have been the case that at that stage Senator Mitchell, whose appointment had not been completed, had not fully read, read at all or been shown the terms of the communiqué. I do not know, but there is no doubt about its content.

Ms Mowlam: The Opposition congratulate both Governments on the launch of the twin-track process. Does the Secretary of State acknowledge the public desire for a lasting peace so vividly expressed in Northern Ireland last week during President Clinton's visit? Interestingly, paramilitary punishment beatings on both sides of the divide stopped during that period, which is indicative that they could soon stop altogether. As to reflecting the feelings exhibited during President Clinton's visit, does the Secretary of State agree that it is up to the political parties in the preparatory talks to reach widespread agreement through dialogue on the way to proceed to all-party, substantive negotiations?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her opening remarks. I much agree with her about the significance of the intermission in punishment beatings at a time when it would have been politically inexpedient for the persons who carry them out for political purposes to have continued doing so during President Clinton's visit. If those individuals could stop the beatings at that time, let us hear no more about the inability to control them at any other time. As to the last part of the hon. Lady's question, I join her in hoping that the political parties will take full advantage of the political track—of the preparatory talks that can take place.

The hon. Lady rightly used the word "dialogue", which is intended to mean that there shall be talks in any format that seems convenient. They need not necessarily be around a table. One-to-one talks are still a dialogue. That is an important point to make, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for enabling me to make it.

Royal Victoria Hospital

3. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the effect of the funding of Royal Victoria hospital capital projects on other capital developments in the health service; and if he will make a statement. [3031]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): The Royal Victoria hospital scheme is one of a number of major capital schemes currently being taken forward. Others are at Causeway in Coleraine, the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children, at Craigavon and at the Altnagelvin hospital in Londonderry. Together with a programme for health and safety improvements, that commits the bulk of resources over the next few years. In line with the Chancellor's Budget statement, I will be looking more and more to private finance to take forward new schemes.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that it is rather strange that wholesale capital investment went ahead at the Royal Victoria hospital before the McKenna report was published, bearing in mind the fact that the Minister did not release funds for the development of Belvoir Park hospital, which would have been much more minimal, until the report appeared? Is the Minister aware of continuing anxiety that the Ulster hospital, which has been waiting a considerable time for capital finance, is still waiting? Will he re-examine the private finance initiative concept and say whether it will be applied to capital work or specialty services?

Mr. Moss: The Royal Victoria capital project was agreed and endorsed by the Eastern health board and by Dr. McKenna's reorganisation project. A business case has been made for the Ulster hospital and it is currently with the Department of Finance. As to Belvoir Park, I have commissioned a report under the Chief Medical Officer to investigate cancer services in Northern Ireland. When I have that report before me, I shall make a decision regarding capital requirements at hospitals providing cancer services.

Mr. McGrady: Is the Minister aware of the grave disappointment that his answers will cause the people of Down, who for three decades have been waiting for a modest capital scheme to improve the Downe group of hospitals? The injustice is that Downe, having passed efficiency and business tests with flying colours, is now subjected to a private finance initiative to which the Royal Victoria, in respect of a sum of £64 million, was not subjected. I ask the Minister to provide Downe with the modest sum required, over a three-year period, say, to improve a hospital complex that is 250 years old.

Mr. Moss: The business case for Downe hospital has been passed by the management executive and is currently with the Department of Finance. We shall then move to testing for the private finance initiative. If no private finance is forthcoming, we will have to consider providing funds on the normal basis to progress the capital scheme at Downe hospital.

Mr. Dowd: Will the Minister confirm that the effective use of capital investment in the national health service in Northern Ireland remains a priority for his Department? If so, will he comment on the fact that when the new Waterside hospital at Gransna park was opened only four years ago by his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who is now Minister of State, Foreign Office, it was described as the jewel in the crown of the Western health board, but it is now to close, along with Strabane hospital in Roe valley in Limavady, as 173 NHS care-for-the-elderly beds are replaced by 65 private nursing home beds? Will the Minister give an assurance that no future expenditure of precious NHS capital resources will be wasted in a few short years, as they have been at Waterside?

Mr. Moss: The total sum available over the next five years for capital development of hospitals in Northern Ireland comes to £240 million, which is £40 million each and every year. We are considering the private finance initiative for the hospitals that are not in the programme. As I have said, it is a full and comprehensive programme. We are out for consultation on the closures at Strabane. We shall be making our decisions when we have the benefits that will derive from the consultation process.

Employment

5. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his assessment of the prospects for employment in Northern Ireland. [3034]

Mr. Ancram: The outlook is very encouraging. Employment is at record levels. Output and trade are increasing and tourism is booming. Business confidence is very high and there have been substantial inward investment successes recently. With continuing peace, we can look forward to this excellent progress being maintained.

Mr. Spring: Is my hon. Friend aware that over the past two-and-a-half years unemployment has fallen by 18.5 per cent. in Northern Ireland and that unemployment at the long-term end fell by fully 17 per cent.? Does he agree that the increasing employment opportunities flowing from the improved economic condition bodes well for long-term stability in the Province?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who rightly talks about the significant progress that has been made to reduce unemployment. It is interesting to note that employment is at a record level of 566,550. Even more encouraging is inward investment. Since the ceasefire 14 projects worth £288 million, with the potential to create 4,000 jobs, have been announced. Even more significantly, in the month of November five projects worth £153 million and over 2,000 jobs were announced. That indicates the strength of the Northern Ireland economy and the hope that we all have in it for the future.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that there is a sound foundation on which to build better future prospects for employment in Northern Ireland, and that we can expect with permanent peace more inward investment to take advantage of our excellent national and international air and sea links and our good road and rail links to efficiently managed harbours at Larne, Belfast, Warrenpoint and Londonderry? Most important of all, there is the opportunity for those investing in Northern Ireland to harness the skills, talents and high education qualifications of an industrious work force, which is awaiting opportunity. Will the Minister assure us that there will be continued financial support available to encourage further inward investment?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. We certainly will continue to encourage inward investment. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State visited Larne the other day with the hon. Gentleman and was most impressed by what he saw.

It is important, too, to recognise that peace is an important ingredient for inward investment. It underlines the importance of reaching an agreed settlement to underpin that peace. At the end of the day, that will give a greater boost to inward investment than anything else.

It is worth recording that it is the responsibility of us all to ensure that we sell all the good aspects of Northern Ireland, as the hon. Gentleman has just done, rather than talking, as we sometimes tend to do, about the bad aspects. Last week, when President Clinton was there, the eyes of the world through the television media had a wonderful picture of the opportunities that exist within Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Although the peace process has played a significant and welcome part in creating new jobs in Northern Ireland, should not the agencies, such as the Irish Development Board and the tourist board, be recognised for the enormous amount of effort that they have put into making the Province more attractive in many respects? In relation to tourism, does my hon. Friend agree that even greater efforts could be put into ensuring that people, not only in that part of the United Kingdom but in the rest of Europe, are aware of the wonderful opportunities and attractions of that most beautiful part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Ancram: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, who not only has great experience of the work that is being done in Northern Ireland but contributed to it very substantially during his time as a Minister in Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute to him for that. He is right to point to the work that is being done by those agencies, both of which are fully aware of the opportunities that the ceasefires have brought to Northern Ireland, and are taking Northern Ireland out across the world and selling it. I know that both are making substantial efforts to do so.

Miss Hoey: The Minister will agree that inward investment depends very much on good transport links. Does he share my concern and that of many people in Northern Ireland that Belfast international airport is seeking to take over Belfast city airport, and that that would be to the detriment of the tourist industry, the business community and, indeed, all people travelling between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Ancram: As the hon. Lady knows, those areas do not fall within my responsibility, but I am sure that my colleagues who are responsible for them will have heard what she has to say. It is important that we give every encouragement to movements within the economic sector in Northern Ireland that increase competitiveness and therefore give a chance to the people of Northern Ireland to prosper within their economy.

Mr. Illsley: Although I welcome the inward investment into Northern Ireland, which is creating jobs and impacting on long-term unemployment, would not the prospects for employment be improved if job losses that have occurred through privatisation, the creation of agencies and the contracting-out of services—particularly strategic services, where in-house bids are prohibited—were prevented? Would it not be better to stop that process to preserve jobs within the Province?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman were to talk to those involved in, for instance, the five projects that were announced last month, in terms of inward investment, he would find that many of them are interested in investing in Northern Ireland because of the flexible employment practices that exist there. My understanding—if I do understand Labour party policy, which is never as clear as it might be—is that if the Labour party had its way, those flexible practices would be discontinued.

Water and Sewage Treatment Plants

6. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the performance of water and sewage treatment plants in Northern Ireland. [3035]

Mr. Moss: The Department continually assesses the performance of its water and sewage treatment works. Data about the quality of water produced at its water treatment works is available on the public register. The environment service is preparing formal discharge standards for sewage treatment works for monitoring on a similar public register.

Mr. Forsythe: Is the Minister aware that his Department is allowing industrial effluent to be put into the normal sewerage system, which inevitably leads to untreated sewage entering our rivers? Will he give an assurance that no sludge from aluminium or supernatant water is getting back into the drinking water system in Northern Ireland, with the obvious dangers of causing Alzheimer's disease?

Mr. Moss: The Department's water executive operates approximately 900 sewage treatment facilities in Northern Ireland, ranging from small rural septic tanks to multi-million pound works in urban areas. In that context, in 1994, just 27 pollution incidents out of a total of 2,216 were ascribed to its work—approximately only 1 per cent. Aluminium levels in public water supplies are regulated under the Water Quality (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1994, and the United Kingdom standards in them incorporate those of the European Commission. There is no proven link between aluminium and the incidence of Alzheimer's disease.

Dr. Hendron: The Secretary of State will be aware that the people of Greater Andersonstown in my constituency of West Belfast have had to tolerate the stench of human excreta for the past 20 years and that various Department of the Environment Ministers have made promises and given explanations, all of which have been futile. He will also be aware that the DOE gave planning permission for building the large housing estates and development of the nearby brewery. Will the Secretary of State accept that the DOE and the Northern Ireland Office have been grossly negligent in allowing that problem to continue for so many years?

Will the Minister now give a guarantee that meaningful and urgent action will be taken to deal with the problem so that the thousands of families who live in the area will no longer have to tolerate the stench of human sewage?

Mr. Moss: I am familiar with the problem, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, of the Upper Falls works, since he brought a deputation to see me on that very matter. He will be pleased to note that the Department has met the senior management of the Bass brewery, who have agreed to reduce the strength of the brewery's discharge by 50 per cent. during the next six months. That should bring the discharge load down to design capacity.

In the longer term, we have now agreed a new route for the sewer to Glenmachan street pumping station and from there to the reconstructed sewage treatment works at Duncrue street. Detailed design work has commenced and I hope that the new sewer will be installed towards the end of the 1996-97 financial year.

Republic of Ireland (Agreement)

9. **Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that no joint agreement with the Republic of Ireland will be agreed by the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of Northern Ireland citizens. [3039]

Mr. Ancram: It is already the declared policy of Her Majesty's Government that the present status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of the people who live there, and that the outcome of the three stranded talks process will be put to the electorate of Northern Ireland for their approval by referendum. We have no plans to add to or subtract from that policy.

Mr. McCartney: Will the Minister, mindful that the principle of consent is a cornerstone of the Downing street declaration and has never been unequivocally and unreservedly accepted by Sinn Fein-IRA, give an assurance that, should the substantive talks take place and fail, Her Majesty's Government will not enter into any agreement with the Republic of Ireland in relation to the future government or administration of Northern Ireland without the specific consent of the majority of British citizens living there? Does he accept that the pro-Union parties in Northern Ireland will need an assurance before participating in those talks that they do not do so against a background of a threat of an imposed agreement or settlement without the majority's consent being given?

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State have made it clear on many occasions that consent is absolutely central to any settlement in Northern Ireland. Not only is it central in terms of the Government's belief and policy, but in terms of practicality. History teaches us that any attempts to impose settlements on the people of Northern Ireland against the wishes of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland do not work. It is for that reason that the present status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of the people who live there.

Mr. Soley: Does the Minister accept that the principle of consent, which has always been at the heart of the Labour party's policy, is now established in an international treaty? Does he agree that consent, which is so important, should now give the people of Northern Ireland the confidence to negotiate [illegible] agreement which brings to the minority and to the majority community a sense of confidence in their own direction, which they can set for themselves knowing that we shall not drift back to what happened in the past when either the minority or the majority community felt threatened that something would be imposed without consent?

Mr. Ancram: Indeed. That is key to the whole question of confidence, and to parties' becoming involved in the talks. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear at the time of the publishing of the framework documents that there was what he called a "triple lock". It is a question not just of the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, but of the broad agreement of the parties, followed by a referendum, followed in turn by the agreement of Parliament. That triple lock remains firmly in place.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

10. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is known to be (a) Protestant and (b) Catholic. [3040]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): At 1 November 1995, 89 per cent. of the Royal Ulster Constabulary regular force, 88 per cent. of the full-time reserve and 93 per cent. of the part-time reserve were perceived to be from the Protestant community, whilst 8 per cent. of the regular force, 6 per cent. of the full-time reserve and 5 per cent. of the part-time reserve were perceived to be from the Catholic community.

Mr. Livingstone: Does the Minister agree that, until the RUC reflects the balance of the communities in Northern Ireland, problems will continue? If the Government were able rapidly to present plans to achieve a better balance in the RUC, that might be a major argument in favour of decommissioning, which would reassure nationalists.

Sir John Wheeler: I do not agree with the supposition that it is necessary to change the religious characteristics of the RUC to achieve that balance. The evidence points the other way. Now that we have a ceasefire, however, more Roman Catholics are seeking to join the RUC.

Perhaps I might remind the House that, during the 25 years of violence, one of the major reasons why members of the Catholic population did not seek to join the RUC was the fact that 297 RUC officers were killed and more than 7,300 injured and the Roman Catholic police officer was specifically targeted. Those days, I hope, are now behind us.

Mr. Hunter: Is not it the case that, throughout the years of violence, support for the RUC was remarkably strong? Has not that support increased significantly on both sides of the political community divide since the ceasefires?

Sir John Wheeler: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The latest opinion survey shows that more than three quarters of the population—some 78 per cent.—thought the police to be helpful in dealing with ordinary policing problems. The Catholic population were only just less positive in their overall assessment of the helpfulness of the RUC than the Protestants, in whose case the figure was 81 per cent.

Mr. John D. Taylor: The House and the people of Northern Ireland will be encouraged by the Minister's reply. Does not the increased Roman Catholic membership of the RUC demonstrate that the RUC is becoming more acceptable throughout Northern Ireland, and belie the campaign by Sinn Fein and its fellow travellers for the crown on the RUC badge, or the word "Royal", to be removed if the RUC is to become acceptable?

Sir John Wheeler: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. All the evidence in Northern Ireland suggests that the constabulary is serving the whole community of Northern Ireland. It is increasingly successful in community affairs, and is addressing the concerns of the population. There is no need to change its basic characteristics to obtain support.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, whether it is Catholic or Protestant, the RUC enjoys the utmost admiration among my constituents—and, I believe, among those of most hon. Members?

Sir John Wheeler: I agree with my hon. Friend. The RUC has a tremendous reputation, built over 25 years of terrorist violence and, because of its steadfastness, it has contributed to the present peace process. The House and the country owe it a great deal.

Mr. Worthington: As the Minister has said, a crucial part of the peace process in ensuring that the police force is supported and respected by all the people in Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that, to achieve that consensus, it is necessary that the Police Authority for Northern Ireland should be given more powers and that the Secretary of State should reconsider the process whereby he appoints all the members of that authority?

Sir John Wheeler: I shall issue a White Paper on the future arrangement for that police authority, and the tri-partite arrangement in Northern Ireland, soon. The hon. Gentleman is right—the authority should echo the interests of Northern Ireland's population and have clearly defined powers to hold to account the expenditures and policy objectives of the Chief Constable of the RUC.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3059]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hood: Will the Prime Minister tell us who is running the Government this week? Is it proper for the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) to announce that the Government intend to publish a White Paper on Europe? If so, is that not further proof of the lurch to the right—or is the Prime Minister doing what he usually does: ruling nothing in, ruling nothing out and being decisively indecisive?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear this morning, we are examining all the issues that will come up in the intergovernmental conference, including whether it would be appropriate to have a White Paper.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the present turmoil in France epitomises the potential social and political dangers of any attempt to shackle Britain to a single European currency or the social chapter, as is proposed by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: What it certainly shows, as my hon. Friend will be aware, is the difficulties that the present French Government have inherited from their socialist predecessors. If their predecessors had dealt with the underlying structural and fiscal problems at the time, the present French Government would not be facing this difficulty.

Mr. Blair: I am surprised that the Prime Minister cannot tell us whether there will be a White Paper, but let me put this question to him and see whether he can answer it. Is it still the Government's position that he will not rule out joining a single currency in the next Parliament?

The Prime Minister: That is still the Government's position, as I have made clear on a number of occasions.

Mr. Blair: I think that that is a very important statement. The Prime Minister has said that he will not rule it out in the next Parliament. We know that that is not the position of the Welsh Secretary or of many of his Back Benchers. Will he tell us this, then: is that the position of the whole of his Government, including the Euro-sceptic members of the Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is the position of the whole Government and it has been repeatedly stated that that is the position of the whole Government. We have made that clear on a number of occasions, and nothing has changed.

Mr. Robert Jackson: One of the conditions of the Dayton agreement is that all the parties should observe the European convention on human rights. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be somewhat paradoxical for British forces to be, in a sense, enforcing the European convention on human rights in Bosnia while we in Britain are contemplating withdrawal from that convention?

The Prime Minister: We are certainly unhappy about some of the rulings made under the European convention on human rights. We have made that point and we will continue to do so. We were one of the founders of the European convention on human rights which, as my hon. Friend knows, is a quite separate matter from the European Court of Justice. That does not alter the fact that we and a number of other countries have been profoundly unhappy with some of its rulings. As I have said, we have made that point clear and will continue to do so.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister make it clear whether Britain will withdraw from the European Court of Human Rights?

The Prime Minister: We have not said that we shall withdraw from the European convention on human rights. We have said that we are profoundly dissatisfied with some of the court's judgments and that we propose to take that up with the European Commission of Human Rights and deal with it in some way in the future.

Mr. David Atkinson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at the end of this decade, a great many of our computers and those elsewhere will fail because they are not programmed to recognise the double zero of the year 2000? That will have immense and costly consequences for British business, small businesses and, perhaps, Government Departments. Can my right hon. Friend say whether the Government are aware of that and how they are responding to it?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that helpful question. I shall certainly ensure that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade examines the matter and responds to him.

Q3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3061]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: When the Prime Minister writes his customary letter to Santa this Christmas, will he make it quite clear that he is not asking for a puppy? Will he make it clear that he would discourage anyone from giving a puppy as a present to a child this Christmas, because a puppy is for all the year, not just a Christmas present?

When the Prime Minister has finished his Christmas list and is writing his resolutions for the new year, will he make a resolution to introduce legislation to ban puppy farms? Such legislation would win support on both sides of the House and outside.

The Prime Minister: I hope that everyone who contemplates giving a pet as a present for Christmas bears in mind that it is a present for the long term, not just for the short term. I hope that people will be responsible in their present giving.

Mr. Butler: Is my right hon. Friend surprised at the survey today which found that more than half of all private investors would remove their capital from Britain in the event of a Labour victory—or does he consider that that is the inevitable consequence of such a catastrophe?

The Prime Minister: I cannot pretend to be surprised at that survey's findings. I suspect that those surveyed have examined the likely implications of joining the social chapter and of the spending promises made by the Labour party and realised what they would do to taxation, competitiveness and employment.

Q4. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3062]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bayley: As a parent of school-age children I am sure that I speak on behalf of many parents when I tell the Prime Minister that the Government have failed to convince the public or school caterers that British beef is safe. Will the Prime Minister, as a matter of urgency, make sure that the Department of Health issues genuinely independent advice about this matter to reassure parents?

The Prime Minister: Of course this is an important matter for schools and for the safety of consumers as a whole. I have sought and received advice that there is currently no scientific evidence that BSE can be transmitted to humans or that eating beef causes CJD. That is not in question. I am also advised that beef is a safe and wholesome product. The chief medical officer's advice is clear—there is no evidence that eating beef causes CJD in humans.

Q5. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3064]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the quality of teaching is crucial to improving standards and that the publication of test results is important in monitoring them? Does my right hon. Friend find it strange that the belated conversion of the Labour party to recognising the need for higher standards has not been matched in the past by its willingness to see the publication of test results? In fact, it has done everything to frustrate that.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a point that will be recognised by parents throughout the country. On this matter, the Opposition's actions have frequently spoken a great deal louder than their words. During the past few years, they have opposed every measure that we have introduced to raise standards. They have described school league tables as political propaganda, test results as virtually useless, teaching children the basics as a fanatical doctrine—[*Laughter.*] Hon. Members may scoff, but they are scoffing at what their party and their Front Bench have said.

Q6. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3065]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beggs: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that Northern Ireland students who have been accepted into universities in England to follow physiotherapy or other courses leading to para medical qualification should not be disadvantaged and should not be expected to pay the balance between their mandatory award and the fees charged by the universities, which sometimes amounts to more than £5,000? Will he consider the matter and ensure that Northern Ireland students are not less well off than students from the Irish Republic or the European Union? Will he endeavour to remove this perceived disadvantage?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly examine that matter. If the hon. Gentleman has pointed to a genuine disadvantage, I shall invite my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to examine it and see whether it can be corrected.

Mr. Lidington: Which local education authority produced the worst results in the recently published GCSE league tables? What options would the Government want to be available to parents in that local council area who are dissatisfied with the education authority's performance?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the worst results were in Islington education authority. There are several options available to Islington. I hope that the education authority will try to correct what has gone wrong and improve the quality of education for all the children in Islington. Of course, there remains the option of grant-maintained schools, which many parents throughout the country rightly perceive as offering good education that they want their children to enjoy.

Q7. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3066]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McFall: In her Centrepoint speech this morning, Princess Diana highlighted the inadequacy of the present system for homeless young people forced to live on the streets. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking to respond to that eloquent plea by providing further assistance for such young people so that the problem no longer blights British society?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have been dealing comprehensively with the problem for some time and have made remarkable improvements over the past few years. We are fully committed to ensuring that there is no necessity for some people to sleep rough. We very much hope that the culture, which has grown up among some people, of doing so can be changed and broken. The Government are providing about 5,000 places in permanent and temporary accommodation for people who otherwise would have to sleep rough. That is in addition to the outreach and resettlement services for homeless people living on the streets. There is no doubt that there has been a remarkable reduction in the number of people sleeping rough. Plans to eliminate that practice continue, and I look forward to that day being reached.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I welcome very much what my right hon. Friend said about a possible White Paper on Europe. Does he agree that it would not only help to set out the Government's basic objectives, but would draw to public attention the ever-widening gulf between the Government and the Opposition who, under their present leadership, are destined to surrender more of our liberty, power, jobs and freedom to Brussels?

The Prime Minister: That policy is clear in many Opposition speeches, but it is not universal. They seem to sing a different tune on some occasions. We are considering the desirability of a White Paper, which was recommended by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and the Scrutiny Committee. We shall consider their recommendations carefully, but we have made it clear on a number of occasions that we will most certainly oppose some areas—certainly in advance of any White Paper saying so—in the negotiations that are to take place next year. They include an extension of qualified majority voting, massive new powers for the European Parliament and signing the social chapter. Whatever decision is reached about a White Paper, those policies are firm and will not change.

Q8. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3067]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: When will the Government stop closing hospitals and wards, which affects the million-long waiting list and creates misery for all the people who want to get into hospital? Is the Prime Minister aware that it is creating another problem? Does he know that people are roaming the streets at night looking for hospitals to visit, but cannot find them? It is giving a whole new meaning to the term "roving ambassador".

The Prime Minister: On the subject of provision of resources in the health service, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the increased provision—an extra £1.3 billion again this year, which is 70 per cent. above inflation during the year. There was a time when there was a significant cut in the health service, but that was when the hon. Gentleman supported a Labour Government.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The Business of the House for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 11 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER—Until about seven o'clock, Second Reading of the Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill.

Second Reading of the Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Armed Forces Bill.

THURSDAY 14 DECEMBER—Estimates Day (1st allotted day). On recommendations from the Liaison Committee, in relation to specified votes on account, there will be two debates. First, there will be a debate on the provision of NHS services for women with breast cancer, clinical research into breast cancer and the NHS breast screening programme. That debate will be for up to three hours. It will be followed by a debate on the regulation of financial services in the United Kingdom.

At ten o'clock the House will be asked to agree the winter supplementary estimates and the vote on account.

FRIDAY 15 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to know that the following European Standing Committees will meet at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows:

TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER

European Standing Committee A, European Community Document 6612/94 and the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on 30 November 1995 relating to environmental impact assessments.

European Standing Committee B, European Community Document COM(95)333 and the European Monetary Institute report dated November 1995 relating to the single currency.

WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER

European Standing Committee A, European Community Document 9491/93, 7511/95 and the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on 2 June 1995 relating to integrated pollution prevention and control.

European Standing Committee B, European Community Document 10836/95 relating to state aid to the Irish steel industry.

[Tuesday 12 December:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 6612/94 and (b) unnumbered, Environmental Impact Assessments. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: (a) HC 48-xxi (1993-94) and HC 70-xiv (1994-95); (b) HC 51-iii (1995-96).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: COM (95)333, Single Currency; (b) European Monetary Institute report relating to the changeover to the single currency. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: (a) HC 70-xix (1994-95) and HC 70-xxvi (1994-95); (b) HC 51-i (1995-96).

Wednesday 13 December:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 9491/93, (b) 7511/95 and (c) unnumbered, Pollution Prevention and Control. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: (a) HC 49-i (1993-94), HC 48-xiii (1993-94), HC 70-xii (1994-95), HC 70-xix (1994-95), HC 70-xxi (1994-95) and HC 70-xxvi (1994-95); (b) HC 70-xxi (1994-95) and HC 70-xxvi (1994-95); (c) HC 70-xxvi (1994-95).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 10836/95: State aid to the Irish steel industry. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee: HC 70-xxvi (1994-95) and HC 51-ii (1995-96).]

Thursday 14 December:

Estimates Day—Vote on Account, Class XI, Vote 1, Department of Health: Hospital, community health, family health services and related services, England, in so far as it relates to the provision of NHS services for women with breast cancer, clinical research into breast cancer and the NHS Breast Screening Programme.

Relevant report: Third report from the Health Committee, Session 1994-95, (HC 324), Breast Cancer Services.

Vote on Account, Class XVI, Vote 1, Departments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer: HM Treasury, in so far as it relates to the regulation of financial services in the United Kingdom.

Relevant Reports: Fourth report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, Session 1993-94, (HC 236), Retail Financial Services Regulation: An Interim Report; Second report, 1994-95, (HC 26), Financial Services Regulation: The Building Society Sector; Fifth report, 1994-95, (HC 187), Financial Services Regulation: Self Regulation at Lloyd's of London; Sixth report, 1994-95, (HC 332), The Regulation of Financial Services in the UK.

In the following week, on Monday 18 December the business will be as follows:

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Remaining stages of the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill.

Motion on the Copyright and Rights in Performances regulations.

Debate on the Commons Fisheries policy on a Government motion.

On Tuesday 19 December and Wednesday 20 December, I anticipate that Government business will be taken, but details of it have not yet been determined. At the conclusion of business on Wednesday 20 December, subject, of course, to the progress of business, the House will rise for the Christmas recess.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. Next Wednesday morning's debate in private Members' time on the preparation, drafting and publication of Government Bills, welcome as it is, does not preclude the need for a fuller and wider debate on making Parliament more effective—the debate for which

I have been asking. I think that the right hon. Gentleman has some sympathy with my request. Perhaps we can look forward to such a wide debate early in the new year.

May I ask the Leader of the House about progress on the establishment of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges? I know that he is extremely anxious, as I am, that that Committee should be established as soon as possible so that it can get on with the difficult job of establishing a new code of conduct for Members. Will he use his best endeavours to ensure that the Committee meets as soon as possible so that that important work can be started?

The Leader of the House will also be aware that the Government were defeated in the House of Lords on Tuesday on the Probation Rules (Amendment) Order 1995 and that serious concerns were expressed in the Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation yesterday when the order was debated. As the order deletes entirely provision for the training of probation officers and puts nothing in place of the existing arrangements, can the Leader of the House assure us that a new training requirement to fill that vacuum will be brought before the House as quickly as possible for full debate and approval?

In view of the widely conflicting expert opinion—not all experts are as confident as the Prime Minister—about the health threat from eating beef, and in view of the widespread public concern, may we have an urgent debate on the issue? Does the Leader of the House agree that such a debate would be widely welcomed, especially by parents, following yesterday's advice to schools that beef should be taken off the menu? This is a matter of great concern to many people. It is not as simple as the Prime Minister has said. I ask the Leader of the House to provide time for a debate as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Newton: As for the debate on legislation next Wednesday, I have some sympathy with the hon. Lady's request for a wider debate at some stage although I cannot yet make a definite commitment. She and I have in common a wish to continue to build, in any practicable way, on the improvements of the past couple of years.

I entirely agree with what the hon. Lady says about the new Select Committee on Standards and Privileges and I shall continue to use my best endeavours to ensure that it is established as soon as possible. You yourself, Madam Speaker, said yesterday that you attached some importance to the matter.

On the probation rules debate, I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering what was said in another place last week and he will, no doubt, also consider what was said in the Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation yesterday. I cannot, however, add to that or say this afternoon what the outcome of that consideration will be.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was not presenting himself as an expert giving advice on BSE, but was reporting the advice of the expert and independent committee which advises the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on these matters and the advice of the widely respected Chief Medical Officer who advises my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Nevertheless, I note the hon. Lady's request and do not in any way dismiss it, although I make the point that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is due to answer questions next Thursday.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): May I ask my right hon. Friend yet again if he will spare time for a debate on Essex social services, as it has recently become evident that Essex county council, under Labour, is wasting £90,000 a week keeping its own old people's homes open, instead of using the private sector at a much cheaper rate?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a dedicated debate, despite my interest as my hon. Friend's constituency neighbour, and my being well aware of the concern felt in Essex. However, my hon. Friend will know that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), has recently asked the social services inspectorate to investigate the position.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Will the Leader of the House make time for an urgent debate on the plight of elderly and disabled people during the present cold spell? We do not want there to be more unnecessary deaths from hypothermia. Will he announce that the Government intend to change the rules whereby a person does not get a cold weather payment unless the temperature has been below freezing for seven consecutive days?

Mr. Newton: The cold weather payments scheme has been considerably improved over the past few years, as I know, because I was responsible for many of the improvements. The payments have recently been increased from £7 to £8.50, and there has been a 40 per cent. increase since April 1994. Since 1991 more than 8 million payments, worth more than £50 million, have been made, which reflects the extent to which the scheme has been widened effectively.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): My right hon. Friend may be aware that the compensation arrangements for big public works in this country are still lamentable. Kent is threatened yet again with another railway proposal, and the Department of Transport has not yet worked out how it might implement its promise to the ombudsman to reconsider compensation for various oppressed individuals. Will my right hon. Friend allow us a debate on that important issue?

Mr. Newton: No doubt some reference was made to that subject in the debate on the carry-over motion for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill shortly before the end of last Session, and I cannot promise an early further opportunity to discuss it. However, as his question acknowledged, my hon. Friend is aware that the Secretary of State for Transport is examining some aspects of the matter following the ombudsman's report. My hon. Friend will also recognise that the matter is difficult and complex.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): May we have an extra Scottish Question Time next week to compensate for the fact that more than half the questions tabled for the next Scottish Question Time have been planted by Tory Members representing English constituencies? And if we are still level after extra time, can we decide it on penalties?

Mr. Newton: I might be more sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's request if he would give me an undertaking never to ask a question that relates to England.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will my right hon. Friend give some thought to the idea of allowing time for a debate on victim impact statements? He may be aware that there is much interest in them in this country, and that they already operate in many states in the United States of America. Victims are allowed to go to the court and make a statement about what has happened to them since they became victims, and the sentence is passed accordingly. I believe that we could consider that idea seriously for our courts. At present many victims in this country do not even know when their attackers are coming to court.

Mr. Newton: I always consider requests on such important matters, put in such a reasonable way, but my hon. Friend will understand that I can make no commitment.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I understand from a parliamentary answer on Monday from the Secretary of State for the Environment that he has now received the inspector's report from the public inquiry into the emergency drought order in Yorkshire, but that he is not prepared to publish it yet—possibly not until after Christmas. The people who attended the inquiry feel that they have the right to see the inspector's report in the public domain as soon as possible, so will the Leader of the House find time to ensure that his right hon. Friend presents the report to the House before Christmas?

Mr. Newton: Of course I will bring the hon. Lady's request to the attention of my right hon. Friend. But I would say off the cuff that as this is a serious and difficult matter, I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend would want carefully to study such a report.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (North Dorset): Will my right hon. Friend expand the debate on Parliament that he is having with the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to include the future of the other place? Is he aware that old Labour wanted to abolish the other place? Is he further aware that new Labour wishes to abolish all hereditary peers and convert them to life peers by an act of patronage that has not been seen before? Has it occurred to my right hon. Friend that both steps would move us in the direction of becoming a one-party state?

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's concern, and I agree that in this matter—as in many others—the Opposition's policy appears to consist of a rather fluctuating set of half-baked proposals.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on specific areas of law and order? Following recent widespread consultation, my constituents told me that their top priorities are still crime and the fear of crime. Will the Government consider crime prevention measures and try to get at the roots of crime? Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to find time for a debate on the issue?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has found time for a debate on the issue tomorrow.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will it be possible to have an early debate on industrial relations in this country, so that we can make an effective comparison between this country and trade union and mob-rule dominated France? Such a debate would give us an opportunity to condemn the Labour Members of the European Parliament who signed up to a resolution supporting the strikes in France, thereby proving that the Labour party is still the striker's friend.

Mr. Newton: I share my hon. Friend's astonishment that Labour Members of the European Parliament should have acted in the way reported, and I can only assume that they would equally vote for a return to the winter of discontent here.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Leader of the House offered the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) a deal—no English crowding out of Scottish questions if Scottish Members do not ask questions on English matters. I will take that deal if it is still available.

In the mean time, may we have a debate before the Christmas recess on the Secretary of State for Scotland's forecast earlier this week that Scotland would be independent by the year 2002? Does the Leader of the House support his Cabinet colleague on the matter, or is he thinking of a quicker time scale to get us out from under this decrepit institution? Given that we are moving into the season of good will, can I have a more adventurous reply from the right hon. Gentleman than I usually get to my very reasonable questions at Business Questions?

Mr. Newton: As far as I am concerned, every season is the season of good will—even for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): May we have an urgent statement before Christmas by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment regarding the conduct of ballots on whether schools are to become grant maintained? In addition to the well-reported experiences of a school in County Durham—in the Sedgefield constituency, I seem to recall—I have recently heard that there was serious harassment of parents at Hollyfield school in my constituency by members of the Opposition regarding the proposal that the school become grant maintained? Fortunately, the parents voted yes to the proposal. Nevertheless, this is a serious matter. Unfortunately, harassment seems to be going on all over the country.

Mr. Newton: It would be unfortunate if the allegations were demonstrated to be true. My hon. Friend will understand that at a time when the Department for Education and Employment is making inquiries about the allegations, it would not be right for me to comment further from the Dispatch Box. I would make the point to my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is due to be answering questions on Wednesday 13 December.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I add my voice to the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) for a debate on BSE? Given the alarm that people feel when top scientists advise against eating beef burgers, sausages and beef products and the fact that advisers are now telling schools not to serve beef, surely it is incumbent on the Government to have an urgent debate and to receive expert advice from sources other than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food because its advice is completely discredited and nobody believes it?

Mr. Newton: I underline what I said earlier. We are not talking about officials in any Government Department, but an expert committee in relation to MAFF, comprised largely of eminent academics who are certainly not MAFF officials. I rightly described the Chief Medical Officer as widely respected—I happen to know him quite well because I used to work with him—so whatever else the hon. Lady says, I hope that she will not convey the impression that inexpert people are offering advice. For the rest, of course, I note her request.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend endeavour to provide time for a debate on policing so that we have an opportunity to congratulate the police on the success of Operation Christmas Cracker, led by the chief constable of West Mercia? That operation demonstrates the determination of the police to crack down on all forms of theft.

Mr. Newton: That is the third question related to crime, law and order and the like, so I can only assume that there will be a busy and crowded debate in the House tomorrow.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Bearing in mind the present spirit of good will and the concept of Santa bringing presents, is the Leader of the House aware of whether the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wishes to make a statement announcing that Northern Ireland will receive the same benefits as have been extended to Scotland and Wales and that sittings of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee will be held in public in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Newton: I have not received a request from my right hon. and learned Friend to make a statement, but as I take the hon. Gentleman's question as a disguised request for something to be done, I shall bring it to my right hon. and learned Friend's attention.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have time to debate local government spending so that I can bring before the House the subject of the refusal of Ealing Labour council to provide travel passes—which it is bound by law to provide—to children wishing to attend the sixth form of Twyford Church of England school? That is not the only school for which the council is refusing travel passes. That refusal represents a denial of parental choice of school, which the Labour party has said that it believes in, but does not practise.

Mr. Newton: That would be another good question for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment next Wednesday. Of course, I would expect further debate on the local government settlement in late January or early February when the usual orders have been laid.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May we have an urgent debate on the problems facing exporters who want to obtain money from countries to which they export goods? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Smith and Nephew in my constituency had to lay off 50 people as they found it impossible to get any money out of not only Iran, which has acknowledged foreign exchange difficulties, but Saudi Arabia, which is paying billions of pounds to the United States in recompense for the Gulf war, but cannot find the money to pay an important employer in my constituency? Can the right hon. Gentleman imagine the fury that I felt when I received a Christmas card through the post today from the ambassador of Saudi Arabia, when that country cannot pay its bills for goods exported there?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure whether the Saudi ambassador reads *Hansard*, but I am sure that in one way or another the hon. Gentleman's remarks will be brought to the ambassador's attention. I shall certainly bring them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I join those who have urged my right hon. Friend to have a debate on education so that we can discuss the fact that, while the Labour party nationally talks about education standards, Labour councils locally produce poor results? Does he agree that there is more than whiff of hypocrisy in the fact that those who practise choice in education for their own children seek to deny it to other children?

Mr. Newton: Yes—that is, yes to my hon. Friend's observations rather than to a commitment to a debate, but I shall consider his request.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on the view expressed by all the hon. Members who participated in the debate yesterday on young people leaving care that the Children Act 1989 is not working and that the plight of young people leaving care at the age of 16 and 17 is deteriorating? We need that debate to draw attention to the cut in housing benefit which will further punish those young people who have faced every problem that life can throw at them, as described in early-day motion 135.

[*That this House notes that 30 per cent. of young, single homeless people have experienced local authority care; recognises that young people leaving care need secure and stable accommodation; accepts that shared accommodation is often unstable and necessitates frequent moves; believes that young people leaving care should have the option of living by themselves; deplores the decision in the Budget to restrict housing benefit for the under-25 year olds to the cost of shared accommodation; and believes that this will greatly increase the problems already facing young people leaving care in finding a home.*]

Is it not a terrible disgrace that we are treating those children in that way? Most young people leave home at 22, but these youngsters are being thrown out at 16 and pitchforked from full-time care into full-time neglect.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's question has little or nothing to do with the Children Act 1989, but is more a question about the social security proposal that was announced at the time of the Budget. I draw his attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for Social Security is also due to answer questions next week.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Unusually, may I urge my right hon. Friend to resist the calls for a debate on BSE? Does he understand that, given that British beef is completely safe, such a debate would be greeted with utter

[Mr. Peter Luff]

dismay by the beef farmers of Worcestershire and the rest of the country? The Opposition are prepared to exploit any issue for narrow party advantage.

Mr. Newton: I take note of those representations even though they are somewhat different from those I have received from the Opposition.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Employment Select Committee is to wind up on 2 March, having had to complete its report on employment statistics by then. The report will have to take into account the independent report by Dr. David Steel, commissioned by the Government. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the President of the Board of Trade when that report will be available; whether he will keep to the undertaking that we shall have it before the House by the end of January; and, if there is any doubt about it, whether he will make a statement to the House?

Mr. Newton: It is not true to say that the Employment Select Committee must complete anything by a particular date. I know that it wishes to, and our objective was to give it the opportunity to do so.

I believe that the hon. and learned Gentleman has recently written to the Chancellor or the President of the Board of Trade about the matter. Of course, I will do anything I can to assist, to ensure that the report is available as soon as possible. However, I cannot guarantee a particular time.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): May I add my support for the call for an urgent debate on education, so that we can discuss the amazing inconsistencies of certain Labour Members, who say one thing publicly about grant-maintained schools, but do something completely different when they have the opportunity to send their youngsters to those schools?

We could also discuss Lancashire county council and the fact that it sent letters to parents, before it knew the amount of the Budget settlement, that frightened them into thinking that the education budget would be cut by 8 per cent. The council now knows that there will be an increase in the education budget, but the chairman of the education committee—Stan Wright—will not give a guarantee that all that extra money will be passed on to schools.

Mr. Newton: A debate on education, given the enthusiasm manifested by Opposition Front Benchers, becomes a more attractive proposition by the minute. Of course, careful students of the Gracious Speech will realise that education legislation is in prospect, partly related to grant-maintained schools. That should provide some opportunities in due course.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Following his previous answer, and in view of the fact that if the weather changes not a single penny will be received by pensioners for heating—because of the mockery and farce of the scheme—will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the Secretary of State for Social Security to come to the House on Monday to announce that the payments will be made regardless of the weather and because of the intense hardship experienced by millions of pensioners on the lowest possible incomes? Is that asking too much before the festive season?

Mr. Newton: I have already arranged for the Secretary of State for Social Security to answer questions on Tuesday, as I told the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). Beyond that, I cannot add to what I said earlier—except to underline the fact, which is well known to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), that the scheme has been radically improved over a short period.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Labour party has called for a significant increase in the powers of the European Parliament. Can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate soon, to give Opposition Members the opportunity to specify the powers that they would like to hand over? Without wishing to tempt my right hon. Friend into indiscretion, will he comment on how damaging such a transfer of power would be for Britain?

Mr. Newton: I am tempted to say that if only people would stop asking me questions, such a debate would take place immediately.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 147?

[*That this House notes that the latest official electoral figures show that there is an average of five per cent. of the eligible population missing from electoral registers in the United Kingdom; further notes that these figures under-state the problem and that as many as three to four million people may be absent from registers, a claim that is described as broadly correct by the OPCS Director of Statistics; believes that this continuing and high level of voter under-registration, particularly in inner city areas and among the homeless and rootless, black people and youth, should be of urgent concern to democrats in all parties and none as it undermines the quality of our parliamentary democracy; further notes that Saturday 16th December is the deadline for people having their names included in the annual register of voters published in February; and encourages those who have not already done so to register by this deadline; further believes that reforming the current outdated voter registration system through the introduction of a rolling register will help to reverse the dramatic shortfall in electoral registration as this will allow people to register where they live, when they live there and will give extra duties for electoral registration officers, greater local and national publicity and increased access by disabled people to polling stations and to voting; and congratulates the Full Franchise umbrella group for seeking to bring all these matters to the attention of Parliament and the people during its week of activities from 3rd December.*]

That early-day motion has been signed by 157 hon. Members, even though it appeared on the Order Paper only on Tuesday, and the six main sponsors are from six different political parties. The early-day motion shows that the electoral register is in a terrible state and needs readjusting and work. The homeless, young people and others should be added to the register, so that they may enjoy their full democratic rights. All democrats should believe in the basic building block of equality of the franchise. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange a debate, which would be appropriate now, because 16 December is the final date for checking names and recording them on the electoral register?

Mr. Newton: A lot is done to make the register as complete as possible, including television advertising by the Government aimed at the young and people from ethnic minorities, who are among those about whom the hon. Gentleman is concerned.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the House debate the panic in the Tory party, which has now reached epic proportions? Today's *Financial Times* reports that the 1922 Committee is accusing not just Labour and other Opposition parties but the Speaker of being biased. The Chairman of the Tory party is also monitoring the activities of Madam Speaker. I speak from a position of impartiality, having been thrown out—in rugby league parlance, taken an early bath—a few times. The last occasion was when I said that the Government were a wart on Thatcher's nose. Will the Leader of the House put a stop to that nonsense, so that we can get on with the job of proper politics? If the Tories cannot stand it, let us have a general election and sort the matter out.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that you, Madam Speaker, listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I hope that we may take them as a promise of future good behaviour.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Leader of the House may not have had the opportunity to read an article in today's *Independent* which details the extent to which £86 million that has gone into Motability Finance Ltd. to provide transportation and vehicles for the disabled is difficult to account for, to say the least. I ask him urgently to arrange a debate on the structure of Motability Finance and to ask the Prime Minister to clarify whether the matter has been brought to his attention and is one that he has raised with Lord Sterling in his capacity as chairman of Motability Finance Ltd?

Mr. Newton: I have not studied the article in the *Independent* although I know a good deal about Motability, having been the Minister for Disabled People and held other relevant positions over the years. The Minister with principal responsibility for the matter is the Secretary of State for Social Security, who will be in the House to answer questions next week. I will draw his attention to the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Leader of the House find time in the next few days for a debate on Britain's contribution to international organisations, particularly in view of the visit to London today of Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO? I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 152.

[*That this House welcomes UNESCO's Director-General Dr Federico Mayor's visit to the United Kingdom and his participation in the events which took place in London to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of UNESCO's Constitution adopted at the Institute of Civil Engineers on 16th November 1945; welcomes the strong message of support for UNESCO's work which Dr Mayor received from President Clinton on the occasion of that anniversary and his assurance that the re-entry of the United States of America to UNESCO would be given high priority as soon as the budget situation allowed; deeply regrets the negative and outdated arguments put forward by the Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the debate on UNESCO on 31st October; believes that the United Kingdom is missing a very important opportunity to promote both its international obligations and its national self-interest by not joining UNESCO without further delay; laments the incalculable harm that is befalling British culture as a whole and the English language in particular as a direct result of the United Kingdom's absence from UNESCO; and seeks specific guidance from the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that Her Majesty's Government is willing to set a specific target date for early re-entry and to include the financial obligations connected with renewed membership in its budget planning.*]

Will the Leader of the House raise with his Government colleagues the disgraceful decision to cut funding of the British Council and of projects such as those in Gaza, where there is an enormous demand for English language tuition and where the funding of new building would greatly help the development of the middle east peace process? Also, the Commonwealth Institute is about to make redundancies because the Government cut that organisation's support a couple of years ago. Is not it time to debate the Government's disgraceful attitude to supporting international organisations?

Mr. Newton: It is well known that this Government and this country have a good reputation—far better than some larger countries—for paying their subscriptions and the like. We note the views expressed in early-day motion 152, but, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said a month or so ago, the question of our return to UNESCO remains under review.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Looking around the House, it is clear that we are too late and that mad cow disease has already entered the human food chain. If the Leader of the House cannot arrange for a debate on BSE and its link to human beings, will he issue an instruction that all beef products should be removed from the menus of the House? Perhaps that would prevent us from becoming even more demented.

Mr. Newton: Even were I minded to do so—the hon. Gentleman will have realised from my earlier answers that I am not—I would not have the power to do so.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on Monday about the orders that are due to take effect which will lead to another huge upheaval in public services in Wales, in this instance the fire brigades? We have had no opportunity to debate the orders despite requests that we should be able to do so. Does he understand that many people in Wales are concerned that there has not been an opportunity for proper and democratic scrutiny? Fire services are vital to Wales and the Government's proposals are viewed with great concern by many members of the public.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It would seem to highlight the advantages of the proposals that my right hon. Friend has recently made to extend the role of the Welsh Grand Committee.

Point of Order

4.6 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not the case that if ever there is any criticism of the Speaker a motion should be tabled on the Order Paper? As I understand it—you will correct me if I am wrong, Madam Speaker—that motion should be debated immediately. Is it not unacceptable for your activities to be monitored? When there were Conservative Speakers, I am not aware that Labour Members monitored their activities.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Disgraceful.

Mr. Winnick: As my hon. Friend says, it is disgraceful. If the chairman of the Conservative party, a Member of this place, is dissatisfied with your conduct, Madam Speaker, he should table a motion on the Order Paper so that we may have a debate.

Madam Speaker: I do not believe everything I read in newspapers. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is right: if there is any criticism of the Chair, a motion must be tabled, which would be debated immediately. I repeat that I do not always believe what I read in newspapers.

European Union

[Relevant documents: The Twenty-fourth Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation, Session 1994-95, on the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference: the Agenda; Democracy and Efficiency; the Role of National Parliaments (HC 239-I), and the Government's reply (Cm 3051); European Parliament-Resolution A4-0102/95 on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union with a view to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference; Report of the Council on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union (Cm 2866); Report by the Commission on the operation of the Treaty on European Union (SEC(95)731); Report by the Court of Auditors on the operation of the Treaty on European Union and the Report of the Court of Justice on certain aspects of the application of the Treaty on European Union; the White Paper on Developments in the European Union January-June 1995 (Cm 3130); and the Minutes of Evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 30th November (HC 72-i).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The debate provides Members with an opportunity to comment on a range of issues affecting the European Union. I intend to concentrate on the forthcoming European Council summit in Madrid. I shall have a few comments to make, which I hope will be helpful, to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the Opposition's spokesman, so that we may help to clarify certain of the Opposition's policies. I think that that will be of benefit to the House and the country.

First, I shall concentrate on the forthcoming summit in Madrid. The next few years will be as important as any in the EU's 40-year history. We shall face challenges such as enlargement to the east and south, hard decisions on a single currency, the development of Europe's security architecture, and fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy. Underlying all that is the need to restore Europe's global competitiveness and its ability to create jobs. Only if the EU can contribute to that goal can we rebuild people's confidence in a way that is relevant to their concerns.

Next week's Madrid European Council will focus on many of the issues to which I have referred. It is clear that the intergovernmental conference will be a major item on the agenda next week. I welcome the close interest that the House has taken in the preparations, and especially the reports from the Select Committees on European Legislation and on Foreign Affairs. Members will have seen the Government's response to the Committees' reports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), the Minister of State, has kept the House closely in touch with developments in the study group. He will talk in more detail later about these developments if he is successful in catching your eye, Madam Speaker. Keeping Parliament informed is a priority for the Government. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier this afternoon, we are considering whether to publish a White Paper early next year setting out the Government's approach to the intergovernmental conference.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for showing his characteristic courtesy. Does he agree with

Commissioner Kinnock that, as far as eastern European countries are concerned, the prospect of membership of the European Union is exceedingly distant?

Mr. Rifkind: I am not sure that I necessarily agree with Commissioner Kinnock. It very much depends. It is undoubtedly true that negotiations on enlargement will take a number of years; they did for Spain and Portugal, so it is hardly likely that they will take less than the five or six years that were required for those countries when we come to the countries of central and eastern Europe. But time will tell, and I will have something further to say on enlargement later.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The Secretary of State talks about fully communicating and informing Members of Parliament. Is not what we need as domestic politicians more involvement in what is going on in Europe, and proper, positive involvement, not just information?

Mr. Rifkind: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman proposes to support the Government in their view that national Parliaments should be more involved in the consideration and scrutiny of European proposals, and that will be one of the items for the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: No, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

The study group, which has been meeting since June to prepare options on the issues that the IGC will address, issued its report earlier this week. Although the membership of the study group does not precisely reflect that of the IGC, the report is a good preliminary indication of the likely agenda, and the current balance of member states' views.

The report says that next year's IGC will not entail a radical rewrite of the Maastricht treaty or aim to turn the European Union into a super-state, but will concentrate on practical steps to make Europe more relevant to people, and to make the Union work better and to prepare it for enlargement. These are fine words, and I endorse them, but it is not enough to assert these things: we need to deliver them. Our Government's realistic, practical agenda for the IGC will, I believe, do that.

With so many major challenges facing us over the next few years, people could be forgiven for asking why the European Union is embarking on another IGC so soon after Maastricht came into force. If it heralds a long period of navel-gazing and institutional tinkering, people will feel that the European Union is fiddling while Europe burns. But if the IGC strengthens practical European co-operation where necessary, and shows with renewed determination that the European Union should stay out of areas where it is not necessary, people will be prepared to welcome that. That is what our approach is designed to deliver.

I shall now comment on European Union enlargement, which the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow raised with me.

None of the challenges that I mentioned earlier is more important than the historic mission to re-embrace the countries of central and eastern Europe. We must welcome them back fully into our family of democracies. In extending to our neighbours to the east the security and prosperity that we have enjoyed for 50 years, we will enhance the security and prosperity of the whole of Europe. That is why we are so firmly committed to enlargement.

It is clear that enlargement will not simply happen overnight: both the candidate countries and the European Union have plenty to do first. The European Union must take sensible decisions about the negotiating process. We expect at least some of the countries of central and eastern Europe that are ready and willing to begin negotiations alongside Cyprus and Malta, six months after the IGC.

But we also want to ensure that the enlargement process is smooth and sustainable. That means that the European Union will have to decide which associated countries have made most progress towards readiness for membership. The Commission's Opinions will be a vital ingredient in that process, and I welcome its intention to produce the Opinions shortly after the IGC. Meanwhile, we must continue to encourage the associated countries to keep up the progress that is being made in preparing to take on EU membership, particularly in preparations to join the internal market.

There are other major issues, too. The IGC must address the institutional needs of an enlarged European Union, and there are important policy implications. The Commission has just published two important reports, which will launch a very important debate on reform of the common agricultural policy and the structural funds. I welcome its analysis that, as we have long been saying, extending an unreformed CAP to an enlarged European Union would breach commitments under the general agreement on tariffs and trade on subsidised agricultural exports.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend on the importance of enlargement for Cyprus and Malta and for countries of eastern Europe. However, as he says, enlargement will require institutional change. Does he not perceive that some of that institutional change will be an extension—a wise extension—of qualified majority voting? Otherwise, the possibility of a small country using its veto to block progress until there is a reform of the CAP that suits it will surely be all too great.

Mr. Rifkind: I do not agree with my right hon. Friend. Of course there will be implications for the size of the Commission as the Community enlarges. It is ludicrous to imagine that, as the Commission enlarges, each new member state, including very small countries, will automatically have a Commissioner, and that nothing else will change. The Commission itself clearly has to be reformed, and I recognise that fact. I also recognise that the weighting attached to the voting rights of individual countries may have to reflect an enlarged European Union. But I do not accept the argument that the case for enlargement points towards an increase in qualified majority voting.

I say that for this reason. The Community is already 15-strong. We already have qualified majority voting in many areas. Where we have the need for unanimity, it is almost invariably because there is a need for it because of the importance of the issues concerned. If one considers the European Union, despite small countries such as Luxembourg, that has not prevented progress from being

[Mr. Rifkind]

made. If one considers other international organisations, NATO, for example, has never had qualified majority voting at any time in its history. It has always proceeded by consensus, and has always managed to reach agreement acceptable to all member states.

Therefore, the Government's view is clear. We do not believe that there is a case for an increase in qualified majority voting, and we do not believe that the enlargement of the European Union changes that in any meaningful or significant way.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I accept the Secretary of State's view that there should be no extension of qualified majority voting to take account of enlargement, but will he say something about the directly relevant point of what should constitute a blocking minority in an enlarged Community?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. As I mentioned, I accept that there is a case for what is often referred to as a re-weighting of the voting strength of individual countries, because it clearly would be ludicrous if a country such as Malta, with a tiny population, had a voting strength which was more comparable with that of Belgium, Greece or the Netherlands. Likewise, one must take account of the larger countries, which have considerably increased voting weight. That is already recognised to some extent in the existing voting rights and the voting weight of respective member states. I have no doubt that further work needs to be done on that, and the British Government are willing to support that approach.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: If hon. Members will forgive me for a moment, I am sure that they will have an opportunity to intervene later in my remarks.

It has also been pointed out by the Commission, in the work that has been done on enlargement, that, unless the CAP is reformed, the European Union will face the prospect of yet more food mountains. That is why the report concludes that the status quo for the CAP is not an option. That is welcome news, even if it does not go far enough for us. I should also add that the status quo is not an option for the structural funds, either. Reform will be needed so that the Union can enlarge successfully and affordably.

Those are difficult issues. We must tackle them and tackle them soon. That is not because we have somehow gone cool on enlargement—quite the opposite. If we put these problems to one side now, they will certainly come back to obstruct progress later. We are serious about enlargement to the east, and keen to see the process begin as soon as it reasonably can. That is why we want to bring all the questions into the open now, starting at the Madrid European Council next week.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): On the question of enlargement, is it not a huge task to expect the former Soviet bloc countries to sign up to the whole of the acquis communautaire? In view of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's exhortation to have a multi-speed, multi-track Europe, should we not be seeking to give those countries the opportunity to join aspects of activities of the European Union, not necessarily to compel them to join all of them?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not underestimate the complexity of the issues, but I must say two things to my hon. Friend. First, the countries themselves wish to sign up to the whole of the acquis; they are not asking for a differentiated approach. Secondly, the complexity that my hon. Friend rightly identifies will be relevant to the length of the transition that may be required for individual countries.

However, the countries that have expressed the greatest interest—the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary—have said that they wish to become full members of the European Union, and they are prepared to make the internal changes because they are trying to move to a market economy as quickly as possible.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Following the answer that the Foreign Secretary gave one of his own Back Benchers, the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), may I ask him whether it is not a measure of the success of the European Union that so many former members of the Warsaw pact want to sign up not just to parts of the treaty, but to all of it?

Mr. Rifkind: That is an entirely reasonable comment. Despite being controversial in many respects in many countries, the European Union is seen as a positive force for European progress.

The Government and British businesses are wholly committed to maximising the gains to British citizens and British business from membership of the European Union. The achievement of that goal is not a zero-sum game; as Europe prospers, so does the United Kingdom. The Government have an economic agenda for Britain and for Europe. We want, and are working, to sharpen the competitive edge of European businesses. Successful businesses create jobs; uncompetitive businesses shed jobs. We want less regulation and fewer burdens on business, completion of the single market, liberalisation of the telecommunications and energy sectors, and more free trade.

It is fashionable to knock Brussels. It is the bureaucratic capital of the world, and the home of red tape. Much of the criticism is justified, but under the new Commission things may now be changing. Jacques Santer made that clear in his speech to the Guildhall earlier this year. He is committed to "less action, but better action". Sir Leon Brittan made it clear in his speech to the CBI three weeks ago when he said:

"the tide of social legislation has all but dried up . . . the emphasis is now on job creation".

At Madrid, our Prime Minister will again reinforce the message. We want progress on enhancing competitiveness, improving the quality and reducing the quantity of legislation, deregulating labour markets to make them more responsive, creating jobs and reducing unemployment. We want less rhetoric and more action, and we shall continue to push strongly for that.

Let me give two examples of the way in which the battle is being won. First, there is the legislative burden. In 1990—only five years ago—the Commission proposed 185 pieces of primary legislation; by 1993, that figure was down to 75, in 1995 it is down further to 43, and the Commission estimates that next year it will be down to 21.

Mr. Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): One of the reasons why that admirable trend may be happening is the increasing power of the European Court. Lord Denning's "onrush of European law" is beginning to become a reality. Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that some of the reforms may increase the Court's credibility? We want to restrict and limit it to interpreting the treaty of Rome, rather than making laws that replace some of the Commission's laws.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend that the proper task of the European Court is to interpret the treaty when there is a genuine legal dispute concerning its provisions. We are giving thought to proposals to improve the workings of the Court. We think it unfortunate, for example, that no appeals procedure exists. However controversial or expensive for a member state the Court's judgments may be, there is no opportunity for a second consideration. That is quite unlike the procedures that are available in national courts.

We also need to look afresh at the European Court's powers to impose heavy damages on member states retrospectively, even when some infraction of a directive may have been carried out in good faith and with no intent to disregard the significance of that directive. Important reforms can be made in a constructive way, and we intend to take the lead in promoting such an approach.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is not the problem that, in interpreting, as my right hon. and learned Friend says, the treaty, the judges consider it with the eye of continental lawyers? They do not narrowly construe just one section of one Act; they consider what they believe to be the general purpose of the treaty. The result is that the thing is always skewed in a federal direction.

Mr. Rifkind: I must confess that I am very nervous when my hon. Friend refers to the judges interpreting these matters in a continental fashion, as the British judge, Judge David Edward, is my old devil master, at whose knees I learned such knowledge as I have of Scottish law. I would not dare make such an accusation in regard to any judgments in which he was personally involved.

One of the European Court's strengths is that it has brought together different traditions and different legal systems, and sought to apply the European legal profession's accumulated wisdom in determining such matters, but I accept my hon. Friend's point to some extent. Of course, if the bulk of the judges come from countries with a continental judicial tradition, that is bound to influence the way in which they deal with particular matters. That is another reason why some appeal system is required within the European Court: if, for whatever reason, there has been an imbalance, it is unhealthy if that cannot be rectified in any way.

I mentioned the dramatic and welcome decline in primary legislation in the past five years. We should like similar progress in secondary legislation emerging from Brussels. The quality of legislation also needs to improve, with greater consultation, especially with businesses, before specific legislation is even considered.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Before my right hon. and learned Friend leaves the point about an appeals procedure, has he considered how that might be structured, and whether, if disputes on subsidiarity were involved, it might be better if an appeal were referred to a body drawn from the national Parliaments of the European Union rather than from another series of judges?

Mr. Rifkind: There are various ways in which subsidiarity can be given greater primacy. Our view is that we should like it entrenched in treaty form, to ensure that such matters are given much greater weight. That is what we will seek to do.

The other area in which there has been good progress is in the fight against fraud. The United Kingdom secured significant changes at Maastricht, including an enhanced role for the European Court of Auditors and for the European Parliament in that respect. That is also an area where further work is required. Further detailed examination of the ways in which fraud can be more effectively dealt with should be given the prominence it deserves.

The UK lives by trade and by investment. That is why the Government are fully committed to working towards open markets around the world, whether within the European Union, across the Atlantic or elsewhere. With our European partners, we took a leading role in the 1995 World Trade Organisation negotiations on financial services liberalisation. We shall press hard for a good outcome to the negotiations currently under way within the WTO for liberalisation of telecommunications and maritime services. We must keep up the momentum for dismantling barriers to trade and investment wherever they exist.

Market access is crucial, whether for the European Union's neighbours to the east or for the Mediterranean countries. Britain is the strongest supporter in the EU of open markets, and that is why we want over time to create a Mediterranean free trade area, covering, in particular, agriculture, where many Mediterranean partners enjoy a comparative advantage.

That is why we have been pressing for increased access for agricultural and other goods from central and eastern Europe. That is important if those countries are to develop their economies in a free-market fashion that we would wish to welcome.

That challenge has not yet been responded to satisfactorily by member states as a whole. Last month, European Union Foreign Ministers considered a European Commission proposal for a five-year programme to increase quotas for goods from eastern European countries by 10 per cent. a year. That would have been a modest help in allowing them to develop those sectors of their economy that are most competitive. We strongly supported the Commission's efforts. We made it clear that the quantities of extra goods involved were tiny. It was absurd that the Commission's proposals were opposed by some member states.

Let me give just one or two examples of what some member states felt obliged to oppose. At present, Bulgaria can send four lorryloads of strawberry jam to the European Union each year. The Commission proposes that, by the end of the century, it should be able to send an extra two lorry loads. That was opposed. In five years'

[Mr. Rifkind]

time, Poland would be allowed to send an extra four tonnes of lettuces to the European Union each month. That was opposed. Slovakia's quota for ham exports should be raised by 12 kg per day per member state. That was opposed. An extra 40 lb of Polish sweet peppers per member state per day was opposed. A total of 40 g more Czech duck meat annually for each man, woman and child in the Community by 1999 was considered unacceptable. According to the Commission's proposals, in five years' time all the associated countries of eastern Europe would have been able to export additional cereals equivalent to 0.3 per cent. of German production, yet Germany opposed that request.

Those proposals for increases over five years were opposed by a number of countries, including Germany and several Mediterranean countries. I am not sure how other member states can proudly claim to be helping the central Europeans when they are so miserly about access to our markets. It defies belief that a few jars of Bulgarian jam could represent a serious threat to the economies of western Europe.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Since the Foreign Secretary is obviously opposed to petty opposition from member states, can he tell me why his Government are opposing a proposal by Sweden to make full employment an objective of the European treaty? Does he oppose full employment in Europe, or is his opposition petty?

Mr. Rifkind: Britain's position stems from the fact that we have the lowest levels of unemployment of any major country in the European Union. One of the reasons for that low level is that we believe that employment policy can best be determined by national Governments answerable to national Parliaments. We have rejected the social chapter precisely because it results in higher unemployment and lost jobs. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about these matters, he should speak to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, and tell them to abandon the policy that is so damaging to the employment requirements of this country.

Economic and monetary union will feature prominently at Madrid. The Prime Minister made it clear at the informal Heads of Government meeting in Majorca in September that a number of important issues had yet to be examined properly. Although the Prime Minister secured for Britain an option on whether to join stage 3 of economic and monetary union, the questions to which the Prime Minister referred, and will refer again at Madrid, are of the utmost importance not only to Britain but to all member states.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Was it not a remarkable triumph of diplomacy to negotiate that option on the single currency at Maastricht, and to gain along with it the right to play a full part in the discussions on the future shape and management of the single currency? Is it not right that those two abilities—the option and the right to take part in discussions—represent considerable assets for this country, and that one would have to be completely barmy to suggest simply throwing them away?

Mr. Rifkind: That is right. It was a negotiating triumph by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and it illustrates most clearly a point to which I shall return—that, just occasionally, the United Kingdom has to be prepared to be on its own if it is properly to protect British interests.

It is clear that, if EMU is to go ahead on 1 January 1999, only a minority of member states will be ready. Many will not have met the convergence criteria in the treaty of Maastricht. What will be the relationship between those within and those outside EMU? What effect might that have on the functioning of the single market, Community spending and the institutional framework of European decision-making? Much more work needs to be done on those and other issues before any clear picture emerges about what stage 3 might look like.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House what the British Government will be expecting by way of currency convergence and stability to meet the Maastricht treaty 109J for those countries and currencies which are seeking to join?

Mr. Rifkind: Those are exactly the issues on which the work has not been done. We will be arguing strongly that, whether it is because of an inability to join EMU or an unwillingness to do so, it is clear that more than half the member states of the Union would not be part of a single currency if it were to be formed in 1999. Therefore, it is crucial that the work should begin now, not in 1997 or 1998, on the implications for the relationship between the "ins" and the "outs" in such a situation.

At Madrid, the Heads of Government will also consider the reference scenario for the transition to stage 3, the name of the currency, and German proposals for a fiscal stability pact in stage 3 to reinforce budgetary discipline among those member states which participate in the single currency. In its present form, the recommendation on a reference scenario which ECOFIN will submit to Madrid is broadly acceptable to the UK.

The decision on the name, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech to the Guildhall, is a potential distraction from the more important issues which we want discussed at Madrid—although I imagine that those who support a single currency will want it to have a name with some popular resonance.

Mr. Gapes: If a single currency is established by a minority of countries and Britain stays out of it, would that not be extremely damaging to the British economy and to our role in international financial institutions, especially if those countries take retaliatory action against other countries that are not part of the system?

Mr. Rifkind: Those matters are clearly among the issues that the United Kingdom will have to consider and on which it will have to reach a decision—looking not only at the alleged advantages but at the alleged disadvantages, and coming to a judgment on where British interests lie. We will give very serious consideration to that.

On fiscal stability, the Government's record—notably the recent Budget—speaks for itself. The Government's fiscal policy is directed at maintaining sound public finances. As to the detail of the German proposals, that will be a matter for the Heads of Government to address.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor emphasised in his Budget speech, we will continue to pursue economic policies that will have the effect of achieving the convergence criteria set out in Maastricht by the end of 1997. These policies make sound economic sense in themselves.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Given the obvious difficulties that some of our partners, such as Italy and Belgium, will have in meeting the convergence criteria, does my right hon. and learned Friend think that, in a spirit of fraternal friendship with those countries, it is time to suggest that they might dust down the idea so ably put forward by our own Prime Minister several years ago, that the ecu should trade not necessarily as a single currency, but as a common currency? That would be a market-based, gradualist solution that might well have many attractions, both for our party and for other countries.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's views are well known. We must leave it to other countries to come gradually to their own conclusions on whether they might be relevant to their circumstances. My right hon. Friend has always said that he believes that there is strength in that sort of approach. Perhaps, at some stage, it might commend itself to others as well.

With regard to Madrid, I want finally to deal with the immediate issues facing the EU on the question of the customs union between it and Turkey. We are anxious to ensure that the EU remains outward-looking. The Foreign Affairs Council on 30 October took a formal decision to implement a customs union. I very much hope the European Parliament will give its assent next week.

Customs union will reinforce the EU's relations with a very important neighbour. Turkey is a key partner in a volatile region, and customs union will help to maintain its western orientation. It will also bring important benefits to British business, as Turkey liberalises its import regime and brings its legislation into line with the EU on intellectual property protection, competition policy and state aids.

Turkey has made real progress on a number of human rights issues identified by the European Parliament in recent months. There have been constitutional and local government reforms, the release of certain Members of Parliament, and reforms to article 8 of the anti-terror law. Some 150 jailed writers and academics have benefited. When she visited London recently, Prime Minister Ciller of Turkey made it clear that she is committed to continuing the process after the forthcoming general elections. We very much welcome that.

Having commented on the Government's approach towards the Madrid summit, I want to refer to the views expressed in an interesting and memorable way by the Opposition. What has struck me as most significant has been the extent to which both the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Livingston, the shadow Foreign Secretary, have emphasised that a British Government led by them would not be isolated in Europe. They have made their views on that clear in a most unambiguous way.

The Leader of the Opposition said on 4 October 1994:

> "Under my leadership, I will never allow this country to be isolated or left behind in Europe."

He said on 20 May:

> "My belief is that the drift towards isolation in Europe must stop and must be replaced by a policy of constructive engagement."

The hon. Member for Livingston said at the Labour party conference on 3 October:

> "The Government's isolation in Europe has cost Britain dear. Labour has a positive agenda for reform in Europe, a people's agenda, that will strengthen Britain's influence and benefit the people of Britain."

I have been giving some thought to what the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Livingston might mean by not being isolated in Europe. It is a very powerful position to adopt. One has tried to work out how they intend to achieve it. So far as I can tell—unless the hon. Member for Livingston corrects me—there are only two ways in which they could achieve it.

Either they are saying that, over the past 16 years, if they had been the Government, they would have agreed with the rest of the European Union on all the issues on which the British Government stood alone. That is one possible way in which we could have avoided isolation. Alternatively, they are saying, "Well, no, we would not necessarily have agreed. But we would have allowed ourselves to be out-voted, allowed majority voting, and removed the veto. So, even if we disagreed, we would have come to terms with what is being proposed."

I thought that that latter approach was Labour policy because, at the time of its party conference, it produced a policy document that seemed to suggest that it was preparing to abandon the veto and unanimity requirements. In that document, published in October, it said, quite explicitly: "We reject permanent opt-outs." That is very clear. In the same document, it said:

> "Labour therefore accepts that it is in Britain's interests to extend qualified majority voting in some cases such as certain areas of social policy, industrial policy, regional policy and environmental policy."

That seems quite clear. Labour is saying that we would not be isolated, because we would have no permanent opt-outs, and QMV would operate in all those areas.

At least, I thought it was clear, until I started listening to the speeches. Despite putting those statements in their document, Labour Members have been extraordinarily shy in sharing those observations with the general public. Unless one goes to the actual text, one would not know that what I have cited is Labour party policy.

On the very day that the policy document was published, the hon. Member for Livingston made a speech to his party conference. He made no reference to having no permanent opt-outs or to abandoning qualified majority voting in those four areas. He has made a speech in the House on European policy since then, and, despite requests from Conservative Members, he did not make a single reference to ending qualified majority voting or having no permanent opt-outs. The leader of the Labour party, in his famed address to the Confederation of British Industry, made no reference to those matters, nor did he in a major speech on European policy on Thursday.

So we have to ask ourselves whether that lack of reference is because of shyness. Did the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Livingston forget that that was their policy? Have they not read their own document? Or is it tactics? Do they like to have a

[Mr. Rifkind]

commitment on paper to end Britain's ability to protect its interests, and hope that no one notices because they make no reference to it in their speeches?

If that is their policy, as spelled out in the document, we are entitled to ask—I say this in the friendliest possible way to the hon. Member for Livingston—why they are so coy about informing the House and the public on the implications of it and why they hold it so dear. Why is it a policy that dare not call itself by its name? Why is the hon. Gentleman so reluctant to speak to the policy to which his party has committed itself? We will be listening very carefully to his speech to find out whether what I have said is indeed the case.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is it possible that, in addition to the powerful points that my right hon. and learned Friend has just made, there is a third interpretation of Labour policy—that it totally exaggerates the degree to which this country has been isolated over the past 16 years in the European Union? Indeed, in many respects, we have forged effective alliances in order to advance our national interests, especially in the single market.

Mr. Rifkind: That may indeed be the case. I come to the second possibility that I mentioned. It could be argued by the Labour party that what it meant when it said that Britain would not have been isolated is that it would have agreed with the various policies in which Britain has, under this Government, stood out. Let us look at that question.

It may be that the Labour party had the social chapter in mind. Indeed, we would have been entitled to assume that it was prepared to go unreservedly into the social chapter. But there again, the Leader of Opposition sought to assure the CBI conference when he said:

> "The social chapter is not detailed legislation . . . Each piece of legislation will be judged on its merit. I have no intention whatever of agreeing to anything and everything that emerges from the EU. Proposals are just that: proposals. And they will be examined, with you, on their merits."

What happens if, having been examined, those proposals turn out to be against British interests? Would a Labour Government stand out alone against such proposals? Would they be able to, given that qualified majority voting applies to the social chapter? We have had no statement from the hon. Member for Livingston on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) referred to the areas in which Britain has been isolated over the past 16 years. If the Labour party claimed that it would not have carried forward a policy which would have led to our isolation, I should remind it and the hon. Member for Livingston about some of the issues on which we fought for British interests, even though it required isolation.

It took several years of very splendid isolation from my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher, to win the British budget rebate, for example. It has been worth £18 billion to British taxpayers since it was won. When the hon. Member for Livingston comes to the Dispatch Box, will he inform the House whether a Labour Government would have been prepared to be isolated, standing alone in Europe, in order to win that British budget rebate? Indeed, would a Labour Government be prepared to continue to be isolated in defending that British budget rebate, when other member states might seek to have it terminated?

If the hon. Member wants to give me that assurance, I shall happily give way. Will the hon. Gentleman assure the House that a Labour Government would be prepared to accept isolation to defend the British budget rebate? Would he care to give the House an assurance?

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): May I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that I hope to catch Madam Speaker's eye? I shall be making my own speech in my own good time.

Mr. Rifkind: Very well. We have given the hon. Gentleman adequate notice of the information that the House is entitled to know. Would a Labour Government be prepared to accept isolation in order to defend the British budget rebate? That is question No. 1. As he is noting it down, will he note down a number of other similar questions?

The second question is on the Schengen frontier controls. On that, virtually all the member states have accepted that they are going to have open frontiers, that they will not have the sort of controls which we have to combat terrorism, illegal immigration and drug smuggling. The only other country that does not take that majority view is Ireland, because it is so linked to the UK that it could not do so unless the British Government changed their policy. So we are isolated—I have to acknowledge that.

Since the hon. Member for Livingston is noting down these points, will he note down and also inform the House whether a Labour Government would be prepared to see Britain isolated for as long as was required in order to protect frontier controls? Can he make a clear statement on that—no fudge, no equivocation—to the House and the country?

While we are on the subject, will the hon. Gentleman also express some views on his attitude towards defence policy? We may very well be isolated, with many member states saying that the Western European Union should be subordinated to the European Union. A number of countries appear to wish that as a long-term objective. Is that what the hon. Gentleman believes? Or would he be prepared to see Britain isolated, if that was required?

What about qualified majority voting on common foreign and security policy? Would a Labour Government acknowledge the need to go for QMV on that matter? Would the hon. Gentleman be prepared to see Britain isolated on that matter?

Those are not unreasonable questions to put to the hon. Gentleman. I put them to him, as I said, in the spirit of trying to have a constructive dialogue across the Floor of the House, so that the House and the country may have a clearer understanding of a policy, to the clarification of which the Labour party up to now does not appear to have given the highest priority in presenting its views.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that many of the issues on which Britain has been isolated—and rightly isolated—have been those on which people, business men and sometimes politicians in other community states have looked to

Britain to fight their corner? Indeed,, some years later, they come round to thank us for having done so, and take up that very position themselves.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Other countries sometimes like to do good by stealth. They give us promises of support which are sometimes less visible on the day than we would like. That is the way of the world, and it does not deter us from what we believe necessary. I shall make a final remark on the Opposition's policy, because it deserves some comment.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that we could have got a rebate and an opt-out if we had gone into negotiations with our hands tied behind our backs, saying that we were not prepared to be isolated?

Mr. Rifkind: The answer to that is self-evident. Securing the rebate required a great deal of determination and a long period of unpopularity, but the £18 billion from which British taxpayers have benefited as a result makes that isolation entirely justified. That is why we are entitled to ensure that the rebate is protected in years to come.

My next comments also refer to the extraordinary and perhaps historic speech that the Leader of the Opposition made last Thursday. He devoted many minutes to describing the Labour party's policy on Europe. Quite apart from the matters with which I have just dealt, he sought to impress on his audience and on the British public the Labour party's determination, if it formed a Government, to have an exciting new agenda—bringing forward new ideas that others had not brought forward—to give British leadership to Europe.

The Leader of the Opposition said:

> "We need to be able to set a positive agenda of our own in Europe. For too long we have been reacting to the ideas of others."

I waited with eager and bated breath to know what exciting new ideas the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party would put forward. Here they are, and I quote the words of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

The right hon. Gentleman said:

> "First the enlargement of the European Union to include . . . Central and Eastern Europe."

There is an exciting new policy, which no one has ever thought of. The right hon. Gentleman also pledged that

> "a Labour Government will open negotiations with the first group of these countries in the first half of 1998".

As Europe is considering opening negotiations in 1997, this is not quite the exciting new agenda that we thought the right hon. Gentleman had in mind.

What is the second original idea that the Leader of the Opposition has in mind? Again, I read what he said:

> "Second we need to make a serious effort to reform the CAP".

Why did the Government not think of that? This is exciting stuff. The Leader of the Opposition brought a third idea to the attention of an excited nation. He said:

> "Third we need to achieve stronger economic growth . . . open competition in aviation, energy and telecommunications and a tougher approach to unfair state aids."

Of course we welcome the fact that the Labour party and its leader have endorsed what has been Government policy for some considerable period. I am especially pleased that the Leader of the Opposition added, as another exciting, new, innovative idea, the desirability of a renaissance of the Atlantic community. I was personally interested in hearing that, and we unreservedly welcome it.

A lot of hot air is coming from the Labour party. There is a desire to deceive the electorate about Labour's true policy on the European Union. I say, again in a spirit of generosity, to the hon. Member for Livingston that I may be wrong. He now has the opportunity to explain at the Dispatch Box the extent to which a Labour Government would be able to avoid isolation, how they would go about that, and which policies they would abandon to avoid isolation. He has the opportunity to give us some greater insights into the exciting new agenda which the Leader of the Opposition has promised us. We all wait with bated breath.

4.52 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The Foreign Secretary has given the House two speeches. Those of us observing carefully could spot the join—or should I say the absence of join?—between the two speeches when he switched from Foreign Office notepaper to his own. I am bound to say that his own speech was infinitely more interesting, entertaining and parliamentary than the departmental brief. I look forward, therefore, with enthusiasm to the day, which is coming soon, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be able to go straight to the political speech without having a departmental brief in front of him.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to Labour's white paper on European policy. I fully intend to answer each and all of the questions he posed to me. I hope that he will be able to tick them off on the little exam sheet that he has in front of him as we proceed.

Before seeing whether I get a pass mark in my examination on my white paper, I draw the attention of the House to the fact that what we are seeing is a reversal of roles between those on the two Front Benches. Those who purport to be the Government are quizzing us on the contents of our white paper while they have yet to decide whether they will have a White Paper on European issues. This morning, I heard the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) announce that there would be a White Paper on Europe.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Rubbish.

Mr. Cook: I heard the hon. Gentleman say on the radio that he had extracted an understanding that there would be a White Paper.

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose*—

Mr. Cook: Although I do not want the hon. Gentleman to retreat so soon from what we all heard him say this morning, I shall give way.

Sir Teddy Taylor: There was no such statement. I simply said that if there were to be a White Paper, which I expected and hoped for, it would be welcomed very much by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I said that one of the main advantages of a White Paper would be that if we set out our policies clearly and precisely, we could show the wide difference between ourselves and the hon. Gentleman, who simply wants to pass over more

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

power, freedom, authority and responsibility to Brussels. Does he agree that what he said was untrue and should be withdrawn?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman requires any supporting evidence of my statement, he has only to glance up to an area of the House above us, which I cannot refer to without being declared out of order. He should look at the expressions of incredulity on the faces of those who reported him on the radio this morning and on television last night.

So enthused was I by what the hon. Gentleman had told the BBC that on the way to the "Today" programme this morning in my car I found myself composing a little observation—that the Euro-sceptics are now so in charge of the Conservative party that what the hon. Gentleman announces at 7 am the Government will confirm by 4 pm. During the "Today" programme, at 8.15 am, the Foreign Secretary said that the Government had the matter under consideration.

The hon. Member for Southend, East need not be so modest or so shy and retiring. The reality is that he knows that his side of the debate has won the Tory party. He keeps telling us so; he said at the Tory party conference that his side had won. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said:

> "There is no doubt that the Conservative party has shifted decisively in the Eurosceptic direction".

I predict that the shift towards Euro-scepticism will continue. What better proof could we have than the fact that the first time we hear that the Government are thinking of a White Paper is when the Euro-sceptics tell us so.

Even the right hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—I am sorry I have promoted her. No doubt one day, given the continued drift towards Euro-scepticism, she will become a right hon. Lady. Even the hon. Member for Billericay, after the Foreign Secretary's speech at the Conservative conference, said that the Foreign Secretary showed some signs of common sense. It is a measure of the extent to which Euro-scepticism has entered the mainstream of the Tory party that the hon. Lady is regarded as an expert on common sense.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Labour party was completely up to its eyes in the exchange rate mechanism? Does he agree that Labour too has accepted all the implications that went with the disaster that the ERM contained? Does he agree that it led to massive unemployment, the loss of homes and the loss of businesses, as would any commitment to a single currency or any movement towards monetary union, which Labour accepts? Does he not accept, therefore, that the Labour party is riddled with hypocrisy and is misleading the British people about its aspirations to European integration?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman has been reminded by his Foreign Secretary that we have a document that went to our conference. It repeated verbatim the words that went to our conference three years ago. Throughout that period, we have consistently said that the test of convergence for the single currency has to be convergence of the real economy—industry, jobs, productivity and output—and not just the financial criteria to which Conservative Members signed up in the Maastricht treaty.

I come back to the point made by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) because it deserves a full answer. I cannot understand why he and a number of his colleagues feel that the problems in France are a source of smugness for them. First, if the problems are related to the Maastricht treaty, those are their own criteria, which their Ministers negotiated and voted for at Maastricht, and presented to the House.

Secondly, I cannot understand why the hon. Gentleman, who occupies the right wing of the Tory party, feels that he can take satisfaction in the fact that cutting welfare benefits and rolling back the public sector is as unpopular in France as it has been in Britain, and has made the French Government almost, but not quite, as unpopular as the Government of Britain, whom he supports.

Finally, as the hon. Gentleman follows such matters closely I am sure that, far from being smug about the extent to which the present criteria are causing pain, he will note that only last week the Chancellor of the Exchequer, representing the Government that he supports, went to ECOFIN and supported even tighter measures for the future of the single currency, supported by fines that the Chancellor described as draconian—but as he said that they would not infringe sovereignty, presumably they were all right.

If we have seen one hilarious spectacle in Britain as a consequence of what has been happening in France, it has been the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) writing in *The Guardian* to express his anxiety about the effects of cuts in welfare benefits.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I must make progress.

Mr. Jenkin: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on all the hard work that he has put in with the leader of his party since that person committed the Labour party to membership of the single European currency earlier this year.

Hon. Members: Is that it?

Mr. Cook: I confess that the hon. Gentleman's question must be too deep for me, because I did not manage to follow it. However, for his benefit—possibly I was too deep for him—I shall repeat what I said to his hon. Friend. For three years our policy on the single currency has not changed. For three years we have said that the test of whether Britain should join must be based on progress in the real economy, especially convergence in real industrial performance. I understand why Conservative Members do not wish to take that into account, because today's figures show that in the past month industrial production in Britain has fallen by a full 1 per cent.

Mr. Shore: I am interested to hear what my hon. Friend is saying about convergence in the real economy. We all know that convergence in the real economy, as distinct from convergence in the monetary economy, is not written into the Maastricht treaty, and that there are no clauses, let alone protocols or other additions, to that effect. I therefore invite my hon. Friend to make it plain that we shall not join the European currency or enter the third stage of the exchange rate mechanism unless and until there is an equivalent treaty obligation, writing in the objectives of output, full employment and other real world criteria that he says should be there. Presumably our acceptance would be contingent on those.

Mr. Cook: I can give my right hon. Friend two assurances. First, when we say that those are our conditions, that is what we mean: those are our conditions. Indeed, I managed to get on to the front page of one of our respected newspapers by saying that we would not necessarily join if our conditions were not met. That seems to me to be absolutely simple English. If those are our conditions, we shall join when they are met—and we shall not necessarily join if they are not met

Secondly, I assure my right hon. Friend that we support the Swedish proposal to write into the treaty of union a commitment on employment. I agree that alongside a commitment to monetary union we need to set objectives for macroeconomic management. It is indeed regrettable that the Government have refused to support that proposal, which now has majority support in the European Union.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the French level of unemployment and the budget reductions being proposed by the French Government are a price worth paying for currency union?

Mr. Cook: I personally would have some doubt whether, if I were a Frenchman—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members must contain their hilarity. I personally have grave doubts whether the macroeconomic management in France has necessarily been in the interests of the French economy and of French industry. That is a matter for the French people to decide at elections. They chose their Government but, as rapidly as the British people, they have decided that they rather wish they had not chosen them. Given the outcome, I well understand that.

I gather that the right hon. Member for Wokingham will launch another interesting campaign next week. He represents, although now from the Back Benches, the ascendant tendency in the Conservative party. As I said earlier, the Euro-sceptics are in charge.

Mr. Cash: And right.

Mr. Cook: They are certainly on the right of the party; I have no difficulty in concurring with that proposition—and they are in charge.

There is now no hoop so tight that Ministers would not slim down their beliefs in order to squeeze them through it. There is the occasional straggler, such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has not yet slimmed down enough to pass through anybody's hoop. Last month he described the demand that there be a commitment to "no single currency in the next Parliament" as barking mad. Right on cue, the right hon. Member for Wokingham proposed to launch a campaign with just such a demand.

By and large, however, such people are only stragglers. In the European debate the Tory party now has the unity of the prison camp, and the hon. Member for Southend, East and the hon. Member for Billericay have the keys. We shall have to wait for the speech—

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall certainly give way to the hon. Lady, in the absence—no, gallantry forbids me to explain why I give way to her, but what I was talking about is a perfect subject for the hon. Member for Billericay. However, I shall respond to the hon. Member for Southend, East first. I look forward to his speech, because as he has announced that there will be a White Paper, the whole Chamber will want to hear him tell us what will be in it, because we did not hear that from the Foreign Secretary.

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Gentleman will know that I am the chairman of the Conservative Group for Europe, a nationwide organisation of Conservatives who are very pro-Europe, and who actively campaign. Many of those people are also members of the European Movement, an all-party group. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that it is not true that all Conservatives are anti-Europe—far from it.

Mr. Cook: I ask the hon. Lady to be patient and stay to listen—although I am not entirely sure whether she encouraged some of her hon. Friends, who I would have thought might agree with her views, to stay and hear further exchanges, because they are now leaving the Chamber. What she says suggests that there may have been some truth in the observation by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that the war was not over on the Tory Benches. If the hon. Lady cares to wait until the end of my speech she may hear something that I wish to address to her and to those of her hon. Friends who share her views.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I really must make progress. If the hon. Gentleman is patient I may reward him later, but I must make some progress with my speech or I shall be in trouble with the Chair.

The Foreign Secretary said, very properly, that the Labour party has produced a white paper setting out our views. *[Interruption.]* It is quite white. It went through our conference unanimously. I shall give the right hon. and learned Gentleman a challenge, as he offered so many challenges to me. When he produces his White Paper on Europe, let him put it to the Conservative conference and see whether he gets unanimous support for it there.

I shall take the precaution of being present at the conference in the flesh to see what really happens. I shall not rely on Conservative central office sending me a video of it afterwards, since we have discovered how central office took its revenge on the Secretary of State for Defence by editing out his applause. I want to see the uncut version, and see what support there is for any White Paper on Europe that the Government can cobble together.

The Foreign Secretary is right that the Labour party has a White Paper setting out our commitments on Europe and making it plain that we do not favour a federal super-state, but are committed to working together in an association of European countries that come together as independent member states. That is the only way in which we can give our people a stronger economy and a higher quality of environment, and achieve greater freedom for our citizens.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way, on that very point?

Mr. Cook: No, I shall answer the Foreign Secretary now. With respect to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), he has not yet quite arrived at the seniority of his right hon. and learned Friend. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nor have you."] I fear that I can offer hon. Members good odds on my taking over from the right hon. and learned Gentleman in the future.

The Foreign Secretary asked me a series of questions about the budget rebate, immigration and foreign and security policy, but he has not read our proposals to the party conference with the greatest care. If he turns to page 11, he will see that we specifically restate our commitment to maintain the principle of unanimity for decision-making on budgetary policy, taxation, external border controls and foreign and security issues—every single one of the issues on which the Foreign Secretary challenged me. It is explicit in our document that we will preserve the principle of unanimity, with which goes the clear implication that, if necessary, we would be prepared to use the veto in any of those areas.

Mr. Rifkind: I am glad that we have extracted from the hon. Gentleman in this House—as opposed to in documents—a statement of the Labour party's position. If we accept what he says, does that not mean that the Labour party would be isolated in Europe on the budget rebate? Does he think that he would get support from the other member states on that matter? On frontier controls, does he accept that a Labour Government would be isolated in Europe? On the opt-out of the single currency that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated, does he accept that a Labour Government would be isolated in Europe? That is what he seems to be telling the House. If that is so, how does he reconcile that with the fine words that he and the Leader of the Opposition have used that a Labour Government would never be isolated in Europe?

Mr. Cook: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman consults the speech that I made in March, he will see that I said that of course there are occasions when one must opt for isolation—*[Interruption.]* That is by no means a new revelation from me, as I think 600 people were present and heard my original speech, including the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor as Foreign Secretary. Isolation may sometimes be the necessary price if one is right. It should not be—as it is with the Conservative Government—an ambition for the conduct of foreign policy.

The area of difference between the Foreign Secretary and me relates to those other areas dealt with on the page of the document to which he refers. Since he has raised the matters, let me return to them. First, we will preserve the principle of unanimity in those areas. Secondly, if I may say so to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, it is a piece of brass neck for the Government to say that they have discovered a new principle and that they are opposed to any extension of qualified majority voting. This is the Government who came to the House and carried through a vast extension of qualified majority voting. They recommended it to the House and voted for it in the House. They put the measure through. Why did they do it?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave an interesting explanation in answering questions last week. He said that it was necessary to introduce qualified majority voting to make progress on the reform of the single market, because otherwise proposals could be blocked by any one country.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cook: If that is the argument—and I am glad to see that the Minister agrees—that the Government are going to use to justify the extension of qualified majority voting, which they steered through at a time when there were 12 members of the EU, how much more vigorously correct is that argument when we contemplate the enlargement that will take the EU not from 12 members to 15 but from 15 to 25 and beyond?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has been good enough to inform the House that a Labour Government of which he would be a part would accept that Britain occasionally would have to be isolated if British interests were to be defended. How does he reconcile that with the speech made by his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition who—as I said earlier—said

> "Under my leadership, I will never allow this country to be isolated . . . in Europe."?

Not "sometimes" or "from time to time" but "never". How does the hon. Gentleman reconcile that statement with what he has now informed the House—that isolation is sometimes necessary?

Mr. Cook: I can understand the Foreign Secretary's difficulty. He, after all, belongs to a party that is totally isolated in Europe and has no sister party throughout Europe.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is isolated.

Mr. Cook: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that neither I nor my party is isolated. We have sister parties in every country of the European Union with which we discuss our position and with which we form alliances. I am perfectly confident that when we take office—as we will—those parties will work with us on a common project of constructive engagement in Europe.

I can assure the Foreign Secretary that one of our first acts in this area when we take office will be to end the shameful isolation into which the Government have boxed Britain over the social chapter, on which their only ally throughout the European Union is the French National Front.

Mr. Riddick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robin Cook: I will give way in a moment to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), who has been waiting for some time to intervene.

I would rather have the 22 sister parties with which we work—all of which support the social chapter—than the French National Front, who oppose it.

Mr. Riddick: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the opt-out from the single currency, which the Prime Minister successfully negotiated, is in Britain's interests—yes or no?

Mr. Cook: At Maastricht, the Prime Minister negotiated the criteria that are set out in the Maastricht treaty. Labour's position is that we will join the single currency and end the opt-out when our tests of convergence are met, but those tests of convergence are not the financial criteria that have caused so much difficulty in France but those of the real economy. We will end that opt-out when we have finally managed, by an industrial programme, to turn around the industry that we will receive from the Conservative party and when we believe that the British economy is ready to compete with the German economy.

I wish to return to the subject of qualified majority voting.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I will not give way again. I wish to continue my argument with the Foreign Secretary, rather than with all the Conservative Members behind him.

Mr. Spicer: He should give way.

Mr. Cook: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman thinks it unwise for me to focus on the Foreign Secretary rather than on the rest of the Government. That would tend to suggest poor confidence in the Foreign Secretary.

The Minister of State's argument was that we should have accepted qualified majority voting when there were only 12 members of the EU. We now face a situation where there may be over 20. The least convincing part of the Foreign Secretary's speech was that where he claimed to be on the side of enlargement. It is dishonest to argue for enlargement of the EU while arguing against changing any of its institutions to allow that. [HON. MEMBERS: "He did not say that."] He did indeed say exactly that.

Mr. Rifkind: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman found the rest of my speech convincing. That is a happy acknowledgement from him, but he must listen to what I say. I made it clear that I took the view that changes would be necessary in the Commission, as it would be absurd if the Commission were to be expanded every time a new member state joined. I accepted that there was a need for the re-weighting of votes to take account of larger and smaller states. The one point I did not, and do not, accept is that there is a need to assume an increase in qualified majority voting, because most of the issues on which we have unanimity require unanimity because they go to the heart of ensuring that member states' vital interests are not affected by the decisions of the Community.

Mr. Cook: The Foreign Secretary might as well be honest about it to the nation and state that what he is defending is not a British veto but a veto for every new country that comes into the EU. He is defending a Slovakian veto, possibly a Bulgarian veto and certainly a Maltese veto. How is it possibly in Britain's interests that each of those countries should have a veto over areas where we may wish to achieve reform and where we may find—on the Minister of State's own doctrine—that those countries are the ones who are blocking changes that are in Britain's interests?

If the Foreign Secretary wants to sound genuinely enthusiastic about enlargement, he must recognise that there is no prospect of the EU enlarging on the basis of everybody sitting around a table, clutching a veto. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is sincere about wanting those countries in the EU and if he thinks that that would be good for Britain and for Europe, why is he saying to the House that he must keep the veto because those countries will never agree with Britain? I cannot say that I have a deep understanding of it, but I am familiar with how the Government have so often managed to find themselves the odd one out among 15 members. But do they plan on the United Kingdom being the odd one out when there are 25 member countries in the European Union, from Lithuania to Lisbon and from Sweden to Sicily? Will we use our veto to stop what all those other countries have agreed? Are the Government saying that, even in those circumstances, they do not think that they could find a couple of allies to provide a blocking minority? Given the recent record, the Foreign Secretary may be right to say that.

When the right hon. and learned Gentleman produces the White Paper he may discover that if it is acceptable to the hon. Member for Southend, East it will not be acceptable to those other countries. That is why the Labour party document, which was presented and accepted unanimously at our conference, most certainly does not leave us isolated in Europe. Our document has broad support in Europe. It gives a clear commitment that we will support jobs as a priority for the European agenda; we will write a commitment to full employment and sustainable development into the treaty of European Union.

We will provide measures fundamentally to reform the common agricultural policy, which has failed to happen so far, so that it ceases to be a means of subsidising unnecessary production and becomes a basis for supporting the income of people in rural economies. That will also bring us into line with other European countries that have recognised—which our Government refuse to do—that the way to achieve competitiveness is not through low wages and low skills but through high investment, technological advances and high skills. A proper social partnership between management and the work force, which is at the heart of the social chapter, would bring us closer to achieving that goal.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then I must move towards my close.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has talked about qualified majority voting and about the social chapter. Will he confirm that under QMV it is absolutely impossible to pick and choose what will be put into practice and what will not?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman looks at what has been said in the reflection group, to which the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) has signed up, he will see that it rejects the idea of an à la carte Europe. Not only that, many of his other hon. Friends have previously rejected it. The words "pick and choose" were derided in a book six years ago by a very distinguished member of the Government who is now the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State. He made it plain then that we could not have a pick-and-choose Europe. The reason why it is impossible for the Government to find allies when faced with

[Mr. Cook]

something that they do not want is precisely because the rest of Europe knows that the Government's approach is on a purely pick-and-choose basis.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I shall not give way as I must proceed. I want to ensure that I cover the remarks of the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) before I conclude.

The other point that the Secretary of State is fond of making is that we can proceed by a trade arrangement with other countries that will provide us with an alternative to Europe. Indeed, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is fond of parading a commitment to the transatlantic free trade area. [HON. MEMBERS:"Hear, hear."] The hon. Members who have just shouted and the Secretary of State know perfectly well that the route to a transatlantic free trade area lies through Brussels. We may well have a special understanding with America, but it does not want Britain to have less influence in Europe. The United States wants a Britain that is part of Europe and can provide a role in Europe.

On last week's "On the Record" a spokesman from the state department said:

> "We would regret a lessening of Britain's power in Europe. Our own dealings with Britain would be less relevant, less vital if Britain's own role was diminished."

Our relationship with the United States and any of the other great powers outside Europe will be determined by how influential we are inside Europe. It is not a formula for success with the rest of the world to be as rude as possible to our immediate neighbours.

There was a time when Ministers would not have waited for that message to be made by the Opposition, but would have been prepared to tell that truth to their Back Benchers. It is a curious feature of Ministers that they have the courage to be isolated in Brussels, but that courage appears to evaporate between Calais and Dover and they show no such boldness in talking about the reality of Britain's need for allies when they confront their Back Benchers. They are prepared to isolate Britain in Europe, but not prepared to isolate themselves in the Conservative party.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I must proceed.

Those Ministers know that the process of isolation on which they have embarked does not match up to the need for co-operation in the modern world. They know that the majority of British exports go to the continent. The Confederation of British Industry has recorded by a majority of three out of five in its recent survey that the recent statements by the Government have been unhelpful in promoting business interests in Europe, our majority market.

Those Ministers know that we cannot protect our environment by concentrating only on national measures: they know that we have to work in co-operation with our partners in Europe. They also know that the most positive development in international politics, both inside and outside Europe, has been the growth in democracy and, with it, the parallel demand for proper human rights. But, at that very moment, voices from the Conservative Back Benches suggest that Britain should withdraw from the European Court of Human Rights although Britain helped to create it. In Britain, some quarters of the Tory party no longer want to live by the standards of that court.

Mr. Butterfill: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the European Court of Human Rights is not an institution of the European Community, but the function of a separate treaty which, to our eternal regret, a Labour Government sponsored.

Mr. Cook: Absolutely. My case—I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman entirely apprehended it—is that we support the European Court of Human Rights. Conservative spokesmen are arguing the case for decoupling from it.

It has not always been so—there was a time when current senior members of the Government would have argued with Conservative Back Benchers who argue for isolation. I do not know where the Deputy Prime Minister is today, but I know that we never hear those views argued from the Dispatch Box, nor did we hear them from the Foreign Secretary today. If we hear them at all, it is occasionally from voices such as the hon. Member for South Derbyshire and other Tory Back Benchers who know that it is foolish to boast that we must be successful if we are isolated.

Those Conservative Members know that we cannot make a success of our membership of the European Union if we constantly talk as though we wanted it to be a failure. They know that if we have pride and a sense of national identity we need not express it in hostility to the ambitions of other countries and contempt for their politicians—[HON. MEMBERS: "Soundbite politics."] With the greatest respect, I think that I have been speaking for longer than a soundbite. Those Conservative Members know that the Euro-sceptics in the Tory party are the tail wagging the dog. They know that they are a minority, even in a Tory party which itself has only a bare majority in Parliament.

There is a majority in the House for constructive engagement in Europe. There will be no vote tonight—there has been no vote on most nights this week and there will be no vote on most nights next week, as the Government trickle out the most threadbare programme that I have seen in any parliamentary Session in my 22 years in the House. But we shall not complete the year of the intergovernmental conference without a vote on Europe.

There will come a night when those Conservative Members who know that the hon. Member for Southend, East does not speak for all their party will wish to demonstrate. As the hon. Member for South Derbyshire said, there are others who disagree with her. Those Conservative Members will then have to ask themselves whether to vote for what they believe will be right for Britain and Europe or to vote for what they know is wrong as a policy for their party. When they are ready to answer that question, we shall be ready to give them an opportunity to demonstrate their answer and to show that there is a majority in Parliament in favour of Britain's future in Europe and only a minority committed to Britain's future as an isolated island on the margins of Europe and in the backwaters of the global economy.

5.29 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief speech in this debate.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and, through him, the Prime Minister in no circumstances to make a statement on the position of the British Government before the conference next summer. I have had many experiences of international negotiations and five years of negotiating in Europe. It is impossible for any Prime Minister or leader to lay down beforehand what he must get from negotiation.

In this Parliament, we have long had a tradition, which has been broken occasionally in recent years, that the Prime Minister and the Government decide what they are going to negotiate and what will or will not be acceptable. Having made their judgment and negotiated, they come back to both Houses for their approval. If we do not approve, that is the end of the Government.

I beg the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister not to make statements at any time before the negotiations, however much they are provoked, about their intentions.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: No, I must be brief.

The House and the present members of the European Union know that the first six members had an enormous advantage because, in each country, every political party supported membership. As the number of members increased—it is now 15—in all countries except one, Britain, all parties supported membership. One country that wanted to join was Norway, but it did not have three-party support for membership. It held a referendum, and the Government who had negotiated lost.

I believe that our position can be consolidated for the first time—if we go the right way about it. All three major parties will be agreed about our membership of the European Union. That is essential, because Britain has no future outside the European Union. The statement of an American spokesman just quoted by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) shows that very clearly, and those of us who have had discussions with the leaders of the other members of the Union, and with Americans, know it vividly. Before that statement, President Clinton had announced that he was not interested in a transatlantic free trade area.

I must tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, whom I greatly admire, that I wish he had not started his first speech as Foreign Secretary by asking for a transatlantic free trade area. The first reason is that the Americans are not interested—they have enough to do to sort out the North American Free Trade Area, especially with Mexico's problems. Secondly, the Americans do not want a transatlantic free trade area, and Europe knows that they do not. Thirdly, from our point of view, his speech made Europe think immediately that we are again trying to ride two horses—that we are not really wholehearted about Europe and that we want to be able to play both sides of the Atlantic together. That is damaging to us.

We should remember that the last negotiation on trade took six years to complete. It was a tough negotiation, and it went only part of the way. The effects of that negotiation will take some time to be felt in business, in trade and in Governments. Further such negotiations will not be possible, even if they were desirable, for many years to come. In the meantime, we must continue the development of the European Union. I hope that too much emphasis will not be placed on a transatlantic alliance, because it raises doubts in the minds of every leader of the Union countries about our real intentions.

There is a possibility of the three parties working out agreements to give us strength in the European Union. I do not believe that this is a matter for party-political warfare before a general election, and I wish that it had not happened in the past. My task in 1960 would have been infinitely easier, and probably successful, if I had been able to persuade Hugh Gaitskell to give me his support. I offered him, as Leader of the Opposition, full information on Privy Council terms from the time I started negotiating, but he refused it. Then, of course, he made his brilliant party conference speech utterly opposing the negotiations. I hope that, with the right attitudes, we will be able to reach agreement.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Edward Heath: No, I am sorry.

There are no answers to many of the questions that have been asked so far in this debate. It is not possible to give answers to such challenges or to say what one would do in certain circumstances or why one has not committed oneself. It is not possible, in the circumstances of a major negotiation in Europe, to commit oneself beforehand. It is very unwise to. I hope that we shall adjust our attitude to Europe, because the present situation does not help anybody and doubtless damages us abroad and in the European Union.

We have to ask what the purpose of isolation is. If we are negotiating satisfactorily, we know that if we want our own way—as people say, in our own interests—we must negotiate with other people about their interests. That is what negotiation is all about. Stating our interest, and saying that that is that, is not a means of negotiation. We must ask ourselves what we are isolating ourselves for.

At times, isolation has been deplorable for us. We were isolated on Black Wednesday, when sterling was devalued by 15 per cent. Nobody was prepared to help us because of our attitude on so many other subjects. We were isolated when the Prime Minister, on his own, tried to change the voting system. Nobody else would support the proposal, so it went down the drain. Those are not examples of desirable isolation. There might be cases in which it is desirable, but we have to ask clearly why we are making ourselves isolated on a particular point.

Other matters have been discussed on which we have tended to be isolated—the military activities of the Western European Union, for example. We tend to take the attitude, which others do not, that nothing more must be established in Brussels and that all these activities must be spread around. That cannot be efficient or operationally successful, so we have to ask ourselves why we are taking that attitude instead of moving forward logically and naturally.

Finally, I shall say a few words about a common currency and the opt-outs on it and the social chapter. The effects of the social chapter have been exaggerated out of all proportion. British firms who have subsidiaries in the

[Sir Edward Heath]

Union are implementing the social chapter completely. They are extending it to their people here. They have no worries about that.

This country had minimum wage arrangements from 1909 until they were abolished by the Government two or three years ago. We had them through party Governments, through wartime coalitions, through the national Governments of the 1930s, and through the post-war Governments of the two different parties. They were abolished only two years ago. What harm were they doing us all that time? We had times of great prosperity and of problems, but they were not due to our arrangements for minimum wages. The problem can be grossly exaggerated and that does not produce any worthwhile result.

Various requirements, which I think are unrealistic, are being made for the single currency. The requirement is for each member country to be in the same economic position. The hon. Member for Livingston went further than others have done in that respect. It will never happen. It does not happen in the United States. Consider the differences between California, New York and President Clinton's home state: they are enormous. The same will be true of Europe. The pattern can be fitted together successfully into a common currency.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Ministers seem to be getting aggravated.

Sir Edward Heath: I am keeping calm.

The most persuasive point is the fact that there is no single market in the world with more than one currency. Imagine the United States with 51 currencies. Imagine Japan with separate currencies for its constituent islands. It is unthinkable, and the reason is that, with more than one currency, member states cheat by manoeuvering their currencies to deal with their problems at any given time. Indeed, that is what we were accused of on Black Wednesday.

If we are to keep a single market, we must move to a single currency as speedily as possible.

The Foreign Secretary spoke of the huge number of regulations emanating from the Commission from 1990 onwards, and of how the Government have managed to reduce the number since then. The simple explanation is that all those regulations paved the way for the single market. Altogether, 272 regulations were needed to get the single market going. They were therefore desirable, and the Commission cannot be blamed for them. After all, we played a major part in bringing the single market about.

Similarly, for every regulation issued on the single market, 12 were abolished in the member countries—another beneficial effect. The people of this country have been misled about the number of regulations pouring out of Brussels and by the idea that we have somehow succeeded in stemming the flow.

Business and industry in the United Kingdom want a single currency. I know that some of my hon. Friends have issued a statement in which they claim to want to re-educate business. I sometimes feel that we might do better to take more notice of what business people think and want, instead of believing that we can do everything on our own and re-educate business leaders. *[Interruption.]* There seems to be a lot of noise behind me.

Public opinion polls also show that 82 per cent. of business men in this country want a single currency. Why? They know that they will have to send out only one invoice, not 15. That means less expense; it means that they can cut prices and have far less trouble in general. Secondly, they know that speculators would never dare touch a single currency. The trouble with one group going ahead with a single currency, leaving others outside it, is that the speculators will operate against those outside, and that can only be damaging for everyone.

The quicker a single currency is achieved, the better. The decision is continually put off by this country, but the other member countries draw their own conclusions from that: that we are not prepared to take a full part in a single currency or a single market within the European Union.

Ever since its creation, the Community has moved forward in leaps and bounds, sometimes of six years, sometimes of 10, sometimes of eight. That is what must happen now with the single currency; it will require a major leap forward. We cannot just shuffle the problem around, tinkering with various solutions. The whole process must be thoroughly worked out and then put into operation. My point concerns speed; we must not wait for 1999 or 2001 or 2010. If we do, the single market will disintegrate. We shall then lose all the fruits of the work done ever since 1950.

The other member countries will not stand for this. If we are left out, we will find ourselves not splendidly isolated but open to attack from every quarter, and in the end we will lose not just the single market but the European Union. I have seen a great deal of the Union, from its creation onwards, and I have listened to the views of its leaders. It is vital that we understand their point of view. We are kidding ourselves if we believe that they all really want to follow whatever we do. Nothing could be further from the truth. They just think how lucky they are to be saved from our position.

I beg the Foreign Secretary not just to announce what we intend to do and then hope that everyone else will follow. I am sure he will not do that. In any case, it would not happen; it would not work. It would damage our interests enormously. What we need to do is to keep this country, as the Prime Minister said, at the heart of Europe. That means working with the other member countries and negotiating and discussing all the time—not insisting on getting our way for the sake of British policy and British interests. The interests of the Union are our interests and, incidentally, ours are the Union's in the long term.

I think it important that the points I have made be taken into account.

5.45 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) always speaks with great authority on European matters, and with good reason. There is always an element of good sense in what he has to say, but I disagree with him on a number of points, and I had better say what they are.

First, however, I shall say what I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about. I agree that the whole argument about the social chapter has been ludicrously exaggerated. Its importance has been so absurdly overestimated because it meets the convenience of Government and

Opposition Front Benchers, who need a bogus political fight on an unimportant part of the treaty so that they can avoid discussing the major, important parts of a treaty on which they are agreed. The really important parts of that treaty deal with economic and monetary union, and with the single currency to which the right hon. Gentleman quite properly addressed most of his speech.

My sources of information differ from those of the right hon. Gentleman. He says that British business and industry are in favour of a single currency. I have with me a survey by the Institute of Export, dated 6 November. Of 1,100 replies to the question,

> "Do you wish to see a single currency in the European Union?",

a majority, 54 per cent. of exporters, said no; 36 per cent. said yes; and 10 per cent. were undecided. Whatever that shows, it does not show a majority in favour.

The right hon. Gentleman must also know that it is possible to have a market with open trade without a single currency. Canada, Mexico and the United States operate an open frontier policy under NAFTA for visible and invisible trade, without a single currency and without the slightest prospect of one. I therefore reject the right hon. Gentleman's link between a single market, or an open market, and a single currency.

Sir Edward Heath: I quoted the CBI's figures for industry, and public opinion polls reported in the press. North America does not have a single market; it is a free trade area—in part.

Mr. Shore: We could spend some time on the precise difference between a free trade area and a single market, but not today. I think the right hon. Gentleman accepts the CBI's figures too easily. I do not believe that it accurately represented its questionnaire and the replies to it.

Mr. Jenkin: The CBI's previous survey showed that only 14 per cent. of respondents were in favour of further European integration. That prompts the rather important question: how do we impose a single currency that does not involve further integration on the whole of Europe? This conflict rather suggests that the business men answering the questionnaires are confused by the phrasing of the questions.

Mr. Shore: That may be the explanation.

My major concern, which I believe is shared by my right hon. and hon. Friends, relates to the third stage of economic and monetary union. So far in this debate, there has been no mention of events on the other side of the English channel—a violent deflationary move by the French Government at a time when France is suffering from persistently high unemployment of more than 11 per cent. The total number of unemployed throughout the Union is 18 million. Why are deflationary measures being introduced not only on a large scale in France but elsewhere in Europe? The reason is that all the countries of Europe are trying to meet the convergence criteria laid down in the Maastricht treaty. The French made no pretence of concealment. They feel that they must reach their 3 per cent. target by 1997 to qualify for monetary union membership in 1999.

The French borrowing requirement was 5.6 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1994 and 5 per cent. in 1995. That leaves a gap of 2 per cent. to close in the two years remaining, which roughly works out at a mixture of tax increases and public spending cuts of £20 billion. France is not the only country to have to deflate. Italy, Spain and many other European states are way above the 3 per cent. of GDP threshold and are strongly deflating their economies by cutting public expenditure and raising taxes to converge in the time scale envisaged. If EU countries that I have not mentioned have no difficulty reaching the 3 per cent. criterion, they are caught on the 60 per cent. of national debt criterion. Only two countries could meet the Maastricht treaty criteria—Luxembourg and Germany. The rest are faced with finding some way of conforming to the criteria.

I have not mentioned Britain, but I will. The Foreign Secretary took it all too easily, saying, "Britain's going to be there. We're going to conform." The newly published Red Book shows that in 1995-96, Britain had a 4 per cent. public sector borrowing requirement, representing £29 billion of expenditure. The new forecast for 1996-97 is £22.5 billion and 3 per cent. PSBR. However, the British PSBR is not the same as the general Government borrowing requirement that is used in measuring convergence under the Maastricht treaty. The major difference is that we count into our accounts and PSBR the receipts from assets. The difference between our PSBR and the measure used to conform under the treaty is roughly equivalent to 1.1 per cent. of GDP. Our PSBR target for 1996-97, which is the last year before convergence, is 3 per cent., but it will be more than 4 per cent. by the European Union's accepted measure. Our forecast for 1997-98 is 2 per cent., but on my interpretation it is bound to be at least 3 per cent. and may be more.

It is not the case that Britain will conform just like that. We too face considerable cuts in public expenditure or increases in taxation if Britain is to conform to the rules of the Maastricht treaty and the convergence provisions. European monetary union is not an easy option for the UK either, which also has major problems of high unemployment—although I willingly concede that the figure is not as high as in France, Spain, Italy and certain other EU states.

As to my own party's approach, I will refer to arguments used in the past and those deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) this afternoon. When we debated the Maastricht treaty, Labour's Front Bench spokesman argued, "The targets of 3 per cent. and 60 per cent. are just guidelines or approximations. There is plenty of flexibility. If things get difficult, there will be no holding us to account on 3 per cent. and 60 per cent." I wonder what the people who made that argument have to say about Herr Waigel's stability pact, which was proposed to the French on 13 November. It allows for a 1 per cent. GDP borrowing requirement, and it argues for and claims an automatic fine on any country that exceeds the 3 per cent. GDP borrowing requirement. If that rule had been in force, and taking into account our behaviour over the past two years, we would have already paid the European Union a fine of £16 billion, which does not make sense. I hope that I have dealt with the ludicrously optimistic argument used in the Maastricht debate, unfortunately, by the individuals who spoke for the Labour party at that time.

Another get-out is used in the document that went before the Labour party conference in October, which has been quoted. It invests a great deal in supporting the Delors white paper, as though it offsets in some way the deflationary effects in not only Britain but Europe

[Mr. Shore]

generally of converging with the treaty criteria. Dare I mention those famous trans-European networks and other things? The sum total of all those expenditures in relation to stimulating the GDP, output and employment of the European Union is negligible. It does not meet the needs in terms of quantity, amount—although the figures are confused—or the time scale in which those expenditures will take place. In general, they comprise large investment that will take years to come to fruition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston spoke helpfully about convergence in the real economy. He was insistent, when answering the questions that I put to him, that there will have to be convergence in the real economy. When I pointed out that nothing about that appears in the Maastricht treaty, he said, "That's too bad for the Maastricht treaty. We are going to have our convergence, otherwise we will not sign up." That is most welcome.

My hon. Friend mentioned that the Swedes have proposed that employment criteria should be written into the revised treaty. I like that idea, but one must be realistic about the degree of support that it will enjoy. Sweden may vote in favour. The incoming British Labour Minister will vote for it. What about the rest? I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston is not in his place. Is he not aware that during the negotiations on the Maastricht treaty there were allegedly socialist Governments in France, Spain and Italy? I would not like to say where those Governments are now when it comes to the law. However, three major socialist Governments who were involved in the Maastricht treaty were unable to secure agreement on the articulation of a high level of employment, let alone full employment, anywhere in the treaty. Why does my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston think that we have only to clap the Swedes on the back and say, "We are with you"? Does he think that in no time we shall be able to convince the other member states to write in the new convergence criteria in the real economy, including a commitment to full employment?

I find that events and comments are moving helpfully against the single currency. Our experience in the exchange rate mechanism in September 1992 is still vivid in our minds. I assure the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who preceded me, that it was not a matter of letting Britain be isolated. In a sense, thank heavens that we were not supported at the then rate of exchange. Imagine that there had been funds available in Europe to prop up the pound at 2.95 against the deutschmark. What would be the level of unemployment in Britain now? The ERM was folly and thank heavens we escaped from it. Are we to expose ourselves to it again? We would have to do so two years before the move to a single currency. We have seen what it has done to France. Political disorders, let alone economic, may ensue. We would be mad to countenance such a move.

I am not sure about tactics but I would keep our opt-out. We might weaken our position in saying no to joining a single currency on the present criteria if we do not maintain our opt-out.

It is interesting to see opinion on the move in Britain and elsewhere. An influential commentator from the Labour party's point of view is an excellent journalist who writes in *The Guardian*, Will Hutton. He is the author of "The State We Are In", a well-received book. Will Hutton convinced himself—no doubt he hoped to convince some of my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench—that we should join a single currency. He is generally an enthusiastic Euro. It is interesting that he has now come to a different conclusion. On 2 November, he wrote:

> "The deflationary effects of the Maastricht ambition to create a single currency must not become so overriding that they create the very social division and friction they were intended to heal."

There is some foresight there. He continued:

> "If Maastricht is seen to be the cause of the dismantling of the welfare system and the social wage upon which millions of the poorest in Europe have come to depend, then it will spark inevitable populist backlashes." Will Hutton sensibly adds:

> "The creation of a single currency by 1999 with its convergence criteria needs to be put aside—in its place might be a parallel currency and a loose exchange mechanism, but anything more would be destabilising."

I welcome the conversion of an influential columnist and writer in my party.

Published in November, again, were the opinions of two gentlemen whom I greatly respect. Brian Hopkin was chief economic adviser to the Government during my time, 1974-79, and possibly slightly before the Labour Government took office. He wrote an article with Brian Reddaway, who is a professor of economics at Cambridge. The argument is summarised as follows:

> "if, as proposed under Maastricht, a single European currency were created and an Independent European Central Bank given control over monetary policy, the arrangement would be likely to disintegrate, or require drastic reconstruction, because the results of its operation would be found intolerable".

That is the opinion of two men of considerable distinction. Their opinions are well worth recording.

I hope that my Front Bench colleagues, as well as Ministers, will think again, and extremely hard, about their commitment to a European single currency. I know that we have set a condition. It could be an important one because it could be the way out of the commitment. The condition of convergence in the real economy is very much worth having. Let us adhere to that. Let us not weaken our position in any way in subsequent legislation.

The intergovernmental conference that is about to open in Madrid will last for at least 18 months. My Front Bench colleagues should be aware that the victors at the next general election will go to Madrid to negotiate the final settlement. That is where a special responsibility falls. That applies to the Government who are playing their hand now and to my Front Bench colleagues, upon whom will fall the great burden and duty of getting things right in the kind of Europe with which we can live as opposed to the Europe that would destroy so much of that in which we believe.

6.6 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): It is a pleasure to take up the remarks of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). He has brought the debate about Europe several stages nearer to reality after the acrobatic performance of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who was so brilliantly exposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

I was pleased that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney began by reminding us that while we all debate the lesser matters that come before Euro summits, as the stage army moves from one capital to another, there are some seismic shifts taking place within the European scene. The situation would be comic if it were not rather worrying for those of us like myself who believe strongly in European unity but who think that the rush to Madrid is to get to the name of the new currency.

I do not know which journalist it was, but he had a real touch when he reminded us in the press of the adage that the more sickly the child the quicker the christening. That is very much a summary of where we are now in terms of the great emu bird or chicklet which, in my view, will never fly. If it does, it will fall rapidly to the ground. More of that in a moment.

The right hon. Gentleman reminded us that the deal, the arrangement or the settlement, even that which prevails from Maastricht, has now begun to unravel. It is not a matter of thinking about France alone, although that country is certainly in all our minds. The tensions are colossal. The agonies of decision facing the French political establishment must be awful. Whichever way it turns, whether it gives in or not, it will be faced with endless pressures and difficulties.

It is not only France that is in difficulties. In Austria, a veering to the hard right continues at great speed. Who knows what the elections in a few days' time will produce? There is almost extreme vocal opposition to the European Union and all its workings.

The situation in Sweden, as has been mentioned, is one of grave hostility to the European Union, which it has joined, and now it proposes—it is probably completely impractical but it is a measure of its desperation—to bung in a series of extra provisions to the Maastricht criteria which, they say, will somehow restore the popularity of the European Union. It will not.

The reflections group, in which my hon. Friend the Minister played such a distinguished and excellent part, has just reported, and if the proposition is that the Maastricht treaty should be revised, that would require a referendum in some countries. France is not compelled to hold one, but several other countries are and the referendums will be lost. If we continue on the present path and the state of flux continues in Europe, ahead lies the prospect of a severe threat to the single market, and the European unity that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) spoke about and for which he had fought would be at risk—not from the Euro-sceptics, the Euro-critics and others who say that things are going too fast but from those who have fanatically pressed ahead with federalist confections.

I was interested to read a comment in the Italian press yesterday about the reflections group. When Italian officials were asked whether they were worried that, apparently, the British had been isolated—in the commentary there was much talk about one country not liking this and another not liking that—the answer was that that was not the worry. The countries that stood against these matters had played a positive part and the real enemy was the fundamentalists. The people who are really the wreckers are those who press for extreme measures in the European system and propose the great leap forward—another terrifying analogy, as we all know where great leaps forward invariably lead—in it.

Those are the things that the House should now be worried about—certainly those of us who support the European process in broad terms, as I have always done. Some items threaten to destroy the European system. That threat gets more dangerous all the time, and if it is not curbed by the British Government, among others, speaking out bravely and boldly—I hope that they will have a White Paper of principle, not on the negotiating detail, as that would be absurd—we shall look grimly on the disintegration of European stability, which has never been in the interests of this country and for which we have fought over hundreds of years, long before anyone thought of the Common Market or the European Union. I am talking about the single currency, which is a very divisive project indeed.

The proposition is that new barriers should be put up to cope with the interface between the countries that are inside the inner core and those that are outside. There is also the proposition for stability pacts and fines, and compensation for the French textile and motor industry, because they would not be able to cope with the competition from the more competitive currencies. There is also the theory that the Italians, who were one of the founder members of the European Common Market, as it was, may be excluded unless there is a fudge. The German electorate is determined that there should not be a fudge, and if there is, it will take its money out of the deutschmark and into the Swiss franc, and so on.

Those are divisive issues on their own, and unless, as I think the Prime Minister said yesterday, they are handled with the greatest sensitivity and care—much more than any indication from some of the blind enthusiasts for the single currency—they will do irreversible damage to the European ideal and to the European single market. They will also blow back on another aspect about which one is entitled to have increasing worries—the European budget and financial structure. We have already heard that enlargement—enthusiasm for it in Brussels seems to be disappearing rather fast—with the present common agricultural policy would add £18 billion to £21 billion a year to the cost for all European contributors to the system, which, of course, would be an intolerable burden. We know also that if we go ahead with monetary union, which would rule out any kind of limited flexibility in exchange rates, the structural and cohesion funds would be vastly increased. We are talking about the prospect of doubling the cost of Europe to the contributors. I do not believe that any Government who tried to double the cost of the European project and impose it on their electorate would survive very long. They would be rapidly turned out of office. These are divisive issues, and the worst thing of all is the threat that they pose to the enlargement process.

I hope that no one will say—I am afraid that they will—that the British position, because it appears to be isolated, is anything other than extremely positive. The hon. Member for Livingston got into a bit of a fix when nailed by my right hon. Friend over the fact that the Labour party, apparently, is against being isolated in principle, but when it comes to the detail he is prepared to be isolated on one or two things. I give him a little comfort in that in a race one is isolated if one is running behind, but also if one is running ahead. We need to do a great deal of running ahead. We should not be reluctant as a Government, Parliament or country to be prepared to run ahead, without having our European credentials

[Mr. David Howell]

automatically questioned, and to make an angry and vigorously positive case for creating the kind of Europe that will stay together and not be rent by these bitter arguments and be undermined by absurd, overcentralisation and false economic arguments of the kind that say that a single market must have a single currency. That is an utterly out-of-date proposition, belonging more to the 19th century and to ancient monetary doctrines than to the modern world.

I believe that the positive position for Britain is there to be made. We have our commitment to enlargement. It is not an afterthought. We are not just saying that it would be nice to bring in the new democracies. The central purpose of the European Union is that it should embrace the whole of Europe. Any backsliding on that must be utterly rejected. If it is said that we cannot do it because we cannot reform the CAP, we must reform the CAP. If it said that we cannot do it because the structural and cohesion funds are wrong, that they would be too expensive, we must look again at the whole structure of those funds.

We must apply our minds much more vigorously than some of our colleagues are prepared to do to enlargement in the IGC. We must apply our minds to subsidiarity much more vigorously, which in my book always meant much more than just saying, "No more centralisation". It means unravelling some of the existing competencies and commitments to centralisation. I know that the debate is between the parties, and it may be slightly blown up and exaggerated, but I have never understood why social policy, which is so sensitive and needs to be so carefully geared to the details and instances of shop floor operation, is amenable to the generalisations and grand principles that are spreading across the European Union. I know that there are some ideas in the social chapter that the Opposition like, but the proposition that our social policy should be "desubsidiarised" and centralised in this way always seemed to me to be miles away from the reality. Subsidiarity is a matter on which we have a lot more to say, and I hope that we will say it with great vigour.

Then we come to the European Court of Justice, about which my hon. Friend managed to make some excellent references in the reflections group report. Clearly, there must be changes to make it a genuinely balanced court of adjudication and much more sensitive to national judicial systems than it is at present.

On the Commission itself, we have tiptoed around the issue of whether its powers are properly defined. Can we stop the "communitisation" that is stretching out into the pillars of justice, home affairs and common foreign security policy in a way that is very undesirable and is very unpopular in Europe? It is not just Britain that thinks that it is unpopular; many countries do and it should be resisted.

Then we come to the matter, which really is one for us in the House, of how we fit national Parliaments into the scheme of things. Everyone pays lip service to that. It is in the Maastricht treaty and in every speech that is made by a political leader, but nothing much comes out of it.

I was full of admiration for the excellent comments in the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation. I see that its Chairman, the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), has a speech there, so he will probably be speaking on it in a moment. His Committee made an interesting proposition to the effect

> "that national parliaments might suggest amendment or rejection of legislative proposals, and that if a prescribed proportion of parliaments made such suggestions, this would have implications for the decision-making procedure in the Council."

In other words—I leave the hon. Gentleman to explain it in more detail—if certain legislative instruments or potential legislative instruments were put before all the national Parliaments, before they were rushed on into the statute law of each member state, and a number of Parliaments gave the thumbs down, those propositions would be rejected. That is an ingenious and good start, not bringing national Parliaments into the European legislative process but asserting our own legislative rights and powers before measures suddenly turn up on our own statute book.

Britain has put forward a range of extremely positive European ideas. If, when we first put forward a new idea we are isolated because we are ahead of the pack, so what? It is an absurd line of attack by the Opposition to criticise the concept of isolation. It is necessary to be isolated to make any progress with new ideas. The British stand, as reflected in the reflections group, and as I hope will be reflected in the IGC, is one of innovation, is pro-European, is pointing the way to keeping Europe together, and is in contrast to those who pretend to be good Europeans and parade their ideas as good Europeans, but in fact are proposing measures which would divide Europe, destroy the single market and undermine everything that we have fought for over the years.

6.21 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The machinations of the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, in his position as a senior Back-Bench Conservative Member of Parliament, are a fair reflection of the difficulties within the Conservative party. Although the right hon. Gentleman and the Foreign Secretary are fundamentally pro-Europeans, it was also self-evident from the Foreign Secretary's speech that they must dress up their pro-Europeanism these days in fundamentally sceptical language.

It is rather depressing to watch that going on. The net result is that the sceptics are more and more driving policy, and that is bad for the Tory party, for the Government and for the country.

Mrs. Currie: It may be an entirely rare occurrence, but I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that there is not a single Euro-sceptic on the Conservative Benches. There may be on the Opposition Benches, but not here.

Mr. Kennedy: There are certainly Euro-sceptics, if that is a term of description, endearment or abuse to which they would answer, on the Labour Back Benches, but there is an important Euro-sceptic on the Conservative Benches, and that is the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), who will be replying to the debate. That is the most fundamentally depressing of all.

The people in the reflections group taking the decisions and making the interventions on behalf of Britain—in this case, the Minister of State—are delivering speeches there that are targeted not at fellow Ministers in the reflections group but, unfortunately, at the domestic Conservative audience back at Westminster and the other parts of the Tory party across the country. That is fundamentally depressing and not helpful.

The Foreign Secretary and his shadow go back a long way. They have been debating with each other and enjoying debating with each other since their earlier political incarnations, when they were both operating at elected level in Edinburgh. The mutual sophistry showed through. The position of those on the Front Benches of the Labour party and the Conservative party is somewhat cynically similar on many matters.

For example, on the issue of enlargement, the Conservatives will the ends. They say that they are in favour of enlargement. They do not appear willing to will the means, which will have to be a logical extension of qualified majority voting.

The Labour party says, as the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did this afternoon, that it wishes to see the achievement of a single currency, but the means by which that would be achieved are means that it knows will not be realised. The Swedish proposal is unlikely, for the reasons that the right hon. Gentleman outlined with great lucidity, to be in the ascendancy in the Union.

Even if it was, there are unlikely to be the further criteria that the Labour party has been saying should be written in. It knows that the criteria will never formally be on the agenda, so it is easy for a Labour Front-Bench spokesman to keep both ends happy by saying that the Labour party wills the objective, knowing that the hurdle that would have to be crossed to obtain that objective never will be crossed. Therefore, we have a degree of mutual cynicism which is not helping the debate in the House.

As we approach the IGC, I hope that the debate will be helped by two sets of events which have not been discussed in this debate at all—one is Northern Ireland and the other is Scotland. Britain has an unwritten constitution. It is deeply unsatisfactory, but it is there, and it is unwritten. The Prime Minister, along with others, is making valiant efforts in favour of the Northern Ireland peace process. We wish him well, and we hope that that meets with success.

If it does, the Government's stated position is that they would wish to see some form of elected body re-established in Northern Ireland. I agree with them. That is a good policy, for which it is worth aiming. But if that success is attained, the minute some form of elected political legislative body is reinstituted in Northern Ireland, the status and rights of Northern Ireland Members vis-a-vis other Members of the House are affected.

Equally, Scotland last week saw the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and others launch the Scottish Constitutional Convention blueprint for re-establishing a Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom. If we go down that route, it will have major constitutional implications for the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, I welcome the fact that those other items are on the British political agenda. They will be deeply relevant to the IGC.

However much Ministers may wish to persuade us that it is not the case, Europe is developing in a decentralised way. We want to encourage that tendency. The great chance of the IGC is to give Europe and the European project a firm push in the direction of more decentralisation, more democracy and more diversity across the nations and the regions of Europe. That means the very principle to which the Government pay lip service, subsidiarity, being applied not just at European level but within the member states of the European Union.

For example, it means that subsidiarity is not a principle that ceases to have any constitutional, political or legal validity the minute one crosses the English channel. It is a principle which the Government are willing to apply in the context of Northern Ireland, and which the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party would wish to see applied in the context of the English regions, Scotland and Wales. It needs to be applied within the United Kingdom and throughout the United Kingdom. Therefore, I hope that the IGC will be a heaven-sent opportunity to move the debate in that direction.

Unlike the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), I would welcome it if the Government were to produce a White Paper setting out their vision of Britain's future in Europe. It may be a rather short one, if that is the task that they are setting themselves. There was no hint of vision in what the Foreign Secretary said today. If they bring such a publication forward, it would be in Britain's best interests if it contained four important principles.

The first is unequivocal support for United Kingdom participation in the development of Europe, deepening it and in due course widening it. The second is a determination to play our part as a country in making the European Union more decentralised, more democratic. The third is an active role for Britain, which we have effectively, in large measure, so far eschewed in preparation for a single currency.

The right hon. Member for Guildford is right to say that no one can predict deadlines for the likely developments on a single currency. In many ways, the most significant feature of the Chancellor's Budget statement was his specific reference to the Maastricht criteria. He is clearly not ruling out the possibility, which is a sensible stance. Given what the Prime Minister said at Question Time this afternoon, however, it is clear that, if the process takes place, it would be insane for this country not to be part of it.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Why?

Mr. Kennedy: Trying to run the pound sterling alongside a single European currency while we were still part of a single market would have as much validity as an attempt by Manhattan to run a separate dollar from the rest of the United States. That is not the real world.

Mr. Mitchell: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that, in a single market, the only way in which a laggardly economy—or one that is not competing with the most successful—can insulate itself and take shocks that would otherwise result in unemployment is through the exchange rate? That is the current experience of Canada and Mexico in the single market in the North American Free Trade Area; it was also the experience of Ireland, which cut its ties in 1979 when sterling was rising too far in a defective single market.

Mr. Kennedy: That last example is the worst that could be cited. In fact, Ireland is rather enthusiastic about the project, and wants to be part of a single currency in due course.

Competitive devaluation—or the prospect or option of such devaluation—is hardly a good basis on which to run an economy. It is not part of any Government's policy to

[Mr. Kennedy]

keep competitive devaluation in the back locker to use when all else has failed; that should not be what democratic Governments are about, whatever their political complexion.

The single currency is often associated with the loss of sovereignty. In real political day-to-day terms, the country would experience a far greater loss of sovereignty and clout internationally if a single currency were introduced and we were not part of it, than if there were not such a currency at all.

Fourthly, as well as playing an active role in European monetary union, we should learn the lessons of Maastricht, which have been referred to. The House did not cover itself in glory during that exercise. There was never any proper debate; the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and I sat through hours of discussion, and all too often—whichever section of the treaty was being dealt with—we would hear a defensive speech from a Minister and a cagey speech from the Opposition Front Bench, but no real debate, because there was no difference between the Front Benches in regard to the fundamentals. The debate would then take place on the Back Benches.

There are two lessons to be learned from that. First—I voted for this at the time, and I hope that, if the IGC proves to have constitutional implications, we will pursue the policy—we should have had a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. The matter should have been debated openly, in public. The House failed to achieve that at the time.

Secondly, some of the Labour party's clever tactics—or so they appeared then—may now be viewed with some dismay in retrospect, and seen for the mistakes they were. By concentrating on the social chapter—which served both Front Benches only too well—and building up the Conservative Euro-sceptics, Labour helped to create a monster that is now increasingly out of control and doing immense damage to our position in Europe.

It would be good to see the Government taking a far more positive role, but I do not for a moment think they will. They are locked into a vortex of Euro-scepticism, in which the only audience that counts is the section behind them and the electorate; they are not concerned with the long-term interests and future of Britain, and Britain within Europe.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: Yes, although I was about to end my speech.

Mr. Spearing: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given way, because my intervention relates to his party. There are sceptics and divisions in both the two main parties, but—with, perhaps, one exception—the hon. Gentleman's party wishes to "move ahead". Given all the troubles and difficulties that we see directly across the channel—and perhaps in other European countries as they try to meet the required terms—why is a single currency so essential? We have had first the common market and then the single market, with all their supposed benefits; why must people press ahead, as the hon. Gentleman is, to achieve something that leads to so much trouble, dissent and perhaps disunity?

Mr. Kennedy: I do not want to become involved in a long discussion about the current problems in French politics, but I believe that there is more to those problems than the Maastricht convergence criteria.

Let us consider the credibility difficulties experienced by our Government over the tax issue since the last election, when they had to go back on their promises. Those difficulties pale into insignificance in comparison with the credibility problems of the Gaullist Administration, who promised 18 impossible things before breakfast in the run-up to the election, and have disallowed each and every one of them at a rate of knots since that election. I believe that France's difficulties have much more to do with that than with the perception being peddled in some quarters that the French citizenry have suddenly taken to the streets because of the Maastricht convergence criteria.

Let me also tell the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) that anyone who talks to those involved in business and industry will be left in no doubt that the superficial attractions of competitive devaluation are outweighed by the long-term steadiness of knowing what the exchange rate will be in relation to other currencies. For many a small business, that still makes the difference between boom and bust.

I am not talking about the ICIs and Shells of this world, but about the small business sector. I believe that, in due course, it is that sector that will drive the single currency issue forward. As and when the currency arrives, we should be part of it.

I advocate a positive and constructive role for the IGC, but I am not at all optimistic. I think that, if the IGC does prove to have constitutional implications for the country, we should reconsider the possibility of a referendum to make the debate public, and to marginalise—as we are not managing to do in the House of Commons—that part of the Tory party, in particular, that seems to exert excessive influence on the Government of the day.

6.36 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I must take issue with the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy)—as he would probably expect me to—following his suggestion that the "sceptic" element is now driving our party policy. He knows very well, as, I think, does the whole House, that there is a good streak of scepticism in every hon. Member, just as there is in the country as a whole. Everyone has reservations about aspects of the European Union. It is a question of degree: there is a measure of scepticism in everyone.

I also take issue with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). In discussing the single currency, he used the analogy of the United States and Japan, pointing out that both those great economic areas had a single market and a single currency. They also have one Government, however, and we do not want that in Europe. We are happy to have a single market and to trade as we do; we are happy to have political links. What we do not want is a single currency that could lead rapidly to a single Government. I do not think that the British people would vote for that, although I accept that it is Liberal party policy.

Much has been said today about the possibility of a White Paper on the future development of the European Union. Hon. Members may recall—certainly, my hon. Friends will—the publication of two documents a long time ago. One was called "The Right Approach"; the other was called "The Right Approach to the Economy". Both were published by the Conservative research department. Those two documents set our party on the road to victory in the late 1970s.

A sequel has now been published, entitled "The Right Approach to Europe". That document, also produced by the Conservative research department, was on the bookstalls before this year's Conservative party conference. It set out clearly the principles on which our party is addressing the European Union's development, and led to the considerable degree of agreement at that conference, when many political opponents were expecting and hoping for a split right down the middle. Today's debate has shown a split over Europe, not in the Conservative party, but clearly in Labour party, whose Front-Bench team seems to be split in two.

Our party conference debates also demonstrated that clear blue water exists between the Conservative party and the other parties on the important issue of the development of European union. The policies that the Conservative party has adopted go much more with the grain of public opinion than those of any other.

The choice before the British people is absolutely clear: if one wants a federal Europe, one votes Liberal Democrat; if one wants a centralised Europe, run out of Brussels, one votes Labour; and if one wants a Europe of nation states, working together when appropriate, but where the major decisions affecting Britain's future are taken in Britain, one votes only Conservative.

I and the country at large will endorse that if it ever comes to a vote, but, before anyone gets too excited, I should say that, when the time comes to visit the hustings, there will not be all that many votes on the question of Europe. If, however, it is one more issue where Conservative Members are more with the grain of public opinion than our opponents, one or two critical marginal constituencies will fall to us rather than to the other two main parties.

Most of today's speeches have concentrated on the politics and economics of the European Union, and some speeches will no doubt touch on foreign policy, too, but I want to concentrate on security—both the architecture for security and the mechanics for it. I hope that hon. Members will note that I use the word "security", not "defence", because common foreign and security policy will be discussed at the intergovernmental conference, and the thing about security is that it stretches beyond merely defence.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made an interesting suggestion during his speech. In discussing economic development, he referred to the possibility of a European Mediterranean free trade area. That is precisely what I mean.

To give an example on the question of the security of Europe, the Select Committee on Defence has been considering the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and its southern flank. We realise that, in discussing the security of Europe, we must look beyond the boundaries of the European Community and of NATO. If we cannot within the European Union have generous and free policies on trade, we will not succeed in meeting the economic needs of developing nations outside our area.

Without that success, we will not be able to avoid the political and economic conditions that can eventually lead to economic breakdown, to civil disobedience, to internal conflict, to terrorist activity, to insurrection and then, as sure as night follows day, to external military adventures. When we discuss security, therefore, we must think in terms of the European Union doing its best to help the developing countries on our borders.

That is probably the most effective way of preventing strife, and will do more to defend Europe's nation states than having just a mass of military weaponry and men under arms. That matter was dealt with on 26 and 27 November during the Barcelona conference of Ministers. I should like to hear what is said about that matter in the winding-up speech.

In discussing the question of security, there is also the matter of the spread of drugs and of mass immigration—both extremely sensitive matters. North Africa is a region of considerable insecurity. Countries there, in common with many others, have problems of over-population and of shortage of water. In trying to anticipate from where trouble may come, one will find that there is a common denominator in and a close link between shortage of water and over-population, and potential flashpoints for strife.

What do we want to emerge from the intergovernmental conference in relation to security? The first question involves the Western European Union's future development. I regret that we ever changed the name of the European Economic Community to the European Union, because there is a great deal of confusion in people's minds, and they automatically connect the two. The WEU is not new—we should remind ourselves of that. It is based on the Brussels Treaty Organisation of 1948. It was modified in 1954, and it includes a mutual security undertaking, exactly like that involving NATO in article V of the Washington treaty.

Admittedly, the WEU had become a bit moribund, but it was reactivated in 1984 as the European pillar of NATO. The Maastricht treaty gives the WEU a dual role—first, as that NATO pillar, and secondly, as the European Union's defence component. We must decide the extent to which it is complementary to the NATO commitments, or if there is a danger that it will result in the duplication and undermining of NATO.

The types of task that the WEU expects its military capabilities to be employed on were set out in the 1992 Petersburg declaration. Those are crisis management, combat operations, peacekeeping, including embargoes and sanctions enforcement, humanitarian rescue missions and evacuations. Those tasks could effectively be undertaken by European Union member states, either singly or in partnership. They do not need the WEU to provide a co-ordinating authority for those tasks to be done.

It is significant that many of those tasks cannot be undertaken without help from NATO, in particular the United States of America. For some of them to be achieved, one needs intelligence and surveillance. Often, one needs heavy lift, either by air or by sea, and logistical support. My first conclusion, therefore, is that there should be no new WEU full membership without full membership of NATO.

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

The WEU has 14 members and four observers—Ireland, Austria, Sweden and Finland, which are all already European Union members. Of course, those four countries jealously guard their neutrality. How would they feel if there were a common EU defence policy? They would not be too happy.

What about the nine countries that are associate WEU members—the Visegrad four, the three Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Romania—and, of course, with the United States and Canada, the only two non-WEU NATO members, sitting on the sidelines? It is significant that, if the EU and WEU were merged, as some people advocate—it seems that it is beginning to emerge that the Labour party supports such a merger—and if it were necessary for new WEU members already to be full NATO members, the United States of America would effectively have a veto over additional applications to join the EU, which is totally dotty.

The other thing that must be decided at the IGC is whether the EU and the WEU integrate, or whether there should at least be a subordination of the WEU to the EU. Again, the Labour party seems to be split on that matter. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did not answer the direct question put to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. Perhaps we will hear an answer in the winding-up speech.

It is suggested that the United Kingdom stands alone in opposing a merger between the European Union and the WEU. That is not so. There is a great deal of reservation among other member states. When the Select Committee on Defence was in the Iberian peninsula recently, we were interested to hear from our Portuguese friends—Britain's oldest ally—who said:

> "The fundamental rule we believe should be retained is the principle of national sovereignty in defence issues . . . we cannot imagine how declarations of war could be decided by majority voting."

That sets out the matter clearly—NATO and the WEU already operate by consensus, not by majority voting. It is impractical to have a merger of the WEU and the EU.

The IGC could also help with the clarification of the different security organisations that exist currently, and to establish what their roles should be. We have the WEU. We had the CSCE—the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, which is now the OSCE—the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe—because it is an operating body. Under NATO, we have the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, the North Atlantic Council and the partnership for peace. It has been suggested that we might have a CSC-Med, which might not be a bad idea. There is scope for a fresh look at the different structures we require for security in the light of the peace dividend and the collapse of the iron curtain.

There could be a little tidying up of some of the force structures. The combined joint task forces were launched at last year's NATO summit for Euro-led missions. There is the EuroCorps, EuroFor, EuroMarFor and FAWEU—the forces available to the WEU. There are many different structures, and there is a great deal of overlap. There are many different headquarters, and a large number of staff.

One of the problems may be that, although we got rid of a lot of soldiers, sailors and airmen when we rationalised our armed forces across Europe, we are left with too many generals, air marshals and admirals. I sometimes feel that they do not have enough to do except sit in headquarters trying to invent new enemies. It is extremely urgent to clarify the European security and defence identity.

The problem with NATO is that it has effectively concluded its mission. It succeeded in keeping the Americans in, as we say, and keeping the Soviet Union out. I am glad that France is now back on many of the NATO committees. That might begin to undermine the argument that the main role of the WEU is to keep the French on side. The time has come to review all those various organisations. NATO in particular needs to think about its future role. It has 60 different headquarters in its area of activity, which cannot be economic. The time has come for a full review.

The best way to prevent war—that is what security is all about—is through trade and economic growth. We should never forget that that has been the principal objective of the European Union from the days of the founding fathers.

My last thought is about the recently announced appointment of Mr. Javier Solana as Secretary-General of NATO. That is as good an example of poacher turned gamekeeper as I have ever known. It probably shows in political terms a greater U-turn than that performed by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). If Mr. Solana can persuade his countrymen to vote to come within the integrated military structure of NATO, he will have earned his place as the Secretary-General of one of the most important defence structures in existence.

6.54 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): As Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, I welcome this debate. Although there has not been much mention of our report so far, I am sure that the Minister would like to say a few things when he replies to the debate.

In my brief contribution I hope to be as pragmatic as usual. I am tempted to deal with some of the issues that have been raised in earlier contributions, but I feel that it would be more helpful if I confine my remarks strictly to the report. That may provide more emphasis for the issues that we have addressed during our inquiries.

I want to thank my Committee and its staff for the work that they have put into preparing the report. My Committee has 16 members—nine Government members and seven Opposition members. There is a wide range of views, from that of the Euro-sceptics to that of the Euro-fanatics and the Euro-agnostics—of course I am referring only to Government members when I say that. In spite of that wide range of views, there has been tremendous co-operation during our work and during preparation for the publication of our findings, and I should like to record my appreciation for the excellent work carried out by my colleagues.

It is important that we recognise the tremendous work of our staff, including the clerks, advisers, and the secretariat. It is not usual to name individuals, but I want to mention my senior clerk, Robert Rogers, whose expertise in European legislation has no equal. Our findings owe a great deal to his valuable contribution. I record my appreciation for the work carried out by Robert.

The debate comes at an opportune time and I hope that it will help to meet the great need to involve more parliamentarians in the scrutiny process and/or educate right hon. and hon. Members on how best they can contribute to and involve themselves in that process.

Democracy and transparency will be the two key themes of the 1996 IGC. How do we make the European Union more responsive to its citizens and how do we make it more understandable and accessible? The Select Committee's report, which is before the House today, shows just how bad things are. Part IV reveals a litany of failure. For example, it shows how European legislation appears to be made in a private club and how the Council is prepared to discuss laws on the basis of an unofficial text, which would be unthinkable in our national Parliaments. It shows how translation and transmission delays often mean that proposals arrive in national Parliaments after laws have been approved. It shows how, time and again, the Commission fails to meet deadlines for the production of proposals and how proper discussion in member states is prevented. It shows how important matters appear on the agenda of the Council of Ministers at the last moment. It shows how documents travel not by e-mail but by snail mail, because there is no proper electronic transfer system that links the European institutions and all the national Governments and Parliaments. On a day when a probe from the earth has reached Jupiter, surely that is not too much to ask.

What about the jargon and the Euro-speak? I think of them as the dry rot of the European Union, because they can ruin any idea, no matter how good, and any proposal, no matter how sound. As we say in our report:

> "If the Union is to move closer to the citizen, then it must speak in a language that the citizen recognises as his or her own."

Our report is uncompromising on all those issues because we do not believe that there is room for compromise where the interests of the people of this country are so fundamentally affected. I am delighted to say that our views have been widely endorsed. We sent our report to every Parliament, to every European Affairs Committee and to every Foreign Minister in the Union. Last month, at a meeting of all the European Affairs Committees in Madrid, there was widespread support for both our criticisms and our proposals.

I want to pick up on a key recommendation. We see national Parliaments as a focus for democratic legitimacy in the Union. Without their full involvement and consultation, the Union would lose its way. We suggest that there should be a minimum period of four weeks between any proposal with legislative implications arriving in every national Parliament—in the correct language and in an official text—and that proposal being considered by the Council. Let us try to bring some sanity and order to the way that Europe does its business.

It may surprise the Minister, but I want to compliment the Government. The Minister took our four-week proposal to the reflections group; he argued for it and the group endorsed it. It is clear from my conversations with Carlos Westendorp, the able chairman of the group, and from the group's final report, that the importance of orderly decision making, proper information and the role of national Parliaments are well understood by the group. I hope that they will also be well understood by the IGC.

The Minister may think that Christmas has come three weeks early, but I want to say two other nice things about the Government. First, I thank them for arranging this debate today. It will not, of course, clear the five documents that we have recommended for debate, because this is only an Adjournment debate. However, there will be a further debate in European Standing Committee B after Christmas. That will also be a good opportunity to consider the outcome of the Madrid European Council.

Secondly, I thank the Minister for the Government's constructive reply to our report. It shows a real appreciation of the problems and, I hope, a real willingness to tackle them. The Government have asked for further views from my Committee on a number of aspects and we hope to respond soon.

However, I must sound a warning. The problems are not to be solved by rhetoric. When the Maastricht treaty was being negotiated, somebody must have said—it was probably in the middle of the night—"Hang on a minute, what about national Parliaments? Will not they feel left out?" So the national Governments stuck on to the Maastricht treaty a declaration on the role of national Parliaments. It sounds wonderful. It states:

> "The Governments of the Member States will ensure that National Parliaments receive Commission proposals for legislation in good time for information or possible examination."

In fact, as our report shows, that turned out to be a sham. The declaration is routinely ignored by the very Governments who agreed it so solemnly. High-flown commitments, intentions and undertakings will no longer do. Better ways of doing business must be legally enforceable and must give national Parliaments their full and proper role.

I hope that the House will forgive me if I end with a short advertisement for the Committee that I have the honour to chair. Some hon. Members are critical of our European scrutiny system, although I suspect that most of them do not read the reports that they criticise. I am not sure that many of them attend the Standing Committees; certainly, not many of them have attended tonight's debate.

The House of Commons Select Committee on European Legislation examines well over 1,000 documents a year. It assesses their legal and political importance, their financial implications, their likely effects on British interests, how well they are drafted, whether they are consistent with other Union policies, and so on. We are in constant dialogue with Government Departments to get the information that we need and we try to ensure that the Departments observe their obligations to this House. We co-operate closely with our sister Committee in the other place. We produce a report virtually every week that the House sits and we report substantively on more than 400 documents each year. Those reports are key sources of information for both hon. Members and their constituents. I hope that that will be the case with our IGC report and its extensive glossary.

We recommend 70 or 80 documents for debate every year, but it often appears that the excellent system of European Standing Committees, in which Ministers can be questioned for an hour on their policy on a particular European proposal and then have that policy debated, is greatly underused. Some hon. Members might not realise that any hon. Member can attend and speak in any European Standing Committee. We often say that our parliamentary opportunities are limited, but I have just referred to one that is definitely underused.

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

My Committee is continuing with the next stage of our work that relates to the IGC. We will be looking at the effectiveness of the European scrutiny system in the House and determining what improvements can be made. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will feel free to tell us their ideas.

I have some bad news for the Minister, but as he has had three compliments already he has not done too badly out of the deal. One of the areas on which my Committee will be focusing is the performance of Departments, which has been steadily declining over the past couple of years. Indeed, in some Departments the performance is nothing short of lamentable. I know that we will have the full support of Ministers, as well as the House, in that aspect of our work.

The matters that I have discussed this evening are not glamorous; some may think them unimportant. However, unless the Union works in an orderly, professional way, involving its citizens and their representatives in national Parliaments, the grander ideas for the future of Europe will come to nothing. In our report, we said that there seemed to be three in-trays in Europe: one labelled "difficult"; the second labelled "too difficult"; and the third labelled "exciting and visionary". The problem is that only the third in-tray is ever emptied. We must be prepared for the hard work of dealing with the first two in-trays as well.

7.9 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I am sure that the whole House is very grateful to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), not only for his speech this evening but for his work, the work of his Committee and the work of those he has enumerated who support it. We are also grateful for the impact that the Committee has already made, not only in the House but in the European Union as a whole, including the reflection group, on which we are represented by my hon. Friend the Minister.

Clearly, virtually everyone—indeed, those who take any interest in the European Union are almost unanimous on it—agrees on the need to take the operation of the Union closer to the people and to make it better understood. Obviously, the much enhanced and improved role of national Parliaments will be vital in that process. Therefore, the Committee's recommendations are obviously of great importance.

I should like to make a plea at this stage in our venture into the European Union to—almost—start again. We have gone through two or three very difficult years, not only, without doubt, in the Conservative party but in the nation as a whole. There is a frenzy and a froth related to European issues which is extremely unhelpful and, indeed, unhealthy. I offer three little words as our criteria for approaching the next stage of development of the European Union. They are: clarity, calmness and honesty—qualities that have been singularly poorly adhered to over the past year or two.

In particular, of course, we have had problems in our own ranks. One of the reasons is that we have been playing games with the media and the media have been playing games with us. Sadly, the words "calmness", "clarity" and "honesty" do not spring to mind when one thinks of the British media in their present state or of the European Union. I very much hope that all of us who genuinely want to develop a really constructive relationship with our European partners will stop playing games with the media. Of course, the media like playing games with us because that sells papers, it is much more fun and it makes a good story out of something that is otherwise workmanlike and mundane.

One of the problems with the media lies, of course, in ownership. It is often said, when talking about the European Union, that there is a group of foreigners who are working extremely hard to damage British interests. That may be true, but the people about whom we ought to be talking are not Belgians in Brussels, or Germans or French; I happen to think that we ought to be talking about an Australian—who took United States nationality for commercial reasons—a Canadian, and a gentlemen who is a dual citizen of Britain and France and a Member of the European Parliament for a French constituency.

Those gentleman have very strong views on Britain and Europe; they are hostile to Britain's constructive relationship with the EU. Because of their power and the influence that they wield, they are able to do great damage. All of us who want to ensure that we develop a fruitful relationship—we may have our differences on how we get there—should be extremely careful not to give those gentlemen, shall we say, the weapons with which they can go about their own affairs.

These gentlemen constantly drip, drip, drip vitriol and disinformation into the British people. The harm caused is obvious to us all and we should do everything that we can to stop it. If we could—I agree that it is an optimistic objective—introduce some clarity, calmness and honesty in the media, and our dealings with them, that would certainly be an immense step forward.

We should apply the same principles to our European partners too. We should not lacerate ourselves, and either think that we are always right, as some of us tend to do, or think that we are always in the wrong, and that those on the other side of the net always get it right. Certainly, mistakes are continuing to be made among our partners, although many of the mistakes of what I would call the Maastricht frenzy were quickly recognised. Many continental European politicians were the first to say that such mistakes must be avoided and—as I said—that we must get closer to the people.

We must look very carefully at any initiative that exists. Of course the one at the forefront of all our minds at the moment is the single currency. Above all, with an issue of that nature, nothing is more needed than a good deal of calmness and a great deal of clarity and honesty. I certainly believe that the prima facie case for a single currency is extremely strong. We need not elaborate on that in this debate. Of course there are downsides to it, but my instincts are that it makes a great deal of sense and has many advantages.

I also believe—here I certainly agree with the line taken by my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench—that the difficulties inherent in this grand project have not fully and honestly been faced by any of us or by its protagonists in other countries.

There has been much talk about the convergence criteria. I believe that they are essential. The sort of thing advanced by the Labour party is unrealistic. The criteria of Maastricht—inflation, interest rates, budget deficit and public debt—are good and necessary. I say to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), with whom I regularly joust in these debates, that yes, we could argue about the pace of restructuring that is now applied in France, but that does not negate the desirability of those criteria, which any self-respecting, good-housekeeping Conservative considers entirely right. If one were an unreconstructed Keynesian, I could well imagine that those criteria would not seem desirable, but there are not many unreconstructed Keynesians left—although I think that at least three of them are in the Chamber this evening.

France's problems lie in the legacy of 14 years of socialist presidencies, not with the fact that it is trying to get its house in order now. Perhaps the problems are mainly caused by the pace at which it is trying to do that and the style that it is adopting. I submit, to anyone who has any doubts, that we as Conservatives should not be in the least hostile to those criteria because, regardless of a single currency proposal, we should aim to meet the targets that they represent. I am happy to say that, given the way in which the economy is developing, there is every reason to expect that, in the next year or two, we shall indeed meet those criteria.

On the single currency and my themes of clarity, calmness and honesty, an issue that has not been addressed, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister regularly seeks to put on the agenda, is the relationship—as, when and if a single currency group is created—between the first tier and the second tier, between the inner core and the outer core. Clearly, there are many problems—competitive devaluation, different standards of living and, possibly, the reintroduction of tariffs. What do those problems mean for the single market? There are many serious questions to be answered and they should be looked at positively. I believe instinctively that a single currency is the right way forward, but that is not to say that we should sweep those questions under the carpet and ignore them.

When we talk about British interests, which we must always do in this connection, we should never forget the challenges, to put it mildly—the threats to Britain—of a core single currency bloc with Britain left outside. What Britain needs is what every economy needs, but our position is slightly different because we depend on international trade and its impact on the City. What we need above all is stability and low interest rates. Those two targets would be achieved within the single currency and it would be quite impossible to achieve them outside.

When we approach the matter, let us cut out the emotion. Yes, we must look at the sovereignty issue, but we should all recognise that any British Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he stands at the Dispatch Box to deliver his Budget, is not sovereign in any sense; he cannot ignore what is going on in the rest of the world, the balance of trade, interest rates and currency movements. We must use the wonderful word "sovereignty" with the greatest care and the greatest honesty so that we do not send up a great flame of emotion about the concept of sovereignty when we look at issues and interests that are vital to our nation.

I have a suggestion for a number of those who seem to take pride in the title "Euro-sceptic". I have always thought of it as a negative label. One wonders what they are sceptical about. I should like them to approach the issues again, with the criteria of clarity, calmness and honesty. I have always asked those of the sceptic persuasion, from whichever side of the political divide they come, the same question. We know what they are against and we know what they do not believe in. Over the years, we have heard many times what they are against and what they do not believe in. What we really need to know is what they do believe in and what they do support. Do they, for example, believe that this country can hold its own with the continental economies? Do they believe that we need to live in a country in which our national unit of currency is constantly devalued? I do not believe that.

I believe that we can look the Germans and the other economies in the face. We do not need to rely on constant and competitive devaluations. Do the Euro-sceptics believe that? That is the kernel of it. I believe that there are many areas of national activity—not only the economy but security, the environment and many other issues—where Britain's best interests are served by constructive collaboration with our European partners. Do the Euro-sceptics believe that? If not, what do they suggest instead?

I believe that the United Kingdom's political powers and interests are better served by working in conjunction with our European partners. That seems so obvious that it is hardly worth debating. One gets the impression—a false impression with some—that the constant negative carping means that we lose sight of the crucial positive. I say to Ministers that we need more from them. We need more emphasis on the benefits that Britain obtains from membership of the European Union and on the benefits that we can obtain in future.

I know the problems that Ministers have. When I raise the point with them, they say, "Our speeches are balanced. We have a nice paragraph or two about how we want to be in Europe and about how we are getting benefits. We then go into the corrective bits, because who would argue that there are not things to be corrected in Europe? However, the media only pick up the carping, the negative bits and the nagging at the European Union." That may well be the case, but it is all the more reason for Ministers to redouble their efforts to remind people that membership of the European Union is of fundamental importance to our country. Such a reminder is needed now because of the intense and negative campaign to which our constituents have been subjected for three or four years.

People have genuinely forgotten the huge achievements of peace, security, international co-operation and economic co-operation, and the potential of this huge market. They have forgotten that in all the rigmarole about lollipop ladies who have to carry signs in German and maps of Britain which have "Mercia" written on them—all that nonsense. There is a task for Ministers. It is a task we all share as Back Benchers, but people need to hear about the positive aspects from the Government. I quote a leading spokesman, of whom our party is very proud, who stated 20 years ago:

> "We are inextricably a part of Europe . . . Europe is where we are and where we have always been."

Those are the words of the now Baroness Thatcher on 16 April 1975. Those words were right then and they are right now.

7.26 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It was good to have the routine, ritual recitation of regular clichés by the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney)—the debate

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

would not have been the same without them. There is a routine in these debates: the Euro-sceptics versus the old septics in the hon. Gentleman's case.

Although these debates have always been an exchange of stereotypes, I sense that they are becoming more serious, more realistic and more accurate—all accusations from which I exempt the hon. Gentleman. He is still crazy after all these years—a Foreign Office clock stopped in 1972. Indeed, he is the best manifestation I know of the lemming mentality. If people in Brussels jump over a cliff, we must follow them because we cannot be left behind. It would be uncommunautaire not to jump over any available cliff Europe jumps over.

The hon. Member for Wycombe told us about the benefits of membership before we went into Europe and it turned out to be a disaster. He told us about the joys of the exchange rate mechanism before we went in and it turned out to be a disaster. He now praises monetary union in the same terms. We view his arguments in the same light as we do the consequences of his other arguments.

I am afraid that what the hon. Gentleman talks about—the Labour party talks about this too in a sense—is a mystical Europe, a Europe of dreams and a Europe that does not exist. We are talking about Europe as we would like it to be, not about the club to which we belong, which is basically a coalition between France and Germany to force their interests on the Community and to bribe a peripheral Club Med of smaller states to go along with what they want. It is a hard commercial relationship and the consequences of our lack of success in that hard commercial relationship are now coming through to the British electorate.

What the hon. Member for Wycombe called the frenzy, the froth and the negativity is the process of discovery of the pain and consequences of membership. It is still all disguised by the usual litany of lies. Membership of the European Community has polluted politics in this country. Failure must be portrayed as success and the advocates of going in will never admit that they are wrong, so they must say that we are doing well although we are manifestly not.

I have a point for the hon. Member for Wycombe and the Euro-enthusiasts who still survive in this country. I see that the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) is with us, so some Euro-enthusiasts still survive; she is perfectly preserved, I might add. They should tell us the truth.

As I see it, the consequences of membership have been disastrous for this country. The White Paper told us that there would be no benefit from membership unless the growth rate increased substantially, yet it actually fell with our membership. Unemployment has quadrupled, and imports' share of our market has trebled since we joined. We have therefore got ourselves into a trade deficit in visible trade, and also a massive public deficit, because we have shrunk the tax base and destroyed more of our industrial base than any of our competitors.

What caused all that? Was it due to the far-sighted efforts of a Conservative Government who have been in power for 16 years, or was it due to the consequences of our membership of that malign Community, so weighted against us? Conservative Euro-enthusiasts should tell us which one did the damage. Why are we in this mess? Was it their Government, or was it their enthusiasm for Europe, that gave us all those benefits?

Economically, we have had our worst years since we entered that relationship, and now the politics of hypocrisy are emerging. The reality is that both parties are split. It is a foolish game for either major party to pretend that it is united on the issue. It is also foolish to trade the insults and stereotypes that we have heard today.

Both parties will stand up for Britain and will do their best in the negotiations, but both will be overruled, because to stay in and to belong they will have to go along with whatever folly is demanded, whether that be the Maastricht treaty or whatever emerges from the intergovernmental conference. We are always told, "Move along, or be left behind." Although both parties would stand up for Britain if they were in power, in fact they are always dragged along behind, and simply because people try to disguise that we are left talking about a Europe that is not real. It is like talking about a cloud of gas.

It is interesting to see how attitudes to Europe have changed. In the 1970s we were told that membership of the European Community—or the Common Market, as it then was—was a great bulwark against Bennery. Apparently the treaty of Rome, a capitalist treaty, would stop the forces of socialism in this country. But now we are told that that same Community really represents socialism creeping across the channel from Brussels. What was a bulwark against Benn has become a tide of socialism dragging this country down.

Both sides are confused, so the politics of hypocrisy are emerging on both sides of the political divide—and they are at their worst when people talk about monetary union. Europe has gone down the path of monetary union because that was the only way to build union. The politicians cannot get the democratic consent of electorates, because electorates will not vote for union, and they cannot get agreement between Governments because in the process of deal-making and discussions inside Europe Governments tend to construct a camel. They therefore decided to go down the monetary road.

Lord Jenkins of Hillhead avows as much in his autobiography—or his "alibiography", as it might be called. In 1979 Europe began to go down that road because it was the only road open. The logic is quite clearly that if we have a single currency we shall need the institutions to manage it, and the huge redistribution system that will be necessary to remove the consequences—that is, the damage that monetary union will do to the backward regions and the weaker economies.

The redistribution system will have to be monstrous and enormous. In a nation state one can move money around. If Scotland or the north is not doing too well, we can have a regional policy, unemployment benefit and public spending on roads and other infrastructure in the area. But Europe cannot do that. Europe is not a nation state and it controls only about 1 per cent. of Europe's GDP. If we had a single currency we would need the machinery to redistribute money on an enormous scale to offset the disastrous consequences of monetary union for the poorer areas.

That bill would have to be paid, as the bill had to be paid to merge the currencies of East and West Germany. The Germans were prepared to pay that bill, for kith and kin, but there is no set of institutions or relationships that would pay the bill after monetary union. That is the unspoken bill that will come to us at the end of the whole process, but everyone keeps quiet about it.

Mr. Spearing: I was given to understand that one of the reasons why West Germany was keen on the union of the then single market was that that would enable it to provide support for its southern areas at the expense of the north. Does my hon. Friend agree that where there is more competition, which is supposed to be one of the benefits of a single market, the better-off areas get even richer and the worse-off areas get even poorer? That involves not simply the recirculation that my hon. Friend mentioned, but a centralised financial and political power to collect the money and redistribute it.

Mr. Mitchell: That is a consequence of a single market, too, but it would be compounded by a single currency. In a single market a country can at least cushion itself and take shocks on the exchange rate rather than putting people out of work. That cannot be done with a single currency, so the machinery and scale of redistribution will have to be much bigger.

With all those disadvantages, there is only one consolation about monetary union: the simple fact that it will not work. It will rip the weaker economies apart. That realisation is growing—but not, as other hon. Members have pointed out, among the elite of Europe. There is a deep gulf between the people of Europe, who feel apprehensive, worried and anxious, and are being hit by the consequences of the move to a single currency, and the elite. That is happening in France, in particular, but it is happening in Italy and Belgium too. The people are being hit by rising unemployment and cuts in public spending, but the elite maintains its enthusiasm undiminished, because it is immune from the consequences. The elite is losing touch with reality.

The result is that Governments approach the issues backwards. Look at Italy. It did well out of leaving the exchange rate mechanism, because its exchange rate came down. The Italians also wisely decided to send many politicians to prison, which destroyed confidence in the currency, and the lira fell even further. Italian manufactured exports then became enormously competitive, and a deficit in trade has been turned into a surplus within two years.

Italy is now trying to bring the exchange rate back up, because the Prime Minister is a former reserve banker and the Italian Government are desperate to get into monetary union—all unaware of the fact that the terms of convergence for monetary union were deliberately written by the Germans so as to exclude Italy. Italy is almost the last nation that the Germans want to let in, yet Italy is now trying to submit itself to targets and to hurdles that were deliberately built high to prevent it from jumping them.

The Labour party says that monetary union might be a good thing, but that we must change the terms of convergence so that there is real convergence—in fact, we must rewrite the treaty. That, too, is a Europe of dreams, a Europe that does not exist. Those terms will not be changed. The harsh convergence criteria were put in deliberately because they were the minimum acceptable to the Bundesbank. They will not be changed, because the Bundesbank and Germany do not want them changed, and the German politicians will not be able to change them.

It is no use the Swedes talking about a full employment policy, or our talking about real convergence; it is no use trying to pursue escapist dreams in that fashion. The terms will not be changed, and we are simply indulging in wishful thinking if we think that they will be.

France gives us another example of a country walking backwards. President Chirac was elected on a platform whose main plank was the fight against unemployment. Yet he has now turned that into a fight against his own people. He has declared war on the social security system, on the trade unions and on the people of France. Probably in the end he will win. There is no doubt that elites are powerful in France. France has a strong executive Government and it can win through.

For the French elite, the desire to maintain the franc fort, which it sees as the key to France's relationship with Germany, is crucial. There has been such an investment in pain and misery there over the years, with such low growth and such high unemployment, that the elite will not suddenly admit that it was all a terrible mistake and say to the electorate, "Sorry, we have been pursuing the impossible for eight or 10 years. It was a mistake, so let's begin all over again."

Germany is in the process of walking backwards as its politicians discover that its people do not want monetary union because they do not want give up the deutschmark, and the Bundesbank does not want monetary union because it does not want to give up control of German economic policy. German politicians are now pressing for tougher conditions in an attempt to propitiate the German people and the Bundesbank.

All this walking backwards means that monetary union will not happen. Look what happened to Commissioner Kinnock, who said that the king had no clothes. Retribution descended on his innocent head after his innocuous statement on something that should have been obvious to everybody.

My point is not that monetary union will not happen—it may happen. The elite in France will want to stick to Germany, and a group of "deutschmark states" may form with France around Germany. But that is the only way in which monetary union will happen. If it is pursued as a policy for Europe without a test of how much the elite of Europe is prepared to listen to the people, it will be disastrous. I do not know whether monetary union will happen—it may, or it may not—but it will be disastrous if it does and our future will lie on the outside, pursuing our own interests.

Whether monetary union happens or not, enormous efforts will be put into trying to make it happen. We will have to go through the preliminary stages, which are causing the problem, to the point where everybody will finally accept that it cannot happen. The domesday machine is now out of control and is grinding down the people of Europe. The preliminaries to monetary union are causing unemployment and leading to cuts in Government spending, which are leading to low growth. Europe, which was supposed to be the train to take us to growth, is dragging us back. Thanks to Europe's ruinous economic policies, it is worse off than we are.

Europe is not working. Monetary union cannot work, yet it is being pursued through all its stages, which will inflict pain. What is happening in monetary union is also happening in every other sphere of European activity, including enlargement. Our Government are attached to the

[Mr. Mitchell]

idea of enlargement, whereas the German Government want it for rather less altruistic reasons, but nothing is happening. The best way to help the emerging democracies in eastern Europe is to help their agriculture. We cannot do so, however, because of the enormous effect that that would have on the common agricultural policy.

Such selfishness precludes us not only from helping those countries in the most effective way, but from giving them full membership of the Union. That would have to involve membership of the common agricultural policy, which would almost certainly double the burdens of the CAP. That would bring the CAP crashing to the ground, but it has not materialised so far.

The measures will be a barrier against the eastern European states joining the EU. They will not be able to join the CAP, nor will they be able to join the common fisheries policy. Some of the countries concerned—Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia and Estonia—have big fishing fleets. Where will they fish? They will not have waters, and we cannot compensate them as we did the Spanish in our waters. We cannot therefore enthusiastically welcome those countries on that basis.

We cannot subsidise the eastern European countries on the scale that we subsidise Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, as those countries might object to our doing so. No progress has been made on enlargement. However many platitudes we preach and however desirable we say that enlargement is, it is being put in limbo, and nothing will happen.

Nothing can be decided on the institutional changes either, because the European Parliament is in a power struggle with the Commission, the Commission is in a power struggle with the Council of Ministers, France and Germany are in a power struggle with the other countries and the elite is in a power struggle with the people. This is not building an exciting and idealistic venture—it is wrestling in blancmange. It is a living tableau by Damien Hirst of a wrestling match smothered in blancmange. That is what we are being asked by hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Wycombe to give our allegiance to.

I am not sure how the IGC will work out. For a start, what is it? Is it a 3,000-mile service for a car from hell that is shorter on one side than the other? Is it a fundamental reconstruction of the Union? Nobody seems to know—nobody has any idea. It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to get any agreement. France and Germany cannot let the conference fail and they cannot allow monetary union to be postponed. President Chirac cannot say after all the current events in France that monetary union should be postponed, and so the consequences will be pursued.

I will conclude on this point. The IGC will be a messy, but it will be no use the countries involved postponing any outcome or decisions while they wait for a Labour Government in this country. The advent of a Labour Government has been postponed. We will win power, but it is clear that there must be another Budget next November. We shall not win power until April 1997 as the election will be put back to that date.

It is no use those countries thinking that they can postpone the outcome of the IGC in a typical European fashion until there is a Labour Government who will be a soft touch. We will not be a soft touch when it comes to the negotiations, as that is in the interests of the British people and the interests of the Labour party.

It is essential that we pursue our job in government, which is to conquer unemployment, rebuild the industrial base of this country, generate economic growth and maximise the living standards of our people. We cannot accept anything—monetary union, cuts in Government spending, restrictions on growth, insistence that we should cut the public sector deficit—which gets in the way of the job that the Labour Government will be taking on in April 1997.

7.46 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): In following the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), I cannot help but notice the irony. Here we are debating Europe, with all the arguments about Euro-scepticism, but where are the sceptics now? Every Opposition Back-Bencher in the Chamber is a Euro-sceptic, whereas all my hon. Friends who are present have a more positive view of the EC. We are told time and again that the Labour party is united on Europe, but we must realise that it is not and that Labour has its differences just as differences are expressed by Conservative Members.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) stressed the need for Britain to be at the heart of Europe, which, I am glad to say, is where we are and where the Prime Minister wishes us to remain. In my view, what matters more than anything is that the European Union is developed in a way that is not just pragmatic and realistic but is broadly capable of carrying the peoples of Europe with it. That means the acceptance of Community institutions to standards of democratic accountability, with the European Parliament effectively carrying out its role as the Union's scrutineer, given that there is a difference in the relationships between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers and between the British Government and this House—or indeed between any member state and its Parliament.

As part of that realism, we must reflect on how the Union almost came unstuck over the Maastricht treaty, which encompassed much ambition combined with what many people would have said was gobbledegook. Many members of the public across Europe found the treaty hard to understand. That is why I was glad to see some opening words of refreshing realism in the reflection group report, issued on 5 December which said:

> "And yet, for a growing number of Europeans, the rationale for Community integration is not self-evident".

The report goes on to say certain things which all of us can accept. It says that the Union is not and does not want to be a super-state, and adds that the IGC must make the Union more relevant to its citizens. It also states:

> "The conference must also make the Union more transparent and closer to the citizens."

It could be argued that such hesitancy is reflected throughout the report, in which my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), has played an important part. The report is punctuated by phrases such as, "Many of us think that", "Some of us also felt", "One of us"—I cannot think who—"believes". I shall leave it to the House to decide who that might have been and to reflect on the uncertainty that seems to be permeating member states. That is very different from the conditions that existed in the run-up to the Maastricht treaty.

It is clear that the number of doubters out in the country has grown—often because of their worries about smaller aspects such as excessive bureaucracy and the absurdity of what has become known as the daft directives, with which we used to be plagued. There is also a feeling that the competency and tentacles of the Union stretch too far in an over-zealous bid for excessive regulation.

Many of those charges are often unfair, but the mud sticks. The most common sentiment expressed to me by doubters—rather than sceptics—in my constituency is that the Union should be about free trade, not a relentless search for a federal super-state. The reflection group report seems to have started to share that view. My response is that Britain has been the driving force behind the creation of the single market and we must not lose sight of the outstanding work that still remains to be done.

Equally important is the development of the concept of subsidiarity, which involves ensuring that decisions should be taken where they are most suited. The problem is that the lines have often become blurred because, for years, member states preferred to agree on matters that they did not think were so important and on which they could agree most easily. As a result, we have taken the Community further in some sectors than we would wish. The argument about the development of subsidiarity is an attempt to ensure that competencies are placed where they can best be dealt with.

Democracy is precious to all member states, but especially to the aspirant states in eastern Europe, which have had so little time to enjoy their new-found freedoms. That is why I was delighted to hear strong support from my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary this afternoon for the process of enlargement.

I visited Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia recently, and it was impossible not to be struck by the strong commitment to membership. As the realisation sinks in that the fruits of democracy, particularly in the context of economic growth, are hard to come by, it is no longer a bar to office in those countries to have been associated with earlier regimes. Yet the new president of Poland, whatever his past, is firmly committed to membership of the European Union and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. That ambition is not remote, but focuses on the immediate years following the turn of the millennium.

I was therefore glad to hear the recognition that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to the reform of the common agricultural policy, which is fundamental. I was disappointed, however, not to see any mention of it in the chapter entitled "Enabling the Union to work better and preparing it for enlargement" in the reflection group's report. I can find no reference to reform of the CAP in the document.

Mr. David Davis: The subject was discussed at some length in the reflection group but as the group was aiming solely at the intergovernmental conference, which deals with institutional matters rather than policy matters, it was not given the priority that would normally be expected. That was simply an organisational matter, but nobody considered the subject unimportant.

Mr. Robinson: I am grateful and encouraged by my hon. Friend's explanation. As I studied the report, I could not help feeling that there was a danger that southern member states might have an interest in ensuring that discussion of the reform of the CAP was left out of the process. I am glad to hear that the subject remains on the agenda. If it were not, I fear that aspirations for further enlargement would be difficult to achieve. There is a strong feeling in this country that the CAP needs to be reformed and revised, and needs to work better for the Community's producers, of which our farmers remain among the best and most competitive in Europe. They should be allowed to have the freedom to exercise that competitiveness.

I sense that Europe is not in the mood for an outcome to the IGC that makes radical changes in the Union and its sister organisations such as the Western European Union. We need consolidation and considered improvement in the development of the single market and in the fight against drugs, terrorism and cross-border crime. We need the sensible development of arrangements that will build on the progress that has been made over the years in the development of a common foreign policy. We also need to strengthen our capacity in European security and defence policies. I was glad that the reflection group paper emphasised the need to strengthen further relations between the European Union and WEU—discussion should remain there at present.

We can be sure that a Conservative Government will always be prepared to exercise their right to disagree, even if they do so alone. The long-term health of the European Union has already been strengthened by some characteristics that have flowed from constructive belligerence. If we apply that in 1996 we shall have a better chance of achieving a satisfactory outcome to the IGC—and a much better chance than the one offered by the Labour party were it to follow the policy of the Leader of the Opposition and insist on never being seen to stand alone.

That policy has been slightly blown apart this afternoon because, in his opening speech, the shadow Foreign Secretary made it clear that he was prepared to see Labour stand alone on some issues. It remains to be seen whether his line was cleared in advance with the Leader of the Opposition. One of the Labour party's typically nice-sounding policy phrases—"We will never stand alone"—has this afternoon been smashed on the rocks.

Much emphasis is placed on the importance of qualified majority voting, particularly by smaller states. We have managed to come a long way without the use of QMV and any change in the voting system will have to be significant and fundamental. The change must cover not simply the way in which votes are cast, but the weight of individual member states, particularly in terms of their economic contribution to the Community. If we are to encourage into the Community—as I believe we should—some of the very small states such as Malta and, I hope, Cyprus, we will clearly have to find a more rational structure for our decision making.

Changes to the system of qualified majority voting should be undertaken only in the context of significant structural change. If we achieve such change, then, and only then, can we consider the competencies to which QMV should be applied. I would add only that there will always be room for a veto in certain areas of Community policy, where vital issues of strategic importance are involved. If such arrangements are not made, the danger is that the Union will start to unravel.

[Mr. Robinson]

We all want to avoid the work of the past 50 years coming to grief because of an over-zealous approach to the decision-making process and to the institutions of the Community. The Community has always done best when it has moved forward on the basis of rational consensus.

Some would say that we made great strides during the years leading up to the Maastricht treaty and beyond, but perhaps now is the time for a little more measured reflection. Now is the time to see where we can go with the enlargement process and to bring in the countries of eastern Europe that so keenly want to join. They will be good for the Community; they have had to fight for their democracy, and they will not give up their freedoms lightly. They will bring with them an element of common sense of the same sort as the other new members have brought to Community discussions in the past 12 months.

There is much to play for at the intergovernmental conference in 1996. Britain must be at the heart of the negotiations. It must be the voice of reason and common sense. If we succeed in that, we shall be able once again to help the Community to develop in a way that its peoples will understand and accept: that is the key. If we do not carry the peoples of Europe with us while developing the Community, the long-term viability of its institutions will ultimately be threatened.

8.1 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I echo wholeheartedly the closing sentiments of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson). He traced a fairly objective picture of what is going on at the moment; but I suggest to him that developments in the European Union are not the real problem that we face.

Everyone asks what sort of Europe we want—I do not, but others do. That suggests that we can start afresh, but I fear that it is impossible. We can only build on the combined treaties; we can develop only as far as they permit. We are not building the edifice from scratch. The foundations are already in place, and they limit the actions that we can take. To that extent I dissent from the hon. Gentleman's closing remarks. Things are not as he described them, much as people who want to avoid the issues pretend they are.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to have some faith in the idea of subsidiarity, a somewhat mystical concept. As I told the Minister in the course of a Select Committee investigation chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood)—he has already produced an excellent summary of the report—subsidiarity does not apply to anything over which the Community has exclusive jurisdiction. That represents an enormous area, including the single market. Huge amounts of legislation deal with the single market under article 100A and the definitions of an area without internal frontiers. Subsidiarity therefore does not operate over most of the treaty's provisions.

In so far as subsidiarity is claimed to be able to operate, to use a phrase I have used before, it is to be tested by a comparison of probabilities, estimates and complex predictions, in a context of unknown future conditions. It cannot, of course, be justiciable. It is impossible to judge the future; courts can judge only on the present and the past. Here, however, we are dealing with a matter of complex prediction and political judgment.

I maintain that subsidiarity, despite all the conferences held about it, is not the viable protection it is often claimed to be. That, too, adds to the general air of disillusionment. As a member of the relevant Committee I am privileged to possess a copy of the report by the reflection group. I would sum it up as saying that things are not working, that the Union does not have the confidence of the people of Europe, and that something must be done about that: more centralisation. Perhaps the Minister will put me right if I have misinterpreted the report, but it seems to suggest more centralisation on top of what the Maastricht treaty, which is still in the early stages of development, provides.

These events seem to creep up on us and surprise us all, as I have said in this House for 15 years. We sign treaties, only to find two or three years later that events have moved on. A good example of that came in the past 10 days, headlined in all the newspapers and the subject of a spat on the "Today" programme. It had to do with something that the Home Secretary had prevented from happening at a meeting of the Home Affairs Council. Apparently he did not agree to an otherwise unanimous decision on a certain statement about racism and xenophobia.

Even I, who try to follow these things, learned only after further investigation what it was all about. We had not seen the relevant document in the Scrutiny Committee, set up by this House to look into such matters. It appears that the document had been drafted by the Commission under the home affairs and justice pillar. It may have been thought that that was an intergovernmental subject over which the Commission has no jurisdiction. But the treaty says that the Commission can produce proposals on six topics: asylum policy, rules governing the crossing by persons of the external borders of the member states, immigration policy—with three sub-divisions—combating drug addiction, combating fraud on an international scale, judicial co-operation in civil matters. Under article K.3.2, action may be taken under qualified majority voting at the instigation of the Commission.

As some of us have pointed out before in late-night debates, this is yet another example of how even politicians can be taken by surprise. And the problem is that most official documents to do with the EC mean hardly anything to the general population. That is why the media do not report them much—they are meaningless and hence not useful for news purposes, however important they may be in law.

After reading the report of the reflection group I went down my local high street and looked at the faces of the electorate. I doubt whether more than two or three lines in the report would be comprehensible to the average citizen, even the well-informed citizen. That is the communication gap on which the reflection group has quite properly remarked. But if the conference called to review certain aspects of the treaty goes in for more complications and centralisation, or for embroidering still further the powers of the centralised institutions, serious disillusion will set in.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome wondered why so many countries on the eastern border of the present Union want to become members. I suspect that it is not because they know everything about the treaties. I will mention later the problems in relation to our Scandinavian friends, who recently became members. First, I will add to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale about scrutiny in this place.

The Select Committee's report, which my hon. Friend summarised well, shows how far we have to go. The document that the Home Secretary was dealing with not long ago did not come before the Select Committee on European Legislation, even though legislation might flow from it. It can certainly do so under article K.3.2. The document might have gone to the Home Affairs Select Committee, but I am fairly sure that that Committee did not have an opportunity to tell the Home Secretary what it thought.

I do not often see eye to eye with the Home Secretary, and I may not do so even on this matter. However, are we saying that everything will depend on the swift, snap judgment of the Home Secretary of the day—whoever he may be and from whatever party, advised by a few civil servants in the course of a few hours, 10 days or a fortnight of notice being given of a particular statement at the Council of Ministers? Are we saying that that will be done in the case of important policing matters relating to the international movement of peoples? That is the current position.

There has been a great deal of improvement in our scrutiny procedures, particularly in respect of the pillars and the Foreign Affairs Committee. Today, we heard distinguished contributions from its Chairman and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). However, I do not think that they can get at the single European foreign policy, which is to be determined by 15 people—of whom our Foreign Secretary is one. I do not think that they could keep up. The distance between even Members of Parliament, let alone our 50,000 or 60,000 electors each, and the real decision-making that used to happen in this place is growing wider and wider. No wonder the general population, in whichever country of the European Union, is disillusioned.

Was there ever any confidence in the first place? The European Union's great boast is that it represents all that is best in western European democracy. One characteristic of democracy is not only the plethora of words ending "ity" in the reflection group report, but information and visibility. Where do we find that? Did we find it on entry? There may have been White Papers at the time of accession in 1971 and 1972, but it was claimed then by the Prime Ministers of two parties that no law could be passed and be directly applicable to this country if a British Minister said no. Strictly speaking, that was being over-economical with the truth. That was a reference to the so-called Luxembourg agreement, which was not in the treaty, has hardly been used since and is not really effective.

At the time of the one referendum held in this country, we were told that the risk of economic and monetary union had been removed by negotiation. Denmark held two referendums. The result of the first was roughly 50-50. The second, which just went the other way, was based on a few words after the Edinburgh summit that did not change a word of the treaty. Can we say that that is really democratic? The result of the referendum in France was virtually 50-50. Was that wholehearted consent, on the basis of what was known at the time—not as things turned out later?

Some members of the Select Committee on European Legislation had the opportunity to meet our friends from Sweden and Finland. The Finns are on the northern margins of the Union. A high proportion of that country's population live within the Arctic circle. The Finns told us time and time again that their overriding purpose in joining the European Union was security. Of course it was, given the instability further east. We would be in that position too. However, it is little known in this country that to meet the rigorous terms that were virtually imposed on the Finns by the European Union, Finland now has a Government that is more than a coalition. It comprises all parties from what would be the middle of the Conservative party in this country to the greens on the far left. The Finns can comply with the disciplines that the treaties will impose on them only by having a national Government of that sort. Some of us said at the beginning that the treaties were defective because they begin to destroy the normal operations of parties and Parliaments. I suggest that that has happened in Finland. Would it have such a Government otherwise?

The Finns are planning to reduce substantially support for agriculture. While it is true that a considerable sum will come from the European Union for a few years, special arrangements have been made to allow Finland to continue national aid because a large proportion of its population are in the northern areas. Even on the best estimates, there will still be a cut in incomes for the farming community, where unemployment is already high in Finland. Why are such coercive conditions placed on applicant members, who virtually have no choice? Is that democratic? Is that really power from the bottom up, which is what democracy is about?

Many years ago, Sweden was looked upon by people on the left of centre as the ideal nation of societies, because socialism is really about that. Today, Sweden is having to give up that which was regarded for many years as a remarkable if not ideal state on the world stage. Sweden managed to retain its political neutrality and to produce a unique relationship between capital and labour and production. Sweden played a distinguished independent role in world peace organisations. It was able to do so—as was Norway, in the middle east—by virtue of its independence. From the beginning, the Riksdag created a central bank—as a public service that was seen as a community organisation. In the past few years, because of some form of misjudgment, the banks created a lot of private credit, which I presume will not be stopped by the treaty of union. I suppose that one can stop public credit or borrowing being created but that private credit can go up to the sky. That does not seem to matter. It is just another little matter of the criteria.

We learnt from distinguished sources that the Swedish people were assured that joining the European Union did not mean that they were committed to economic and monetary union—that there would have to be a debate and a vote in the Riksdag if the nature of the currency were to be changed. I have been told—this is subject to further information—that when they took the first vote many people in Sweden thought that they were under no obligation to join any economic and monetary union. I put it no higher than that. They thought that they had an opt-out of the sort negotiated by the United Kingdom. If that is incorrect, I stand to be corrected. We have, however, been told that on good authority by Swedish people.

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

How can any organisation claiming to be fundamentally democratic insist on such conditions for potential member states who wish to join? It is not surprising that since joining many things having emerged and the balance of consent in Sweden has moved from a small yes to a rather more substantial no. That bodes badly for intra-Community relations.

Austria has never featured prominently in newspaper headlines. It managed to keep its nose clean to both east and west. Indeed, it had to. It is a remarkable country with many remarkably ingenious people. Large areas of Austria are used for alpine agriculture while others contain innovative and skilful industry. I have been told that since joining the Community Austria's industry has been disrupted and that alpine farmers are in difficulties.

Why is that? Prices in Austria for food and other forms of agricultural production were much higher than comparable prices within the Community. That had to be if Austria was to continue to sustain the cost of agriculture in alpine pastures and the upland areas generally. Prices in Sweden, Norway and Finland are much higher than those on the world scale because those countries had to do the same thing.

There is now widespread discontent in Austria, especially in view of a long period of coalition government when conditions were not so difficult. That may encourage nationalist feelings in the forthcoming election, the results of which we shall know on 17 December. I fear sometimes that nationalist feelings are the motivation of some Conservative Members.

Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends and I who have always been doubtful about European treaties from the first, or have seen little or no merit in them, have adopted that approach because we do not believe that they are inherently international. They lead to erosion and cause doubts within national democratic structures. That may not have been obvious to some but it is becoming more and more obvious as we proceed.

The intergovernmental conference, if it moves further down the road of centrality and further away from people's representatives and begins to undermine or destroy the effective power of elected people, will further cause disillusion. If treaties do not allow policies to be adumbrated and agreed to by a Government in this place, or by national parliaments everywhere, the democratic choice of the people is automatically destroyed. That choice has been destroyed in this place. Let us hope that wiser counsels will prevail and that on-going centralisation will not be pursued. Let us hope also that we develop or change the Community's institutions in a way that reflects democracy and not, in my judgment, attacks it.

8.23 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): I take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) with some respect. I know that he is pro-European, not anti. As he said at the beginning of his remarks, he is stuck with the institutions that we have in Europe. That is his dislike.

The hon. Gentleman will recall that we last crossed swords in debate on 1 November at the English Speaking Union. I took on both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). I beat them hands down. I had a 2:1 majority, even among the former colonials of the ESU. It is clear that the arguments of the hon. Member for Newham, South were listened to and rejected.

Many of those who speak against Europe and are hostile to some of the European institutions adopt a rather different attitude, which was probably inadvertently revealed by Mr. Bretherton of the Board of Trade back in 1955. As he was pulled out of the Messina talks by the then Conservative Government, he wrote to his French counterpart as follows:

> "I leave Messina happy because even if you continue talking, you will not agree; even if you agree, nothing will result; even if something results, it will be a disaster."

Three years later the treaty of Rome was signed and the United Kingdom had excluded itself from the beginning of the first great European movement. I consider that to be the greatest mistake that the United Kingdom ever made. Had we been in at the start we could have had a far greater influence. We could have helped to form European institutions and many of the complaints that the United Kingdom has justifiably made since would not have been necessary.

That has been our attitude to many institutions. We refused to join the set-up called the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system, which was established in 1980. We still talk as if our removal from it in 1992 smashed the whole operation. That is not true. Many of our Community colleagues have had the benefits of closer monetary co-operation for about 15 years, and three more countries joined the EMS in January.

It appears that monetary union and the potential single currency will be discussed at Milan and beyond. Colleagues may be interested to hear outside opinions on the British stance before I move on to my opinions.

Last Friday, 1 December, Citibank in Germany held a seminar in Berlin that was addressed by Count Otto von Lambsdorff, the former Commissioner. He said, first, that he had not the least doubt that the United Kingdom will fulfil the convergence criteria. He paid the Government a great compliment. Thus we would be qualified to join the single currency.

Secondly, Count Otto von Lambsdorff suggested that Britain would then refuse to join the single currency. I think that he is probably right about that. Thirdly, he said that he had not the least doubt that later Britain would apply to join. It was his view, fourthly—this was his advice to the gathering of more than 350 bankers and industrialists—that Britain's reluctance to join should not stop the rest of its partners going ahead with a single currency and getting involved if that was what they wished.

We should start discussing a single currency on the assumption that currency union will happen. It may not happen exactly to the Maastricht criteria or exactly to that timetable, but it will happen. It will happen in Europe sooner or later. Not all member countries of the EU will join. Those which join will press ahead without the others. One question, of course, will be whether it is a workable currency union. Of course. Even so, we should consider whether we should join. We hear many arguments about why we should not and I thought that I might adumbrate a few arguments to explain why we should.

There should be no debate about the wisdom of the convergence criteria. We helped write them into the Maastricht treaty. It is good to have low inflation, low interest rates, a stable exchange rate, low Government debt and small budget deficits. I would prefer there to be no budget deficits. As a good Tory I believe in sound currency and sound finance. I see my hon. Friend the Minister nodding vigorously. I take it that those are his beliefs. In any event, it is Government policy. Nothing should stand in our way when it comes to the convergence criteria.

If that is so, to what does opposition to our joining the ERM amount? There are a number of consequences, including loss of flexibility, sovereignty and political control. These are serious issues. I set to one side the dislike of foreigners, misplaced nationalism and a distaste for co-operating with our neighbours and recognising some of them as equals. These are genuine emotions. They certainly exist in the United Kingdom, as they do in other countries. We must discount them because at least in part they are not rational. They are probably not amenable to rational debate whereas I hope that the serious arguments about flexibility are.

We are told that we cannot have a currency union while there are great differences in the economies of the different member states and their regions. It is said that these discrepancies would somehow be dangerous. That argument has been well advanced on several occasions this evening. As economies converge, many of the present differences will disappear. The United Kingdom, having been on the fringe of the economies of Europe is, I hope, moving into a middle-range economy, meaning that we shall neither be the richest nor the poorest. It is a fact that coexistence within currency unions happens all the time between widely different economic areas. That is a simple matter of fact. The United Kingdom is a currency union and has been for a very long time. The city of Liverpool, with an unemployment rate that varies between 15 and 20 per cent., depending on which bit one looks at, has the same currency as, for example, Hampshire, which has an unemployment rate of below 5 per cent. It has the same interest rates. People go to the banks and borrow at the same levels. The Welsh economy shares the same central banking arrangements as England. Technically, Scotland has a separate central bank, but Scottish money is legal tender in England, despite the fact that I can get more quickly from London to Brussels than I can from London to Inverness. The unemployment rate in south Derbyshire, at 5 per cent., co-exists almost exactly with an unemployment rate in Derby, South of 15 per cent. We use the same currency, go to the same banks, have the same interest rates—we manage. Therefore, much of that argument is spurious.

More broadly, the United States, a country with 250 million people, has a single currency, and not a single soul there would recommend that there should be diverse currencies because of different economic conditions. Indeed, nobody there would suggest that a single state would be stronger if it had its own currency, even though some of the states are bigger than those in the European Union.

We are told that currency union enforces political union, which is often a concern of Conservative Members. That is nonsense. The Scots and English have different legal systems; they have different education systems. I happen to think that the Scottish education system is far better than the English one. Ulster and Wales have different types of criminal court; they have a different age of consent. What a 16-year-old girl can get up to in Caernarfon—not a 16-year-old boy—is illegal in Coleraine, where the age of consent is 17. In Wales, she can do it in Welsh as well.

In the United States, in one state one will hang. In another, one will be electrocuted. In a third, one will be given psychoanalysis—assuming that one has committed a homicide, of course. Banking laws differ from state to state more than they do across Europe, and so do official languages in places such as Miami and New York. There is absolutely no reason why countries in a currency union should have to change their social systems or legal arrangements, and we should remind the harmonisers of that when they try to get too enthusiastic. Aspects of our culture are inviolable and do not need to change.

What about the loss of flexibility? Flexibility to do what? To fiddle with the exchange rate, of course, because the whole essence of going into a currency union is fixed exchange rates. I am all in favour of flexibility if that means a little rise here and a little fall there, but that is not what floating exchange rates have meant in the United Kingdom. What we have instead is falling exchange rates, for more than 40 years.

When I was born at the end of the war, £1 sterling would buy DM16. When we applied to join the European Union in the early 1960s, it was DM11. When we got in, it was DM8. When Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of this country in 1979, it was DM4. Now it is about DM2.20. We have had a continuous steady process, under all Governments, of a falling exchange rate. All that we can really say with any certainty is that the rate of decline since 1979, where it has halved, is marginally better than in the previous 16 years, where the pound dropped by two thirds. It is a tragedy and a disgrace, for the British disease is no longer wildcat strikes, poor delivery dates and bad management but debasing our currency, as though we were a third-world country. It beggars our nation, devalues the efforts of our people and it is about time that we stopped.

The other loss of flexibility and of sovereignty which is often mentioned, is our ability to control taxation and public spending. Again, that was enunciated several times by Opposition Members. It was that fear that made Labour anti-European for many years. It is a curious irony that the same fear seems to imbue many of my colleagues. But none of it is true. Under the currency union as proposed by the Maastricht treaty, a country could tax as much as it liked, and it could spend as much as it liked. What it could not do was spend more than it taxed to a substantial degree to push up Government borrowing and start printing money. That would lose control of inflation and therefore it is a bad idea. But who in the House wants huge Government deficits? Who in this country advocates printing money? The very fact that every single time the Labour party opens its mouth and we pose the question: "Who is going to pay for this, or are you just going to push up borrowing?", and then see the uncomfortable squirming shows how important the question is for the nation at large.

What do those fears boil down to? That a British Chancellor would no longer be able to allow sterling to depreciate year by year, little by little and that a British Chancellor would no longer be able to spend wildly beyond the taxpayers' ability to pay, either temporarily or in the long term? Both of those seem to me to be commendable outcomes and very strong arguments for being in and not out. Of course, we could behave in that

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

commendable fashion anyway, but we do not and we never have, not in my lifetime. I suspect that only if we had to would we impose on ourselves the necessary discipline and competence.

There is one additional huge advantage were we to join a future well-run single currency, and that will come not so much from stability but credibility. It would be assumed by the markets that British Governments would behave themselves and run the economy responsibly, that we had given up devaluation as an instrument of economic management, and so there is every chance that interest rates would be lower, as they are indeed in other countries that have strong currencies. Observance of the rules would mean that lower inflation, which is entirely beneficial, would be part of our scene. Our voters might then have a more secure attitude to the future and a greater sense of prosperity, and certainty in prosperity. The feel-good factor might return, and would not that be wonderful? Those, as I see them, are the positive arguments for joining.

I conclude with my fears about what will happen if we do not. If we chose not to join a well-run currency union, and our colleagues in the rest of Europe chose to do so, we would not be the stronger nation. We would be weaker. Two thirds of our trade would then be with countries that were relieved of substantial expenses associated with currency risks. Their prices would benefit. That is one of the reasons why they would want to do it. We would not have a stranger currency as a result but a weaker one. I fear in the long run for sterling. The markets would infer that British Governments, possibly of all colours, wished to retain the option of devaluation, and they would react accordingly. We would have signalled that we were not willing to be at the very heart of Europe, and thus we would put at risk future inward investment into the UK, both from the rest of Europe and the United States and Japan.

I have the European Toyota factory in my constituency. I do not think that it would move. I think that the company would keep its promises and stay with us for our lifetime, but the next European Toyota factory might decide to go closer to the heart of Europe. What we would have announced by a decision not to go in, to exercise this opt-out, would be that we believed that our country was a timorous, narrow-minded and backward-looking nation, lacking confidence in its competence to hold its own in open competition, and in so doing we would deliberately have given up our role as one of the leaders of the free Europe that we helped to create 50 years ago.

If we want a Europe that is dominated by Germany, with France and other client countries trotting docilely along behind, the quickest way to ensure such an outcome is to opt out. I hope instead that we will be courageous and join when the time comes.

8.28 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie), and I agree with her conclusion. She revealed today, quite clearly, that despite all the efforts of the Foreign Secretary, what was written in *The European* on 23 November is basically true—he feels that he just has to hold together the fragile unity in his party. The article reads:

> "The Euro-sceptic wing, confident that it has brow-beaten the Cabinet into accepting a hardline stance, has ceased the remorseless attrition against the Tories' more fervent Europeans. There now exists a fragile truce; Malcolm Rifkind, the new foreign secretary, is the embodiment of that truce."

What we have just heard shows that the truce will not necessarily last for ever because people on the pro-European, perhaps realist, wing of the Conservative party will in time—I hope—reveal the fact that they are not very happy. What we have just heard is an example of that.

It is clear that, despite some of what we have heard, there is a consensus in Britain, and in the House, that Britain's future lies in Europe. The argument is surely about how best to pursue that future in Europe and what are the best ways forward during the next few years.

There has been a strange crossover in the Labour and Conservative parties. The Labour party was, historically, seen to be the anti-European party—Hugh Gaitskell has already been referred to—the party that stood out against the capitalist west European club and for the Commonwealth, our relations with the third world and a vision of a wider world.

The Conservative party had its xenophobic wing and the little Englander nationalism, which is still there, but it also had close links with business. It was probably the only political party to have such links 15 or 20 years ago. That has changed recently, but it could have been thought to represent the interests of British business in its public statements.

Nowadays, the CBI and the Conservative party are increasingly at variance. Many British business people are worried about the Government's stance, for the reasons that the hon. Member for South Derbyshire has just spelt out. They are worried that Britain will be outside the process in Europe, that there will be speculation against our currency, that we will lose inward investment and that we will suffer the job consequences of that.

As a London Member of Parliament with many constituents who travel to central London to work in various financial institutions, I am worried about the long-term consequences for the City of London—not today, not tomorrow, not next year nor in five years' time, but in 15, 20 or 30 years' time when information technology and the transferring of financial institutions' information becomes so vital to our economies that we in London may lose out to Frankfurt or some other European centre. That might not happen—none of us can predict the future accurately—but Britain is taking a big risk if it stays out of these major developments.

There is clearly a great deal of cynicism among the general public about all things European. Very few people—they could be counted on the fingers of one hand if we had one finger—understand the minutiae of the so-called decision-making processes in the European Union. That is a real problem because it means that none of us can really get a grip on jargon such as comitology, co-decision and so on. Even people in the institutions themselves do not really understand it. That means that we cannot be sure who makes decisions, how they are made and how they can be changed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said that power had been lost by this Parliament to the European Union's institutions. I do not agree. Parliament lost power many years ago—to our Executive, and our Executive is now conspiring with Executives in other countries to do things behind closed doors, to make deals, to work things out, and neither this Parliament nor national Parliaments in other European countries nor the European Parliament have the ability to keep a check on it. That is why this absurd structure has been built up. That must be considered if we are to [illegible] public confidence, to obtain real accountability and to deal with the democratic deficit.

There is an associated issue of great and fundamental concern. In the European Union today, there are 20 million unemployed people. Different parts of our continent have seen the rise of extremist, nationalist, racist and xenophobic parties and organisations. Fortunately, perhaps because of our electoral system, that is not happening in Britain in quite the same way as it is elsewhere, but it is clearly not sufficient for us to dismiss such issues and say that it does not really matter to us that the far right has growing support in Austria, that the national front in France consistently has between 12 and 15 per cent. of the vote in elections or that neo-Nazis from Germany have been going to Croatia to help in the civil war in former Yugoslavia.

When I saw that the Government were blocking proposals for action against racism and xenophobia, I was appalled. If we are saying that we have superior national legislation against it and that we do not need a European Union-wide approach, where is our law that makes it an offence to deny the holocaust? If the Home Secretary and other Ministers present such legislation in the next year, I might be convinced, but if they are not prepared to do so, I shall be suspicious that they have another agenda, and that it is that they do not want to upset the right wing and the xenophobic and racist vote in Britain.

Mrs. Currie: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that many hon. Members, including people of Jewish origin such as myself, would be deeply frightened at the thought of our stopping free speech in that way. It must be possible to hear an opinion so that it can be destroyed by argument.

Mr. Gapes: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but I draw to her attention the comments of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and other organisations from the Jewish community in the past week. I think that she will agree that they take a different view. It seems that the hon. Lady thinks that they are wrong, but I happen to agree with them and believe that they have a serious point.

Several measures before the European Union can begin to combat the cynicism and difficulties that are being experienced throughout the European Union. The Swedish Government's proposals to counter unemployment deserve serious support and consideration. We might argue about the small print, we might well say that there are different approaches, but it is completely wrong for our Government to dismiss them and say that we are not interested. I hope that, when the Government changes in the near future, we shall have a much more positive approach.

Europe is not just a single market. It is not just a free trade area. It has not been since its inception and it is absurd for people to pretend that we can somehow transform it into one. Neither by undermining the acquis communautaire, which was called for by the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), nor by restricting and blocking any attempt to change will we succeed.

The Government say that they want enlargement. It is not possible to enlarge the European Union from 15 to 20 or 25 countries without doing something about accountability and the decision-making processes. Without such change, we would end up with deadlock. It is absurd that a country as small as Luxembourg can effectively block measures to deal with fraud. It would be absurd if countries in southern Europe, benefiting financially from tobacco subsidies, could block reform of the CAP that sought to eliminate that scandal. It would be absurd if countries could prevent progress towards enlargement because they could prevent changes in the budgetary relationship and distribution.

We currently spend 50 per cent. of all European Union money on the common agricultural policy. That is far too much. In a country such as ours, with a largely urban manufacturing population—only a small percentage of the population is employed in agriculture or in agriculture-related industries—it is nonsensical that the vast majority should pay so much to subsidise agricultural systems elsewhere as well as in their own country.

During the past few months, there have been changes in world market prices that affect the future of stockpiles of various products. Nevertheless, the CAP as a system must go. The Foreign Secretary conceded that when he said that it could not be extended to Poland, Hungary and the other agricultural applicant countries. If that is the case we shall need allies to secure change. That is why we need to build a coalition with other countries, and why reform of the institutional framework will become necessary.

Enlargement will not be confined to the Visegrad countries. It is wrong to view those four countries as a bloc. This week, I met the Leader of Slovakia's Opposition, and was worried by what I was told about the authoritarian behaviour of Mr. Meciar towards his opponents. Because of its high growth rate, Slovakia might become economically capable of joining the European Union with the other applicants, but I do not think that we should allow into the Union countries that have not become accustomed to the concept of a democratic Opposition who have a right to protest, a right to vote down Governments if they can secure the majority in Parliament and a right to campaign against Government policies.

The Estonians have also just applied to join the European Union. As one who has visited Estonia a number of times, I am still not convinced—despite the economic growth and development that has taken place in the country in the past few years—that adequate safeguards for dealing with the substantial Russian-speaking minority yet exist. Again, we must be very careful: the European Union must be clear about its democratic standards and its standards in regard to respect for minorities.

Far more serious is the fact that there can be no question of allowing Croatia into the European Union, because of the abuses of human rights there, the expulsion of 200,000 people from Krajina and the other atrocities that have been perpetrated at the behest of President Tudjman. I know that today's debate is not about Yugoslavia, but the Government should consider seriously whether they are prepared to refer senior figures in Croatia—including President Tudjman—to the war crimes tribunal on the basis of what has gone on in recent months.

[Mr. Gapes]

Increasingly important in world politics and in Europe are arguments about self-determination, nationalism and the rights of minorities. The European Union potentially provides a way in which to deal with those problems: recognition of the rights of regions, and of the fact that diversity and different structures are possible within an institution that brings people together. That must be handled sensitively and carefully, however. It would be a big mistake to imagine that any country can be allowed into the European Union, regardless of other factors.

The European Union is a magnet: everyone wants to join it. Despite the litany of horrors that we have heard from some hon. Members on both sides of the House, the overwhelming view in eastern and central Europe is that people want to be part of the European Union, for very good reasons. They see the Union as a source of stability, prosperity and democracy. That is why it is about time that we stopped arguing about the institutional framework, and started to argue about the vision of the Europe that we wish to create—a Europe based on co-operation and diversity. It is not sufficient to argue that all that we need do is say, "No, no, no." We had a Prime Minister who did that a few years ago, and look what happened to her.

I believe that, in the next year, when the time comes, the British public will say that they want to participate actively at the centre of the decisions that will be made about the future of our country. They will not be content with a Government who decide to block all initiatives from elsewhere. For that reason, I am confident that the IGC will have a positive outcome that is in the interests of the country, our people and the prosperity and peace of all Europe.

8.55 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I shall try to gallop through my speech in order not to trespass too much on the time of the Front-Bench spokesmen. I hope that, in galloping, I shall not garble, but in my part of Leicestershire we are quite used to galloping.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said that he did not want a radical rewriting of the treaties governing the European Union and the IGC; he wanted practical steps towards improvement in the workings of the Union. It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) simply to complain about, for example, Lady Thatcher's attitude to the European Union—or the European Community, as it was in those days—or about what he believes to be the Conservative party's attitude towards the institutions. Only through the proper working of those institutions can we secure the co-operation between nations on which the hon. Gentleman seems so keen. I urge him to lay aside the mantra of attacking the Conservative party on the issue; it must be realised that the best way in which to achieve what is best for Britain and for Europe is to ensure proper arrangement in the institutions.

I, too, welcome the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of eastern and central Europe, but we and they have a great deal to do before their accession. What we must not do is promise them more than we can deliver, or raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled. I want Cyprus and Malta to enter the European Union, but Malta in particular must be prepared to recognise its duty to assist in enforcing British court orders by convention and out of respect for the comity of nations, which it seems remarkably reluctant to do. In this respect, I refer to the case of my constituent, Mrs. Anna Bergmann, who is the beneficiary of a financial settlement order from the High Court's family division in London, made against her ex-husband who is now resident in Malta.

The Madrid summit will take place next week on 15 and 16 December. It is to be chaired—I may be wrong but, anyhow, it does not matter—by Carlos Westendorp, the Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister. He in particular reminds us of the historic links between Spain and the low countries, places that were once linked through a common Crown and are now members of the same European Union. If we and they are not too careful, however, they may eventually be linked again—and more closely—as separate provinces within a United States of Europe, having to fend and contend with a single currency.

Whether Mr. Westendorp's Government will be in power long enough to witness the conclusions of the intergovernmental conference is debatable. What is more certain is that his British counterpart, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will be in office, not only when the IGC convenes next year, but when it completes its deliberations.

The reflection group, which has been preparing for the IGC, has been meeting since 3 June and my hon. Friend the Minister has been travelling to and from Europe to attend its meetings. Unlike some representatives of the member states, however, he is not only a member of our legislature, but a politically accountable and aware Minister. He knows, as all Ministers must know, what his fellow parliamentarians want to come out of the IGC. As important, if not even more important, he knows from his constituents what the British people require and what they do not want from the IGC.

Unlike many mainland European politicians, who have been elected by proportional representation and put into government by post-election backroom deals, and who represent a party list rather than individual constituents, our Ministers in every Department engaged in European Union affairs are closely in tune and in touch with our country's citizens. They do not pay lip service to the democratic process, but daily must respect it and respond to it.

The major fault of European federal enthusiasts, of the integrationists, is that they belong to that school of politics that sees no real need to listen to or to consult the public because they know what is best for the people. They have decided, for example, that there will be a unified single currency by a given date. In France, the political elite seems prepared to destroy social harmony in order to meet the convergence criteria, no matter what the consequences, long or short term. The elitism of so much of continental political thought and practice, although sometimes majestic to behold, is not always beneficial to the state or to the people whom the politicians believe they are governing.

In the few minutes left to me in the debate, I want to concentrate on just one of the five subjects considered by the reflection group: common foreign and security policy. In its first report on the CFSP, the group identified as the problem with that policy, as presently constituted, the separation of the European Union's external policy dimension and its external economic dimension. Whereas the bulk of, if not all, decisions on economic matters can be taken by qualified majority voting, CFSP decisions require unanimity.

That is not a problem, but a strength, as it recognises the delicate nature of security issues for each member state and underscores my view that no Government have a right to delegate their people's allegiance to the sovereign. By that, I mean not simply the Queen or the monarchy, or the Crown in Parliament: I mean that intangible concept of nationhood, which I accept is easier to recognise than to define, but which applies to all democratic states.

I am saying not that it is wrong to ask our fellow citizens to fight for Europe, for liberal democracy or against totalitarianism, but that it is for this Parliament, or at any rate a Government supported by this Parliament as representing the popular will, to hold to itself the decisions about which battles to fight and which wars to wage.

We, or at least my parents, my grandparents and their generations, have fought for freedom and for Europe. They have been soldiers in allied armies and in other military formations commanded by foreign generals, but that does not mean a loss of statehood or of national determination in time of war. It represents the consequence of a national decision to act on security matters in and for the national interest. Even now, and obviously, the historical and geographical links that differ from country to country—one takes the most obvious examples of France and the United Kingdom—demonstrate that there are interests that we and, for example, the French have which go well beyond the shores of Europe. That surely must allow us to take our own decisions unfettered by a common foreign and security policy.

For the IGC to amend the treaty of Rome to "cure" the problem that I identified earlier, because member states are worried that the CFSP's lack of qualified majority voting is a cause of its ineffectiveness, is badly to misunderstand the question. A CFSP cannot be dealt with suitably if some aspects remain subject to unanimity and some are made subject to QMV. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not to retreat into that sort of compromise which, no matter how comfortable and attractive it might seem at 5 o'clock in the morning in the IGC meeting room, is a dangerously flawed solution.

Soon, thousands of NATO troops will have been deployed in Bosnia. They will include troops from Britain, France, America and even Germany. There, in my submission, is the evidence we need to demonstrate that a CFSP in Europe is for Governments acting in their own national interests but in concert, making decisions based on shared analyses and shared intelligence and doing something together because they all believe it to be right and achievable.

An intergovernmental foreign and security policy, not a European Union foreign and security policy, works. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister in his meetings, and his colleagues in their meetings at Cabinet level, to pursue such a policy. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said at the outset, the IGC should be about practicalities, not about wish lists or pipe dreams. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to steel himself to that task in the months that remain before the IGC.

9.6 pm

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Like all European debates this has been predictably wide ranging because of the nature of the subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said that these debates were sometimes seen as routine. However, in this debate hon. Members on both sides of the House have dealt with many new elements of the changing European situation, particularly the opening up of the European Union to the countries of central and eastern Europe. Hon. Members have also mentioned the changing economic circumstances which are affecting the major countries in the European Union now.

Sharp differences of view have been expressed on both sides of the House and, occasionally, on the same side of the House. Hon. Members have also mentioned matters of widespread and common concern. Virtually all hon. Members talked about the need for the intergovernmental process to be seen as relevant to the citizens of the countries represented in the European Union. A thread running through many speeches was that an intergovernmental conference which seemed to be a Maastricht mark 2 would not be widely welcomed and that we want to avoid any huge gap between the so-called political elites of Europe and the populations of Europe. We need to take that to heart. Presumably, when the Minister replies to the debate and reports on the activities of the reflection group, he will refer to that.

There was widespread support for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood). He referred to the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation and mentioned some of the important aspects of the way in which the House looks at European legislation and how that could be improved in the future. He said that the report contained a litany of failures and, in many ways, that is so. He said that the report talks about the undue secrecy involved in European deliberations, the frustration of dealing with unofficial texts rather than with official and properly translated documents, the frustrating delays facing the Select Committee on European Legislation and European Standing Committees A and B when looking at European legislation and, allied to the delays, the inadequate time that they have to consider what are sometimes very important matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale also, quite rightly, called for much more efficient and swift communication between European institutions. It seems absurd, with modern technology, that some communications procedures seem to take so long. That does not help the important business of scrutiny.

The Government frequently hide in scrutiny Committees—especially European Standing Committees A and B—matters that should be debated on the Floor of the House. In European Standing Committee B recently, I have been dealing with enlargement and other wide-ranging issues which, despite the useful work done in the Committee, should be dealt with on the Floor of the House. However, the Government sometimes do not want to parade their divisions in front of us.

We want the Government to go further and push for much greater openness within the European decision-making process. We want them to agree with our view that, when the Council of Ministers makes decisions as a legislature, it should do so openly so that the people

[Ms Joyce Quin]

can have full knowledge of how votes were cast at the critical time. We certainly support the proposals for greater openness from some of the other Governments in the EU, especially from the Swedish Government, but also from the Dutch and Danish Governments. We rejoice that there have been some successes in ensuring that more documents are available, not just to national Parliaments but to the wider public. That is essential if people are to see the European project as more relevant and if they are to be more directly connected with it.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House referred in considerable detail to economic and monetary union and the proposed single currency, including the Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

Many hon. Members referred to the convergence criteria, the reaction to them by different countries—not just Britain—and the question of how those criteria might or might not be met. The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) predicted that Britain would fulfil the criteria, but not join the single currency. I do not know whether she was thinking that that would happen under her Government or under a future Government. However, it was significant that at Question Time today the Prime Minister once again refused to be specific. He also refused to rule out joining a single currency, as he was urged to do by many of his right hon. and hon. Friends.

There are difficulties with the move towards the creation of a single currency. Many hon. Members referred to the position in France. However, it is not just the constraint of trying to meet the convergence criteria that is causing difficulty in France; some of the policies and commitments entered into by the French Government, in particular the difficult to reconcile promises that they made during the French election, have caused problems. They promised to increase public spending, especially on unemployment and education, while at the same time taking action to cut the budget deficit. They promised to raise public sector wages, while at the same time cutting taxation. Many of the protests in France relate to some of those matters, not simply to possible strictures arising from the convergence criteria.

There was considerable discussion about the convergence criteria and the need, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston rightly referred, to achieve real convergence, to tackle the problem of unemployment in Europe and to ensure that we can go forward in a climate that is conducive to economic growth, not economic cuts. During the debate on how strict or flexible the criteria could be, it would be advisable to stress other parts of the Maastricht treaty in arguing for policies to promote employment. For example, article 2 of the Maastricht treaty talks about sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of convergence of economic performance, high levels of employment and social protection, and so on. We must use some of those arguments in approaching the convergence criteria.

Mr. Shore: The significant difference though, is that those rather few references of an encouraging kind are in general terms. They are not in quantifiable figures as are the convergence criteria, which are in the treaty, the protocols and other associated documents. There really is a world of difference between just a reference to the desirability of growth and strict criteria of a quantitative kind which impose strong deflationary obligations on member states.

Ms Quin: I greatly respect my right hon. Friend, but I should point out that article 2 is right at the beginning of the treaty of Maastricht. It is one of its basic commitments. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston referred to the way in which article 2 could be supplemented by other action in the EU. He specifically referred to the proposals of the Swedish Government and others.

Obviously, in the European Union, there will be a very keen debate between people who favour different economic approaches. It is true that in Germany they have talked about tightening up the criteria even further, although the treaty would not provide any great solace in that respect. At the same time, there are genuine concerns among countries that have always been in the vanguard of the European project, such as Italy, France and Belgium, that the criteria could cause difficulty.

During the intergovernmental conference and beyond, there will be some very pertinent debates on those subjects. I would certainly closely align our views, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston, with those of the Swedish Government and others who are supporting them on the subject, to try to give much greater priority to the all-important task of fighting unemployment.

We also believe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, that it is important to build on some of the initiatives in the Delors package, which were agreed by countries, although, sadly, they were watered down, largely at the insistence, or at least the keen encouragement, of the British Government and their representatives.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to enlargement to include the countries of central and eastern Europe. Like all hon. Members who have spoken, the Labour party and I are very much in favour of it. It is important, however, to go beyond the general expressions of welcome for the idea of enlargement and to start to grapple with some of the practical problems that it brings with it.

Despite the fact that the Foreign Secretary's speech was controversial—at least, half of it was—we all felt great sympathy with him on one matter: some of the petty and mean-minded protectionist instincts that certain countries have shown towards the countries of central and eastern Europe. I noted that most of the examples, if not all, that the Foreign Secretary gave related to agriculture. That shows that the battle over the accession of countries of central and eastern Europe will largely be fought over agricultural policy.

We certainly consider that battle an opportunity to reform the common agricultural policy in the way that we have argued for a long time—to give agricultural support to those who actually need it, and not encourage large-scale production at very high consumer prices. We should find a way forward which is much more respectful of the natural environment, the future of which concerns us all, right across Europe. We should also try to ensure that the policy operates in such a way that it does not distort world markets and harm the exporting possibilities of developing countries, as has happened for far too many years. The discussions about enlargement to the countries of central and eastern Europe provide an opportunity.

We share the Government's keenness to pursue this approach. However, I agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) when he said that enlargement should not be seen as a dilution of the European Union into a free trade area. We are talking not about a free trade area but about trying to construct a system of co-operation across Europe which suits the citizens of our countries and Europe as a whole.

There have been sharp divisions on certain aspects of European policy in this debate. That was especially evident in the interventions during the Foreign Secretary's speech, especially those by Conservative Members. The intervention by the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) contrasted sharply with those by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood).

Today seems to have been an active day for each Euro-tendency within the Conservative party. As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, we started the day with the announcement by the Euro-sceptics of a White Paper whose existence has seemed to become more dubious during the day, but which still seems to be on track to be published at some time in the future.

We have also heard today about pro-European Conservative Members of the European Parliament challenging the Government's increasingly sceptical approach with a series of policy papers calling for a substantial move towards integration. Those co-ordinated publications are intended to reinforce the attempts by Members of the European Parliament to challenge what they see as a dangerous drift towards isolationism by the Conservative Government. The challenge seems somewhat doomed because, as other hon. Members have pointed out, it seems to be the Euro-sceptics who have the upper hand in the Government's deliberations. As has also been pointed out, we have the prospect next week of the right hon. Member for Wokingham launching his new campaign to try to extract from the Government specific commitments against the moves towards a single currency.

Throughout it all, the Prime Minister remains steadfastly and resolutely indecisive. He tries to be at the heart of Europe while pursuing an actively isolationist stance, no doubt ending up somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic.

There are different points of view on both sides of the House, as we have seen in this debate; I accept that. What concerns us, however, is that the divisions within the Government ranks, even within the Cabinet, are weakening Britain's position in Europe. They are losing us influence in Europe and we seem continually to be negotiating with one hand tied firmly behind our back.

I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston about the strong and solid support which our white paper on the future of the European Union and the preparations for the intergovernmental conference received at the Labour party conference in October. That is in stark contrast to the disunity shown by Cabinet Ministers on this important issue.

The debate has allowed us to clear up some deliberate misconceptions about Labour's policy expressed by Conservative Ministers. It was good to hear the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) talk in sensible terms about the social chapter. He did not talk with what the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) rightly described as the frenzy and froth of European debates. The social chapter is important; it is a general commitment to giving people at work and citizens in the European Union a fair deal at their place of work. That is extremely important.

However, the social chapter does not represent a huge raft of specific measures, although more measures may be proposed under it. At present we are talking about no more than two specific measures, and so far the chief legislative measure has been the European works council directive.

We must draw the contrast between what the Government are saying and what British businesses are doing. Today, we read in one of the newspapers that the Engineering Employers Federation is to urge its members to adopt the European works council directive in spite of Britain's opt-out from the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty.

The federation has found that none of its member companies intends to exclude its British workers from any procedures or systems that it is bound under the directive to introduce in its operations elsewhere in the European Union. That gives the lie to many of the extravagant claims made by the Government about the directive.

Reference has been made to the speech by my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party at the Confederation of British Industry conference, and to me the words that he said there represented common sense. He talked about considering the proposals that come from Europe, which we do in any sphere—social, environmental, economic or whatever—anyway, and about negotiating about them with our European partners. That is the route that virtually all proposed legislation in Europe already takes.

Of course it is sensible to consider the proposals closely and to consult the various people who will be affected by them. If we do so, it is more likely that the legislation passed will be in people's interests, and will be workable and easy to implement in our different countries.

The world prosperity league has been mentioned many times lately, and I must point out that countries that have done well in recent years and also over a longer period, ever since the end of the second world war, have on the whole, although not always, been those that have treated their work forces well in many different ways. It is absurd to demonise European social policy and the social chapter, as Conservative Members so often do.

Today at Question Time, the Prime Minister said that Labour favoured massive new powers for the European Parliament. Nothing in our document backs up that idea. Members of the European Parliament themselves have not been calling for massive new powers. They know that they were given new powers under the Maastricht treaty, and that it will take time for those to be fully tested and tried out. The proposals in our document for streamlining the European Parliament and making it more effective are largely welcomed by them.

[Ms Quin]

We feel that there are areas in which the European Parliament and national parliaments should work together to complement each other in the important scrutiny in which they are both involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said how inaccessible to the House are some of the matters considered under the third pillar, dealing with justice and home affairs.

The Labour party firmly believes that that important pillar should remain intergovernmental, but the issues covered by it should be debated in our national parliaments, and we should know what is going on in that important aspect of policy. We should not suddenly be surprised at the last minute by a fundamental decision that the Council of Ministers may have taken in that area.

I strongly support what my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South said about the disgraceful conduct of the Home Secretary in vetoing action at European level against racism and xenophobia. Those are important matters. We know that there are problems of increased racism and xenophobia in many parts of the European Union. We believe that, just as the EU has a good record in opposing discrimination against women in the large single market, it should be similarly vigorous in trying to prevent discrimination on racial grounds. It is simply unforgivable for the Government to be smug about the fact that we have some good provisions in this country and to say that therefore there is no need to take any further action at a European level.

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), has become known as Mr. No in Europe because of his obstructionist and negative attitude; yet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston pointed out, last week at Foreign Office questions the Minister—who had said that he was against qualified majority voting on principle—said that he favoured the massive extension of qualified majority voting when we accepted the Single European Act because it was in Britain's interests. That is precisely the point. The Opposition think that in the rather modest areas where we favour qualified majority voting—such as social and environmental issues—it is in Britain's interests. In that sense, we are taking exactly the same point of view as the Minister of State. He seems to accept that the single market is in Britain's interests, but that no social or environmental policy is. I am afraid that I cannot agree with him on that.

Finally, Labour firmly believes that its approach to the European Union will give the British people a better deal out of our European Union membership. We believe that our approach to economic, social, environmental and agricultural questions in Europe will give the British people that fairer deal, and will also—happily—be in the interests of the long-term development of Europe as a whole. The sooner we are in a position to deliver that good deal to the British people and end the European failures of the present Government, the better.

I did not agree with the prediction of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) that the present Government will still be in power at the end of the intergovernmental process. We very much look forward to helping to complete that process when we are in government. I believe that, once again, the points that have been made in this debate have shown clearly that Britain's influence and position in Europe will only be improved under Labour.

9.31 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): This has been a serious and reflective debate—perhaps, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, more so than usual. It has certainly not been a routine debate. That, in part, is because it has taken place at a timely moment—two days after the signature of the study group report on the IGC, and a week before the European Council in Madrid that will preface the IGC. These two events offer an illuminating perspective from which to gauge the recent change in attitude within the EU.

Ten years ago, it would have been unthinkable that subjects such as subsidiarity and deregulation would have featured prominently on the European Council agenda. A study group report that extolled the virtues of national parliaments and nation states and made no overt reference to federalism would have been equally inconceivable. Yet those are today's realities. The change has come about to a very large extent because the United Kingdom has been resolute in pressing our vision of an effective, responsible and flexible European Union.

Let us be clear: we need an effective European Union. We need a Europe that can deliver the single market, a Europe that can promote effective co-operation on cross-border issues and a Europe that will keep up the effort to contribute to opening markets, both within the Union and outside it. We want a Europe that recognises that it must win back people's confidence. I take the point made in the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) about the need to handle the public's perception of the Union. He made some wise and insightful comments.

We need a Europe that will not interfere where it is not needed and will not undermine national sovereignty. We need an effective Europe with an institutional structure that harnesses the strength and diversity of member states, and I stress "diversity", which was recognised in the reflection group report. Britain's agenda for Europe concentrates on the real issues—job creation, encouraging enterprise, scrapping unnecessary regulations and making a real and effective effort to tackle the fraud and waste that damages public respect for the Union. It concentrates on enhancing Europe's security through practical measures, rather than through doctrinal Euro-waffle and Euro-theology. The British people have no time for arcane and obscure institutional irrelevances—what the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) rightly called the dry rot of Europe.

We need a flexible Europe that builds on the innovative, intergovernmental arrangements created at Maastricht instead of trying to dismantle them. We need a European Union that recognises that the structures that work well for the single market would not work for foreign security policy or for a number of other policies. We need a flexible Europe that can cope with countries with different traditions, different histories and, certainly, differing economic circumstances.

I began by noting that what was once unthinkable—at least outside London—now obtains in at least some parts of mainstream European thinking. As the problems facing Europe change, we are often the first to face up to the new realities. It is not always comfortable and it is not always politically expedient, but being in a minority has never deterred us before. My right hon. Friend the

Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) made a powerful speech in which he mentioned being one of a minority. He said, rightly, that when we are isolated we must know the purpose for standing out; I agree. We must consider each proposal on its merits and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said, in the light of our national interest. If we had been deterred by being in a minority we would have forgotten about ensuring that the principle of subsidiarity was accepted in the treaty; we would have abandoned enlargement; we would have given up our competitiveness and we certainly would not have had a Commission President whose motto is "Less action, but better action."

Within this framework we have developed our approach to the IGC. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has outlined our general approach. During the study group meetings it has been noticeable that some of the wilder ideas that emerged two or three years ago have failed to surface. No one ran with the idea of exclusive hard cores; no one mentioned the prospect of the Council becoming a second Chamber of the European Parliament.

Hon. Members should not get me wrong: the federalists have not given up; the federalist impulse has not disappeared and there are still many who fight hard for more centralisation and more power for Brussels. Those points were made in the excellent speech of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and picked up, in his usual assiduous way, by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who mentioned some of issues in the study group's report.

The balance is changing—the changes are sometimes driven by popular opinion in member states and by circumstances. The debate has moved on from what became known as the fundamentalist agenda. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) was right when he quoted the Italian press—albeit that it may have been too flattering about me. When the Italian press interviewed members of the study group and asked whether they were concerned about the "Obstructionism of Britain", they replied that they were not at all concerned. They said that Britain was constructive and that the biggest problem arose from the fundamentalists. I should say to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe that it was interesting that virtually every member of the British press asked the same questions and was disappointed with the answers, so his adage is doubly relevant.

It is not surprising, therefore, that I found significant support in the group for many key UK themes. We were supported on subsidiarity, on competitiveness, on the role of national parliaments, on enlargement and on relevance to the citizen—a point that came up time and again, partly because we pushed it very hard. There were also matters on which there was no consensus, but in those cases we were frequently one of a majority or one of a large minority—one such example involved common foreign and security policy. Some of our views on this were put rather well by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). In our view, a more effective common foreign policy can be achieved by improved CFSP machinery and by the exercise of more political will to use it. It will not be achieved, as some would like, by voting models that override the key concerns of minorities, replacing a common policy with a majority one—a single loud voice with a babble. That would allow foreign policy questions to isolate and ostracise members of the Union, thereby internalising what were external problems before.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) made a number of important points on defence, WEU and security issues. He said that there should be no membership of WEU without prior membership of NATO. I could not agree more. Membership of WEU requires the sort of security guarantees that only NATO can deliver. A country cannot logically be a full member of WEU, therefore, without also joining NATO.

My hon. Friend highlighted the combination of special circumstances: the situation of the neutrals, the need to preserve sovereignty in defence and the need to preserve and reinforce NATO. These led to the careful design of the policy proposal that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State published earlier this year on WEU and its relationship with the EU. It is a policy that I believe will gain supporters in Europe as the IGC progresses.

As for the so-called third pillar—justice and home affairs—we have argued, and will continue to argue, for improved co-operation in the fight against drugs and international crime. The federalists—the centralisers—wanted to communitise some of these areas, arguing that the third pillar had not worked. We do not believe that. It is new, and much has been achieved in practical terms in the past two years, besides four major conventions and a deal of useful co-operation behind the scenes between national law enforcement agencies. I think that about 600 items of information have already been exchanged in connection with international crime. There is still scope for streamlining decision-making procedures in this area, but it must remain firmly intergovernmental.

I also argued in the study group for a European Union that is more relevant and acceptable to people. People rightly say that there is still too much over-regulatory, ambiguous and intrusive legislation from Brussels. To deal with it, we need further to entrench subsidiarity, to prevent interference in matters that should be ours to decide. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford made some excellent points in this connection; I agreed with much of what he said.

The Commission must also be obliged to consult more widely before preparing major new harmonising legislation. We shall pursue our efforts to deregulate in Europe, in parallel with, and if necessary within, the IGC.

We need to reform the European Court of Justice, not to weaken it, which is an occasional misapprehension. We must make its judgments more appropriate and more acceptable, and we have submitted a paper to the study group to that effect.

I also explained to the group the priority that the Government attach to improving democracy in the European Union, with a bigger role for national parliaments and a bigger say for member states following enlargement, in terms of the weighting of votes. The hon. Member for Clydesdale talked about his Scrutiny Committee, which has made extremely positive proposals that were well received by the study group. I took the liberty of recommending the proposal that declaration 13 be incorporated in the treaty. I am glad to say that that was later agreed by the Cabinet committee that gives me orders. That would help to meet the points that the hon.

[Mr. David Davis]

Gentleman raised in respect of timing and of proper information being passed to the Scrutiny Committee and other Committees of this House before measures are taken in Europe.

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Clydesdale is no longer here, because I should like to thank him for his compliments. I look forward to the Committee's next proposals in response to the points that we have made. I reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point that declarations are not good enough—action and performance matter, and we need practical measures.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) mentioned transparency. A new code of conduct was adopted in October, under which most of the minutes made when the Council is dealing with legislation are made available. We were at the forefront of securing that change, but complete openness would probably be counterproductive in areas where negotiations take place. It could have the effect of driving negotiations into the corridor, which would be exactly the opposite of that intended. Nevertheless, we understand only too well the hon. Lady's point.

People in Britain—and increasingly in other member states—emphatically do not want more transfers of power away from national Governments to the centre. The British Government will not accept further extension of majority voting, any watering down of intergovernmentalism of the pillars or massive new powers for the European Parliament.

Mr. Shore: We all welcome the four weeks' notice of any Commission proposal before it is debated as it allows the House to deal with it. Another proposal that could be valuable in the same direction appeared in a recent Select Committee report from the other place, which was published on 3 November and which related to the third pillar. There was a general feeling that far too many decisions could be made in the House of Lords without adequate discussion in this House. The Select Committee recommended that a Council decision on a third pillar instrument should be invalidated unless the national parliament of each member state had been offered, in accordance with the procedures applicable in each member state, an opportunity to express its view. That procedure would make a valuable addition. What does the Minister think?

Mr. Davis: We are reviewing some of the proposals of the Scrutiny Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee, and of the Select Committee in the other place. It is a complex area and we must devise proposals that work for every Parliament in Europe. We know only too well how getting that wrong could have perverse effects. We have been considering the issues for some months but because they are complex and the effects in different constitutional arrangements are difficult to predict, we are taking time to reach a conclusion.

The appearance of isolation is not always what it seems. I will give an example. We were the only member state opposed in principle to the extension of qualified majority voting. If one looks closer at the report, one sees that some people link their support for more QMV to the reweighting of votes between smaller and larger states. That is not an enthusiasm for more qualified majority voting but a negotiating stance or linkage, prior to the intergovernmental conference. I do not want to be drawn in to debating our negotiating tactics but, in my judgment, the situation will change over the year, with different states taking different stances to achieve what they want.

Even people who appear to support more QMV in principle often have trouble with the practical implications. I draw the attention of the House to paragraph 65 of the report. Behind all the jargon lies the point that some member states do not wish to abandon the remaining unanimity requirements in certain areas, unless another member state is willing to pay for the consequences. That will not come easily. I highlight that so that the House will understand that the issue is not so clear-cut as perhaps the British press and the press elsewhere made it appear. Even if the United Kingdom were to withdraw from the debate, which I can assure the House it will not, the remaining member states would find it rather difficult to square their differences in some instances.

It is not Britain's occasional isolationism that undermines its national interests. On the contrary, we have achieved much in the past precisely because we have been willing to be isolated. It is not merely being tough-minded in our tactics. In the past, we have secured vital opt-outs by being willing to be isolated. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did not comment on whether he thought the opt-out that we obtained on the single currency was good or bad when he was asked about that.

Our national interest would be undermined, however, by Labour's socialist surrenders to Brussels. It has said as much itself in terms of surrendering the veto on social, industrial, regional and environmental policies. It would surrender our hard-fought social chapter opt-out and any permanent opt-outs. Such action would undermine Britain's sovereignty in what I consider to be supine acquiescence to creeping federalism.

It is not difficult to see the consequences. It is difficult, however, to understand why Labour pursues such a line. Perhaps the leader of the Labour party feels that his party would win some credit by adopting such a policy and not letting Britain become isolated. I do not think so. Perhaps he feels that he would be seen as more communautaire.

It is a policy born solely of ignorance. If even one member of the Opposition Front Bench had served on the Council of Ministers, he or she would know that no other nation in Europe fears being isolated when its national interest is at stake. Do Labour Members think that France would hesitate? Do they think that Spain would? Do they believe that any member state would surrender its policy through fear of being in a minority?

Mr. Spearing: Look at GATT.

Mr. Davis: Indeed.

Labour's policy of compliance would purchase nothing but it could cost everything. No wonder some federalists in Europe are hoping for a Labour Government. Such an Administration would lead to the most foolish and pointless surrender that it is possible to imagine.

Labour would like to cover up its weaknesses. We know that only a few weeks ago its leader told the CBI that a Labour Government would merely pick and choose those elements of the social chapter that were good for Britain. As most of the social chapter is decided by qualified majority voting and as those parts that are not now would be if Labour had its way, the leader of the Labour party would not have any choice.

That point was made clearly by Adair Turner, the director general of the CBI, who was speaking only last weekend. He said:

> "If you sign up to the social chapter you can't actually be sure that you will have your way because some directives will be covered by qualified majority voting. There is, however, a way to pick and choose, and that is available to the Labour party if it wants to have it as its policy. The way to pick and choose is actually not to sign up to the social chapter."

In effect, that is the CBI speaking in response to the speech delivered by the leader of the Labour party.

There are implications. Several hon. Members, however, have tried to suggest that the social chapter is not especially important or serious. When we fought and won our opt-out of the social chapter, Jacques Delors did not like it. I think that he said that it would make Britain a paradise for investment. He was right. Many of his fellow travellers in Europe recognised that he was right. They knew that Britain had already won far more than its share of inward investment in Europe. They knew that the more that they increased the burden of the social chapter the more advantage we would have. As a result, they became much more cautious about using it. They tried to put some of their proposed legislation into other articles, including health and safety. Other proposals have been held back, at least for the moment.

Again, I refer to the director general of the CBI, speaking only last weekend:

> "We oppose this because of our broad belief that the continent does now have a major problem with inflexible labour markets and high social costs, and because of our fear that once we accept the social chapter there will be an ever-creeping tendency to extend its operation."

One effect of the opt-out has been to limit the growth of the social chapter, or to curb the enthusiasm of the social engineers. But if the opt-out disappeared—if Labour destroyed it—the limits on the social chapter would disappear. Much more would go into it. That would damage not only Britain's ability but Europe's too.

The Labour leader, speaking last weekend, claimed to have a new agenda for Europe. It was, he said, enlargement, competition and CAP reform. Had he been promoting that agenda some years ago, he would, given his other views, have discovered something of an uncomfortable fact. Enlargement was, of course, already a British position, a minority position; competitiveness was already a British position, a minority position; and CAP reform was already a British position, again, a minority position. He tries to claim those positions, because he thinks that they are popular, but they are popular today only because we stood up for them yesterday.

The Labour leader has made it clear that there is no issue on which he is prepared to stand alone, and, accordingly, no President of the Commission is ever likely to say of him what Jacques Santer has said of us:

> "Very often it is British initiatives that end up being Europe's mainstream policy."

The Government have a clear vision for Europe: a Europe of effective co-operation between sovereign nations; a Europe responsive to ordinary people's concerns; and a Europe flexible enough to do its work in the most appropriate way. From that vision, we draw our agenda for the intergovernmental conference. The Government's agenda is realistic and positive. It will serve Britain's interests and Europe's too. That last point needs emphasising.

The European debate is not a contest between the needs of the United Kingdom and the needs of Europe. Advancing the interests of the British people is not simply about saying yes or no to ideas or proposals from our partners. The Government's approach offers more: a model for Europe that can meet the different needs of all its peoples. Some members of the Union will want to co-operate more closely in some areas, and our vision recognises that. All members of the Union will want the business that they do together to be done efficiently and to good effect. Our vision encourages that.

Above all, members of the Union will have to confront the challenges that enlargement poses—the hard questions that closer monetary co-operation sets. Our approach reflects that, too. The issues are difficult, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) elicited only too clearly. I repeat the point that I made to him: the reason why these policy issues were not within the reflection group report was not that their importance was underestimated. They are issues to be dealt with not within the IGC but in parallel to it.

Some may prefer not to face these difficult issues today, but wishing them away is not an option. Asking the questions and finding the right answers is vital to Europe's future success. We do not shy away from the task. Indeed, we cannot afford to do so, because our national interest demands that we anticipate and confront these challenges.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) eloquently raised the challenge of European monetary union. Our caution about signing up to rigid timetables and our freedom to opt out or opt in on stage 3 of EMU has been clearly vindicated by events throughout Europe. Although he perhaps did not intend to do so, that point was reinforced firmly by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney in an extraordinarily effective speech on this issue. Indeed, it was also reinforced by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough.

The hard questions that we have been raising all along about EMU are now becoming the currency of discussion within the European Union, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's meeting with his Italian counterpart demonstrated yesterday.

In other areas, too, the positions that we have taken seem increasingly justified. We welcome the French decision this week to draw closer to NATO. That is further confirmation that the alliance remains the bedrock of our security. The objective of European defence co-operation must be to keep the alliance strong.

The kind of union that we want to see is one in which all its members can feel comfortable and from which all its members can profit. It is a union that recognises that Europe and Europe's interests do not end at the frontiers of the 15 member states. There is a wider Europe slowly being reunited. To the north and the east there is a wider Europe of nations coming to terms with their new freedom. It is for us to ensure that they succeed in that transition. It is also for us to power the drive for global free trade that promises new prosperity for all—not least those new members.

[Mr. Davis]

The countries of Europe must rise to these tasks, not turning inwards, not tinkering with institutions, but looking to the world beyond. We will continue to pursue that broader vision because—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 131(2) (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [5th December] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

Local Television

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Television, in all its forms, is one of the United Kingdom's greatest assets, one of its life forces. Its creativity and artistry are evident, and its employment implications are evident and important to this country. However, television can never stand still. It must face the new challenges of the future.

I am afraid to say that, during the past 16 years or so, the Government have missed the opportunity to build upon our great tradition and ensure the future of television, by missing out a whole new layer of accessible programmes, skills and jobs—that new bottom layer of the television pyramid, local television.

There are immense opportunities for productive and profitable partnerships between local newspapers, radio groups, regional television groups, councils and local multimedia companies, but the Conservatives have lamely abdicated their responsibility during the past few years.

At no time have the Government created any incentives for innovation in that area. The Broadcasting Act 1990 removed any real requirements for cable companies to provide local services. Television under the Conservatives has been about the size of wallets, crafty deals, small fish lording it in a tiny and evaporating pond—limited takers, not risk takers. Nowhere is that more evident than in local television.

This is a great missed opportunity. Local television, by connecting citizens to one another, could regenerate a sense of community and shared identity. If combined with the new information communications technologies, it could enable a more responsive, interactive political system to develop at local level. It could create opportunities for new media companies operating at a local level, with the resulting benefits in terms of employment and training. It would help to broaden the involvement of citizens in their television, and challenge the dominance of London-based broadcasting elites.

Those are the opportunities. Cable television gives the chance to provide television to a smaller community of 2,000 people. I believe that there will be significant growth in cable subscribers, partly because local television will offer a unique selling point. Sadly, few cable companies currently provide any local content, despite the fact that the majority of their licences, signed before the Broadcasting Act, contained a commitment to provide local services.

It would be wrong to say that only cable can provide local television. For example, what happened to the visionary plans for channel 5 to have local opt-outs, as one of the original bidders intended? I am afraid that that was sacrificed at the altar of commercial television.

What about the potential of digital terrestrial to provide more local content? We are promised many dozens of channels, yet again there is a gaping hole in the Government's proposals to provide local services rather than more of the same. In Bruce Springsteen's words, "two hundred channels and nothing to watch."

If the Government became involved and took action, the alternative could be a burst of creative variety in local programming. The need for such variety will not be satisfied by the satellite television companies' introducing many dozens of channels—possibly more than 100. They do not wish to enter that market, and we shall have to look elsewhere for local provision.

I believe that cable companies should consider providing three types of local service—commercially run local television, which can chase a large audience with entertaining local programmes and news; public service-style television, seeking to fulfil a community remit and to address minority concerns; and "local access" television, produced by local people in conjunction with professionals. One channel could combine all three services, or could emphasise one or two.

Some channels have already been developed that claim local status. Channel 1, London's 24-hour news service, is an example, and Live TV plans opt-outs in cities such as Birmingham. A spine of centrally produced programming facilitates the development of local planning around it.

Cable has finally begun to recognise its own self-interest. It needs viewers as well as infrastructure. It already has a head start on British Telecommunications; it must make good use of that head start to ensure that it remains a competitor when BT is allowed into the entertainment market by the next Labour Government.

The Minister may well argue that local television is not commercially viable. Part of the reason for that is the fact that the Government have already distorted the television market. There is a wide demand for locally produced programmes: opinion polls show that large majorities would prefer more localised television services, and both Live TV and Channel 1 have illustrated that the production costs of local television can be significantly reduced. That will ensure that local television does not run at a loss. Viewing will also grow rapidly as people come to value and exploit this new source of information and entertainment. Income from local advertising, as yet an untapped revenue source, will make local television profitable. If viewing is high enough, national advertising may also be secured.

Much as I value the high quality of television provided by BBC Midlands and Central Independent Television, how much better it would be if they complemented their services by developing Greater Nottingham Television, Derby City Television and Leicester Television. The opportunities are there, and the BBC and ITV companies can create a wider audience for local television by working in partnership. Perhaps for once they could work together to promote that aspect of television's development.

What about the role of the regulator, the Independent Television Commission? It has made some laudable efforts to get the cable companies moving, but its hands have been tied by an adequate governmental framework. It has only the "nuclear deterrent" of removing cable companies' franchises if they do not meet the commitment in their licences to provide local services.

It is possible that the ITC could impose a graduated set of penalties to enforce those commitments, and it should have the power to bar a franchisee from reapplying for a licence if it fails to honour them. The Broadcasting Act 1990 could be amended to ensure that the responsibility to provide local television services is statutory. In addition, the ITC might have the power to allow an independent producer of local television to use the network if a franchise holder was slow to provide such services. Those measures might help the cable franchise to become viable, particularly when the monopoly ends and BT enters the entertainment market.

Like many other countries, Canada has had the nerve and vision to introduce a regulatory framework requiring cable companies to provide a local television service. Local television has blossomed as we hope it may blossom here. The results have been highly successful, and cable companies have recognised it as an opportunity to boost consumer loyalty and play a genuine community role. Local television can revel in Britain's cultural, economic, social and ethnic diversity, bringing a bright plurality of voices to the screen.

What about the potential for using local television to enhance democracy? Again, there is no current vision from the Government as to how to harness that power of decentralised television. Labour's plans to create regional chambers and to liberate local government will complement and support the growth of democratic initiatives using television. Perhaps regional chambers may be the body to license local television, as is the case with the Lander in Germany.

Other exciting possibilities exist. The BBC, Channel 4 and ITV could potentially provide content for local television. It may be necessary for them to consider their future by refocusing existing resources to provide this new service. If that were linked with a responsibility for developing community access, a radical development and redevelopment could take place of the public service role of the BBC and Channel 4.

British Telecom, once it begins to provide broadcast entertainment, could play an important role in encouraging such television. Government are desperately needed to encourage thinking in these sectors. The Government have abdicated that responsibility. We need a Government who will intervene and ensure that this sector is developed. Of course, there is an alternative. It is, I am afraid, to stare unblinkingly into the headlights of the British Sky Broadcasting satellite. I hope that people in British television do not believe that that is an appropriate alternative.

We must think about creating opportunities for community access. What is the best method to achieve that? Many colleges and universities already have media centres with a range of production equipment. Could those be developed as community broadcast centres? Cable companies, BT and broadcasters should now begin to think about how they could develop local community television co-ordinators with responsibility for encouraging participation in television by local people.

When I talk about local media, I think also about the new communication technology's potential to transform local democracy and accountability. Under the current system of representative democracy, individuals still have to lobby their political representatives using traditional methods such as writing a letter, signing a petition, contacting their representatives' office, arranging an appointment or attending their surgery At best, that is often self-selecting and a one-way flow. Local television, allied to the information super-highway, can make politics a more widespread and two-way activity.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

The new information and communication technologies afford the possibility of understanding and interacting directly with national, regional and local representatives and Parliaments. Just a couple of months ago, the Labour party conference had an experiment with a virtual electronic conference that was open to people throughout the world. Debates took place not only in the virtual conference hall, but in the virtual conference bar, which seemed equally popular. Debates took place between eminent people in the Labour party, passers-by, delegates and people in the United States of America, Japan and elsewhere in the world.

That could be repeated, not only in this place in a virtual Parliament, so that I could question—at his leisure, of course—the Minister or his staff more than once every three weeks and at any time of the day, but perhaps in councils, with virtual council meetings, where, at certain times of the month or week, councillors would be available to discuss and interact with one or many individual constituents, pressure groups or lobby groups.

Allied to local television, the role of such technology will help educate all of us in our politics, rather than being used as a way of finding an electronic snapshot of prejudice, a sort of electronic plebiscite, which is a danger of that technology. Every Member of Parliament could engage in this with their own home page on the World Wide Web, so that they could interact with their constituents at given times of the week.

Local television can help to regenerate a sense of community and a shared identity, while allowing everyone a voice. Those are just some of the possibilities that local television and multimedia provide to enhance democracy and reactivate civic culture. It is a possibility that is being denied to people by the Government's sloth in recent years.

I urge the Minister to take the opportunity offered in the forthcoming broadcasting Bill to explore some of the possibilities that exist. He may not feel that it is appropriate to include those matters in the Bill, but I hope that he agrees that it would be appropriate to have sensible and extensive debates in Committee on the matters I have raised.

After almost 60 years of television, we are still allowing a relatively small elite to control the entirety of broadcasting to and for all 58 million of us. It is time to broaden the involvement of citizens in their television, to counter the erosion of diversity that has undoubtedly taken place in our television in a search for mass audiences, and to begin a democratic process of retuning our rich broadcasting culture to the needs of the individual local television viewer.

10.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has been moved from his job as Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on broadcasting and media matters. We had some extremely interesting debates in Committee, and his speech tonight showed that he is no less fertile in ideas than he was then. I hope that some of the ideas he mentioned can be considered in the broadcasting Bill that will be before us shortly.

I can promise the hon. Gentleman that if his stimulating ideas are raised in amendments to the Bill—which I am sure they will, because I know that the hon. Gentleman has influence with his hon. Friends, and no doubt with some of my hon. Friends who read his speech—we will debate them seriously. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman will not be present to debate them with us.

Because of the relative nearness of the debates on the Bill, I will have to be more constrained and circumscribed in my reply. I will not be able to pick up an idea, throw it around and discuss it in the rather carefree way that we used to do in Committee. As I have said, I hope that we will have a chance to return to these issues seriously.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are introducing a Bill shortly on the developments in broadcasting. I should like to emphasise that the Government are committed to encouraging the development of technology and the expansion of the broadcast media, which in turn will increase consumer choice.

The Broadcasting Act 1990 was introduced precisely to encourage the expansion of the media, and to ensure that the high standards and quality that we have come to expect from our broadcasters in the United Kingdom were maintained as the market expanded. That Act, like the Bill to be published shortly, ensures that those with the expertise and market knowledge can develop their products in the most efficient way while ensuring that the consumer receives the quality of product that the consumer deserves and wants. Our commitment to regional and local programming is part of our wider commitment to maintain the standards of British broadcasting while expanding the choice of services for the viewer.

The future of local television is assured, and it is a sector that will grow with the continued expansion of cable and the arrival of digital broadcasting. Currently, the BBC and channel 3 companies have strong regional commitments. The BBC's commitment to producer choice is helping to move production away from a south-east dominance, and the regional nature of the channel 3 licences guarantees quality local television.

In 1994, the last year for which published figures are available, the Channel 3 licensees exceeded the Independent Television Commission licence requirements, and showed an average total of 180.53 hours of regional programming a week. The ITC is extremely vigilant in enforcing licence conditions, and will ensure that the level and quality of regional programming are maintained.

The swiftness with which the ITC responded in 1992 to concerns about Tyne-Tees's regional commitment, when it merged with Yorkshire, demonstrated that any changes in ownership do not affect the quality of local television. Local television has nothing to fear but much to gain from our policy on cross-media ownership.

The provision of local television services via cable is expanding quickly. From a slow start, the pace has quickened, and cable is now available to more than 5.5 million homes, with more than 20 per cent. of homes passed by cable choosing to subscribe. I understand that, in Nottingham, more than 25 per cent. of homes passed by cable have chosen to subscribe.

Although there are no obligations on cable operators to provide local services such as community channels, most companies that sought cable franchises under the 1990

Act committed themselves to developing some sort of local services. I understand that Diamond Cable in Nottingham provides a local text information service. The ITC has so far issued 95 licensable programme service licences to cable operators for local programming. That is very encouraging.

The expansion of cable and the arrival of digital transmission will take local television into a new era. Whereas the five main channels can never hope to provide much more than a regional service for local programmes, cable—and, more importantly, digital—will be able to provide truly local programmes, and, in due course, truly local services alongside its programming.

I share the hon. Gentleman's belief, which we have often discussed in Committee, in the social and economic worth of local television. I firmly believe that the Government's proposal for the introduction of digital terrestrial television will bring about increased opportunities, not only for local but for regional and minority interest television. Indeed, the introduction of digital terrestrial television will bring about many new opportunities for British manufacturing and the broadcasting industry as a whole.

The increased number of channels available will, in itself, provide increased opportunities for local and regional broadcasting. There will be at least 18 to 20 new television channels covering most of the United Kingdom. However, because digital technology offers broadcasters the potential to split channels, at times there may be double that number or even more. Multiplex operators will be looking for new programming of all types to fill their frequencies.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Government's proposals, set out in the digital terrestrial broadcasting policy document, clearly stated that the ITC would judge applications on the variety of programme services that prospective multiplex providers intend to transmit. Multiplex providers, in putting together their proposals, will need to look to prospective broadcasters for different types of programme services appealing to a wide range of viewers' interests. I would expect the ITC to take full account of proposals for local, regional, community and special interest channels and programming as an important element in providing viewers with the appropriate level of variety.

The technological advantages of the digital medium will make it easier for broadcasters to split their frequency allocations into regional and local areas and to schedule programming with interwoven layers of national, regional and local broadcasting.

There will be a variety of patterns of programme provision, which will in turn give rise to new relationships between programme makers and broadcasters, and flexibility in contracting agreements, giving opportunities for smaller local broadcasters of programme makers to gain a foothold. Furthermore, I am assured that equipment associated with digital technology is less cumbersome and lends itself easily to programme making and transmission away from the large metropolitan studios. That represents an important advance for makers of local television programmes.

Against that background, the Government will be publishing their broadcasting Bill shortly. I should emphasise that their proposals for digital broadcasting, which will of course take account of points raised in responses to consultation, will be enabling rather than prescriptive. As I have said, the Government give a very high priority to ensuring that the variety of services available to viewers of digital television is attractive and encourages viewers to invest in digital receivers.

The Government's other key priority in the early stages of digital terrestrial television must be to create a framework that will encourage the industry to invest in the infrastructure necessary to maximise coverage of new digital services as quickly as possible, and encourage the production and marketing of receivers at an affordable price. That is why applicants' proposals for investment in those areas, along with the variety of programming that they intend to offer, are the criteria on which the allocations of licences will be determined.

Given that digital terrestrial television, while undoubtedly a marvellous opportunity, is also a high-risk venture, it would not be reasonable in the circumstances to place other burdens and restrictions on multiplex providers and broadcasters.

Specifically, it would not be reasonable to place on licensees a levy intended to finance subsidies for local television, as some, I am sure with the best of motives, have suggested. To do so could deter investment in digital terrestrial television. That in turn might permanently reduce or remove the scope for new services, whether national, regional or local. As I hope I have made clear, the Government's proposals are aimed precisely at maximising the scope for such new services, whether they are provided by existing or new broadcasters.

I should like to say something about media ownership.

Mr. Allen: Before the Minister moves on, is he prepared to go to see one or two examples of local television that already exist—there are a number around the country—before the broadcasting Bill goes into Committee? I am sure that, if he has not already seen such examples, he would find it very interesting and helpful. Will he make a particular point of going to see the BT experiment in and around Ipswich with about 5,000 homes, where, along with many other services, BT is piping into those homes a local community access channel?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I will. I think that that is an extremely interesting idea. The only caveat that would I add—it is a very practical one—is that, before I get embedded in the broadcasting Bill, I am trying to sort out various aspects of arts, public libraries, museums, galleries and heaven knows what else. But I would very much like to try to do just what the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government set out in May their proposals on media ownership. We asked the industry and the wider community to comment on what we said. We have received many responses, including several from companies in the smaller ITV regions, and they have all been taken into account in framing the Bill. Many stressed the importance of regional programming and production. Indeed, regionality is seen as the particular strength of the ITV network. Our media-ownership proposals included measures to preserve diversity at local levels by setting thresholds for local cross-media ownership.

I should add that requirements relating to regional programming and production are enshrined in the licence conditions of channel 3 companies. We have no intention

[Mr. Sproat]

of removing those requirements. As I said earlier, all the ITV companies, including those where consolidation has taken place, exceeded their regional programming and regional production requirements.

I shall finish with a little present for the hon. Gentleman, which I hope will be in order. I remind the House, in case the hon. Gentleman did not already know, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage today announced an additional digital radio frequency—a multiplex—that will be assigned to local services.

The House will remember that in August the Government published proposals and invited views from the radio industry about digital terrestrial broadcasting.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sproat: I have only one minute.

The proposals were aimed at ensuring that listeners are offered more choice of quality radio services. The Government received more than 100 responses, and have given each of them very careful consideration in the preparation of the forthcoming broadcasting Bill. In particular, we invited views on whether spare frequency should be used for national or local radio stations.

I am therefore very pleased to confirm that additional digital frequencies will be assigned to independent local radio services in areas where the need is greatest. That is especially important for urban areas such as Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff, London of course, and, who knows, perhaps Nottingham.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 8 December 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Crime

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

9.34 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I very much welcome this opportunity to debate an issue that is of the utmost importance to people up and down the country. Crime and the fear of crime, as we all know too well, knows no barriers. It affects and intrudes on the lives of the young and the old, the able and infirm, the family group and those living on their own—whatever their circumstances—and it rightly deserves our continuing attention.

It is all too easy to talk about crime in general terms as we do about the latest television drama or sporting event, but for the victim, crime is not imaginary or easily put to one side. It is real and can have significant consequences for its victims for many months and years ahead.

Against the background of today's debate, I urge hon. Members to bear it in mind that we are dealing not with simple statements of policy, but with the fears and reality faced by many of our constituents. It is our duty to ensure that we bring about a society where it is not the law-abiding citizen who should feel under threat, but those who seek to engage in a life of crime.

The Government are determined to continue to put the criminal in the dock. For too long there has been a depressing view that we are powerless in the face of rising crime; that it will rise year after year and we must somehow come to terms with it. I and my colleagues at the Home Office have never agreed with the nothing-can-be-done tendency. To do otherwise would feed a sense of helplessness and despair. What we need is not despair, but action.

What are the Government's goals in tackling crime? They are the straightforward goals that our constituents want: first, less crime; secondly, safer homes, streets and neighbourhoods; and, thirdly, feeling less frightened of crime. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recently put it, our goals are

> "To protect people's freedom to walk safely on their streets. To allow them to sleep safely in their homes. To build a safer Britain."

Our approach to achieving those goals is based on clear, commonsense principles: preventing crime, holding criminals responsible for their actions, punishing those who break the law and stressing the difference between right and wrong.

But before trying to tackle the problem of crime, we must appreciate the extent and nature of it. If we were to look to the press for our information, we would, for example, think that juvenile crime in this country was at crisis levels, and that all young people were potential criminals. We all know that that is not the case. The vast majority of young people do not commit crime. Equally though, we must not dismiss lightly a phenomenon that causes so much anguish and suffering.

On 27 September, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the Home Office were able to announce the biggest fall in recorded crime in our history. On top of earlier falls, recorded crime fell a further 5 per cent. during the 12 months to June 1995. The latest recorded crime figures highlight the fact that although the level of crime is still far too high, the dedicated efforts of the police and the community at large can result—and indeed have resulted—in significant falls in the number of recorded crimes.

Those successes should encourage us all to make even greater efforts to tackle crime. Effective policing methods, increased partnerships with the community and the use of new technology such as closed circuit television all contribute to reducing the level of crime.

In total, 5.1 million crimes were recorded by the police in the 12 months to the end of June 1995. That is a fall of 5 per cent.—or 260,000 crimes—compared with the number recorded in the 12 months to June 1994. The fall of 2 per cent. in violent crime is an encouraging development, since although those crimes account only for 6 per cent. of all recorded crime, their immediate effects on the victims and their contributions to the public's general fear of crime are especially damaging.

The recent fall of 5 per cent. in recorded crime builds on a previous fall of 5 per cent. for the 12 months to June 1994. It means that over the past two years, most of the major crime categories have seen significant reductions in the number of recorded offences. For instance, there were more than 175,000 fewer recorded burglaries and more than a quarter of a million fewer recorded vehicle crimes than two years ago. The fall of 162,000 recorded thefts, which includes vehicle crime, combined with a reduction of 221,000 offences over the previous 12 months, has resulted in 380,000 fewer recorded thefts than two years ago.

The welcome falls in recorded crime are part of the longest continuous fall in the number of recorded offences since records began. As I remarked earlier, this encouraging trend is a result of the police's success throughout the country in increasingly targeting those engaged in crime. I congratulate the police forces on their proven ability to target effectively those responsible for crime in their area and on their fostering invaluable partnerships with the community which enable everyone to play their part in tackling crime.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I agree wholeheartedly with the Minister's last sentence. Does he agree that one of the reasons why the police have been able to target serious crime, which often networks down to, for example, large-scale drug distribution, is the development of criminal intelligence systems? Will he make a statement to the House now about what is happening to the national criminal intelligence service, in view of the publicity in the past couple of days? I ask him, in an entirely apolitical and neutral spirit, to give the House some reassurance that the NCIS will continue to

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

operate and that the Government will ensure that its operation is not inhibited by whatever investigation is taking place.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to draw attention to the phenomenal success of the NCIS; it has been one of the best innovations in police intelligence gathering and in the national policing effort in recent years. Its success is acknowledged by everyone who knows of it and by the police service in general. I cannot comment on any internal investigations currently taking place in the NCIS. As the hon. and learned Gentleman will know, Mr. John Stevens, the excellent chief constable of Northumbria, has been asked to investigate and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any of that. However, I can give the hon. and learned Gentleman the assurance that the NCIS will continue to operate highly effectively, giving police forces around the country and the regional crime squads the intelligence information they need and as a result of which they are so highly successful.

The police are to be heartily congratulated on their success against crime in their areas. The "Partners Against Crime" campaign promotes schemes such as neighbourhood watch. We have enabled that to be expanded and strengthened and new types of partnership, such as street watch and neighbourhood constables, have been introduced. Those schemes not only prove invaluable in the overall crime prevention and detection effort, but give people an opportunity to play a constructive part in combating crime, thereby making themselves and their local neighbourhoods feel that crime is not simply something that should be feared, but something that can be beaten.

Police forces throughout the country attach particular importance to operations which target persistent offenders who are responsible for a large amount of crime in any one area. I know that the police share my concern about the misery caused by crimes such as burglary and car crime and that they are determined to do everything they can to fight it. Increasing the number of detections for burglaries, and targeting and preventing crimes that are a particular local problem are key objectives which have been set for the police. Throughout the country, police forces have undertaken initiatives specifically to tackle those types of crime, often using intelligence-based methods such as crime pattern analysis and targeting offenders.

I am sure that hon. Members will be aware of Operation Christmas Cracker which was undertaken on 5 December. It was the largest operation against burglary that this country has seen, involving 12,000 officers from 40 forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Let us wait and see how many will be convicted.

Mr. Maclean: Perhaps that will be the responsibility of the hon. and learned Gentleman and his learned friends.

The police targeted people suspected of being involved in burglary and completed 3,772 dawn raids. In all, 3,327 people were arrested and £1.8 million-worth of stolen property was recovered. The objectives of Operation Christmas Cracker are to strike a major blow against burglars, to transfer fear from victims to criminals, to show that police forces around the country are serious about combating burglary and to persuade burglars that there is a high likelihood that they will be caught.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will my right hon. Friend give further thought to helping victims of crime? Will he give serious thought to introducing victim impact statements, as is done in America? Victims have the opportunity, when the perpetrator of the crime comes to court, to appear and to tell the court and the jury exactly what effect that crime has had on their lives. Many victims in this country do not have such an opportunity. Many of them do not even know when their attacker is coming to court and many are not told, after the court appearance, what has happened. Such a scheme would help the victims in their rehabilitation process. We spend a lot of time rehabilitating the criminal and not doing as much as we should for the victim.

Mr. Maclean: I have a section in my speech relating to victims and I shall deal with those issues then. Suffice it to say at this stage that we and the Lord Chancellor's Department have a raft of measures to help victims. They include generous funding for Victim Support and a revision of the victims charter. I hope that some hon. Members saw the pack we published recently with rather specialist victims' organisations which work with those who, unfortunately, are relatives of people who have been murdered. We have issued a rather special pack to deal with them.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Why then did the Home Secretary and the Minister vote against our proposals to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service had to take into account the impact on victims of crimes when deciding how to deal with matters before the court?

Mr. Maclean: We voted against the proposals for most adequate reasons; they were plain daft.

Operation Christmas Cracker follows the successful operation carried out in May this year against burglars. In this operation, more than 5,000 officers from 22 forces across the south of England and Wales searched 1,828 addresses and made 1,324 arrests. The operation was instigated by the Metropolitan police as part of their Operation Bumblebee initiative.

Operation Bumblebee was started in the No. 1 area of the Met in June 1991. In the first phase, more than 5,000 people were arrested and 8,000 offences of burglary were solved. The initiative went force-wide in June 1991 and there have been seven London-wide operations before Operation Christmas Cracker. Around 4,401 premises were searched and 3,276 people were arrested.

Operation Bumblebee has used an unprecedented mix of operational activities, using techniques that had previously been employed only to investigate very serious crime. A key plank of the strategy and all the other operations around the country, including Scorpion, Bear, Claw and Spider, is targeting the criminals rather than the crime.

The latest statistics on recorded crime show that those initiatives are helping to reduce crime levels nationwide. In the 12 months to June 1995, burglary has fallen by 5 per cent. and vehicle crime by 9 per cent. compared with the previous 12 months. Police officers believe, as I do, that it is by targeting and imprisoning persistent offenders that we can significantly reduce crime. Such operations have already led to thousands of successful prosecutions. The criminals are now aware that they are not going to be allowed to get away with their malign activities.

As Mrs. Pauline Clare, the new chief constable of Lancashire, stated:

> "Professional criminals whose activities are curtailed by lengthy prison sentences have perhaps the greatest impact on reducing recorded crime. There is no doubt that the fear of imprisonment is an extremely effective deterrent and certainly protects the public from the habitual offender."

And so say all of us—or at least, all of us on the Government side of the House.

That said, we have no illusions about the level of crime. There is, as I have said, far too much of it, and we shall continue to back the police in their crusade against the criminal.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary plays a significant part in ensuring that good practice is adopted by forces in tackling crime. In 1993 the Audit Commission published a report, "Helping with Enquiries—Tackling Crime Effectively", which encapsulated the principles of crime management advocated by inspectors. It effectively drew together existing good practice and provided a firm basis on which to reassess priorities within criminal investigation departments.

Following that report, in early 1994, the inspectorate, working in association with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Audit Commission, helped to produce a management guide to assist forces. The guide advocated an integrated approach to tackling crime and recommended a more proactive approach to crime management, improved prioritisation of the investigative process, better use of intelligence, improved targeting of suspects and greater emphasis on the prevention of crime.

During the course of the year inspectors have looked carefully at how forces responded. They found that the management guide had enhanced the awareness of forces. Most had instituted some form of crime desk system, which enabled them to target resources more effectively, and had developed crime strategies which incorporated many of the principles in the guide.

The spread of good practice lies at the heart of the promotion of value for money, and is a key responsibility for the inspectorate. In October this year the inspectorate published a report, "Obtaining Value for Money in the Police Service", which followed a major review of efficiency gains made by forces and an assessment of those planned for the future.

The Government's commitment to maintaining law and order and tackling crime was amply demonstrated to the House, to the police service and to the whole country again last week by yet another excellent funding settlement for the police service. Nationally, £6.6 billion will be available for policing in England and Wales next year. That is a generous increase of about 4 per cent., or £240 million, over the figure for 1995-96.

The Prime Minister's pledge to provide sufficient funding for 5,000 extra police officers means an additional £180 million over the next three years, and £20 million is being provided initially next year, which will allow chief officers to recruit 1,000 extra police officers.

We have worked hard to improve the police funding formula. It has been investigated by independent consultants, who concluded that it was technically sound but that further work was needed on a number of aspects. Police service and police authority representatives have helped us with that. As a result, although some work is still continuing, we have been able to make the following principal changes for next year's formula: a reduction in the establishment element from 50 per cent. to 40 per cent., and an increase in the formula's pensions element from 9 per cent. to 12.3 per cent.

On top of those improvements to the formula we have proposed two additional rules for the allocation of police grant. The first rule ensures that all forces—except the Metropolitan police, where other considerations apply—can receive at least 3 per cent. more funding next year. The second rule ensures that all forces will receive a fair share of the additional 5,000 bobbies over the next three years.

The additional rules that we have invented safeguard stability in police funding allocations and make possible real spending increases in every police force. Those results in turn will make decisions on police budgets easier, and allow chief officers to respond to public demand for more high-visibility policing.

The success of the police service in getting crime down deserves our full support. The additional funding for next year demonstrates that every police force in the country is getting full support from the Government, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister tell us what change has been made in capital funding for next year, and whether the total has gone up or down?

Mr. Maclean: We publish the full figures for police funding, including capital funding. Of course there are some changes in capital funding, because we are introducing the private finance initiative. We are encouraging all police forces to grasp that initiative so as to spend considerably more in capital—on new police stations and divisional sub-headquarters, for example—and to share with the private sector the wonderful opportunities for development. Of course, until forces have prepared their private finance initiative plans we are maintaining the major build element of police capital funding.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: No, I have made my point and I want to move on. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech, in his usual way.

We introduced those rules to safeguard police funding. And from what I hear at this early stage, I understand that the police service is pleased with its settlement. Police forces understand that this year's settlement of 4 per cent. builds on the 3.8 per cent. increase last year, and they know that the Government are looking after the police service.

Bobbies with long service and long memories can remember 1977, 1978 and 1979, when the police service was sabotaged by the Labour Government, who left office leaving it 8,000 bobbies under strength. The first thing that Lord Whitelaw had to do in 1979 was to recruit 8,000 bobbies, just to bring police numbers back up to what they

[Mr. Maclean]

should have been. Most officers with long service will take with a pinch of salt some of the Opposition's current protestations that they would look after the police service.

The way in which we have looked after the police service is part of our comprehensive strategy to turn the tables on the criminal, and that strategy is now beginning to bite. It includes changes in the law such as reducing cautions, restricting bail, and limiting the so-called right of silence. Those developments, too, are important in tackling crime.

Action against street robbery is one of the priorities that the Home Secretary approved for the Metropolitan police policing plan. I wholeheartedly supported Sir Paul Condon's Operation Eagle Eye, as did the Metropolitan police committee. Like Sir Paul, I hope that everyone in the community will put their wits together to address the problem. There is no excuse for street crime. All citizens, black or white, have a responsibility to condemn the muggers for what they are, and to ask what the police can do to make our streets safe.

I do not doubt that most people want to see uniformed police officers out on the street. That is why that was made one of the key objectives for the police last year. I know from my discussions with serving police officers and with members of the public how much the public are reassured by the presence of uniformed officers in the local community. As Chief Superintendent Brian Mackenzie, president of the Police Superintendents Association, said recently,

> "What's undeniable is that the public, particularly the vulnerable such as the old, get tremendous reassurance from the patrolling officer".

Of course, he is right.

Regional crime squads also play a crucial role in the fight against serious and organised crime. In the past year they have been involved in operations leading to more than 4,000 arrests, the seizure of drugs with a street value of £176 million, and the recovery of £58 million-worth of stolen property, and of counterfeit currency with a face value of another £36 million.

Many of the squads' operations are international, working jointly with law enforcement agencies abroad. One recent operation, which provides a good example of European co-operation, involved regional crime squad officers working with the assistance of the German police. The operation led to the arrest of two Turkish nationals in Germany and another two in London, all four of whom were involved in the importation of £1 million-worth of heroin.

The Government are committed to tackling organised crime, and we have introduced a comprehensive package of measures to tackle it head on. The first stage of the package is the forthcoming Bill to allow the Security Service to provide support to the law enforcement agencies in the fight against organised crime. The increasing complexity and sophistication of organised crime is a cause for serious concern, and we must ensure that the full range of capabilities is available to the law enforcement agencies in order to combat that menace.

The skills and experience of the Security Service in acquiring and analysing intelligence will be of great value to the law enforcement agencies. At present, the law does not permit it to provide assistance. That makes no sense. Accordingly, our Bill will amend the Security Services Act 1989 to allow the Security Service to act in support of the law enforcement agencies against serious crime.

As we have said repeatedly, the Security Service will be supporting the police service, and the police service will remain in the lead. Linked to this measure, we also intend to establish a new national tier of police response to combat organised crime. This will build on the achievements of the regional crime squads. We will not be setting up a "British FBI", as has been suggested by some, but we will ensure that there is a more focused and better co-ordinated response to what is a national problem. Local police forces will remain the primary focus for policing in the UK. We will also strengthen the key intelligence and co-ordinating role of the national criminal intelligence service.

The police are at the forefront of developments in information technology. It is important that they remain so in the ever-more sophisticated fight against crime which will be needed as we approach the next century. The Government are determined to ensure that the right services, strategies and structures are in place to achieve this.

Use of the police national computer continues to grow and around 50 million transactions will be handled this year. Since the introduction of Phoenix in May, the police have been able to retrieve and enter records of arrests and convictions directly. On 1 November, new facilities were added to allow for the first time the recording of cautions on a national basis. When the very complex task of transferring existing records is complete, Phoenix will provide a database of immense value to the police and eventually to the rest of the criminal justice system.

Further enhancements to Phoenix are planned. The most important of these will be a system called QUEST, an investigative facility for searching the collection for all known offenders who meet a particular description. Phoenix will also be linked to NAFIS—the national automated fingerprint identification system—which will incorporate the national fingerprint collection of more than 5 million records.

The system will be rolled out to the national identification service and eight pilot forces in the middle of 1997. All existing fingerprint-matching systems in England and Wales will be replaced by 2001. Common data and system services will be co-located with the police national computer. As William Taylor, the Commissioner of the City of London police, said recently about NAFIS,

> "This will not be a simple fingerprint matcher, as can be found in bureaux all over the world, but a second-generation full fingerprint management system, the only one of its kind in existence. This will place the UK Fingerprint Service at the top of any league table you would like to devise."

The police national network, provided by Mercury, already forms the backbone for both data and telephone communications. It will also be used by NAFIS and is designed to meet the needs of the wider criminal justice community. The PNN is an excellent example of a public and private sector partnership delivering real benefits to all users.

The police use many local systems in addition to these centrally provided services. We must ensure that the investment of some £150 million a year in local systems is used to the best possible effect. In terms of new technology, there is no longer a clear boundary between local and centrally provided systems.

To maximise benefits, we now need to think about links between systems as well as planning the systems themselves. That is why the Home Secretary launched the first-ever strategy for police information systems. The strategy is fully supported by chief constables and police authorities and, one year on from the launch, lead forces are already developing cost-effective standard systems which will communicate with each other and centrally provided systems whenever necessary.

Changes to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 gave the police greater powers to take non-intimate samples from people suspected of being involved in recorded offences. The police can now take DNA samples, the profiles from which can be entered on the national DNA database and compared with profiles from traces left at scenes of crime. The national DNA database, which became operational only in April this year, is the first of its kind anywhere in the world. It is revolutionary. It relies on leading-edge technology and the most up-to-date DNA techniques.

More than 19,000 samples have already been entered on the database. For anyone whose DNA profile is held on the database, the risks involved in crime are very high. To date, 118 profile matches have already been achieved. The DNA database is an important tool for the police. The number of samples being submitted by them and the number of profile matches achieved speak well for the continued success of the database. As some of those cases come to court in the next few months, the House will see what an effective tool it is and will understand why I am not able to talk about those successes in detail at this stage.

Another area of technology to which I have already referred is closed circuit television. There cannot be many people who have not noticed the spread of these watchful guardians in recent times. High streets, shopping centres, industrial estates, schools, villages, community centres and other areas have all benefited from the presence of the cameras. The police have embraced the new technology enthusiastically, sometimes running their own systems, but more often working in partnership with others such as local authorities or town centre management committees.

CCTV is overwhelmingly popular with the operators, the police and the general public. It undoubtedly helps to prevent crime, helps the police to detect crime and assists with the investigation of crime. It gives the police extra incontrovertible evidence to help prosecute and convict more criminals, and it reduces the fear of crime among the general public.

CCTV has other, less serious social benefits. Everywhere I go, the police have shown me how they have found lost children, spotted fires in the early hours of the morning and got the fire brigade to them and identified people who have been taken ill on the street.

The results speak for themselves. There are examples of crime reductions from all over the country. I will just give the House a few examples of those. The Newcastle city centre scheme has been running for four years. There have been 800 arrests, and in only six cases did the criminals plead not guilty. It did not do them any good—they were still convicted. In Swansea, up to August 1994, there were 147 instances of taking from a motor vehicle. Since the cameras were installed in December 1994, there have been just 10. That is a dramatic cut.

In Northampton, there has been a 57 per cent. reduction in crime since CCTV was installed. In Berwick-upon-Tweed—which has a small-scale, four-camera system—burglary is down by 69 per cent., criminal damage by 41 per cent. and theft by 24 per cent. I use that example, but I should have used one for Montgomery instead, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is in the Chamber.

In Bedford city centre a CCTV scheme became operational in April 1994. It has led to over 200 arrests, to a reduction of 55 per cent. in overall recorded crime in the city centre compared with 1993 and to a reduction of 75 per cent. in recorded thefts of motor vehicles. I could go on, but I will not. We are seeing the same thing happening all around the country. Everywhere that CCTV has been installed, we get the same reports.

John Stevens, chief constable of Northumbria, said recently:

> "We are leading the world in CCTV technology and its use. In every case where cameras have been installed, crime has dropped and the number of arrests increased".

We in the Government are doing our bit to help the process. Last year we initiated a CCTV challenge competition. It was a tremendous success and the 106 winners in the competition will share the £5 million Government funding available. If all the schemes go ahead on the scale planned, the competition is expected to lever in £13.8 million in contributions from other sources including the private sector. In other words, a total of £18.8 million will be invested in CCTV this financial year.

We have now announced another competition. This time we are not offering £5 million, but £15 million of taxpayers' money and we hope we can fund at least a further 300 schemes. A key condition of the funding is that there will have to be a code of practice on the proper use of video tapes. We shall also insist that any scheme currently up and running that wants top-up funding should have a proper code of practice as well. I, and I am sure many both inside and outside this Chamber, totally condemn the irresponsible use of any CCTV images for commercial gain.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Many CCTV systems are operated by private security firms. Why does not the Minister go further on the issue of how those firms operate and introduce some kind of registration scheme—for which there have been many suggestions—to ensure that those working for private security firms are not criminals and other people of public disrepute? A great many criminals work as security guards in this country at the moment.

Mr. Maclean: I dispute the hon. and learned Gentleman's last point about a great many criminals working as security guards. That is not the case. I have studied all the evidence and listened to what the police have said. The point is that a small number bring the majority into disrepute. The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that we are currently carefully considering the Select Committee report and its recommendations. I cannot pronounce on that today.

Preventing crime is as important as tackling its consequences and the concept of partnership is central to our crime prevention strategy. That vital work cannot be left to the police alone; communities have a central role to play. Successful partnerships are essentially those that have developed local solutions to local problems—and

[Mr. Maclean]

they are successful. All over the country, business, community groups, local authorities and the public are working with the police to reduce and prevent crime in their areas. Local knowledge and expertise are being used to solve local crime problems.

To stimulate the partnership principle at a local level, we issued a guidance document in 1993 containing much practical advice on working in partnership and managing successful projects. Various such partnerships have been established across the country and a sample of the wide-ranging activities in which they have become involved includes reducing the fear of crime, reducing car crime, preventing youth involvement in crime, introducing anti-burglary measures, improving community safety and providing advice for licensees, and so on.

One of the main themes of local partnerships is that they should encourage local institutions and businesses to contribute directly to the fight against all types of crime in their areas and to improve the quality of life for the whole community.

I am often asked on my travels as crime prevention Minister why the Government decided not to implement the recommendations of the Morgan report on the local delivery of crime prevention through the partnership approach. The specific recommendation of that report, which is quoted at me most frequently, is that local authorities must be given a statutory duty to undertake crime prevention work. One of my predecessors took the view, in considering the report, that it would be wrong to burden local authorities with additional statutory responsibilities and I have to say that I think that he was absolutely right. As I go around the country and see all the excellent partnerships that are working voluntarily and how enthusiastically local government and others involved in crime prevention and community safety matters are working, I ask what is the point of hitting people with statutory regulation when the system works voluntarily? It is sensible to stay away from statutory provision.

Of course, the Government play their part and will continue to do so. The principles of partnership apply at a national as well as a local level and crime prevention generally is one of our highest priorities. In fact, Government Departments as a whole spent some £260 million in 1994-95 on crime prevention-related activity. In that year, Home Office expenditure on crime prevention rose by some 40 per cent. to £18.3 million.

Mr. Michael: The Minister said that he does not want to put burdens on local authorities. It is an expression of kindness that we do not usually expect from Ministers. However, the request for statutory authority for partnership between the police and local authorities came from the police and local authorities, so why was it refused?

Mr. Maclean: As I said, my predecessor took the view that that would be a burden and I take the view that it is wholly unnecessary because the system is working voluntarily. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it all ways. He will no doubt boast about the tremendous job local authorities are doing in crime prevention, but then say that they must have statutory powers to do it. Since we refused to provide statutory obligations, voluntary partnerships throughout the country have worked very successfully. That voluntary approach is to be commended. I dislike the idea of having to force people into statutory partnerships because it simply does not work. I should be very surprised if anyone could show me any areas in the country where the partnership approach is failing because of a lack of statutory duty to force people to work together.

The Government continue to provide core funding and support to Crime Concern, which works closely and productively with a wide range of partners—the police, central and local government, the private and voluntary sectors and many more—in its aim to prevent crime and create safer communities. Crime Concern has been very successful in establishing local partnerships and developing schemes that are having a real and beneficial impact on levels of offending. It has taken various initiatives. I am delighted with the work that it does, which is why the Government are generous in funding it.

There are many excellent examples of Crime Concern's work and we shall continue to work closely with it, not least through Nigel Whiskin, its chief executive, who will be a member of the new Crime Prevention Agency's board. I will say more about that in a moment. Crime Concern has a proven track record in developing effective crime prevention measures and I will be anxious to continue my support for its work.

In the autumn of last year we extended the concept of partnership through a £6 million "Partners Against Crime" television and radio advertising campaign to embrace individuals as well as institutions. There are three main elements to the campaign. First, we want to strengthen and encourage the existing neighbourhood watch schemes. Neighbourhood watch gets the people of a neighbourhood together to look out for one another and to protect their property from crime.

Secondly, there is the new concept of street watch. This takes the "eyes and ears" activities that already exist within neighbourhood watch out on to the streets. It means being sharp and observant when out and about, for example when walking the dog or taking the kids to school. That helps to block opportunities for the criminal.

The third main element is neighbourhood special constables. That is a sub-division of the special constabulary. They are fully trained specials, but working in their local areas. That brings visible foot patrols to their neighbourhoods. As a regular feature of the local scene, they help to deter criminals.

Initial evaluation of our campaign, which has now been running for just over a year, has shown high levels of approval for the various elements. I view the campaign as a big success. There will be a second phase to the campaign which will be launched at the beginning of 1996 and I am confident that it will stimulate new interest in the campaign and show what people can do to fight crime in their areas in conjunction with the police.

We have recently set up a new Crime Prevention Agency, whose work will be overseen by an agency board. The board will bring together key bodies in crime prevention—the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers, Crime Concern, local and police authorities. the business community and others. The board will be a smaller, leaner body than its predecessor, the National Board for Crime Prevention, and will provide a sharper, more focused approach to the development of crime prevention strategy. The board will be closely concerned with promulgating best practice—what really works in crime prevention—and promoting the effective delivery of crime prevention on the ground, where it really matters.

The new agency will build on the valuable work of the working groups of the former national board, especially on vehicle and retail crime, and the chairmen of those groups will sit on the main board. The board will have an enhanced role by acting as the management board for the Home Office crime prevention unit and the crime prevention centre, whose work will be at the heart of the new agency.

The board will advise on the broad range of crime prevention issues. It will be for the board to determine the details of its work programme, but one area which I have asked it to consider is the opportunities for the increased use of technology in crime prevention. I fully support the view expressed by Sir Paul Condon, in his recent Police Foundation lecture, that there is scope for significant reductions in volume crime if we can involve manufacturers and retailers as active and innovative partners in the fight against crime. We want Britain to be world leaders in taking forward that approach.

Inevitably, when dealing with issues of prevention it is natural to consider why people offend in the first place. One can argue for ever about the causes of crime, but what I think is beyond question is that children, at home and at school, must be taught the difference between right and wrong. Research studies consistently show that family influences are central to explaining why some young people start to offend. Also, young people who persistently truant from school are bound to be more likely to be involved in offending, as are those who commonly associate with other offenders. We know, too, that at any one time a small proportion of offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of criminal activity.

Of course, the Government's influence on the creation of social attitudes is limited, but we are responsible for the framework of incentives and disincentives. We need to do all that we can to make sure that that framework encourages responsible behaviour and discourages irresponsible behaviour.

Despite our best efforts, many children get into trouble with the law, starting what could be a lengthy criminal career. There is thus clearly a need for partnerships between parents, schools, local education authorities, the police and local communities to do all they can to reduce the opportunities for offending, and to look at how we can rescue those, such as truants, from going astray.

If we can help turn away significant numbers of youngsters from a life of crime we will have achieved a great deal. For that reason, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced the establishment of a new ministerial group on juveniles with the remit of looking across Government at what we can do to identify children at risk of developing into offenders.

The group, which is in the process of being established, will be charged with examining departmental policies and programmes so that we can maximise the benefits, identify any gaps and encourage good practice. We are particularly keen for the voluntary sector to play its full part in partnership with Government agencies. In some parts of the country this is already happening, and we want to see it spread.

I remind the House that our new drugs strategy for the period 1995-98 was set out in the White Paper "Tackling Drugs Together", which was published last May. The new strategy, while fully maintaining the emphasis on law enforcement and reducing supply, recognises the need for stronger action on reducing the demand for illegal drugs. We all see, sadly far too often, the misery and suffering caused by illegal drug misuse. The focus of the Government's new strategy is on three main areas: crime, young people and public health. Every opportunity must be taken by those with care of children and young people to discourage the use of illegal drugs.

I want to say a brief word on our new proposals on prosecution and defence disclosure, which are undoubtedly very important. This is one of the most pressing and difficult problems affecting our criminal justice system. The current arrangements protect the innocent, but they also make it far too difficult to convict the genuinely guilty. Put simply, too much is required of the prosecution and not enough of the defence. The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill will redress the balance.

I was much heartened by the welcome that the disclosure proposals received from the police. The sentiments of the Police Superintendents Association provide a useful summary. The supers said:

> "The Bill is a real step forward in the fight against professional crime and is another weight in the rebalancing of the criminal justice system which for too long has protected those who abuse the present arrangements".

In perhaps more glamorous language, the chairman of the Police Federation made the point forcefully when, on the day that the Bill was published, he said:

> "This is a black day for the Lawyers' Angling Society. This Bill should end the farce of the gigantic fishing expedition which has become a notorious tactic amounting, in plain English, to blatant attempts to obstruct and delay justice".

That Bill has started its progress in the other place and I look forward to it proceeding safely there and to us dealing with it in the Commons in the not too distant future.

As the House will know, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has recently announced radical new proposals on sentencing. We intend to publish a White Paper early next year to provide a basis for full public consultation and then to introduce a crime Bill.

The key elements of our sentencing proposals are as follows. First, the sentence imposed by the court should be served in full. Model prisoners would be able to earn a small discount by good behaviour, but automatic early release would be abolished.

Secondly, anyone convicted for the second time of a serious violent or sexual offence would receive an automatic life sentence. At present, even dangerous offenders must be released at the end of the sentence imposed by the court. Under the new proposals, they would be kept in custody until they no longer presented a risk to the public.

Thirdly, persistent burglars and drug dealers should know that they face stiff minimum prison sentences if they continue offending. Accordingly, we propose that the courts should be required to impose a minimum sentence on offenders convicted of burglary or trafficking in hard drugs, if they have already been convicted of such offences on two or more previous occasions.

[Mr. Maclean]

I reckon that the public rightly expect protection from serious, dangerous and persistent offenders. The Government believe that these proposals would provide that protection and send a powerful message to the criminal.

The aim is to improve public confidence in the criminal justice system and ensure the adequate punishment of the guilty and protection of the innocent. We want a system that allows for clearer sentences that enable those who are contemplating further crime to know just what to expect if they are caught and convicted and stop those who present a real risk to the public having to be released back into the community.

On the subject of sentencing, I should add that there has been some criticism of the view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and myself that prison works. That criticism, I believe, has been grossly unfair and ignores the facts.

Of course prison works. It works, first of all, by punishing offenders and depriving them of their liberty. That is why we have provided the courts with power to impose custody where the offence is so serious that no other sentence is justified. It works in a second important regard by removing offenders from circulation and therefore preventing them from committing further offences while they are inside.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people feel that prison is much too comfortable and should not be as luxurious as it is? Many people, especially pensioners, do not want their taxes to go to provide that comfort. Is not it interesting that the bed in the cell of the young man sentenced to prison in Singapore consists of one blanket? Could we not look at having severe conditions in our prisons?

Mr. Alex Carlile: It is a lot warmer in Singapore.

Mr. Maclean: Yes, we must be kinder than that; perhaps two blankets would be more appropriate this week, although we do not know the thickness of the blanket.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) is in accord with public sentiment and with my sentiment. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said that he wants prisons to be decent but austere. He is right. He and my hon. Friends in the Home Office with responsibility for prisons are looking carefully at Sir John Learmont's report and considering his suggestion that any privileges and rights in prisons should be earned by prisoners and not granted automatically on day one. My hon. Friend is right to raise that point.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): What steps has my right hon. Friend taken to ensure that prison regimes are relevant and rigorous and that prisoners do not sit in cells watching television but do useful work? Are steps in hand to make sure that the work they do is sufficiently productive for them to be able to earn their keep, contribute to their costs and provide resources for victim support and for their families?

Mr. Maclean: This could be the subject of another debate, which we may want to have at some time. My hon. Friend touches on many things that are happening in prisons. Yes, regimes are being made as relevant as possible. There are treatment and therapy courses for drug users, alcoholics and sexual abusers. There are pilot studies that are trying to get better work regimes so that prisoners do better things than make mail bags and ministerial boxes—which fall apart far too easily—at great cost.

Prisoners need proper skills that they can use in the real world when they come out. I am one of those who believe that if they do a proper day's work in prison rather than sit in their cells, it makes sense to pay them a proper wage and deduct money to send to wives and families and save money for a nest egg. I want prisoners to pay the same penalty as the rest of us face: it is called income tax. There is no point in cushioning them from that while their wives and families are dependent on the state. If they were doing a proper day's work in prison and getting better pay rather than pocket money, such deductions could be made.

Mr. Carlile: Is the Minister announcing perhaps the most radical and important change that there has been in the prison system in the past 100 years? If he is, it will be very welcome. Are we being told that it is now Government policy that all prisoners should be given proper jobs to do, from which they would learn something; that they will be paid a wage from which they can pay their own keep; and that they will pay income tax? That is the sort of radical change in the prison system for which Judge Tumim appears to have been campaigning for a long time. If true, when will the Government introduce those dramatic new measures?

Mr. Maclean: I said that we were working on pilot studies. The hon. and learned Gentleman should be aware that many of our prisons, despite the new, modern prisons we are building and opening, and which Lord Whitelaw instituted in 1979-80 when he was Home Secretary, are old-fashioned buildings. They do not have adequate workshops and they were not built beside super-modern car plants where prisoners could work.

Mr. Carlile: Half the workshops have been closed. This is absolute piffle.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. and learned Gentleman should stop hollering from a sedentary position. Radical improvement regimes are being introduced in our prisons and attempts are being made to ensure that prisoners do not sit idly in cells all day. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) that prisoners do not have televisions in their cells—my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary does not permit that, and rightly so.

I shall conclude so that others may speak. Prison works because the threat of prison is a deterrent. Many people are discouraged from crime because of the threat of imprisonment. The likelihood of arrest and the threat of imprisonment deter many people from crime. Some of the pre-sentence reports provided by the probation service show that what some scoundrels fear more than anything else is imprisonment.

As I said earlier, I believe that victims should be foremost in our minds when tackling crime. Despite huge pressures on all departmental budgets, we were able to increase our funding of the national charity Victim Support by 20 per cent. last year to over £10 million. It has been increased by a further 8 per cent. this year to nearly £11 million. That enables Victim Support's 365 local schemes and branches, and their 12,000 volunteer visitors, to offer help to over 1 million victims of crime a year.

There will be witness support schemes in all 75 Crown court centres by the end of this year, helping victims through the stress of appearing in court. And better facilities are being provided at all courts, including information facilities, support services and separate prosecution/defence waiting facilities wherever possible.

This Government pioneered the victims charter in 1990. Most of the 50-plus standards it sets have been, or are well on the way to being, met. I can tell the House that we are now developing a new victims charter. This will tell victims more clearly the minimum standards of service they should expect from the criminal justice agencies. It will explain which agency is responsible for providing the service, and how victims can complain if they do not get the level of service promised. We hope to publish the new charter in the new year.

We are keeping victims better informed about what is happening in their case. And last year we set up a victims helpline so that any victim concerned about an inmate's possible release can tell the prison authorities.

Victims' views are being taken into account more consistently. For example, the police now specifically seek victims' views on bail and make those known to the prosecution. Pre-sentence reports on offenders now explain the effect of the crime on the victim. And new guidance has been issued to the probation service about contact with victims when prisoners' release plans are considered.

As I mentioned earlier, we published a special information pack on 6 November to help families of homicide victims. The pack contains practical information, including details of sources of support and advice, to help such families cope with their unique tragedy.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the victims charter also include fresh guidelines to the Crown Prosecution Service? In far too many cases, victims—including police officers who are victims of crime while protecting citizens—are extremely concerned about how many times the Crown Prosecution Service decides not to pursue certain cases. That is the greatest insult to victims who feel that justice has not been done and has not been seen to be done.

Mr. Maclean: Perhaps my hon. Friend does not realise that a new code of practice for Crown prosecutors was promulgated recently and has been issued. I agree that perhaps not many people know that there is a new code of practice which increases the possibility that more cases will be prosecuted. However, at times the CPS is right to conclude that a charge is not valid or relevant; that there is no case to answer; or that the charge should be changed from one offence to another. That is when it is vital to try to keep the victims informed, so that they know exactly what is going on.

As my hon. Friend will have seen in the press, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is currently considering various procedures to bring the CPS and the police closer together and to improve their understanding of how the other operates, and to ensure that victims and the public are kept better informed. We look forward to the result of my right hon. and learned Friend's deliberations, which will make a big improvement to the system.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 created a new offence of witness intimidation. It also abolished committal proceedings, and that means that victims no longer have to give evidence twice over.

I believe the measures that I have announced today will go a long way to help victims pursue legitimate means of redress, and to relieve some of the unnecessary suffering and anguish they are put through by those criminals who have no respect for the law or for the feelings of their fellow citizens.

Our priority is to ensure that our response to crime at every level is as effective as possible. But tackling crime is not just a matter for the Home Office, the Government, the police or the courts, but something for all of us—including local people, local authorities and local business. We are forging partnerships to turn the tables on the criminal, and we are seeing the results of what can be achieved.

This morning, I have set out at length to the House all the action that we are taking. I make no apologies for that because it is important that the House knows that we are not just concerned with the crime figures, or a bit of policing here and victims there. There is a wide, comprehensive strategy tackling all aspects of crime, and creating a safer Britain. We are giving the police the money to buy the tools to do the job; we are giving the courts the powers they need to punish the guilty; and we are giving local people the opportunity to work in partnership with the police. The key is to divert people away from crime, convict the guilty and prevent as much misery to innocent, law-abiding citizens as we can. We will not flag or fail in keeping up our pressure to achieve those aims.

10.38 am

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I shall start by underlining the fact that we are dealing with the fear of crime, and the daily reality of crime for our constituents. The Minister acknowledged as much at the beginning of his speech, but he went on to show massive complacency about a small drop in recorded crime. He said that the Government continued to put the criminal in the dock, but the proportion of offenders going into the dock has decreased under the Government. Crime used to be something that happened to someone else; now it affects us all. People have less and less faith in the ability of the criminal justice system to cope.

In the past 15 years—when recorded crime has doubled—the number of people convicted or cautioned has fallen by 7 per cent. Far more offences are committed in Tory Britain, and more people are getting away with those offences. Those are the facts, despite the rhetoric of punishment that the Minister has used today. He suggested clarity in sentencing with some tough talk about sentences. We wait to see the reality, because the implication is that the courts have been failing us. However, the confusion caused by the Government is what has undermined confidence in the criminal justice system. The public expect protection, but they are not receiving it from the Government. The greatest deterrent is being caught, and as I have just said, the figures show that that deterrent has been reduced during the years of Conservative Home Secretaries.

The public expect a prison system that works, but what will the Government do? How long will it be before they propose measures that will make prison more effective, instead of cutting useful occupation in prison? Education is being cut in prisons throughout the country.

The Minister tells us that he has left the "nothing can be done" tendency. That is a change for the Government. He should read the press statements of his predecessors

[Mr. Alun Michael]

and the past few Home Secretaries because, year after year, they have said that crime is something that we simply have to expect.

The Minister exposed his real attitude when he described the proposal that the Crown Prosecution Service should be made to listen to victims as "plain daft". It is not plain daft. It is an obligation that should be placed on the Crown Prosecution Service. Extremely belatedly, the Government, who might have accepted amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, have suddenly found that there is a need to put pressure on the Crown Prosecution Service to listen to victims.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman should not inadvertently mislead the House by misquoting my remarks. I did not say that it was plain daft for the CPS to listen to victims—that is what it should always do, and that is what happens. What I described as plain daft was the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the victim should be dragged to court to make a victim impact statement, in which circumstances the victim would be eligible for cross-examination by the defence. I am sure that that would have a great effect on the victim.

Mr. Michael: The Minister has misdirected himself. The suggestion about victim impact statements came from the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), not from me. During scrutiny of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill I suggested that the Crown Prosecution Service should be obliged to pay attention to the impact on the victim when deciding whether to downgrade or drop charges. That proposition is not plain daft; it is plain common sense. The Minister should listen when constructive suggestions are made. His hon. Friend has left the Chamber, but I am sure that she will be very interested to hear that he described her proposal as plain daft. Our proposal was not plain daft; it was plain common sense.

I, too, want to congratulate the police, not least on keeping going, even under the present Government. I want to praise the partnerships between police and local authorities and local people, but they are little to the credit of the Home Secretary. The Minister was in Committee on the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill and on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill when he turned down the proposition, supported by local authorities and the police, that such partnership should be set in statute. They wanted Government support for such local partnership, on which they have worked so hard.

Lady Olga Maitland: If the hon. Gentleman is as supportive of the police as he says he is, will he explain why, throughout Committee proceedings on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, he and his colleagues consistently voted against every single measure to be tough on crime? I can suggest only that he is soft on crime.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Lady should not take her briefings from Tory central office. I am sure that she would not want to mislead the House, and the suggestion that the Labour party voted against tough measures is untrue. It is a lie. I hope that the hon. Lady will have the strength of character to withdraw that suggestion, because it is totally untrue.

I shall develop that argument later, because there is a great deal to be said about Labour's record of being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, and those arguments need to be placed on the record during the debate.

Let me respond to some of the Minister's comments. He spoke about targeting crime. That policy complements local partnerships, which we have urged for years. It has nothing to do with the Home Secretary's performance indicators, which are introducing strain and confusion for police forces locally. It is ironic that the Minister, who a few moments ago rejected the idea of placing a statutory duty on the police and local authorities, introduced a statutory responsibility for them to follow the Home Secretary's nationally decided performance indicators. The Minister appears to be criticising not only Conservative Back Benchers but the Home Secretary in his responses to the debate.

The Minister today said one thing that shows a welcome dawning of light. He said that most young people do not commit crime; yet the Government have continually denigrated young people and described them as a problem rather than the strength and opportunity of our future.

The Minister's speech might have impressed someone who had been living in exile for 16 years without access to newspapers or radio and television, but it will not have impressed the people of England and Wales. He even had the temerity to refer to the victims helpline. Do hon. Members remember that one? It followed the cones hotline. Last year, over Christmas, it closed down, despite the fact that Christmas is the time of special stress and danger in respect of domestic violence.

The Minister says that he wants the Crown Prosecution Service and the police to come closer to one another. We have tried to persuade him to follow that policy for the past few years, but he has refused to do so.

I want to draw the attention of the House to the curious history of the current debate. The topic is "The Government's policy against crime". Yesterday, I was telephoned by a journalist who wanted to know more about the topic. In his quest for knowledge, he had telephoned the Home Office, where an official told him:

> "No, it wouldn't be a Government debate—you'd better talk to the Opposition."

Those people with short memories may have forgotten what the debate was about when first announced. The topic was supposed to be "The success of the Government's policies to combat crime". I am told that such a topic, if tabled by the Opposition, would have been ruled out of order as obviously being ironic. Somewhere along the line, it changed to "The Government's policy against crime." I am not surprised that the Minister wants to speak about the future, not the past. I bet the Government had a problem getting the title past the House authorities. Which policy would that be, Minister? Walking with a purpose, perhaps?

I am surprised that the Minister reminded the House of the Home Secretary's document "Partners Against Crime", because not only was that a theft of the title of a Labour party document published earlier, but it was not about partnership. It offered three aspects of volunteering, not of partnership.

We support the work of neighbourhood watch and of special constables, but those are not aspects of partnership; they are aspects of people volunteering to help with crime in their community. Welcome though that is, it shows little understanding of partnership to give that title to the document.

Today's debate is a remarkable own goal, as the Conservative party tries desperately to steal Labour's clothes and appear interested in a subject of public concern on which the Government's record does not stand scrutiny.

Let us consider the facts. Recorded crime is more than 100 per cent. higher than in 1979; robbery in England and Wales is 403 per cent. higher than in 1979; home burglary is 159 per cent. higher than in 1979; theft from motor vehicles is 194 per cent. higher than in 1979; criminal damage is 184 per cent. higher than in 1979.

No wonder the Government changed the title and deleted their claim to success in the fight against crime. That is only recorded crime. The "British Crime Survey" shows that actual crime increased two and a half times as fast as recorded crime between 1991 and 1993—the most recent figures available. Only one crime in 50 ends up with a punishment by a court. Only one crime in 750 ends up with a custodial sentence.

A complacent Home Secretary, whose mantra is "Prison works", is indeed wise to avoid debating the success of Conservative policies on crime. What grounds for complacency are there in a country where the risk of being burgled is one in 12, the risk of a vehicle being broken into is one in six and the risk of a person being assaulted is one in 46?

The Automobile Association recently surveyed its members about their experience of crime. One in 14 of drivers in the survey had experienced a car being stolen. Six out of 10 victims of thefts from vehicles did not claim on insurance and presumably did not report the crime. Many of those surveyed feel that the police are unwilling or unable to reduce car crime activity.

Confidence in the criminal justice system is seriously in question. A survey of members of the Police Federation of England and Wales showed that 87 per cent. of the 73,000 officers who replied were not at all satisfied or not very satisfied with the criminal justice system. Only 9 per cent. gave the lukewarm response that they were "fairly satisfied".

The Police Federation has expressed anxiety that proper debate on law and order should not become a purely party political matter. It states:

> "For many years a consensus existed between the parties on this topic. The police and the public would welcome its return."

We would also welcome its return because, despite the activities of the present Home Secretary and his immediate predecessor, the present Chancellor—the two most partisan Home Secretaries in history—we have continued to try to make constructive suggestions about how to tackle crime. In that context, I welcome the Home Secretary's development of a strategy for police intelligence and a comprehensive database. That proposal follows years of frustration, when the Home Office and its Ministers refused to accept policies and strategies urged on them by chief constables.

I pay tribute to the work of individual chief constables and police forces. Dyfed-Powys police force, one of the smallest in this country—which the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) will know as well as I do—has said that it wants to tackle crimes when they start to happen and use new technology to nip things in the bud. That is an example that the Home Secretary should examine carefully.

I welcome the Minister of State's statement today that a national tier of police will follow the pattern of regional forces, with local forces in the driving seat. I welcome the fact that the intelligence services involved in police work will be accountable to the police—that is an extremely important principle—but will the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), spell out how the accountability will work in practice? In his opening speech the Minister of State outlined the right principles, but in such matters the devil is in the detail, so when he replies to the debate will the Under-Secretary tell us how the scheme will work in practice?

The Minister of State has clearly discovered two other Labour themes: the need to work with families and encourage parental responsibility and the need to work with young people across Government Departments. I participated in a project in which I worked with children and their families in the mid and late 1970s. The report has been on the shelf ready for the Conservative Government for the past 15 years and I recommend that the Minister take it off the shelf and look at it.

I welcome the Minister of State's conversion, but on those two topics, as on others, we shall judge him by his actions—just as we judge the Conservative Government on their record on law and order policy after 15 years of being responsible for it. Their policy has left many people in Tory Britain afraid to leave their homes at night and afraid when they are inside their homes. Women and the elderly feel particularly vulnerable and parents are frightened to let their children out alone. All too many people are terrorised by nuisance neighbours and too intimidated to report offences to the police. In his opening speech the Minister of State did not make one suggestion to tackle those problems.

The court processes are expensive, inefficient and outdated. The cost of criminal legal aid has rocketed. The proportion of cases discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service has almost doubled. I am delighted that the Home Secretary has finally woken up to that fact and that his Cabinet colleagues have recognised the need for new guidance. We have been consistently telling him about those problems for many years. Cases are also taking longer to come to court.

People are desperately concerned about not only crime but disorder. Fear in the streets and in public places inhibits and restricts people's lives and undermines their sense of security and their ability to take an active role in the community. Those points have been stressed, above all, by my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, who has made positive proposals on how to tackle those problems. But instead, the Conservatives have chosen to tackle the victims.

This week, the Home Secretary took a further step towards cutting £700 million from the cash available to compensate the victims of violent crime. Each time that unsavoury and sleazy development is mentioned, the Minister trumpets platitudes about how good the scheme remains, but those are weasel words. The simple truth is that the Conservative Government are cutting the cash available to victims of violent crime by £700 million.

[Mr. Michael]

No Conservative Member of Parliament will ever again have the slightest credibility when pretending to be interested in the victims of crime.

The same is true of the victim support scheme. Earlier today, the Minister of State had the cheek to claim credit for the increase in finance for the victim and witness support schemes, but he planned to cut the cash available for those schemes until the Labour party embarrassed him into maintaining the figures for development. In 1996 the Minister will give Victim Support just enough money to maintain the schemes developed by the end of this year. The growth was encouraged by the Home Office, but it will grind to a halt. The figure involved is less than £11 million which, as the Minister of State acknowledged in his speech, is a minimal proportion of the Home Office budget.

The families of murder victims are being doubly victimised. Earlier this week I offered to help the Minister bridge the gap for the families of murder victims who had been told that they would receive a bereavement award under the compensation scheme introduced by the Home Secretary last year. Those families are angry that their personal tragedies have been caught up in the Home Secretary's legal battles. They feel that he has added greatly to the grief that they have suffered. We asked him to give compassionate consideration to the families' claims to compensation and to support the plea from the victim support scheme. We offered him time and said that a Labour Back Bencher would introduce legislation to tackle that scandal in private Members' time if the Government would also make time available and provide their support to speed the legislation through the House. The Minister rejected that opportunity earlier this week.

The Conservatives have only two tactics on law and order. First, they search for initiatives that will do nothing to solve the problems of crime but, they hope, will wrong-foot the Labour party. That tactic has come apart in the hands of the present Home Secretary, who should give up because he will not wrong-foot a Labour leader who is serious about being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime and who leads a party which, from the shadow Home Secretary to ordinary members at grassroots level, supports him totally in his fight to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

Mr. Maclean: Which tough measures did the Labour party leader vote for in the 1980s and which Bills on law and order did he vote against? Will the hon. Gentleman give us the answer so that we can make a proper judgment?

Mr. Michael: I shall come to that in a moment, but I shall first deal with the Government's tactics.

The Government's second tactic is even more unprincipled; it is to lie. I know that Ministers would not wish to mislead the House and that the information given to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) must be a tactic of Conservative central office rather than a Member of Parliament, but the Home Secretary has been heard to claim that Labour has voted against measures to fight crime and has failed to introduce positive proposals for action against crime. I am sure that no Minister would make such claims in the House because they are two big Tory lies. On the rare occasions when the Home Secretary makes a sensible, coherent proposal, the Labour party supports him, as I have already made clear today. The Home Secretary's record on voting against proposals is one on which any court in the land would convict without hesitation.

The Morgan report on crime prevention is a Home Office report; we proposed that it should be implemented, but the Home Secretary refused. In our document, "Partners Against Crime", we suggested a detailed strategy and a statutory framework for crime prevention, with local authorities working closely with the police and other agencies. The Conservatives paid lip service to it, but voted it down. We proposed early intervention when young people first start to offend, but the Tories voted it down. The Labour party proposed action to tackle those who offend on bail, with bail support and enforcement in every part of the country, but the Conservatives voted it down.

The Labour Front Bench ensured the passage of the Bail (Amendment) Act 1993, allowing the prosecution right of appeal against the granting of bail—Ministers would have allowed that measure to fall. The Labour party demanded additional support to allow the expansion of the victim support and, particularly, the witness support scheme. When Ministers refused to give the police better protection, it was the Labour party that co-operated with the Police Federation for a cross-party presentation of side-handled batons and other alternatives. The Labour party called for rigorous trials but, after long prevarication, the present Home Secretary simply allowed them to be used.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): Why, then, did the Labour party vote against the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Public Order Act 1986, the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and the Criminal Justice Act 1991, and why has it always opposed renewal of the prevention of terrorism Acts?

Mr. Michael: That was a well-rehearsed intervention. It was well scripted, but the Minister knows the answers. The present Leader of the Opposition and shadow Home Secretary offered a cross-party agreement to deal with the problems highlighted in the prevention of terrorism Acts. It was turned down by the Home Secretary for partisan reasons. The Minister can read *Hansard* for himself to see why we voted against those measures. I know that Ministers do not want to listen to the truth being put on record in the House.

The so-called Tory commitment to effective crime prevention is illustrated by the measures that the Tories voted down during the passage of the Criminal Justice Bill in 1993. They include cutting offending while on bail through bail enforcement and support schemes, the expansion of witness support and victim support schemes, making the Crown Prosecution Service consult victims before dropping or reducing charges and putting assets seized from drug users to immediate use in the fight against drug abuse. They opposed proposals for faster action when youngsters first get into trouble by cautioning them, and, after the first caution, for new court orders to make courts more effective in stopping youngsters before they get deeply involved in law breaking and in speeding up the criminal justice system to get quicker court sentences for persistent young offenders.

The Labour party has made so many constructive proposals to tackle crime, yet time and again the Conservatives have voted against them. They voted against the establishment of an independent body to investigate miscarriages of justice. After years of prevarication, it was eventually included in the Criminal Appeal Act 1995—but in a half-hearted way by a Government who did not really believe in it. They voted against creating an offence of racial harassment and stiffer penalties for racially motivated crime. They voted against abolishing the year and a day rule so that we have to waste private Members' time this year to implement a measure that the Home Secretary could have accepted in Committee or on the Floor of the House.

We proposed tighter controls on dangerous weapons and the Government introduced a Bill that did not mention drugs, drug-related crime, weapons or violence. I am not surprised that Ministers wish to gossip among themselves. They do not like the truth of their appalling record of failure in the fight against crime—their failure to accept positive proposals from the Labour party, their failure to think through their own proposals and their failure to listen to Labour Front Benchers when we discussed the issues.

The Government failed to accept the ideas of statutory limits on prison overcrowding. They failed to establish an elected police authority for London, they failed to accept our proposal for a national drug prevention strategy, yet now they have informally proposed precisely the same strategy.

Let us consider another aspect of Conservative failure. The centrepiece of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 was the creation of privatised secure training centres. Where are they? That was a smokescreen for lack of Government action in expanding the existing system of secure accommodation. In 1991, Labour extracted a promise of 65 extra secure places, but not one has been provided.

Let me spell that out because, with others and long before I entered the House, I campaigned for secure places to be made available to end the scandal of youngsters aged 15 and 16 being remanded either in inappropriate adult prison accommodation or in unsuitable, insecure local authority homes because there was nowhere else for them to go. In February 1991 the then Home Secretary promised the House that he would end that scandal and we welcomed and supported an amendment to the Criminal Justice Act 1991. However, the Government have reneged on that promise. Not only has it not been fulfilled, but the number of secure places has fallen by 18 since 1991. The present Home Secretary could not be tough on a paper bag in a thunderstorm.

The Minister spoke about dealing with crime, but he made no mention of the scandal of those who are harassed and intimidated by violent and abusive neighbours. My hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary is the first senior politician to make genuine, straightforward proposals to tackle that scourge on modern society. If he had the sense of the average Llanelli rugby player, the Home Secretary would have picked up the ball, accepted the constructive suggestion from the Opposition and gained credit for himself by taking action on it.

The police have backed Labour's proposals for tough action on criminal neighbours contained in "A Quiet Life". Local authorities are in favour of it. Members of Parliament and councillors, who have experience of the frustration, anger and misery created by violent neighbours, have welcomed the proposals, yet the Home Secretary has refused to tackle a problem that affects families up and down the country.

Let me quote the president of the Police Superintendents Association, Mr. Brian Mackenzie, whom the Minister quoted in his remarks. In the presence of the Home Secretary he said:

> "Law and order should not be a party political issue. In an ideal world there would be consensus on how these issues should be tackled, so it is encouraging to see Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition addressing them. We welcome the proposals by . . . the Shadow Home Secretary, to deal with criminal and intimidating neighbours by a new 'community safety order', with new powers of eviction.
>
> This seems an eminently sensible suggestion and we hope you will feel able to work with the Opposition in developing it".

Has the Home Secretary worked with us in developing it? No, he has simply rejected it and chosen to ignore the nature of the problem.

The 1995 Queen's Speech was a great disappointment for those of us looking for measures to combat crime. The promise of 5,000 police officers over three years has been greeted with some scepticism, to put it politely. Why should we trust such a promise from the Prime Minister when he broke his promise to the electorate in the 1992 general election? He promised an additional 1,000 police officers, yet their number went down and there is still a shortfall of some 1,300. When the Home Secretary has fulfilled the Conservative 1992 election promise, we might take more seriously the Prime Minister's inflated promise in 1995.

The position is crystal clear. I do not know whether the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have shared the truth with the Minister of State, but I shall let him into the secret: there is no new money.

In the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, the Home Secretary was absolutely adamant that he wanted to give up control over police numbers. *Hansard* is full of speeches in which he declaimed his new-found belief in the right of chief constables to take their own decisions over the use of resources. He said that it was not for the Home Secretary or the Government to tell chief constables how many police officers to employ and that his job was to hand over the cash and let them get on with it.

It was an incredible performance for those who had followed the right hon. and learned Gentleman's career. Here was the arch-nationaliser, the architect of the poll tax, the Minister who laid waste to local accountability in one public enterprise after another, presenting himself as the defender of local decision making. But we knew what he was doing. He was abrogating responsibility before cutting the cash in order to blame others for his own decision. Then the Prime Minister—another rudderless ship blown here and there by events—announced that an extra 5,000 police officers would be provided by his desperate Government.

We can imagine the panic at the Home Office, where they would say, "But Minister we do not have the money." It is no use applying to the Chancellor as there is no sympathy there. What was to be done? The answer was to cut the cake differently and hope that nobody would notice—to steal from the capital allocations the cash need for revenue allocations and hope that nobody would notice. I am sorry, but anyone with half a brain has noticed. I am sorry for the Minister and others who have to plough on with the farce.

The simple fact is that the Government are willing to steal from tomorrow to survive today. To put it another way, for those who understood Mrs. Thatcher's

[Mr. Michael]

rudimentary approach to economics, it is as if a family were to steal from their mortgage on their home and melt down the lead on the roof to pay for the food on today's breakfast table. That is the fast track to ruin. That is why the Minister would not answer the straight question: by how much has the capital allocation for police forces been changed for next year? I am not surprised, because it has been cut. Sooner or later there will be a day of reckoning for that theft from tomorrow. The Home Secretary hopes that he will have moved up the greasy pole or, more likely, into opposition, by the time that day of reckoning arrives.

Mr. Maclean: I will give the hon. Gentleman some simple arithmetic. Uniformed police pay is going up 3 per cent.; civilian police pay is going up 2.5 per cent. The total amount of money being made available to the police next year will be 4 per cent. That is new money.

Mr. Michael: The Minister still does not answer the question on capital spending. Nor does he deal with the reduction in real figures in Home Office allocations shown in the Home Secretary's own hand-out on the day of the Budget. It is interesting that some Departments produced a complete breakdown of how that money was to be spent: not the Home Secretary, not the Home Office.

The Labour party has been in the forefront of promoting closed circuit television as an instrument in the fight against crime. Partnerships between Labour local authorities, the police and local business communities have shown the way forward. I am glad that the Home Secretary has joined us in promoting such schemes. I have helped to promote some of them myself. I must sound a note of caution. CCTV schemes work only if they are well designed, utilise the right equipment installed in the right locations and if monitoring is well planned and each partner feels that he has some ownership of the scheme.

I warn the Minister that the public's continued support is essential. The Government's commitment to CCTV is weakened by their failure to support Labour proposals for statutory regulation to monitor its use. In that, I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery in his earlier intervention. If CCTV schemes are to be effective, the public must be confident that they are used honestly and effectively. Last week, I offered the Minister the chance of a Bill to pass through the House quickly, to outlaw the sale of video tapes from surveillance operations of any sort undertaken by the police, local authorities, private companies or individuals—unless the Home Secretary decided that their publication was in the public interest. After the sale of video tapes offering cheap gratification—whether through scenes of violence, sexual passion in a lift or thrilling car chases—who doubts that control is needed? Nobody outside the Home Office. I repeat our offer, for the day that the Minister catches up with the rest of us on that particular issue.

The need for legislation to regulate the private security industry falls into the same category. The Minister has promised to allow access by employers to police records, so that staff can be vetted. What about the employers themselves? I am not talking about decent firms in the private security industry, because they share our concerns; they want statutory regulation as much as we do. Police officers at every level have told me of their concerns. Crooks with records of violent crime, having partners whose record of fraud is as long as your arm, are running private security companies. Not only does the Home Secretary refuse to take a grip on that scandal but he wants to give those crooks ready access to police computer records, which is insane. Is that what the Conservative party means by a policy against crime?

Conservative dogma has overruled public safety. Home Office ideas about regulating the private security industry and the recommendations of the Opposition and of the Select Committee have been overruled by the Department of Trade and Industry on the ground that regulation would constitute a restraint on trade. I have news for the Home Secretary. If regulation is needed to protect the British public against crooks and rip-off merchants, the British public would rather have regulation than Conservative dogma that protects people who live off violence, bullying, burglary and theft.

Most offenders remain in the community. This week, the House of Lords condemned the Home Secretary's bid to end all training requirements for probation officers. I am not surprised that the Minister went through his lengthy speech without mentioning that fact, but it is one of this week's scandals. The Government suffered a humiliating defeat in the other place. Former Home Secretaries, Labour and Conservative, joined to tell the Home Secretary that he was wrong. A former permanent secretary at the Home Office, a former senior police officer, the chairman of the Royal Commission on criminal justice and many other peers emphasised the need for high-quality training and for the Home Secretary to change his policy. Fifteen speeches were made against the abolition of probation service training requirements. Only the lonely, battered Minister spoke in favour of that crazy change.

The Minister, for failing to provide relevant professional qualifications and training for probation officers, has rightly been attacked by Labour and all the relevant professional bodies, which recognise the need for specialist training. Entrants to the probation service from the police or armed services are the first to recognise that they need specialist training, and they want a proper qualification in their new profession. Each year, the probation service deals with offenders who are more difficult, damaged and dangerous. Failing to ensure adequate training and qualifications for new entrants through a national scheme means that the Home Secretary is putting at risk the safety of the public and of new probation officers.

Today, the Minister had a chance to present new ideas and positive policies, but where are the real measures to combat crime? The Government have little to say. They are not implementing the proposals that we have made over the years or measures to tackle disorder on our streets, criminal neighbours, delay at every stage of the criminal justice process or the delays that bedevil our court system.

Where in the Minister's speech were the measures to tackle youth crime? We have made proposal after proposal to nip offending in the bud and to prevent young offenders from becoming repeat offenders. The Government have rejected them all. In recent years, the Government have cut the youth service, which a report produced by Coopers and Lybrand last year showed is cost-effective in preventing crime.

Where are the proposals to regulate the private security industry? Where are the measures to help victims of crime? We have heard a whimper of future proposals from the Minister today, but little of the Government's record on crime. It is not surprising that the Government withdrew their original proposal to debate their record on combating crime. That record is dire. The Home Secretary has lost sight of his duty to protect the public in a desperate attempt to protect his own job. His only strategic aim is wrong-footing the Labour party. The Government are practising for opposition as enthusiastically as the Labour party is preparing for government.

Labour is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. The Tories are neither tough nor competent. They seek to blame others and to avoid responsibility for their failures. The success of others is claimed by a Home Secretary who had little hand in the strategies that truly belong to the police, local authorities and local communities, which have accepted Labour's strategies for a partnership to fight and defeat crime.

11.17 am

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): The people of Welwyn Hatfield have the same needs and aspirations as people in the rest of the United Kingdom and throughout the world. People need to feel secure, which means that the primary duty of the Government is to provide security. The people of Welwyn Hatfield work hard to support their families. They want to feel safe and that they can walk the streets without being threatened. They want to feel confident about leaving their homes and cars.

The Government's role is to provide a framework of law and order so that law-abiding taxpayers feel safe. The Government are providing that safety. Unfortunately, crime has risen constantly since the second world war, in times both of boom and of bust. The reason is a succession of liberal, socialist-minded judges and magistrates who have lacked the nerve to impose sentences that fit the crime. They have failed the Government and the police. Most of all, they have failed the citizens of this country. They have succumbed to flashy terminology, complex theories and soft options. We have crossed our wires and lost our way. They criticise the victim for not taking enough precautions, and counsel and cosset the villains. Villains have been put on community sentences. They have even been sent on holidays. We have tried all of that and it is not surprising that it has failed.

The result is that my constituents feel far from secure. They are scared to walk the streets for fear of violence, and they are scared to leave their homes for fear of burglary. My constituents feel frustrated because, when crimes are committed, the criminals do not receive a suitable punishment. With such soft punishments, which are offered again and again, criminals have nothing to lose.

In these dark days of liberal fudge, however, there is a glimmer of hope. At last we have a Home Secretary who has begun to understand the concerns of my constituents. He knows that they are sick and tired of laws that pander to the villain and frustrate the victim. The Conservative party is the party of law and order. That means that victims must always come first. Criminals must be punished, and the police need our backing.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on just two points: first, that from 1991 until 1994 it was a great frustration to judges that they were not able to send a large number of people to prison because of the Government's Criminal Justice Act 1991; and, secondly, that the community sentence that he criticised so severely did not exist until it was introduced by the Government he supports?

Mr. Evans: I take the hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention in the spirit in which it was given, but surely he knows that judges are suffering from mad judge disease when they say that people who are burgled should be prosecuted and the villains should not. How can judges be credible when they say that, if people do not take precautions and allow people to burgle their houses, they are the ones who should be prosecuted?

The Conservative party is the only party that realises that criminals must be punished, and punished according to the crime. There is no point slapping the wrist of a rapist or ticking off a cold-blooded killer. The public want justice, and it is up to the Government to deliver it. Despite opposition from soppy socialists, we have put more criminals behind bars and kept them there for longer. Why have we done that? Because prison works. One more scumbag behind bars is one less scumbag rampaging the streets. The figures speak for themselves. Recorded crime has fallen by 5 per cent. in the 12 months to June 1995. There has been the largest fall in recorded crime over a two-year period in 40 years, and the lowest level of crime for four years.

The Home Secretary has announced that he intends to build on that success by ending early release. We need to send the right signals to the criminals, and that message is: "If you commit a crime, you will serve your sentence in full." As the Home Secretary said at the party conference:

> "It's time to get honesty back into sentencing. No more automatic early release. No more release regardless of behaviour. And no more half-time sentences for full-time crimes."

Common sense at last, and not a moment too soon.

Mr. Michael: I am following the hon. Gentleman's analysis of crime trends with interest. Will he tell us how the proportion of offenders being brought before the courts, which has reduced under the Conservative Government whom he praises, has helped in the fight against crime?

Mr. Evans: I shall come to that point later in my speech, if the hon. Gentleman will wait.

We need to think about the people on the front line who are there to fight crime—the police. They need us to back them all the way. I believe that we have done a pretty good job so far and given them the support that they deserve. Since 1979, the number of police officers has been increased by 16,000. Spending on the police has risen by 87 per cent. in real terms to £6.6 billion, and a police constable's salary has risen by 39 per cent. over and above inflation. We should not stop there, and we have not. John Major has promised an extra 5,000—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the convention that we do not use names. I think that the hon. Gentleman means the Prime Minister.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Prime Minister has promised an extra 5,000 policemen over the next three years. We want this message to get to

[Mr. Evans]

the criminals: under the Conservatives, there will be more and more policemen on the streets. That might make criminals think twice before they go on the rampage.

We have the promise of a new Crime Prevention Agency and 10,000 more closed circuit television cameras. Both are commendable measures, but we should not rest there. We are at last rolling the ball in the right direction, so now is the time to give it some momentum. We know what the public want, so let us start delivering. I have some suggestions that I would put on the law and order agenda. Let us tackle pathetic parents—those lazy parents who deny all responsibility for the behaviour of their offspring and blame the state for everything. They need to realise that if they cannot control their children, the state will fine them. If that does not work, we will put them behind bars with their children. That would give the family some quality time together to reflect on the values of responsibility and discipline.

I am sick and tired of hearing reports of schoolchildren bullying and manipulating pupils and teachers alike in the knowledge that the teacher cannot lay a finger on them. We need to re-establish discipline in the classroom and show pupils that the teacher is in charge of the class, not two or three hooligans. That means that we must allow teachers the commonsense flexibility to punish children in an appropriate manner. Some children need ticking off. Some need a clip around the ear. Some need a bloody good hiding. How about the reintroduction—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly, but I ask him to moderate his language.

Mr. Evans: Some need a good hiding. How about the reintroduction of national service? Young people—both men and women—need to learn the values of discipline, team work and a deference to authority. I am not suggesting that everyone takes a military duty; in many cases it would be more useful for individuals to have more direct contact with the community, such as caring for the elderly or working with young children. Youngsters need to develop a sense of duty, and what better way is there to get that than by serving their nation for a year?

What about corporal punishment? We must face up to the fact that certain categories of criminal have a limited intelligence and can respond only to basic messages. Community service is a joke to that kind of person, and prison is a waste of time. The only way to get the message across is to revert to old-fashioned flogging. What better way is there to stop a rapist from reoffending than to castrate him, to take away his wedding gifts? I think that the Crown Prosecution Service should be scrapped forthwith and that the money saved should be spent on more police. Perhaps police should be paid a bonus for every successful prosecution.

Then we come to mad judge disease. Perhaps judges should be paid a percentage of the fines that they impose. They might then start to hand out sentences that fit the crime. Perhaps governors of prisons should get bonuses based on the number of unsolved crimes that they crack by intercepting prisoners' mail and listening to their conversations on the telephone and in cells.

Perhaps old-age pensioners should get a double Christmas bonus if they can prove that they shot a burglar in the past year, or defended their allotment. Perhaps child molesters should not be given protection in prison. Perhaps victims of violent crimes should be allowed to choose the punishment for the criminal. That might make criminals think twice. I want criminals to want to get out of prison—not to try to get into prison as they do now, especially when we have a cold spell.

What can we expect from Labour at the next general election? I am told that Labour Members are going to crack down on squeegee merchants—those pathetic individuals who wait at traffic queues to clean our car windscreens. I grant that they are a nuisance, but I doubt whether a crackdown on that rather irrelevant sector of the fringe of the criminal fraternity will make the electorate rest at ease.

I hear that the Labour Front-Bench team have been sent to management schools to develop their skills. What a joke that is. Perhaps they should take lessons in reality and listen to the needs of their constituents. One day, they might just come up with a half-decent idea.

Mark my words, crime will be the key issue at the next general election. The public want to feel secure, so they want a Government who will protect them. My constituents know the Conservative record on law and order, but what about Labour's? What will Labour Members be telling the public? I have a few questions to ask them. It is interesting to note how strong they are on crime and how many of them are here today to take part in this debate. Is not that an interesting insight into what they think about law and order? They could not get up the motorways to their constituencies quickly enough.

Come the next election, will Labour Members say that a member of the shadow Cabinet has called for the legalisation of cannabis? Will they tell the public that? Will they say that they opposed the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which strengthened police powers to stop and search suspects? Will they say that they opposed the Public Order Act 1986, which gave the police better powers to deal with street disorder?

Will Labour Members say that they opposed the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which raised the maximum sentence for serious crime? Will they say that they opposed the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which made parents more responsible for their children's actions? Will they say that they opposed the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, which introduced tough new measures to crack down on bogus asylum seekers?

Will Labour Members say that they continue to oppose the annual renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, as they have every year since 1983? Will they say that they oppose secure training orders for persistent young offenders? Will they be able to say that their home affairs team has consistently called for stiffer prison sentences? Will they say that they attempted to introduce amendments which would have made it more difficult for the courts to refuse bail?

On law and order, we have no competition. How many Labour Members are here this morning? We are the party of law and order and that is not in question. That, however, does not mean that we should rest on our laurels. If I were to prepare a school report on the performance of our Home Secretary over the past few months, it would read, "A flying start to the year, but plenty more to do. Keep it up. Do not slow down. Do not let the Home Office civil servants water down what you know to be right."

My constituents want law and order. They know that the only party to turn to is the Conservative party. They are beginning to think that, at last, they have a Home Secretary who is strong enough to set up a framework to sweep crime off the streets and who will introduce measures that satisfy the victim and punish the villain. The people of Welwyn Hatfield are behind this Government. The Government have their trust and have built up their hopes. I urge the Government, please do not let them down.

11.34 am

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). We always know where he stands, even if we do not wish to be standing anywhere near him at the time.

I should start by taking the cautious step of declaring an interest. For the past 25 years I have been a practising barrister. I have prosecuted and I have defended, and for about 10 years I have been a recorder. I am also involved in various non-political bodies connected with the legal system and the sentencing process.

One always approaches these debates with the suspicion that the politics of law and order neither enhance the law nor improve the good order of the society in which we live. Debates like this can draw out on the one side the dotty, and on the other side the sanctimonious, and there is always a danger of being left with a compromise of policy that is a bit dotty and slightly sanctimonious. I hope that we can escape that in the conclusions that are drawn from this debate.

Before I turn to my general theme, I should like to deal with a number of points that were raised by the Minister in what was an interesting and wide-ranging speech. I entirely share his view that we should take every step feasible to improve the security of our communities—the physical security of town centres and housing estates. I should also mention the security of rural areas such as Montgomeryshire, which I represent. The success of the farm watch scheme in Montgomeryshire has not only reduced the scourge of sheep rustling—a centuries-old offence that remains as difficult to detect as ever it was without the total support of the farming community. The success of farm watch has helped to reduce other crimes, too, in rural areas like mine.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) referred in passing to the Dyfed-Powys police. I pay tribute to that force. Under the extremely imaginative leadership of its chief constable, Ray White, it has become the most successful force statistically in the whole of England and Wales. One can understand why if one has had the sort of contact with it that I have had.

A few summers ago, there was a huge hippy invasion in part of my constituency. One midnight I rang up the police control room—the ordinary control room—simply to get a report on how things had progressed during the day because many constituents had contacted me. The switchboard was answered by the chief constable of Dyfed-Powys police, Mr. White, who was taking his turn in dealing with ordinary public inquiries on that evening of stress for the local police. That is a fine example of the sort of work which Ray White is prepared to do.

Ray White has done something else that I think that the Home Office ought to consider in response to the demands that the Crown Prosecution Service should be brought closer to the police. When the CPS was created, the then Attorney-General, the right hon. and learned Member for Tunbridge Wells (Sir P. Mayhew), made it absolutely clear that it was his purpose to ensure that we had an independent Crown Prosecution Service. He was right. The rationale for having an independent CPS is as good as ever. Its independence in many areas has helped to improve the quality of evidence brought forward by the police because it has been able to advise the police in an independent way.

I have real misgivings about bringing the Crown Prosecution Service as close to the police as, for example, the old Metropolitan police prosecutors used to be when I was a pupil barrister in London a long time ago.

In Dyfed-Powys, Mr. White has employed an experienced criminal lawyer as the force legal adviser. Other forces have done the same. The result is that, in cases with tricky problems, and in connection with investigations as well as decisions on whether to bring charges, the force is able to turn to an in-house lawyer who can give advice, the expertise for which is founded on inside knowledge of the way in which the police service operates. I suggest to the Home Office that it would be better to increase the number of force legal advisers than to increase the closeness between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service in an operational sense.

A matter to which I referred in an intervention is the position of victims of crime. I have declared my interest, so I can safely say this: from the viewpoint of someone who sits in the Crown court as a judge, it is often frustrating that in crimes of violence, the judge cannot really know, first, what has happened to the victim and, secondly, what the views of the victim are about the crime after a period of reflection. The views of the victim are sometimes rather surprising, and it is always helpful to know them.

I suggest to the Home Office that we have reached the point at which the simple step of a written statement, as suggested by the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), might be appropriate. At the very least, if we do not have a formal procedure, we should have an invariable informal practice to ensure that when a crime of violence in particular has taken place, the physical and mental condition of the victim are routinely drawn to the attention of the judge. We should ensure too that the views of the victim at the time of the sentencing of the criminal are known, which may or may not, according to the discretion of the judge, affect the sentence that is passed. At least if that information is given, the judge has empirical information on which to act.

Mr. Maclean: I do not dissent from the vast bulk of what the hon. and learned Gentleman says. We want, of course, to ensure that the prosecution is able to argue intelligently on the condition of the victim. It is vital that the prosecution can present that information to the court so that the judge is aware of it. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman accept, however, that part of my worry about a formalised victim impact statement is that it might be challengeable by the defence? If it was challenged by the defence, we might find that there was a big argument about whether it was accurate and there might be an attempt to cross-examine the victim on the state of his or her suffering.

Mr. Carlile: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern. In the courts now, so-called Newton hearings

[Mr. Carlile]

take place which are designed to determine the basis on which sentence is to be passed and the judge can do little to avoid a Newton hearing if a defendant is determined to have it. Fortunately, by and large—believe it or not, lawyers occasionally do something useful in court—the lawyers and the judge working together usually ensure that Newton hearings are unnecessary and that an agreed basis for sentence can be found. I think that the Minister has slightly exaggerated the worry.

The Minister also mentioned drugs. I am glad that he came to that in his speech. When I started at the Bar in 1970, most offences committed by young people were related to alcohol. Now, most serious offences committed by young people are in some way related to drugs. In 1970, when I started to practise, drugs were in the dance halls and the discos. Through the 1980s, they reached the gates of the school. Now there is hardly an area in which drugs are not available within schools. I include rural areas such as those which I and the Minister represent, which are similar in character.

The drugs available include extremely dangerous psychotropic drugs such as ecstasy. Those drugs alter the balance of the mind and, worse still, alter the chemistry of the brain. Some of them may be short-acting, but their effects, as we know from the Leah Betts case and many others, can be extreme. I do not seek to play politics with any attempt by any Government of any persuasion to ensure that young people in schools, starting from a very young age, are made fully aware of the dangers of drug abuse.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: In a moment.

I believe that if we had a royal commission on drugs, which is my party's policy, it would come down firmly against the legalisation of cannabis and all dangerous drugs; I have strong personal views on that point.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose—*

Mr. Carlile: I will give way in a moment. The hon. Lady should be patient.

To finish my paragraph, I urge the Home Office and especially the Department for Education and Employment to recognise that health education on drugs in schools is patchy. In some schools, it is taught well whereas in other schools, it is a fill-in subject taught by people who spend most of their time teaching other subjects and who have little knowledge of the real issues. It is time for a determined standardisation of the quality of health education on drugs.

I cannot offer a solution. I do not believe that any of us has found the solution to this desperate problem. However, from my observations in the courts over many years, I can tell the Minister that drugs are ruining not only the lives of young people who have come from deprived backgrounds, some of whom might, therefore, be expected to commit crimes, but the lives of children from perfectly organised families where there are two parents and a strong sense of responsibility. Somehow, the temptation of the drug, usually through the school at first, is overwhelming. Now I will give way.

Lady Olga Maitland: I totally accept the hon. and learned Gentleman's personal feelings about drugs. However, how does he equate his feelings with the fact that in 1994 at the Liberal Democrat party conference, delegates voted for a motion supporting the decriminalisation of the possession and use of cannabis? Surely that passes out a dangerous and insidious message. In truth, that is the real position of the Liberal Democrats. They are soft on drugs.

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Lady is known for the sometimes incomplete co-ordination between her eyes and her brain. If she had bothered to read the policy passed by the Liberal Democrats, about which I have just told her—that is why I made her wait before allowing her intervention—she would have realised that it was for a royal commission on the use of drugs.

Lady Olga Maitland *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Lady may shake her head if she wishes, but she really should, with her record of tabling amendments that she has not even drafted, take the trouble to read other people's writings rather than make up her own version.

Lady Olga Maitland: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. and learned Gentleman to make abusive comments about other hon. Members? Do you, Madam Deputy Speaker, agree that the hon. and learned Gentleman should withdraw those remarks?

Madam Deputy Speaker: There is a certain cut and thrust in debate. Although truly abusive remarks must not be made in the House, I do not think that we have come to that point yet.

Mr. Carlile: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps we can now get on to another point of substance—

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Before the hon. and learned Gentleman moves on, will he give way?

Mr. Carlile: I may give way to the hon. Gentleman a little later. I want to get on.

Mr. Banks: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No.

Mr. Banks: Is the hon. and learned Gentleman too frightened?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The rules in this House are clear. If an hon. Member who has the Floor does not give way, other hon. Members must sit down again. As this is a debate about law and order, I hope that the laws of this House will be obeyed.

Mr. Carlile: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I may give way to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) a little later if he still wishes to intervene.

I turn to another point mentioned by the Minister—the Government's new sentencing proposals. I can understand the instinct that gives rise to sentencing proposals to make sentences tougher for serious offences. I support that view. I also support the view, which many judges have held for many years, that it would be far better for the judiciary to pass the real sentence than a fictitious sentence. The law is full enough of fictions, but they do not lie well in the criminal law.

The Minister may be bound to recognise in due course, however, that the quantum of sentences may be affected by the decision that the Government have announced.

Mr. Maclean *indicated assent.*

Mr. Carlile: I see the Minister nodding. Some of his hon. Friends may be less enthusiastic to accept that inevitability than he is. If the proposals are not accepted, the consequences for the prison system will be dramatic and intolerable.

I have a warning for the Minister, to which I hope he will pay heed. If somebody convicted for the second time of a serious sexual offence will be the subject of a mandatory life sentence, it will be difficult to obtain convictions before juries for second or subsequent serious sexual offences. Without echoing what might be regarded as the extravagant language used by Lord Donaldson in *The Guardian* a few days ago, I underline the fact that, on the whole, despite what the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield said, judges do pass severe sentences when there is, for example, a second conviction of rape.

Those sentences may not always be life sentences, but they are usually measured in substantial double figures. I personally have never seen a second conviction for rape that did not result in a sentence of 12 to 15 years or more, and I have seen numerous life sentences passed in such circumstances.

There is no difficulty now in obtaining a conviction in such a case, other than the ordinary difficulties always presented by the need to ensure that the evidence is sufficient to justify it. But the moment that a jury realises—and there is no way of avoiding that realisation—that if it convicts there will be a life sentence, and it imagines that the key will be thrown away, it will become difficult to persuade the members of the jury to convict.

I am an opponent of capital punishment, and when I first entered the House I was involved in a case in a Crown court out of London. I asked the judge's permission to be absent for half a day so that I could speak in the debate on capital punishment. He was a tough judge with a reputation for being excellent but uncompromising, and he called me to his room and asked which side I was speaking on. With some trepidation, I told him that I would speak against capital punishment. He replied, "I shall let you have the afternoon off then, because when we had capital punishment it was very difficult to get convictions for murder." And that man was a judge with a reputation for toughness, who had practised at a time when the death sentence was mandatory for murder. Of course a life sentence is not a death sentence, but the point still holds good. If the jury knows that the consequences are fixed by law, it may be reluctant to convict.

In 1979 the Conservative manifesto said that a crucial part of the party's beliefs was respect for the rule of law. The actual words were:

> "respect for the rule of law is the basis of a free and civilised life. We will restore it . . . giving the right priority to the fight against crime".

However, the truth about what has happened since 1979 is that crime has more than doubled.

Although the statistics that have been repeated today, and on which the Government frequently rely, show a recent decline in crime—a fall of 5 per cent. nationally over 12 months—if one sets that against the record of previous years it is difficult to say that it really represents a turning point.

I do not seek to make a party political issue out of that, because it is much too serious, but the Government should recognise that in the continuum of the fight against crime, with the changes in society that give rise to increasing crime, we must be ever vigilant, and always prepared to change a policy. Knee-jerk political reactions do not always produce beneficial changes in policy. We are all tempted by the hype available to us through the publicity at party conferences, but what happens as a result does not always work in practice.

In 1982 the then Home Secretary made a strong speech at the Conservative party conference similar to that made by the present Home Secretary this year. I was on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill that was subsequently introduced, which became the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. The Minister, too, served on that Committee, and I believe that he would agree that we had a pretty constructive debate. I suspect that we both still have our badges, presented to us by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who was then shadow Home Secretary, to commemorate the fact that that Committee met more often than any other Standing Committee ever.

We had detailed debates, which produced what has turned out to be probably the best piece of criminal legislation this century. The Act has been effective both ways, and has passed almost all tests, subject to a few amendments. It has protected some defendants against injustice and has ensured the conviction of many criminals.

However, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act did not arrest the rise in crime, because that is a social issue bigger than anything that we can do in the House. The Act certainly did not arrest the rise in crimes of violence. Indeed, between 1980 and 1987 crimes of personal violence accelerated by about 4,000 a year, and since then there has been an exponential increase in such crimes.

I am not convinced that current policy is doing anything to reduce crimes of violence. For financial reasons, the Crown Prosecution Service frequently prosecutes defendants for lesser offences when more serious offences could be used. Magistrates all over the country complain that offences of common assault are often prosecuted when there have been fairly serious injuries. Although the Queen's Bench divisional court has recently held that even when the charge is common assault, the sentence that can be passed is the sentence that fits the crime, we are not sending the right message to victims—that message of which the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield spoke. Those procedures do not seem to be tough on crime. I urge the Home Office to review the arrangement whereby the CPS makes those decisions, and also to look at the other end of the spectrum—the way in which decisions are made about the prosecution of more serious offences.

Those who have the conduct of cases in court, especially prosecuting counsel, express an increasing sense of frustration that when plainly obvious and sensible decisions—not about plea bargaining, although that is,

[Mr. Carlile]

and always has been, a reality in our courts—dictate themselves concerning the conduct of a case, it is sometimes necessary to go back to the Crown Prosecution Service in great detail to obtain instructions. That has the effect of holding up the procedure of the courts, thus increasing whatever antipathy there may be between judges and the Government, about which there has been much recent publicity.

Incidentally, I believe, as I know that many judges do, that that antipathy has been greatly exaggerated by the press. It is right that the Lord Chief Justice, a man of forthright views and great clarity of expression, should go to the other place and express those views when matters of great concern to the judges arise. I suspect that that is one reason why the Lord Chief Justice is a member of the House of Lords.

However, it does not help the dynamic that must exist between judges and Government for the Government and Conservative Back Benchers to use expressions such as "mad judge disease" and to criticise the judges as though they were lefty pariahs. I must tell the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield that most judges went to the same schools and universities to which the Government are criticised for being still too allied. Judges are not, on the whole, namby-pamby social democrats. On the whole, judges are realistic and experienced people, some of whom—I suspect at least half—probably vote Tory by instinct, let alone by judgment. So if the dynamic is not working, we must look for the reasons why and not descend into vulgar abuse.

One specific area that is causing much concern to the organisations concerned with analysing the criminal justice system is the use and utility of the prison system. The Minister made what may go down in the annals of some of the organisations with which I have connections as one of the most remarkably positive interventions that we have heard in years from a Conservative Minister. He stated that prisoners should be able to work and to earn a wage for that work, and that they should do work which is not simply painting and repainting the same wall that has been erected for that purpose. Their work should be productive and useful, and they should have ubiquitous access to education.

Prisons should be just what John Howard—whose name is remembered through the Howard league—believed more than 100 years ago. He believed that prison serves society only if it achieves two things, one of which—very obviously—is to lock up people whom we need to keep out of the way because they are too dangerous or too much of a menace. That is the basic utility of prison.

The other reason for using imprisonment, as John Howard saw it, is that prisoners should emerge from prison having been helped in a way which makes them less likely to commit crime, rather than more likely. That should not involve them having televisions in their cells or making prisons comfortable. Prison should not be a comfortable place, but it should be a useful place for those who will emerge from it.

If the Minister is determined that that should happen, he will deserve the praise which he will get. But it ain't happening at the moment, and I shall give an example of that. Internal sanitation in prisons was a necessary measure, and it has made a great improvement in physical respects. But in some respects, particularly in some young offenders institutions, it has been used to reduce the utility of the institution.

I have visited young offenders institutions, including one very new institution in which internal sanitation was simply used as an excuse to lock the prisoners in their cells without anything much to do for the vast proportion of the day. That does not work.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Which institution was this?

Mr. Carlile: Brinsford. I took a group of foreign lawyers and criminologists—some of whom came from tough sentencing regimes—there and they were shocked by what they saw. A number of lay magistrates to whom I have spoken and who have visited that institution were also shocked by what they saw. Physically, the site is fine. It is brand new, clean and tidy. But the regime there is not designed in any way to ensure that the young people who emerge are qualified to do much more than use more drugs, commit more burglaries and beat up more people in the streets.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is the hon. and learned Gentleman aware that there is a very developed education programme in the Prison Service, and that many young prisoners are almost illiterate when they arrive in prison because they have spent their lives in crime or playing truant? The education programme gives them the opportunity to learn to read and write, and to start taking public examinations. Many of the prisoners go on to take degrees, and I have come across one person taking a PhD. There is a well-developed education programme, and I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will pay tribute to it.

Mr. Carlile: There are not many young offenders on short sentences who are taking PhDs, but I would certainly praise the literacy schemes which are in use in Brinsford and in other young offenders institutions. I visited Liverpool prison not long ago, and there have been dramatic improvements there, particularly in the way in which the literacy scheme has been promulgated. The take-up of the scheme has increased as a result. But I urge the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland)—whose strong views may sometimes cloud her judgment—to go and look at more of these institutions. I am sure that she has visited some of them, but she should go to more and make an objective judgment as to whether the people emerging from them are more or less likely to commit crime in the future. The statistics suggest that they are more likely to commit crime in the future.

Mr. Michael: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman find it ironic that support for the prison education service should come from Conservative Back-Bench Members, when the squeeze on the finances of prisons is leading to the education service being ripped out of many prisons? Would it not be a good idea for the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) to press the Home Secretary to end that disgraceful policy?

Mr. Carlile: The point is well made, and I urge the hon. Lady to press the Home Secretary to ensure that the education service in prisons is increased. There have been some succesful partnerships between local further education colleges and prisons, which have been an improvement on the old prison education system. That has been introduced by the Government, and of course I recognise that. But there is an awful lot more work to be done.

Prisons can be thought to be useful in cases where they are the exact opposite. The Coopers and Lybrand study—to which the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth referred—seems to demonstrate that teaching people to read and giving them useful skills before they go to a young offenders institution will achieve much more than any prison regime could.

The probation service has been mentioned, and it is a truism that if all that a probation officer achieves in a year is to keep one young person out of prison for that year, he will have paid for his own salary and earned a profit for the country. The same, of course, goes for police constables on the beat. Value for money is not found in prisons—value for money is ensuring that people do not go to prison, and ensuring that ordinary law-abiding citizens are able to walk the streets in the knowledge that there is justice and security for the public.

Another aspect of the utility of prisons that I wish to mention relates to women. There has been a worrying increase in the number of women in prison—a rise of 40 per cent. in the past two years. During 1994, the number of women in prison reached its highest level ever. The concern is heightened by the fact that the rise in the number of women in prison is closely related to fine default and to drugs, and is also connected with poverty. Many of that group of women who are often the butt of criticism—women who have been left alone to bring up children—suffer poverty, which can bring them into crime. Evidence obtained by the probation service suggests that poverty is a very strong element in the admission of women to prison, even to the extent of involving women in drugs and prostitution.

National standards in writing pre-sentence reports has brought about a remarkable improvement in the reports. I have read many reports, and the change has been dramatic. The reports are more realistic than they used to be, and they give the courts a more realistic picture of the background of the person concerned and why he or she has become involved in crime.

I urge the Government to ensure, in reviewing the utility of prison—which of course has an important part to play in the sentencing system—that the issue of why more women are going inside is studied. Having visited men's and women's prisons—I hope I will not be thought to be making a sexist point, as that is not my intention—I would say that, in my judgment, women's prisons on the whole are much more frightening places than men's prisons. The level of tension which one experiences in the atmosphere in a women's prison can be extreme. I doubt very much if women's prisons are achieving even what men's prisons are achieving.

The final point I would make on the issue is that many people who come before the courts are psychologically disturbed, some seriously. This is often due to a connection with drugs. Some of the present psychiatric services are excellent. Where there are drug withdrawal schemes, they are extremely successful, but they are by no means ubiquitous and the standards need to be addressed, with the aspiration of achieving the best everywhere.

I applaud those who decided to give us the opportunity to debate these important issues. As I said earlier, they make bad politics. They are too important for slogans and political headlines. I hope that by the end of the debate we will have shed more light than heat on our concerns.

12.10 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I want primarily to discuss the issue raised by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) of rehabilitation in prisons, but, first, I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister. He is aware that Lincolnshire Members of Parliament have been pounding on his door throughout the year, complaining about the financial settlement for their local police force. On behalf of Lincolnshire police and Lincolnshire Members of Parliament—I am the only one present today—I thank my right hon. Friend for treating us with enormous courtesy. He listened carefully to our concerns, especially on the sparsity factor, and he then met them. We could not have possibly asked for a better settlement. He has increased funding by 3.4 per cent.—£1.9 billion—over the year. The people of Lincolnshire will be grateful to him for his decision.

As the Minister said, there will be 32 more police officers in Lincolnshire than there were in 1979. The chief constable estimates that the numbers will rise by a further seven by the end of the financial year. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I thank him for what he has done.

Knowing that I hoped to speak in the debate, I telephoned the chief constable yesterday. I hope that the House will forgive me for making a local point. It is interesting to note what has been achieved by Operation Christmas Cracker in Lincolnshire. It has one of the smaller police forces, yet 77 premises were searched, 34 people arrested and 16 people charged, which shows that the operation has been a considerable success. Property recovered includes electrical equipment, jewellery, tools, car radios, alloy wheels, motor vehicles, antique paintings, sports clothing, cheque books, benefit books, computer equipment and vehicle documents.

The chief constable told me an interesting little fact. Thanks to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Minister and our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, recorded crime in Lincolnshire has dropped by 7 per cent. over the past year, with burglary and vehicle crimes dropping by 4 per cent. However, a report from Lincolnshire police on rural crime shows that despite the overall reduction of 6 per cent. this year to date—1 January to 30 September—there has been a 3 per cent. increase in rural areas. The report says that a number of issues are involved, and that a lack of resources outside urban areas, displacement of crime due to CCTV and the large geographical area of the county may be significant.

My right hon. Friend should take that message as a warning. He represents a large rural constituency, as I do. In these debates where we concentrate on the major problem of urban crime, it is easy to forget the rural areas. We should highlight them. I will not weary the House with all that the Lincolnshire police have told me, but clearly a great deal of work needs to be done, such as setting up more neighbourhood and farm watch schemes. There are 54 farm watches in Lincolnshire, covering almost 1,000 farms, but as the police make clear, that is but a small number because the farming communities are, by nature, isolationist. They do not want to work together, but they must do so—and in co-operation with the local police—if we are to deal with rural crime.

Mr. Maclean: I did not focus heavily on rural crime in my speech today, not because I do not consider it important—I do—but because there is to be a National Farmers Union conference on rural crime next week, when a Home Office Minister will deliver a keynote speech setting out all aspects of our policy. I felt that I could not incorporate large chunks of that speech into today's speech because it would have made it inordinately long.

Mr. Leigh: Rural counties such as Lincolnshire will look forward to learning of what transpires during the next few weeks.

As I said earlier, I want to deal with the issue of rehabilitation, which was raised by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery: it is the absolute key to our discussions. As long ago as 1895, the Gladstone committee said:

> "We start from the principle that prison treatment should have as its primary and concurrent objects deterrence and reformation."

That was adopted as official policy and it became the basis for all subsequent action in the prison service.

As the years passed, confidence in the treatment model, as it was called, declined. In 1979, a Government report from a committee of inquiry into the prison service said:

> "The drive behind the original borstal ideas has fallen away and there is now no belief that longer sentences may be justified because they make actual reformative treatment more possible."

That sort of thinking has infected the whole debate.

The report also states:

> "As confidence in the treatment model has waned in this way, no alternative philosophy commanding wide public support has taken its place. Members of the prison service of all grades from governor downwards, responsible for locking up their inmates and for providing regimes for them, have in consequence tended to lose faith in any positive justification for the inherently unpleasant tasks which are their job. Further, the wide intellectual debate which, as we have indicated, has been undermining the treatment model and simultaneously trying to provide a satisfactory alternative philosophy, has on occasions merely given fresh currency to the old ideas that imprisonment could be no more than punitive and deterrent."

My purpose in speaking in the debate is my belief that we must begin to stress much more strongly the concept of rehabilitation in our prison service. That ties in with what my right hon. Friend has said today about his plans to deal with burglary, and I want to focus my remarks on that. I have thought for a long time that burglary is an absolute plague on our society. I credit the Government for the progress that they have made over the past year or two. When we knock on doors and canvass, the one aspect of Government to which people are warming is the Home Secretary's absolute determination to deal with that problem. They are glad that he has been left in his job and that he has been getting a grip of the problem.

I have argued for some time that we must do more about burglary and that there must be minimum deterrent sentences. The Government are now saying that someone who commits two or more burglaries will definitely go to prison. I do not think that that will reassure the public, who see burglary as the No. 1 plague in our society. It would have an enormous impact on society and burglars if people knew that if someone breaks into a private dwelling house, causing such appalling anguish and invading people's very privacy, he will go to prison. If the Government were to adopt such a policy, it would strike a tremendous chord with the public.

I have argued that point for some time, but I know that judges would be unwilling to accept it. They will say that the personal circumstances of offenders—for example, their ages—may differ. Few of us would take the risk, for instance, of drinking and driving because we know that if we did we would lose our licences. It is a clear and simple thing that the public understand. If the public understood that people who caused the anguish that burglary causes would end up in prison, it would have a major effect.

That is easy to say but I am not suggesting, before the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery is appalled by what I say, that we should simply put offenders, especially younger offenders, who account for most of the problem, into ancient Victorian institutions, throw away the key and forget about them. That is no solution.

For inspiration, I turn to the Home Office's "Directions to the Parole Board under section 32(6) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991", which deals with the release of mandatory life sentence prisoners. I do not suggest, of course, that there should be life sentences for burglary. We carefully consider how life sentence prisoners have performed in prison. The only way to deal with the matter is to recognise that there is a plague on society, that a relatively small number of people perpetrate these crimes, that we must at least make an effort to rehabilitate them in prison and that we must have confidence in ourselves that some form of custody can result in their rehabilitation.

The guidelines state:

> "The Home Secretary takes the final decision on the release of mandatory life sentence prisoners . . . and that decision might be taken on grounds that go beyond the risk posed by the prisoner. The Home Secretary is also concerned with the wider political implications, including the effect on public confidence in the life sentence system which release may have."

The guidelines continue:

> "Before recommending release, the Parole Board should consider whether:
>
> the lifer has shown by his performance in prison that he has made positive efforts to address his attitudes and behavioural problems and the extent to which progress has been made in doing so such that the risk that he will commit a further imprisonable offence after release is minimal."

The Parole Board is entitled to consider

> "the offender's background . . . the nature and circumstances of the original offence . . . the sentencing judge's comments . . . attitude and behaviour in custody . . . degree of remorse and steps taken to achieve the treatment and training objectives set out in the life sentence plan . . . the lifer's relationship with the probation service and other outside support such as family and friends."

If people commit burglaries, they should be given a minimum deterrent sentence and told that their ability to leave prison and get back into society will depend on their behaviour in custody, the degree of remorse, the extent to which they have been willing to undertake training, their relationship with the probation service and their attitude and behaviour while in custody.

All those factors should be taken into account so that people who were contemplating committing burglary would know that they would receive a custodial sentence of some sort. It would not necessarily be in an ancient institution. There would be a great deal of flexibility about how such people were dealt with. The emphasis would be on deterrence and rehabilitation.

Unless we are prepared to overlook all the evidence that has been thrown at us in recent years that suggests that rehabilitation does not work, we will never solve the problem. One research study, to take one of many, declared:

> "rehabilitative methods tend, by and large, not to rehabilitate . . . research into the effectiveness of 'methods of intervention' . . . is a doomed endeavour."

That was by an author called Pitts writing in 1992.

Other authors have assembled a sizeable list of studies in which promising outcomes have been obtained and challenged the traditional view that rehabilitation does not work. For instance, one study said:

> "Equally damaging for the 'nothing works' position was a study by Thornton (1987) in which he reinvestigated a selection of the studies used by Lipton and co-workers (1975) to derive their original conclusions. Contrary to what had been claimed by Lipton and colleagues, a number of these projects had in fact described positive outcomes. Indeed, focusing on those studies that employed psychological therapy as the 'treatment' in controlled experimental designs, almost 50 per cent. of the results had demonstrated a positive advantage for therapeutic intervention."

We have to have the courage both to carry on with the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Minister, in focusing on deterrence but, as the other side of coin, also to say that rehabilitation does and must have a role, especially for younger people. In a way, people could learn a lot by discarding a lot of recent studies and reading a book written over 100 years ago by Tolstoy, called "Resurrection". He deals with the criminal system of his time. Many of the arguments that he was talking about 100 years ago are still being debated today.

Tolstoy argued that there is a place for deterrence and rehabilitation and reformation in society. If we concentrate on that, we can make great progress in the future.

12.25 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The Minister paid tribute to our new chief constable in Lancashire, Pauline Clare. I want to talk later about spiralling crime in Lancashire.

First, I want to pick up what the Minister said about people having to be taught the difference between right and wrong. It was the same sort of stuff that was published in 1993 by the Home Office public relations unit in a pamphlet entitled "Government Policy on Law and Order". It states:

> "There is no point in politicians . . . calling for a return to old fashioned morality and respect for authority . . . it must be taught by example."

The Conservative Government could not publish anything like that today without risking gales of laughter.

Society has been fashioned since 1979 in an unfair way. The gap between poorest and richest is greater than at any time since records began in 1886. There is deep poverty and alienation. There is far too much unemployment, which has deliberately been used by the Government as an instrument of economic policy. It was a "price well worth paying". We are now paying the price in rising crime, which is—I shall come to the statistics in a minute—linked directly to youth unemployment.

We heard from the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) about the sparsity factor, which has been introduced into the formula for police grant. The police grant also contains a factor for young male unemployment. The money that goes from central Government to the police authorities is determined, in part, by the level of young male unemployment, so there is a link and we should not deny it.

Crime in my county of Lancashire has doubled since 1979, as it has doubled nationally. The risk of a household being burgled is one in 12 in Lancashire; in 1979 it was one in 43. The risk of a vehicle being broken into in Lancashire is one in seven; in 1979 it was one in 15. The most horrifying statistic of the lot is that the risk of a person being assaulted in Lancashire is one in 123; in 1979, it was one in 283. That is a deplorable record.

There has been a 55 per cent. increase in violence against the person since 1979. Robberies have quadrupled; there has been a 440 per cent. increase in robbery since 1979. Burglary, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, has increased by 220 per cent. in Lancashire since 1979. There has even been an 89 per cent. increase in burglary since 1989. Theft from cars has increased by 296 per cent. since 1979. Criminal damage has increased by 206 per cent. in Lancashire since 1979. The number of offences in Lancashire has increased by 116 per cent since 1979. The crime rate has doubled in Lancashire: it has doubled nationally. We have had an explosion in crime.

That is the recent history. What has happened in the 1990s? In Lancashire, in 1990, there was a 20 per cent. increase in crime on the previous year; in 1991, there was a 14.2 per cent. increase on the 1990 figure; in 1992, a 9.5 per cent. increase on 1991 figure; and then it began to slow down. In 1993, there was a 1 per cent. increase. The latest fall is to be welcomed, but since 1979 there has been a cataclysmic rise in crime.

We are now promised 5,000 additional police officers over the next three years. We have been here before. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) reminded me that, in 1972, the then Home Secretary pledged an additional 1,000 police officers. That never happened. The Prime Minister made exactly the same pledge before the 1992 general election. Nothing happened. We never did get an extra 1,000 police officers, so people are sceptical.

When the announcement was made about the additional money that would be made available to the police authorities, the new chief constable in Lancashire, Pauline Clare, implied that she would have to look at the small print. She said:

> "At first sight it would seem our allocation is above the current rate of inflation but we will have to take a much closer look at the Home Secretary's proposals in the light of our own policing plans."

The Government have been talking about more police for years, but the reality has rarely, if ever, caught up with the rhetoric.

We know from the report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for 1994-95, which was published only on 25 October, that there was a decline in police numbers from 128,045 in 1992 to 127,358 in 1994. Although big structural changes in the police service account for some of the changes, there has been a decline.

The county of Lancashire, and the police authority, has spent at or above its standard spending assessment for every year since 1990. It is spending at a level that the

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

Government think is appropriate to provide adequate policing in the county. The authorised police establishment before the changes of 1 April 1995 was 3,229. In no year since 1990 has the county force ever been up to establishment—never. In 1995, there were four fewer police officers in post in Lancashire than in 1990. There were 10 fewer police officers in post than the establishment in 1991; there were 14 fewer police officers in post in 1992; and, of course, in 1993 in Lancashire—as with elsewhere in the country—there was a freeze on police recruitment. In Lancashire in 1995, we have one more police officer than we had last year. That is the context in which we have to examine the promise of 5,000 additional police officers over three years.

I received a letter from the Minister of State on 30 November—other hon. Members will have received a similar letter referring to the situation in their own county. The Minister wrote to me about the situation in Lancashire. He said:

> "Under our proposals, your force's share of the additional funding in the first year will be £0.5m. This would be sufficient to recruit 28 police officers".

That was the headline—28 additional police officers for Lancashire.

What is the position as it stands? We have 3,195 police officers in post in Lancashire as at the latest date for which we have figures—September 1995. If we add the 28 additional police officers that the Minister has promised, that brings us to 3,223, six fewer than the previous police establishment for Lancashire.

It is all done with mirrors. After all those announcements and all the additional police, even if Pauline Clare recruits the additional 28 police officers we shall be left with less than our previous establishment.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Fascinating as all this is, would the hon. Gentleman care to say how much extra money a future Labour Government would spend and how many extra police in Lancashire that would pay for?

Mr. Prentice: The difference is that we would not allow crime to spiral out of control, as it has under the present Government.

Mr. Evans: Answer the question.

Mr. Prentice: I am answering it in my own way. All those extra police are needed because crime has spiralled out of control. It has doubled nationally since 1979 and it has more than doubled in Lancashire since 1979. Conservative Members should not try to lecture me on the way in which a Labour Government would approach that.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Look what has happened.

Mr. Prentice: Whatever has happened, it has not been the responsibility of the Labour party, has it? We have had no responsibility for central Government for 16 years.

Mr. Kirkhope: For all that nonsense, the hon. Gentleman cannot get away from the simple fact that, under the last Labour Government, the number of police officers in the country was reduced by 8,000. It is all very well to speak as he does, but those are the realities. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has convinced the House of any good intent on the Labour party's part.

Mr. Prentice: There has been a generational change since 1979. I do not know how many Opposition Members were able to vote in 1979. Yes, that Labour Government may have made mistakes—who knows? However, I say to hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who is having a good laugh, that people outside the House are genuinely not interested in what happened in the 1970s. They are interested in what is happening now. They are interested in the present Government's record and in what Ministers have to say about respect for the law and trust for the institutions of the country, and they are squaring that with the cascade of sleaze that we have had from Conservative Members in the past few years—that is the difference between reality and rhetoric.

I shall now make the specific argument that I wanted to make about the consequence of that freeze and reduction in police officers in Lancashire.

I have had meetings with senior officers in the county about what is, I suppose, a policy of stealth to close down our police stations or change them from police stations open round the clock to part-time police stations. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley has that problem in Clitheroe, which is in the same police division as my constituency of Pendle. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) had the same problem; the police station in Darwen was to change from full time to part time, but I believe that it has been reprieved.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Prentice: I do not know the position. *[Interruption.]* I will give way to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) if he has an argument to make.

Mr. Banks: The purpose was to get the bobbies on the beat. That is what mattered. When people are in trouble, they will dial 999, not necessarily rush to the police station.

Mr. Prentice: The hon. Gentleman has not listened to what I have said about police strength in Lancashire and getting bobbies back on the beat. The county, spending at or above its SSA, has not been able to deliver the full police establishment. That is the very point that I have been making, but the hon. Member for Southport has not twigged it—perhaps it is too difficult a concept for him to grasp.

I shall return to the subject of police stations that are becoming part-time rather than full-time stations. When I spoke to Superintendent Rawstrone—with whom I get on well, who is a competent superintendent and who is well regarded in the area—I asked him why all the police stations were now going part time. He said that more police were needed out on the beat. That is a fair enough suggestion, although the police strength has never been up to establishment. Perhaps when the hon. Member for Southport reads *Hansard* he will appreciate the point that I am trying to make.

I spoke earlier about the process being carried out by stealth. I read all the reports of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Lancashire dating back to 1990. All police authorities now have to publish annual policing plans. The Lancashire police authority annual policing plan to which I shall refer was published in April 1995. It contains nothing about closing or changing the status of police stations from full to part time. It merely states that it wants to provide high-visibility policing. It continues:

> "We will make every effort to increase the amount of time officers spend outside the police station and in public, although experience suggests that more officers on visible patrol does not always result in a corresponding rise in public satisfaction."

My constituents, and doubtless the people of Ribble valley and Clitheroe, do not want a trade-off whereby they can have more police on the beat, but the police stations close or go part time. People want police stations as well as police on the beat. The police station is a place of sanctuary and refuge; if people are in trouble, they run to the police station and knock on the door and they do not want it to be locked. But that is happening in Barnoldswick in my constituency, where the police authority wants the spanking new police station, which was opened only two and a half years ago at a cost of £650,000, to be open part time.

I took up the problem with Pauline Clare, the highly regarded new chief constable of Lancashire. She wrote to me and said that she would consider all the representations being made. She said that opinion polls carried out by the local newspapers had resulted in minimal response, with 51 replies to a telephone poll conducted by the *Barnoldswick and Earby Times* and four replies to a postal poll carried out by the *Craven Herald and Pioneer*. She is based in Preston and she does not think that there is too much public agitation in north-east Lancashire, where my constituency is located. But she is living in a parallel universe and clearly does not understand what is happening in north-east Lancashire.

The local papers have been full of reports about our local police stations closing. The town councillor in Barnoldswick, Sandra Garnett, had a 2,000-name petition against the proposal. She was quoted in the local papers saying that the people of West Craven

> "felt betrayed by 'empty promises' in the police's own charter."

I agree with her entirely. Everyone in Barnoldswick and West Craven, regardless of their politics, wants the station to stay open.

Sally Lambert, who chairs Barnoldswick town council, has been outspoken, as have representatives of the Liberal party and, where they can be found, members of the Conservative party in West Craven. We want the police station to stay open. The hon. Member for Southport talks about police on the beat and the fact that people can always pick up the telephone or get in touch with the police in an emergency, but Mr. Michael Townson was quoted in the *Craven Herald and Pioneer* a few weeks ago. He saw some young people throwing fireworks at passing drivers. He ran to the police station and found that it was locked, but there was a hotline. He picked up the telephone link, but although he heard the police in Colne six miles away they could not hear him because it was a one-way hotline. That was not very good.

It was reported to the police at divisional headquarters at Colne that the telephone outside the closed police station in Barnoldswick operated in only one direction. A complaint was lodged, but a couple of days later Duncan Smith, a reporter from the *Craven Herald and Pioneer*, went to the police station at 6.30 pm—not in the middle of the night—to pick up a photograph and found the door locked. He telephoned Colne police station from a friend's house nearby and was told to go back to Barnoldswick station and ring again on the telephone link, and an officer would be sent to meet him. However, he experienced exactly the same problems as Mr. Townson. He said,

> "I could hear the operator"—

six miles away at the divisional police headquarters in Colne—

> "answer but he could obviously not hear me . . . Thankfully, it was not an emergency, but I shudder to think what could have happened if it had been."

That is the difference between having a police station that is open and one that is closed.

We do not want any more false rhetoric from the Government about getting more police on the beat until they start staffing properly the police service nationally and in Lancashire. We need a halt to police station closures. I have tabled parliamentary questions to Home Office Ministers, but they have taken a Pontius Pilate approach and replied that it is not a matter for them but one for the local police authority. That is simply not good enough for people in my neck of the woods—and I suspect those in Ribble Valley and Rossendale and Darwen.

Finally, people want some honesty from the Government in owning up to their manifest failure in curbing the growth of crime since 1979. It is an appalling record and one that people will not readily forgive.

12.46 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in a debate on a subject that causes enormous concern to my constituents and to all honest citizens. The strength of the public's concern is probably the only point on which I agree with the Opposition; given its strength, it is strange that only two Back-Bench Labour Members are present. I believe, however, that that is twice the number that were here for the first part of the debate.

One point that has been raised is that crime figures have risen since 1979. That is certainly true. Rising crime is not a new phenomenon; it is accepted as a fact of life in almost every country in the world. In Britain, crime figures have increased steadily under Governments of every colour.

In 1946, the number of notifiable offences recorded in England and Wales was 472,500. In 1992, the equivalent figure was 5.6 million. The cost to the country that that represents is enormous. In 1992, the value of property reported stolen in burglaries totalled about £1 billion. I understand that only about £64 million-worth has been recovered. A further £2.7 billion-worth of property and £1.8 billion-worth of motor vehicles was stolen.

The cost of crime is measured not just in economic terms. We have to include the blighted lives of the victims of crime and the suffering of those who have had their homes violated and lost treasured and irreplaceable possessions. We must take account also of the fears of citizens who are no longer prepared to answer the door after dark, who are unwilling to let their children out to play and who are too frightened to walk the streets at night. Those fears are not experienced only by people who

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

live in confined areas or the inner cities—they are shared by my constituents who live in towns and villages where previously people did not even think to lock their doors.

In part, the fears might not be justified. They derive not so much from experience of crime as from reading the press or from watching the television news or programmes such as "Crimewatch UK". The lives of some people have, however, been touched by crimes that they previously thought unimaginable—such as the assault and robbery 18 months ago of a retired clergymen in his own home in the tiny village of Tolleshunt D'Arcy in my constituency.

For years it was taken for granted that the upward trend in the crime figures was inevitable and immutable. That counsel of despair was the accepted wisdom of sociologists, liberal academics and left-wing commentators. We were told that rising crime was not the fault of offenders but that society was to blame—that unemployment, poverty or simply boredom left offenders with no choice. We were told that it was all the fault of Hollywood, the materialist culture or income differentials in society. We were told that the threat of prison did not deter and that the effect of imprisonment was to alienate further and turn first offenders into repeat offenders.

Those theories were offensive and wrong. They offended anyone from a deprived background or broken family who had not turned to crime, but instead struggled to make their way and improve themselves through honest hard work. The experience of the past two and a half years has shown that punishment works, that the threat of prison deters and that imprisonment takes criminals off the streets and puts them where they cannot offend.

That assertion is evidenced by the drop of nearly 10 per cent. in recorded crime in the past two years—the largest and most sustained in the post-war period. Credit for that goes to the police, the Prison Service, the probation service and, most of all, the present Home Secretary, who had the guts to ignore received wisdom and to pursue the tough approach for which the police and my constituents have been crying out.

Not all the academics were wrong. I commend to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State the pamphlet by David Pyle, recently published by the Institute of Economic Affairs, which surveys the work of economists in analysing criminal behaviour. As an economist by training myself, I am attracted to that analysis—although, like most good theories, it appears to be common sense.

Becker, a former Nobel economics prize winner, suggested that someone is likely to commit a crime if the expected net benefit is greater than the expected benefit to be derived from legitimate activity. The criminal will therefore be deterred by increases in the likelihood of being caught or the amount of punishment that he can expect to receive. The empirical evidence supports those conclusions.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is entirely right to concentrate on improving the detection rate and imposing tougher sentences on criminals. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) in recommending that persons who are caught and convicted of burglary should expect to go to prison. By doing so, my right hon. and learned Friend will benefit from a virtuous circle. As the detection rate improves, the potential criminal will know that more people have been caught and so will be less likely to commit crime himself.

Improving the detection rate is, in the first instance, a job for the police. The Government are absolutely correct to concentrate on strengthening the front line. The Prime Minister's pledge to provide sufficient funding for an extra 5,000 officers in the next three years will make a major contribution towards improving detection. I should like to take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for the increase of £4.9 million in funding for the Essex police next year, and for the extra 28 officers that they will be able to recruit straight away.

The area that I represent is very rural; many of its small communities are remote and isolated. My constituents want to see more community officers living in villages. They want to see police stations continuously manned—that is the one point on which I share the views of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr Prentice). They also want to see more policemen out on patrol. To achieve that in an area as sparse as the Dengie peninsula in my constituency will always be hard, but it has been made harder by the diversion of manpower away from crime detection and prevention to police the demonstrations that have been taking place a little up the coast, at Brightlingsea.

Such demonstrations have to be policed, particularly in view of some of the disgraceful violence that has taken place there, but it is not acceptable that, as a result, police cover should be reduced to dangerously low levels elsewhere. The extra money that has been announced will help, but if prolonged events such as those at Brightlingsea become increasingly common, the Government might have to consider what additional measures are necessary to deal with them.

The Government are also right to give the police the opportunity to benefit from all the technology that we can bring to bear in the fight against crime. The establishment of a DNA database will prove an effective resource in enabling the police to identify offenders beyond doubt and to obtain their conviction. The installation of closed circuit television, to which my right hon. Friend the Minister rightly referred, is also proving extraordinarily effective in helping to catch criminals and to deter others. Since Brentwood, in Essex, installed its own security camera scheme last year, crime has fallen by nearly 40 per cent. Violence, vandalism, graffiti, shoplifting and credit card fraud have all dropped dramatically. With Government help, CCTV has also been installed in Chelmsford and Braintree, and it will soon be operational in Colchester as well.

Fighting crime cannot just be the responsibility of the police. It also requires the active co-operation of every citizen. Neighbourhood watch schemes have now spread into every village, street and community across the land. In Essex, we have 4,200 schemes involving many thousands of keen and enthusiastic members. In addition, we have schemes such as marine watch, farm watch, industrial watch and horse watch—and I shall not be at all surprised if we soon have pig watch and chicken watch schemes as well. That mobilisation of the public is having a tremendous effect in helping the police and in raising public confidence and their sense of security.

The second influence on the level of crime is the punishment that the criminal can expect if caught. For too long, criminals thought that if they were caught a clever lawyer could get them off; that if they were under age they would simply be set free; that if they were convicted they would get no more than a fine or a ticking off; and that if they were sent to prison they would be let out again after having served no more than half their sentence.

It is hardly surprising that the public began to lose confidence in our criminal justice system. It is again to the credit of the present Home Secretary that he is taking action to put that right. Under the Government, we have seen an increasingly tough approach to serious crime. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will be seen as a landmark—the point at which we stopped listening to those who worried about the rights of criminals and started to listen to the pleas of their victims.

The reform of the right to silence, the tightening of bail conditions and the power to give custodial sentences to juveniles were vital measures. The measures in this Session's Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill will help to reform the rules relating to disclosure which, at present, allow those who are guilty of some of the most serious offences to walk free.

The measures announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in Blackpool to end the automatic early release of prisoners and to stop letting out criminals after serving only half their sentences will go a long way towards restoring the credibility of the criminal justice system and the public's confidence in it.

Crime is not excusable. The rise in crime is not inevitable. The Government have proved that by pursuing commonsense policies that are working. In my county, the number of recorded crimes fell by 7 per cent. last year. Vehicle crime was down by 10 per cent. and the number of burglaries dropped by 18 per cent. I am not complacent—the figures are still far too high. More still needs to be done, but the Government's approach is working and it deserves support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): In the 60 minutes available before the Front Bench winding-up speeches, four hon. Members hope to catch my eye. With a little co-operation, it should be possible for all of them to speak.

1 pm

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): May I say at the outset, if my voice will last for the short time that I intend to speak, that I apologise for not being present for the opening speeches? I submitted a note to Madam Speaker explaining that I would be at a constituency event that I could not miss. In fact, the event had some bearing on today's debate, which is part of the reason why I was very keen to return to make some comments.

I suspect that, throughout today's debate, the Government expect to hear some sort of congratulations on the fact that there have—apparently—been some reductions in the crime figures. I shall make two points about that. First, can we be absolutely sure that crime figures have fallen? Secondly, who is responsible for the fall?

A number of Labour Members have already said—and we will continue to repeat the fact—that crime has gone through the roof since 1979. While there might appear to have been some reduction in the past year, which indeed must be welcomed, the Government cannot be complacent about their record.

What do we understand from the crime figures? One of my great concerns—it affects many of my constituents—is the fear of crime, especially among women and the elderly, and increasingly among young people. Much credit for reductions in crime must go not to the Government but to the police. In London, of course, we have seen remarkable changes and a reduction in burglary rates as a result of targeted attempts such us Operation Bumblebee. That must be welcomed and commended, and credit must be given to the Metropolitan police.

Some of the apparent drop in crime is, however, due to the fear of women and elderly people. They are afraid to go out at night or to travel on trains or the tube because of the possibility of crime, and they avoid areas where they fear they might become victims. It is for that reason that prevention of crime is so important. I shall cite a number of examples of such prevention to show just how effective it has been.

I and a number of my colleagues in south-east London have been working over the years with British Rail—or Railtrack, or whatever it is called now, given that the Government keep slicing it up like pieces of bread—to make our stations safer. It is to the credit of Network SouthEast, for example, that, in collaboration with Lewisham council, a station very close to my home—in Hither Green—has been cleaned up, brightened up and made much more safe and pleasant to use.

As Crime Concern has said, we should be giving much more weight to the effect of the crime prevention measures that have been adopted by many local authorities in co-operation and in partnership with their local police forces.

In my constituency today, I spoke to a number of people including people from other local authority areas. I make no excuse for talking exclusively about south-east London because everyone recognises that south-east London has had a reputation, which has not always been justified, of being a high-crime area. It is an area where the councils and the police have worked together closely, not just to reduce crime, but to change the reputation.

In Greenwich, for example, the Labour council is working closely with the university of Greenwich to monitor and study areas where people feel unsafe. The university is carrying out a survey of its students close to the halls of residence to see what measures can be taken to make them feel safe. As I said earlier, even young people are fearful about going out at night nowadays. The university is studying improving street lighting and moving bus stops, if necessary, to make the area better. Those are practical, simple measures, but they will make a considerable difference to the quality of life of the community in Greenwich.

Since I was a councillor, I have always said that I have never understood why, when we have street lighting, we put the emphasis on lighting for cars and not for people. It is high time that we put the emphasis not only on the car on the road, but on the passer-by on the pavement.

In Croydon, the police are doing something rather dangerous. The council has invited young people to meet the local police and to tell them exactly what they think of them. It is brave of the local police to have taken that on board. They recognise that a number of young people,

[Mrs. Bridget Prentice]

for whatever reason, distrust their local police. The mayor of Croydon said that at least people are now talking and beginning to break down the barriers between the police and young people. That too has been done by a Labour council in Croydon, which is working in partnership with the local police force.

Lewisham borough council has, for some time, been working in partnership with the local police and businesses to prevent crime. A community safety strategy was recently launched there by the Metropolitan commissioner, Paul Condon, and by my good friend the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). At the time, we expected the controversy to surround Paul Condon's comments about targeting young people who were felt to be involved in street crime, which is an important issue in Lewisham. As it happened, the controversy surrounded my hon. Friend's remarks about sorting out crime on the streets. I put on record the fact that, having listened to his speech, I can say that it was nothing like the interpretation that was put on it by some of the more so-called liberal newspapers. It was extremely well received by all the community leaders in Lewisham and I hope that the key measures my hon. Friend proposed will be put in place.

Like a few other councils, Lewisham has incorporated in its core responsibilities a duty of crime prevention. The Morgan report recommended such a measure to the Home Secretary and I am disappointed that he has seen fit to shelve the report. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government are rethinking their views on the Morgan report and that they will give local authorities the duty of crime prevention. Certainly the next Labour Government will do just that.

Lewisham has an assistant director in each of its directorates who has responsibility for that core duty. That is why tenants are getting stronger doors, better locks and locks on windows, and why their estates are being refurbished. At minimal cost, a Lewisham direct team is installing security lights for tenants and other residents who ask for them.

The Government have been loud in their commendation of closed circuit television and about all the money that they are putting into it. We are all well aware of the effectiveness of CCTV in our town centres. Lewisham has three town centres which can benefit from it, but the sums so far provided have been minuscule. I hope that the Government will think seriously about increasing the funding in view of the enormous preventive effect that CCTV has had where it has been installed.

I want to make a special plea on behalf of Lewisham, because it is now able—uniquely—to download information about an incident in any of its three town centres to the police computer-aided dispatch room. There is nobody between the police and the incident—no one has to interpret the seriousness of the incident or the kind of response needed. That decision is left entirely to the police in the police station—the professionals. I hope that, when the Government next dole out the pennies for closed circuit television, they will agree that the unique experiment in Lewisham deserves at least as much support from the Government as is being given by the council and others.

The council and the local police are doing more than that. Through the curriculum, they are also tackling the causes of crime. Last week, I had a most interesting experience at Launcelot school, in my constituency, where primary school children were being taught about drugs through drama and workshops led by a theatre group based in Deptford and Lewisham, Theatre Adad. They learnt not only about the health hazards, but about how drugs draw young people into criminal activity.

After the children have worked with the theatre group, the local police do follow-up work with them. We should all support and encourage such initiatives, but there is only a tiny amount in school budgets for it, and enormous cuts have been made in Government funding for the youth service. Unless the work with youngsters in primary schools can be developed through the youth service and in other ways, it might fall by the wayside. The Government cannot take credit with one hand and cut innovative schemes and partnerships with the other.

If we are to instil a conscience in young people about what is right and wrong, and about the hurt that they can cause by some of their actions, we must help them to understand that they live in a community and have responsibilities to others as well as receiving support from them. We can do that only through co-operation and partnership between the police and local authorities.

The selfish attitude that has grown up in many areas of life since 1979 is very much the responsibility of the Conservative Governments since that date. We would like to change that attitude. Only by instilling a sense of community and responsibility can we achieve a real reduction in the crime figures and, equally important, in the fear of crime.

1.13 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): I am sorry that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is not in the Chamber, because he refused to allow me to intervene in his speech to question him about his party conference's support for the legalisation of cannabis a couple of years ago. I am not surprised that he did not allow me to intervene; I think that he must have taken fright. I also deplore the way in which he dealt with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland)—but lack of time prevents me from pursuing that matter now. Never mind whether the Liberal Democrats support a royal commission or whatever—the fact is that the party conference voted to liberalise the drugs regime. I deplore that policy, and the fact that the party leadership took no action whatsoever in 1995 to rectify the decision made in 1994.

It is disappointing to look across the Chamber this afternoon. We see that there is little evidence of support for the subject of law and order from the Opposition. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) waves his arms about, but he has shot himself in both feet on a couple of occasions. Yesterday at business questions, the hon. Gentleman shot Pendle in the foot in dealing with a constituency problem. He should not have criticised the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the way that he did. He should understand that the Arabs work rather differently from people in the United Kingdom and the west. He should have taken the trouble to write to the Saudi ambassador. John Lee would not have made that mistake, and he would have properly looked after the interests of his constituents.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: This is a long-standing matter which has resulted in 50 redundancies in my constituency because the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would not pay for the bandages with which it had been supplied. I was just making a straightforward—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must get back to the debate in question.

Mr. Banks: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wanted to be courteous to the hon. Gentleman, although I did not expect to mention that particular point. I think that the hon. Gentleman should write to the ambassador. That is the way in which a Member should deal with such a matter, not as the hon. Gentleman did. In doing so, he did a disservice to his constituency—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should react by taking instructions from the Chair.

Mr. Banks: The Conservative approach to the fight against crime is not all about what the Government alone can do, let alone the Home Secretary. It is about a partnership between the Government, the police, the courts and the people. It is about giving the police the resources and the statutory backing to catch criminals, and it is about the courts using the powers bestowed on them by the House. That is what we expect of the criminal justice system in this country and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said, we should not rest until that ideal is reached.

We constantly hear from the Opposition about the 16 years that my party has been in office and about what has been achieved during that time. In law and order, we should be proud of the fact that there are 16,000 more police officers to protect us than in 1979. Recorded crime is down by 5 per cent. in the 12 months to June 1995, and includes 69,000 fewer burglaries and 130,000 fewer vehicle crimes. This is the largest 12-monthly fall for 40 years, and violent crime has decreased by 2 per cent. as well.

In the area including my constituency, 3,000 fewer offences have been committed since 1992—a decrease of about 13 per cent.—while the clear-up rate is 10 per cent. higher than the figure nationally. Indeed, offences recorded since 1979 in the metropolitan borough of Sefton have increased by 24 per cent., but that compares with 107 per cent. for the country as a whole. The statistics to which some hon. Members have referred in this debate show that the Government should take credit.

The law and order agenda is dominated by the Conservative party. A number of measures that the Government have introduced deserve special attention, and I believe that the measures introduced to prevent crime from occurring in the first place must be balanced by tough punishment for convicted criminals. In that light, the encouragement given to local people and businesses to work with the police—particularly in the "Partners Against Crime" initiative launched last year—will be instrumental in breaking down what I call the Sidney street tendency in the fight against crime. The Sidney street tendency—as the historians among us will recall—refers to what Mr. Churchill did when he was Home Secretary in 1910. Sadly, I do not have the time to explain to non-historians what that means.

The Home Secretary and his Front-Bench colleagues simply cannot be in all places at once—as Mr. Churchill tried to be in 1910. In my constituency, much good work is done by local citizens through home watch schemes, the safer cities scheme and local drug prevention teams. The provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to refuse bail more frequently are similarly helpful in preventing crime.

Public confidence has been shaken in recent years by the seeming inability of the police to convict the guilty in some cases. Wrong, it seems, too often wins by technicalities. Wrong must not win by technicalities. Where that has been due to the scales of justice leaning towards the defence, the Government have been careful to redress the balance. I refer in particular to the reform of the right to silence and the prospective changes to defence disclosure contained in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill.

As the Government confirmed in the autumn, they are determined to punish criminals for their crimes, and imprisonment is the key to that. It is clear that the threat of prison and the confinement of criminals in prison reduces crime. During the past two and a half years, the prison population has increased by almost 10,000; during the past two years, recorded crime has fallen by 10 per cent. As the chief constable of Lancashire, Pauline Clare—who was mentioned earlier in the debate—said, there is no doubt that the fear of imprisonment is an extremely effective deterrent and certainly protects the public from habitual offenders. That is why I am firmly in favour of those who commit a second serious sexual and violent offence being sentenced to life imprisonment. That is why stiff minimum sentences should be introduced for persistent burglars and dealers in hard drugs. That is why prisoners who behave themselves should get no more than cursory time off and those who do not behave should serve their full sentences.

There is the matter of bobbies on the beat. The extra funding that has been found for 5,000 additional police officers over the next three years—including £20 million for the first 1,000 officers and a further £160 million for the rest—is to be welcomed. My constituency at the moment—until I have sorted out that little local difficulty—comes under Merseyside. It is a boost for it to receive another £6.8 million, which will enable it to take on another 28 officers. I can only hope that that money will result in a greater police presence on the streets and will not, as some recent reports have suggested, be diverted to fund more computers, civilians or radios. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary can reassure me on that point.

High-visibility policing is more than purely symbolic. If criminals see more policemen on our streets, it must provide a deterrent effect. I agree with Baroness Thatcher, who said that the only way to diminish crime is to diminish the threat of crime.

There has been a great deal of scaremongering in Merseyside recently about possible cuts. Much of it has been initiated through a leaflet produced by the Merseyside police authority. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for listening so carefully to my representations on behalf of literally thousands of constituents. The Government have proved their commitment to law and order by the real increase in Merseyside's funding for next year and through the

[Mr. Banks]

changed capping criteria. I believe that the Merseyside police force is determined to reduce crime even further and the Government are helping with that.

As I said earlier, tougher sentences for criminals must be balanced by more consideration for their victims. In that light, the Government accepted all the recommendations of the Royal Commission on criminal justice relating to victims, including improving facilities at courts and keeping victims informed of the progress of their cases. The increased provision for the criminal injuries compensation scheme and the already generous funding for Victim Support also show the current priority being given to victims by this Conservative Government.

The partnership approach towards law and order is, as I said earlier, the key to winning the fight against crime. The measures to which I have referred and others mentioned earlier are very much part of the far-reaching reforms in which the Government are engaged. The coherent policy to which my right hon. Friend the Minister referred earlier is designed to achieve a partnership to tackle crime more effectively. Yet what support have my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and his colleagues received from the Labour party? Very little. Quite frankly, one or two of the comments made earlier in the debate bordered on the comical.

The policy of the Labour party still seems to be that all crime is the natural accompaniment to poverty; that because people are poor, they can be excused their trespasses. That ignores the issue of personal responsibility, which in my view has always seemed to be a dirty word to Labour Members.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: That lack of responsibility has characterised their years in government over the past three decades.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I would genuinely like to give way to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), but he spoke for 42 minutes and will be able to speak for longer in his winding-up speech than I will be able to do now.

Mr. Michael: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has the hon. Gentleman the right to peddle total inaccuracies and mislead the House by ignoring the facts that were put forward earlier in the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No hon. Member has the right to mislead the House, but nothing that I have heard the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) say has misled the House, as far as I am aware.

Mr. Banks: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Labour party, as my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) said earlier, has voted against many of the measures that the Government have introduced in recent years and, in particular, it has failed to support the prevention of terrorism legislation. It is not just the Labour party. The Liberal Democrats are just as guilty.

In the few minutes that I have left, I want to conclude by dealing not with the negative remarks of Opposition Members but with a significant point. "Responsibility prevents crimes", wrote Burke in his "Reflections on the French Revolution". That is as true now as it was then.

This debate should not be just about what the Government can do to tackle crime on our street; it should be about every responsible person taking his or her share of responsibility for the general escalation of crime and violence in our society. There will not be enough gaols, policemen or courts to enforce the law if it is not supported by the people.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have responded, and will respond, to remarks made in the debate not only here today but as it continues. They can enable the police to catch more criminals, empower the courts to give hoodlums and thugs their just deserts and provide the framework for citizens to group together in neighbourhood watch schemes and other projects. They cannot bring up people's children to be responsible or to be role models to the impressionable. They cannot be everywhere all the time. What the Government have been able to do in the fight against crime, they have done and are doing, with little political support from the Labour party. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and his colleagues at the Home Office on the leadership that they are showing in doing just that.

1.27 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity of contributing a short speech to this vital debate. I have been interested in law and order issues, and been campaigning on them, ever since I was elected to Parliament. I held three public meetings in my constituency on the single issue of law and order. I have been out with the police force in my constituency, visited the courts and Strangeways, Lancaster Farm and Preston prisons and talked to justices of the peace. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), responded earlier in the year to an Adjournment debate I had on crime in the Ribble valley.

The fact that I represent a rural constituency, where the incidence of crime is less than in many urban constituencies, does not mean that each crime perpetrated in a rural area is not significant to victims of those crimes. There have been dramatic increases in crime in rural areas over the past few years.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) said that increasing crime since 1979 is obviously the fault of the Government. The fact is that crime has been increasing in the western world since the second world war. In recent years, the drop in crime has been to the credit of the Government because the measures that have been introduced are proving effective. The message that should go from the House today should be that the measures and the approach to crime of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary must continue. This is no time to go soft on crime.

We have heard that the fear of crime is far greater than the incidence of it. That means that we must take extra measures to ensure that that fear is reduced. We have heard about several such measures today, including those aimed at greater crime prevention. We should also pay special regard not only to the police, who do such a tremendous job protecting us from criminals, but to the specials. I do not believe that they have been mentioned, but they make a valuable contribution to combating crime. I hope that more citizens will take the opportunity, if they have the spare time, to ensure that they contribute towards hitting back at the criminals. We should also congratulate those involved in neighbourhood watch schemes, of which there are 1,632 in Lancashire. That is superb.

The presence of operational police stations is also important. It is quite appalling that Clitheroe police station is closed from 10 pm until 8 am. I have yet to see any proof that that closure means that the people of Clitheroe are better protected than they were when the police station remained open. In future, I hope that that policy will be reversed so that we have a 24-hour police station in Clitheroe. Many imaginative means could be adopted to reopen that station, for example, it could be manned by a civilian. At the moment it is not good enough that, at night, people have to rely on the telephone box outside the police station from which they can ring for help from someone in Colne.

I also congratulate the Lancashire partnership, which has proved tremendously successful. That partnership includes Lancashire police, the local authorities—including Preston and Ribble Valley—and businesses as well. We did not need the law to state that businesses should get involved and contribute financially, and in other ways, to ensure the existence of that partnership—those businesses wanted to be involved. That partnership does not just include big businesses such as 3M, British Aerospace and Castle Cement, but many small businesses such as Gibbon Bridge hotel of Chipping and Syd Brown's of Longridge. They are all involved in the fight against crime in Lancashire.

That partnership demonstrates that everyone wants to get involved in tackling lawlessness within our society. All those businesses should be congratulated on their contribution, which means that far more is done to tackle crime than would otherwise be the case. The partnership has successfully provided 14 cars for the Lancashire specials to go about their duties. That is an excellent boost and shows what can be achieved through the initiative of such partnerships.

Operation Christmas Cracker has been mentioned in the debate. Lancashire police did not get involved in it, and I telephoned to find out exactly why. In fact, Lancashire leads the way in such operations, as it does in so many other ways, because it launched its own operation, Operation Castle, on 28 November. That resulted in 309 arrests and the recovery of £100,000 worth of stolen property, including £35,000 worth of antiques. I congratulate the police on that initiative. The public would like to see far more of those operations, which raise the profile of the police. They also demonstrate clearly to criminals that they must be on the look-out for such operations. That is superb.

I welcomed the installation of closed circuit television cameras in Clitheroe. The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) said that the Government were spending just pennies on such schemes, but they have spent £15 million. The fact that the hon. Lady describes such expenditure as "pennies" demonstrates what we would face if there were a Labour Government—the expenditure of millions of pounds would be dismissed as "pennies". The Government deserve to be congratulated on that extra expenditure.

Clitheroe will benefit from the installation of those cameras. The Home Secretary attended the opening of that system in September, but it is somewhat disappointing to note that because of installation complications, the cameras have not been fully operational since then. The local authority has now sacked the contractor and has appointed someone else to get the cameras operating. I call on all those involved to get a move on so that the cameras are made fully operational and protect local people. They have proved successful in the other places where CCTV has been installed, including King's Lynn, where there was a 97 per cent. decrease in theft from cars in car parks in which those cameras were installed.

Let us hope that we can get those cameras operational as soon as possible, not only in Clitheroe. Many other places might benefit from the installation of those cameras. Longridge, another village in my constituency, is desperate to get cameras installed and to win some money to pay for them. I hope that we can do something there.

Amazingly, civil liberties groups say that those cameras are a terrible intrusion into the public's privacy. That is tosh. I know that we have had the problem of the sale of video-tapes from CCTV cameras, and I hope that that seedy little business is stopped. Nevertheless, those cameras protect ordinary citizens. I believe that ordinary citizens have civil liberties as well as people from fringe organisations. I fully endorse the installation of those cameras—we want more of them—but the use of the video-tapes from them must be controlled.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: I say "pennies" because, in comparison to the amount of money that is lost to local businesses as a result of theft and so on, the amount of money that has been put into CCTV has been pennies. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with that.

Secondly, will the hon. Gentleman join me in supporting the unique position in Lewisham, which I described, where the video goes directly to the police station and the police make the decision about what is done?

Mr. Evans: I am grateful for that intervention, and I am sure that the hon. Lady would welcome the Government's initiative. It is £15 million.

Early in his speech, I gave the hon. Member for Pendle an opportunity to tell me how much extra money a Labour Government would provide for policing on the streets, but I did not receive a straight answer. Extra money and resources have been provided for law and order. They are proving to be extremely successful. That is why we must carry on with the Government's current policies.

We need more police on the beat. They are effective. They are an effective deterrent. In rural areas, especially villages, one tends to find that the police officer comes from that community and knows several of the people in the district so that, if someone who is strange or from outside the district passes through the village, they tend to know about it. I suspect that neighbourhood watch or rural or farm watch were invented in the Ribble valley because people tend to know what is going on in the area and, if anything strange happens, they can at least alert the authorities and try to put a stop to it.

[Mr. Evans]

It is essential that we have more police on the beat, especially in rural districts. I made my representations to Pauline Clare, who has featured greatly in the debate, that the extra resources that are made available to the police authority should not necessarily be spent on more equipment, but should be used to provide extra police, especially in rural areas. That is essential.

Therefore, I was delighted when, in the Budget, an increase of 5.1 per cent. was announced. I hope, irrespective of what the hon. Member for Pendle said, that Pauline Clare takes the opportunity to get those extra resources into manpower. I also hope that extra attention is paid to the civilianisation of some of the posts in Lancashire. Although 160 posts have been civilianised since 1985, it has been noticed that there is scope for at least 310 more. Something needs to be done about that urgently.

Punishment and discipline are vital. We have heard a lot this morning about prisons and the question, "Do prisons work?" Of course prisons work and, yes, we have more prisoners in Britain's prisons today than was the case 15 years ago. We should make no apologies for that because the system is working. I have toured three prisons in my constituency, having a look at the good work that is done there.

I was interested to hear the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that burglars should go to prison even on their first conviction. We need to consider that seriously, because it is not as though people accidentally break into people's homes and steal from them. We should seriously consider a policy, especially in the case of serious thefts, of ensuring that people receive a custodial sentence in the first instance. As the Home Secretary said at the party conference, if people do not want to go to prison, they simply should not commit crimes.

I was delighted when the Government took action to prevent some young offenders from being sent abroad on character-building holidays; it was outrageous—a slap in the face of every victim of crime in this country—and the last thing that we wanted. I am delighted that, instead of those holiday camps abroad, we are now introducing boot camps which will instil into young people the discipline that they do not receive at home and, unfortunately, do not seem to receive in some of our schools. It must be instilled in them that there is a difference between right and wrong, and that if they do something wrong, they will receive the punishment that they richly deserve.

I congratulate the Home Secretary on introducing harsher, stiffer and longer sentences for those who perpetrate crime. When offenders are in prison, they cannot be out in the streets perpetrating crime, and the public support our policy 100 per cent. Last year I sent out a "Westminster Viewpoint" leaflet to my constituents asking them for their ideas on crime. A constant theme ran through the responses that I received: people want offenders to be given longer and stiffer sentences. An austere regime in our prisons has to be welcomed.

I hope that the Home Secretary carries on with his vigorous regime to ensure that we have the right policies to tackle crime and that the police have our full support, not simply through numbers and pay, which was so drastically cut under the last Labour Government, but through the provision of the necessary armaments and body armour. The police should be equipped with side-handled batons, the introduction of which I supported because I believe that it is right to provide the police with protection while they protect us. I hope that the Home Secretary does not give in to the soft ideas of some of those who may be advising him, whether civil servants or Opposition Members. We have the right policies to tackle crime and we should continue to use those policies in future to protect the citizens of Britain.

1.41 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate the Government on their enormous commitment to reducing crime, which they have demonstrated by increasing resources and showing tremendous will and determination. It seems ironic that, despite being an increasingly prosperous society, many people are still drawn to crime.

I take a strong line against those who try to link people in the lowest bracket of the economy to crime and to say that poverty breeds criminal records. That is not true. It is an insult to those who may be at the bottom of the economic pile but who are highly law-abiding. We should consider the reasons for crime and its role in society as a whole.

We must consider the stability of the family. There is much evidence drawn from various quarters to show that broken families create a climate in which children turn to crime. Homes where parents are not married and do not have a commitment to each other or to their children do not provide the stability and security in which children can blossom and flourish. Instead, the children often become the victims of parental chaos and, ultimately, they become young criminals.

We should carefully consider the way in which we convey the moral ethos of society in our schools. It is vital that young people should be taught clearly the difference between right and wrong; they should be taught to respect those in authority—not only their teachers and headteachers, but the police. I welcome the fact that many schools are generous in giving the police time to come and talk to the young people, but I regret that there are blackspots where there is still considerable hostility to inviting police into schools.

I pay great tribute to the police. Their work in the community has been magnificent and they deserve all our respect and support.

May I digress for a moment to pay a special tribute to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which paid a heavy price during the troubles, when 297 police officers were killed and 7,300 were injured? It has carried on undaunted, with total dedication and commitment. It is a salutary fact that now, after a year of the ceasefire, people in the Roman Catholic community are beginning to join the police force, which they never dared to do in the past.

I commend the fact that the Government are committed to providing extra resources to pay for 5,000 more police officers, in addition to the thousands who have already been brought on stream. There will be 4,000 more prison places to support our "tough on crime" policies and we are providing resources for 10,000 more closed circuit television cameras. I also commend the Government for increasing spending on combating crime by £238 million for England and Wales. That is a 4 per cent. increase, so nobody can accuse the Government of being half-hearted.

It is not just a matter of being tough on crime. We must ensure that we are effective in combating crime. I can speak from the experience in my constituency of Sutton. As a result of the enormously wide-ranging measures that have been introduced, crime is down in all parts of my constituency. Burglary and car crime are down and high-street crime has been reduced by the introduction of closed circuit television.

The people of Sutton can walk in our high streets morning, noon and night knowing that they will not be assaulted. There has been an enormous increase in confidence. Crime has fallen by 35 per cent., which is greatly to the credit of the police force.

Closed circuit television is providing an effective deterrent. As the cameras are linked to the police stations 24 hours a day, an intruder, burglar or miscreant can be spotted immediately. The local police station can be telephoned in a jiffy and the police are on the spot right away. That is how we have managed to clear out the thuggery of recent years. Burglars now know that Sutton is not a soft touch and they move elsewhere.

Closed circuit televisions have not only pushed the burglars out of town but have given local businesses tremendous confidence. Businesses now report increased trade. With CCTV monitoring the shops and streets, requests have been made for their installation in non-commercial sites such as bus stops, outside the local post office or in the pedestrian underpass, where people feel vulnerable. Overall, I admire the Government's determination in putting such a deterrent in place.

As we approach Christmas, it is wise and right that the public should be put on the alert to protect their homes. Christmas is when burglars are out. They know that families stock up their homes with precious parcels, and that can be an attraction. Therefore, it is important that people are scrupulous in their domestic security measures.

Other steps can be taken. For instance, retailers could mark goods—particularly those that are highly attractive to burglars such as videos, televisions and mobile telephones—with the local post code. If that is done, whenever property is recovered by the police, they can return it to its rightful owners. We should encourage the photographing of personal jewellery, antiques and pictures. Photographs can be matched by computer, which makes it more likely than ever before that the public will be able to regain property that they thought had been lost for ever.

Juvenile crime hits every area of the country. Sutton has achieved a degree of notoriety because of the Sutton burglar posse—an active group of youngsters who have become lawless and persistent offenders. It seemed that nothing could be done to bring them under control. The Government have taken on board the importance of combating juvenile crime and have made a commitment to provide more secure places for young offenders. I hope that the Minister will be able to make a progress report on the building of secure training centres. In the interregnum, the country will be short of secure places for juveniles. While that continues, lawless youngsters will be put back into foster care or children's homes, or returned to their own homes, only to go out and reoffend. I urge the Government to maintain the momentum. What steps are they taking to make more secure places for juveniles available in the meantime?

The good news is that the focus on juvenile crime has prompted a much greater rapport between the law enforcement agencies and social services. Traditionally, there was a stand-off. Social services felt that every child was innocent and just needed gentle rehabilitation, and others felt that they were hostile to co-operating. As realism has set in, there is genuine co-operation in trying to tackle an intractable problem.

Drugs are a menace to society. I congratulate the Government on their determination to tackle that difficult issue. I am full of admiration for the parents of Leah Betts, who bravely went public about their daughter's tragedy. We must build on that. Drug education has a crucial part to play in combating the curse of drug-ridden societies, not just in this country but throughout the developed world. I congratulate the Government on spending £500 million on drug education programmes. I have seen the success of the youth awareness programme in my constituency, which is now run in all local schools. That is a step in the right direction and society will ultimately benefit.

I offer one word of caution to Opposition Members who like to experiment with wild and extreme ideas, such as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), who said that she was in favour of decriminalising drugs, and Liberal Democrats who have adopted the same position. That is deeply dangerous, because it gives drug abuse credibility when young people need guidance and a firm steer in developing their lives—and that is not down the road of drugs.

When I leave the Chamber, I will visit Downview prison, which has the most successful drug rehabilitation programme in the country. I am pleased to announce that it is the first prison in the United Kingdom that is entirely drug free. That has been achieved with the support of the Government, who have poured thousands of pounds into the programme, which is now showing its benefits. It means that prisoners coming out of gaol will be freed of the terrible curse of a craving for drugs and a craving to go out and commit more crimes. They will now be able to return to society as human beings with respect, and will, I hope, be able to provide for others.

We must all work together in trying to combat crime: the Government must give a lead, and society must back them up. I am very proud that we are all working together in that regard.

1.55 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I remind the House, and the Minister in particular, that the subject of the debate is the Government's record on crime. We must ask ourselves, if that record is as successful as Conservative Members have been implying, why there is the need for another crime Bill.

The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), in a rather predictable speech, reaffirmed his commitment to castration and hanging. He admitted that his constituents looked to the Government to provide security for them and that they were scared of crime—no wonder, because in his constituency recorded crime alone has increased by 44 per cent. since 1979.

The hon. and Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) spoke about crime in his constituency, especially rural crime. The House will be

[Ms Janet Anderson]

interested to know that the charity, Action with Communities in Rural England, recently found that rural crime is rising, while the number of village police officers and regular patrols is declining. The paper concluded that

> "the apparent absence of visible police protection in many communities adds to the fear of crime".

Again, in the hon. Gentleman constituency, recorded crime has risen by a staggering 165 per cent. since 1979.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) referred to a subject that is very dear to my heart. It is proposed to close the local police station at night in part of his constituency. We had a similar proposal in Darwen, in my constituency, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), with reference to the police station at Great Harwood. I am pleased to say that we in Darwen were able, with the help of Councillor Derek Brindle, to resist the proposal and have saved the police station there. It will now be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as is the police station in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn, thanks to his efforts. I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle every success in his campaign to safeguard his police station. I am sure that he will succeed.

I note that the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) is a Dr. Who fan. If he were to take advantage of Dr. Who's time machine and went back to 1979, he would find that since then recorded crime has risen by 88 per cent., even in his constituency. He also said that he expected more Opposition Members to be present for today's debate. This is a Government debate; it was not initiated by the Opposition. The Conservatives could not afford to get it wrong today, because the previous Government-initiated debate was on the subject of earnings top-up. According to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People:

> "The purpose of the debate this morning is to enable the House to take note of the rules that the Government propose for a new benefit, earnings top-up, which is to be introduced on a pilot basis . . . in eight areas of the country. The plans for the pilot were published in July . . . entitled, 'Piloting Change in Social Security—Helping People into Work'.—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 876.]

Lady Olga Maitland: What has this got to do with crime?

Ms Anderson: I am talking about the Government's record on Adjournment debates, and during that debate on the important issue of getting people back to work, only one Conservative Member was present—the Minister.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) referred eloquently to the fear of crime, which is a particular problem for women. I shall deal with that issue later. She rightly gave credit to the police for reductions in crime.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), in a rather confusing speech, initially referred to Saudi Arabia rather than concentrating on crime in his constituency, but I see from the Register of Members' Interests that he has a particular interest in that area.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), whose constituency I know well since it is very close to mine, was quite right when he said that he has long had an interest in this subject. So he should, because recorded crime in his constituency has risen by 116 per cent. since 1979. He referred especially to a debate in May, which he initiated, during which he talked about crime in his constituency. He revealed that 87 per cent. of people in Ribble Valley who had responded to his survey said that they wanted identity cards, and he pressed the Minister to introduce them.

Indeed, in April there was an article in *The Observer* about that very issue. The headline said:

> "Major plays ID card to trump Blair".

The article said:

> "A Number 10 source said it was a question of how they were to be introduced—not whether."

I wonder what happened to that idea.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) made a rather predictable and confusing speech, which seemed to indicate that she was not terribly happy. Her speech seemed to be an admission of the Government's failure all the way along the line. I must say to the hon. Lady that my constituents are not terribly bothered about having their antiques burgled, because very few of them are able to enjoy that particular hobby.

In the hon. Lady's constituency, recorded crime since 1979 has risen by 64 per cent. It is no wonder that, apparently, in 1991, after the hon. Lady's agent had resigned, Labour activists picketed the Tory meeting fearing that she would be dropped as their opponent.

The Home Secretary and his Ministers are very fond of boasting that their policies are reducing crime, but that claim needs to be treated with some scepticism. One by one, the Tories' traditional electoral advantages have been eroded. The voters no longer trust them to run the economy or to keep taxes down. Now the Tories have even lost their opinion-poll lead on law and order.

In 1992, during the election campaign, Labour was ahead in the polls on most policies, but when MORI asked voters which party had the best policy on law and order, the Tories were ahead by 40 per cent. to 26 per cent. By July this year, the position had been almost reversed. Labour was scoring 29 per cent. for the same question against the Tories' 23 per cent. As a recent article in *The Economist* pointed out,

> "the Tories have lost the voters' confidence on law and order less because of New Labour rhetoric than because of the facts".

Crime has risen relentlessly while the Conservative party has been in government, and the voters have noticed. Just as it appeared that the political argument on law and order was lost, the Government found a new weapon: the crime statistics. In 1993-94, recorded crime fell by 5 per cent., and the more recent figures showed a similar drop.

Any drop is of course to be welcomed, but why is it happening? The Government claim that their tougher penal policies deserve the credit, but if that is true, why did similar policies fail to stop the rise in crime in the early 1980s? In fact, there are plenty of other explanations, which, sadly for the Government, carry more credence.

Demographics may have something to do with it. Crimes are mostly committed by men aged between 15 and 24. The number of men in that age group is falling rapidly—from 4.5 million in 1989 to 4 million in 1993. The fewer youths around who may be disposed towards criminal activities, the fewer crimes will be committed.

The police prefer to think, with some justification, that any fall in crime is down to them. Some police forces, as the Minister said, especially those in crime-ridden inner cities, have been thinking hard about new methods of dealing with crime. Business has been doing its bit too. The rise in car crime has led manufacturers to add security features to new vehicles. As car crime accounts for almost a quarter of all recorded crime—it fell by 10 per cent. between 1993 and 1994—the security features accounted for half the drop in the total crime figure for which Ministers are always ready to take credit.

As I have said, we welcome any reduction in crime, but do the figures tell the whole truth? Figures from the latest "British Crime Survey", which has replaced the general household survey as a record of criminal activity, suggest, for example, that crime rose by 18 per cent. between 1991 and 1993, while the police recorded a rise of only 7 per cent. Insurance may account for some of the discrepancy. Insurance is increasingly expensive and sometimes unavailable for people living in the worst-hit areas. For them, the incentive to report has dropped sharply.

We can argue until the cows come home about statistics and, no doubt, Conservative Members will seek to do just that, but they dodge the real question. The real question was put in an article in the *Daily Mail* in April this year, a paper not known for its support for the Labour party. It said:

> "We have been told this week that recorded crime fell by 5 per cent. in England and Wales last year, according to official figures. But does anyone actually feel any safer?"

That is the real question.

House of Commons Library research shows that the risk of becoming a victim of burglary and violence has risen threefold since 1979. Real crime has shown a record increase in the past 16 years. There is no doubt that crime and the fear of crime are damaging the lives of individuals and communities everywhere. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East said in her excellent speech, for women the fear of crime is especially strong. All studies show that women are especially afraid, notably single women who live by themselves. Some 49 per cent. of women have admitted that they feel unsafe when walking alone after dark near where they live.

According to recent research, one person in five now carries some form of protection in case of attack when leaving home. More than one person in four has given up using public transport or walking any distance because they are frightened of being attacked. Almost nine out of 10 people feel that the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime has increased over the past 10 years. Some 21 per cent. say that they never venture into certain streets or areas, which is surely an indication that Britain is starting to become like the United States, with people regarding parts of their inner cities as no-go areas. Those are the results of a poll undertaken by MORI and broadcast on "The Fear Factor" which was part of Channel 4's "Battered Britain" series.

A recent Leicester university research study reveals that shoppers are deserting the high streets for shopping malls because they fear crime and because they feel threatened by beggars, drunks and vagrants in town centres.

Blackburn and district Age Concern, which covers part of my constituency, recently produced a survey on the fear of crime among the elderly. The survey had two aims: to find out whether the elderly were more or less worried about crime and to find out whether the elderly were more worried about crime than younger age groups were. It showed that fear of being a victim of crime ranked high among matters of concern to the elderly. All groups in the survey were very afraid of being burgled.

The study also looked at the effect of the rift between perception and reality. It concluded that a fortress mentality could develop. Advised to seek protection through improved security within their homes, the elderly retreat into them. Visitors are greeted with suspicion, the door is not opened even to friends after teatime and a departure from home is a dangerous adventure, certainly not to be embarked on after dark. Age Concern found that when the elderly shut themselves away from human contact, the ability of Age Concern, the social services and other agencies to help them was reduced.

A report published by the Home Office in 1989 found that going out alone after dark in a dilapidated inner-city area and bumping into people who have been drinking may, along with many other things, induce or reinforce fear of crime. The report concluded that "fear reduction" must enjoy a much higher priority in action against crime by the Government. That was in 1989, and we are still waiting.

What has been the cost of that ostrich-like approach by the Government? The criminal justice system now costs every taxpayer £422 a year, and £10 million-worth of property is stolen every day. More than half of all households are not insured against loss. The cost of house and car insurance rose by more than 20 per cent. in real terms between 1988 and 1992. The cost per household of retail crime is £120 a year, the risk of becoming a victim of home burglary or of a crime of violence trebled between 1979 and 1994, and the chance of becoming a victim of car crime doubled.

Those figures show the reality of crime under the Conservative Government. The Tories may boast of a recent reduction in recorded crime, but even at the rate of last year's reduction, it will be 15 years before crime returns to the level at which it stood when the Labour Government were in office.

Crime has risen relentlessly. Every Conservative Member represents a constituency in which recorded crime has increased since 1979. Crime in the constituency of the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), has increased by 112 per cent. since 1979, and crime in the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), has increased by 118 per cent. over the same period.

Finally, may I bring my remarks to a close?

Lady Olga Maitland: Certainly; the hon. Lady has not said anything much.

Ms Anderson: At least I have never had my constituency party meetings picketed by members of the Tory party who hope that I will be reselected.

I shall finish by reminding the House of the former Tory public relations chief, Mr. Hugh Colver, whom the Tories would probably like to forget. As we know, he resigned because he had had enough of the Tories, and he said:

> "What they wanted was a political propagandist; someone who would argue that everything the other side say is rubbish, their people are rubbish, and everything we say is wonderful, and our people are wonderful. I believe that the level of debate should be higher than that."

[Ms Anderson]

I invite the Minister to take up the suggestion made by Brian Mackenzie, chair of the Police Superintendents Association, who said:

> "Law and order should not be a party political issue. In an ideal world there would be consensus on how these issues should be tackled, so it is encouraging to see Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition addressing them. We welcome the proposals by Jack Straw, the Shadow Home Secretary, to deal with criminal and intimidating neighbours by a new 'community safety order', with new powers of eviction.
>
> This seems an eminently sensible suggestion and we hope you will feel able to work with the Opposition in developing it".

I hope that the Minister will respond to that idea.

2.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I welcome the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) to her Front-Bench responsibilities today, although I cannot say that I agree with much of what she said. In fact, I am not sure whether she said much at all.

The hon. Lady began by trying to correct us on the title of the debate, but that title is not what she said; it is "The Government's policy against crime". I am proud to have become a member of the crusading Home Office team which is determined to continue our fight against crime and the great successes that we are now having in curbing crime in this country.

It is nonsense for so many Labour Members—although perhaps I should not say "so many", because there were only one or two of them—to talk about the Government's record when they have not answered the simple questions that many hon. Members, including myself, have raised about several Acts and other legislation that they have failed to support—for no good reason, other than perhaps to give the impression that, despite what they are trying to tell us now, they are rather soft on crime. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State said at the beginning of his speech that crime is of the utmost importance to everyone. We are all potential victims of crime at any time, and we have to be ready to meet the challenge.

I was interested to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), followed by the remarks from my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), about the causes of crime. The Labour party goes on about the causes of crime, but there are an awful lot of people in society who—for one reason or another—have problems and disadvantages from time to time, but they do not offend. Research carried out on a number of occasions—including a recent Home Office study which compared changes in reported crime rates in different police force areas with changes in unemployment rates—has found no evidence whatsoever of a relationship.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: No, I will not give way as I have very little time. Coming from the north-east of England, I have been told on many occasions—I was not around at the time—about the history of the Jarrow march all those years ago. Those people did not resort to crime. There is no need to resort to crime, and no evidence that unemployment causes crime. I wish that the Labour party would stop trying to think up excuses for people who are basically bad or evil and who do commit crimes. They have to be dealt with firmly by this Government without the support of the Labour party.

I believe that our objectives for dealing with law and order are widely shared by the people of this country, and we are making steady progress towards them. Whatever the Opposition may say, recorded crime levels have fallen remarkably in recent times, but that is by no means our sole objective. We have listened to the concerns of those at the sharp end of the fight against crime and to their views on how we as a Government should respond to their concerns.

The simple fact is that we will never let up in our resolve to fight crime. Thousands of people up and down the country have from time to time their lives blighted by crime, whether a serious or petty crime. It does not have to be this way. Local communities in partnership with local police, for instance, can act to do something really positive. Indeed, many already do.

We have heard discussions in this debate about closed circuit television. I found it extraordinary—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)—that the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) talked about the "pennies" we have contributed to closed circuit television schemes. My hon. Friend reminded her that we have just announced that £15 million is to be spent on projects from 1996 to 1997.

Mr. Maclean: Labour used to oppose that scheme.

Mr. Kirkhope: Indeed. We have already spent £5 million in 1995, and it is not just about money from Government. In addition, funding from partnership schemes with the private sector could mean that those moneys could be tripled as we try to bring CCTV to our people.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: No, I will not. All that we hear from some Opposition Members—although these arguments have been to some extent stifled by the Labour leadership—are arguments about human rights and about the difficulty of installing CCTV schemes. I went to the Newcastle west end scheme recently, and I was deeply impressed by the way it is operated by the police there. As my right hon. Friend said earlier, the scheme has 16 cameras which deal with all kinds of situations. The scheme is cutting crime dramatically in percentage terms.

I want a CCTV scheme in my constituency—hint, hint—and we are going to bid for one. I am delighted that on this occasion the local authority has been kind enough to co-operate with me and with the police to try to bring this about. That is sometimes the way it ought to be. I remind the Opposition that co-operation is a two-way thing. CCTV, when properly used, can contribute to the prevention and the investigation of crime and to a reduction in the fear of crime. We have now seen that the schemes will be successful, and that is why the Government are so keen to develop CCTV.

We have heard today—it has been said many times before—that children must be taught the difference between right and wrong. I was interested to hear the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), who has a particular way of putting things across. I do not think that some of the things that he was suggesting will be immediately a part of the Government's plans. However, I admire him for his attitude towards parental responsibility. There is no substitute for getting things right in the first place, which means teaching our children the importance of accepting responsibility for their own actions. If we fail to do that, can we really be surprised if they display growing disrespect for the law? Respect must also be taught in our schools, but the priority lies with parents.

I am delighted that the Government have made parents more responsible, obliging them to attend court with their children when some penalty is being considered. We should examine that approach in more detail because parents should not be able to avoid responsibility, especially for young children.

I want to say a word or two about youth crime. The best indicator of youth crime is the number of young people cautioned by the police or convicted by the courts. The figures show that young offenders account for 16 per cent. of all known offenders. Although there have been reductions in the overall number of known juvenile offenders in recent years, a small number is responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime.

The majority of juvenile offenders are cautioned by the police. Research shows that almost 50 per cent. of those are not convicted of another offence in the following two years, which is encouraging. However, for those juvenile offenders who are necessarily brought before the courts, the Government's policy is to ensure that a range of penalties is available, so that both the seriousness of the offence and the characteristics of the young offender can be taken into account.

The courts have powers to ensure that parents take responsibility for their children's offending. Not only can the courts require parents to attend court, but they can require them to pay the children's fines and they can bind over the parents to look after their children properly. I hope that the courts will use those powers as much as possible, in appropriate circumstances, and certainly more than they do at present.

The maximum sentence for detention in a young offenders institution for 15 to 17-year-olds convicted of an imprisonable offence has been doubled by the Government to two years. The courts have been given powers to detain 10 to 13-year-olds convicted of certain grave crimes for periods up to the adult maximum. As we all know, the Government are introducing new powers for the courts to deal with those persistent young offenders whom I mentioned. The new sentence of a secure training order will deal with 12 to 14-year-old persistent offenders, who can be held in security.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam asked about training centres. As she will know, we have proposed five training centres. Two are well under way, with tendering for contracts now proceeding. We have planning permission for a third. The fourth, I regret to say, has been delayed due to planning slowness by a district council in the north-east. We are looking for a fifth site. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that we are making progress and, as soon as possible, the centres will be on stream and available to deal with the persistent group of young offenders who must be taken out of society for a time.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made clear at the beginning of the debate, the fall in recorded crime of 5 per cent., or 260,000 crimes, is a result from which we should all take heart. Far from being complacent about that success, as is sometimes suggested by Labour Members, the Government are determined to carry forward the measures that have been outlined and further to reduce the level of crime.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) for his great support for the tougher sentencing proposals that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary wants to introduce. That sort of support is helpful in our fight against crime.

The success of the police in effectively reducing crime, especially the targeting of persistent and known offenders, has been highlighted this week by Operation Christmas Cracker. We will ensure that the police continue to receive the means necessary further to tackle crime and the criminal.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who noted his happiness with the new funding arrangements for the Lincolnshire police. That is symptomatic of our funding of all police forces, but I know that Lincolnshire should be particularly pleased.

The work of the police in apprehending the criminal will be reinforced by the enhanced powers given to the courts to deal with the guilty. I was privileged to have lunch with the chief constable of West Yorkshire the other day. He indicated his satisfaction with the new approach of the Government on funding and with our intentions on sentencing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley mentioned special constables. There are now 19,630 special constables and my hon. Friend will be delighted to know that, as a result of the initiative of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to have far more of them, we have in the past year processed 14,000 applications for special constables. I hope that that will soon be seen to be contributing to the policing of our communities.

It is by encouraging the whole community to play its part in fighting crime that we will be able to be most decisive in our defeat of the criminal. Expansion of schemes such as neighbourhood watch, street watch and neighbourhood special constables helps local communities to find opportunities to reduce criminal activity and gain a sense of security through the visible presence of individuals looking out for their neighbours and their neighbours' property.

I shall quickly commend the real heroes. I commend Bill Prollins, our neighbourhood watch co-ordinator who lives over the road from me in the village where I reside in West Yorkshire; I commend our community constable, Maggie Peare, who does a magnificent job; and I also commend one of my neighbours who was unfortunately the victim of a crime recently. As a result of the great partnership and co-ordination in our area—and this is happening in more and more parts of the country as a result of Government initiatives—we have made sure that crime prevention has been stepped up. The perpetrators of the crime against our neighbour have been taken into custody and, we hope, will be put in prison. Constable Maggie Peare will, I hope, be commended for her work. *[Interruption.]* The problem is that the Opposition do not

[Mr. Kirkhope]

want to know about all that. They are not interested in the results of our policies at street level. They do not want to know about such successes. They have all the high-falutin' statistics and nonsense that the Labour party seems to produce. I congratulate those people because they are typical of all the people around the country who are involved in such schemes.

We must ensure that the largest ever fall in the number of recorded crimes, achieved over the past two years, is built upon throughout the country and not just in my street or those of my hon. Friends. The Government are intent on carrying forward a comprehensive strategy to tackle crime which will continue to focus on protecting the public and targeting the criminal.

Together with the police, the criminal justice agencies and the whole community, we will continue to ensure that the criminal is increasingly deterred and, when caught, that it is the criminal who fully pays for his crimes. Furthermore, because every crime produces at least one victim and every criminal has many victims, it is vital that the support that we are giving to victim support schemes is continued. The Government are intent on doing that.

Mr. Michael: Keep going, only another couple of minutes left.

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Gentleman should not behave in so derisory a manner. This is a serious matter.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: No, I will not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Sedentary comments are not helpful, especially at this stage of a debate.

Mr. Kirkhope: We heard enough from the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) earlier. There was plenty of quantity but little in the way of quality or policies.

The Government have a packed agenda. *[Interruption.]* Yes, we do. Many of our initiatives from that agenda have already produced enormous success in our battle against criminals. We have heard absolutely nothing today from either the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats that would contribute one iota to the fight in which we are engaged.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The Minister has not answered the debate.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am doing so in the way I wish to do it. My response reflects the Government's determination to fight crime.

We have heard useful speeches from my hon. Friends, but most of them have been treated in the wrong way by the Opposition, who failed to take note of them. They should realise that we are succeeding. Instead of the Opposition's constant carping, we should be able to expect some further support from them for the Government's efforts.

We have an agenda designed to protect ordinary people and uphold the rule of law. It is not words, and certainly not those we have heard from the Opposition, which constituents want to hear. They want to see continued action, such as that which allows people to walk the streets in safety—that is action. They want to see measures to promote crime prevention—that is action. They want action to support the dangerous work carried out by our police day by day, and night by night.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 18th December, Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to fisheries, and the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings thereon not later than Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 11 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Regulations (Cost-benefit Analyses)

1. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in preparing the cost-benefit analyses of regulations. [3300]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): When making new regulatory proposals that affect business, Ministers now need to certify that the benefits clearly exceed the costs. Revised booklets on carrying out benefits assessment and compliance cost assessment are currently being prepared for distribution within Government.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if Britain is to remain the enterprise economy of Europe, we must look at the cost-benefit analyses of all rules and regulations that affect business—whether they come from Brussels or from Westminster? We must also examine the interpretation of those rules and regulations so that they are not made worse by Whitehall or town hall. Does my right hon. Friend agree further that, if the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats were to come to power, Britain would change from the flourishing enterprise economy of Europe into the bureaucratic clipboard centre of Europe?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I believe that his analysis is correct. For a number of years, the European Union has attempted to assess the costs of implementing new directives. However, I am bound to say that that system has not worked well. I hope that, by the end of this calendar year, the Commission will adopt new procedures, which will involve a much more rigorous assessment of the costs of introducing new directives, and introduce the new principle of proportionality. We want directives to be relevant and proportionate to the problems that they seek to solve.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister assure the House that the use of cost-benefit analyses in relation to regulations arising from legislation originating in this Parliament does not underpin the report that appeared in the *Financial Times* of 30 November? The report said that the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary are seeking to abolish national quangos in Wales which deal with bodies such as the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales tourist board and those with education functions. Will the Minister give a categorical assurance that there is no truth whatsoever in that suggestion? We in Wales want those quangos to be more answerable: we do not want to see them eliminated or collapsed into United Kingdom quangos.

Mr. Freeman: Where he has responsibility, my right hon. Friend the First Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues shall continue to drive down the number of quangos. I am pleased to inform the House that we have reduced the number of quangos by about 100 in this calendar year. *[Interruption.]* Those are the facts—even though hon. Gentlemen do not like to hear them. As to the hon. Gentleman's specific question, the abolition of individual quangos is, and will remain, the responsibility of individual Ministers.

Regional Policy (Competitiveness)

2. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to make regional policy more sensitive to the objective of competitiveness. [3280]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The White Paper "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" described a wide range of regional initiatives to promote competitiveness, and I recently held a seminar with the regional directors of the Government offices to review developments. The Government intend to report progress in a further competitiveness White Paper next year.

Mr. Clapham: I hear what the Deputy Prime Minister has said, but does he agree that it would be much better to direct regional selective assistance towards investment in research and development and possibly product innovation? That would help to secure industries in particular regions and at the same time be a structural initiative which would strengthen competitiveness more effectively.

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. I think that regional selective assistance is a major engine that has attracted the very remarkable success in inward investment that we are now achieving in this country. Some 40 per cent. of all inward investment in Europe is coming here.

I believe that the very exciting announcement made today about the success of regional challenge is a further example of the success of Government policies. Some £160 million of European money has been put up for competition, and has produced 34 winners. That has attracted an additional £351 million of private sector money to add to the already substantial investment that the public sector is making in the regions.

Mr. Harris: I very much welcome the news of £6 million that is coming to west country tourism as a result of regional challenge. That is particularly welcome in the light of my right hon. Friend's speech on tourism in the south-west recently. Will he nevertheless kindly consider what many of us still regard as the major disadvantage that the south-west faces in attracting industry—the offers that Wales is able to make? That ability gives the Welsh a tremendous advantage over the south-west. Many of us think that that is a very unfair advantage.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a doughty fighter for the causes of the south-west. I have been pleased by the response from the south-west to the speech that I made recently during a visit there. There is a determination in the south-west to enhance its competitiveness and to continue to attract an increasing flow of inward investment. I intend to take an early opportunity, with the agreement of the editor of the *Western Morning News*, to return to the subject because the Government are determined to give every possible support.

Mr. Caborn: The House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.] Thank you. The House will be very pleased to know that there has been a meeting of the integrated regional officers. That is to be welcomed. Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us when the officers will produce their regional strategies, which were requested by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry some six or seven months ago? Can he tell us when those integrated regional officers will be accountable to the House for co-ordinating the spending of £6 billion, which makes the figures that were mentioned earlier pale into insignificance? Those officers are important civil servants—when will they be accountable to the House?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Any time the hon. Gentleman wants to table a question.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Would not the competitiveness of that most important region of the United Kingdom, Scotland, be put in jeopardy were it to have an Assembly? Politicians at such an Assembly would spend much of their time inventing new regulations that would damage the competitiveness of Scotland.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As always, my hon. Friend is extremely perceptive. The imposition of a tartan tax would be seriously damaging to the Scottish economy, as an increasingly large number of Scottish industrialists are beginning to realise. If ever a Labour Government were elected and added the imposts of a minimum wage and the social chapter, that would bring to an end the remarkable recovery that the Scottish economy has undergone recently.

Cabinet Committees

3. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what Cabinet Committee meetings he chairs. [3281]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I chair the Cabinet Committees on Competitiveness, on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy, on the Environment and on Local Government.

Mr. MacShane: Four Committees. That is some work for a grown man, and it helps to explain why the rest of the country now considers that the Deputy Prime Minister, with the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), is now working principally on party political work at taxpayers' expense.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister, as chairman of the Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy, explain to the House why a draft of a Cabinet document by Lord Mackay was erroneously briefed to *The Daily Telegraph*, thus forcing a humiliating public retraction from the Lord Chancellor?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Member knows that that is a very considerable misrepresentation of what actually happened. He will also know that the Leader of the Opposition has unleashed on this country the most sophisticated misrepresentation of Government policy by people who have learnt transatlantic techniques of media manipulation and are paid by the Labour party day after day to misdirect and misinform the British public.

Mr. Jenkin: Has my right hon. Friend ever changed his mind about nuclear weapons, or about the need for standards and testing in education, or about nationalisation—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: I shall take points of order after Question Time; but perhaps the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) will now come to the point that he is making.

Mr. Jenkin: Does not my right hon. Friend's record make him worth a million Labour party members on any Cabinet Committee?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's question, but I differ in one respect. It is not Opposition Members who have changed their minds; it is the leader of the Labour party who has changed his mind. As anyone who sits in the House knows, the only issues that ever excite the Opposition parties are the same ones as have always excited them: those that fundamentally attack the prosperity of the enterprise economy, those that increase the trade unions' ability to wreck our economy and those that pander to the worst excesses of an envious society.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Deputy Prime Minister do a little better now than he did when answering the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane)? Will he answer the question instead of just having a go at the Opposition? Will he tell the House—this is, after all, a matter of public concern—what he is doing to find out how a draft speech was released before authorisation by a senior Cabinet Minister? What inquiry is being held? What responsibility does the right hon. Gentleman have for the actions of the Lord Chancellor or of the chairman of the Tory party in the Cabinet?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that the chairman of the Conservative party is a valued and upright member of this Conservative Administration. He is quite able to explain for himself, as he has often done in the past—as has the Lord Chancellor. There is no point in my adding to explanations already clearly put in the public domain.

Mr. Prescott: Did the right hon. Gentleman authorise the Tory party chairman to instruct Conservative central office to brief *The Daily Telegraph* on Lord Mackay's speech? Will he confirm whether the Lord Chancellor ever intended to warn the judiciary not to overstep its powers? Was such a statement ever contained in a draft prepared by the Lord Chancellor? Is it not time someone made a public apology to the Lord Chancellor?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has been listening to the spin doctors of the Labour party. These matters have been fully explored by my right hon. Friends. If the hon. Gentleman wants to pursue them further, he can table specific questions to the people responsible; he will be told again what he has been told before. The hon. Gentleman is deliberately trying to misrepresent events, in compliance with the worst excesses of his party's manipulation machinery.

HMSO (Privatisation)

4. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. [3282]

Mr. Freeman: I announced in October that the Government were commissioning advice on the possible options for HMSO with a view to privatisation. I also said that I would be consulting Parliament about securing the provision of services which HMSO currently provides. I am now considering these issues and hope to make an oral statement shortly.

Mr. Miller: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the proposed privatisation of HMSO could have profound and detrimental effects on services to right hon. and hon. Members? Does he also agree that major issues surrounding intellectual property rights need to be discussed when considering the matter? Finally, if the Government are determined, as they say they are, to develop open government, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that a matter of this importance should be the subject of detailed debate on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Freeman: On the hon. Gentleman's question about the service to hon. Members, I appreciate that the services provided to Parliament, let alone to the Crown, by Her Majesty's Stationery Office are extremely important both to Parliament and to HMSO. When the matter is more fully discussed in the House at the appropriate time, I shall argue that the House's best interests will be protected through a contract. I understand that such a contract already exists in outline and I believe that the best interests of the House in terms of confidentiality, timeliness and reducing costs can be properly protected.

The hon. Gentleman is right about intellectual property rights. I am not responsible for the copyright of documents belonging to the Houses of Parliament; I am responsible for Crown copyright. I am determined to ensure that control of the Crown copyright is retained by Ministers and I shall continue to be accountable to the House for such copyright. As a process of open government, I should like more immediate access by members of the public to Crown documents, but it is for Parliament to make a decision about its own copyright.

Finally, as regards a debate on the Floor of the House, I shall draw that to the attention of the business managers.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind the fact that many of my constituents work at Her Majesty's Stationery Office in Norwich, will hon. Friend assure me that he is consulting as far as possible everyone who represents the staff and management at HMSO to make sure that the final solution is as acceptable as possible? Will he also hear my welcome and that of my constituents and people nationally for the reduction in the price of *Hansard*? That is good news.

Mr. Freeman: I share my hon. Friend's view about the recent reductions in the price of *Hansard. [Interruption.]* This is a serious subject.

Mr. MacShane: Then the Minister should give us an answer.

Mr. Freeman: I am seeking to give an answer.

Mr. MacShane: That will make a change.

Mr. Freeman: It will not make a change. I am consistently giving the House the correct answer.

I am pleased about the recent reduction in the price of *Hansard*. I assure my hon. Friend that the privatisation of the stationery office, by allowing it to compete with business in the private sector, will secure more jobs than would otherwise have been the case. I give the House an assurance that the unions and the House will be consulted properly.

Mr. Garrett: What guarantees can the Minister give the 900 employees of HMSO in my constituency? Will the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 apply to those workers, as they operate in a sector of rapid technological change?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that whenever industries have been privatised, there has been a massive increase in development and productivity? In respect of quality of service, will he re-read the debates on the privatisation of British Telecom when the Opposition said that there would be a deterioration in quality of service? In fact, there has been a massive improvement.

Mr. Freeman: Privatisation of the stationery office will create more jobs. If we do nothing, jobs will be lost, not only in the constituency of the hon. Gentleman but elsewhere.

Mr. Derek Foster: Does not last Saturday's *Financial Times* expose a furious row between the House authorities and the Government over the Minister's dogma-driven plan to sell off HMSO? Will the Minister for open government let us all join in that row by publishing his evidence to the Finance and Services Select Committee and the Committee's reservations? Will he now delay the sale to meet the requirements of the House?

Mr. Freeman: I have said that Parliament must not only be consulted but be satisfied with the proposed arrangements and I look forward to debating them in detail. As regards the evidence to the Finance and Services Select Committee, release of the transcript is a matter not for me but for the Select Committee. However, I have absolutely no objection to it being made public.

Civil Servants

5. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants were employed by the Government or by Government agencies at the most recent count; and what was the figure in May 1979. [3283]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): In 1979, when we came to office, there were 735,000 civil servants. There are now 506,000—a fall of 31 per cent.

Sir David Knox: Does my hon. Friend anticipate that the progress in the reduction in the number of civil servants will continue? Does he have any targets?

Mr. Willetts: In the White Paper entitled "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", the Government said that numbers would fall significantly below 500,000 by

1999. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said in the Budget debate, we expect to pass that milestone next year—three years ahead of schedule. Continued firm control of Departments' running costs will ensure that the drive for increased efficiency does not lose momentum.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Minister believe that the loss of 200 civil service jobs in four locations in Wales which was announced at the weekend, coupled with the 31 per cent. decrease that he just announced, will help or hinder morale in the civil service, and therefore help or hinder the service that the public receive?

Mr. Willetts: The civil service can take pride in delivering important services with ever-greater efficiency.

Government Policies

6. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to ensure that Her Majesty's Government's policies are communicated to the general public through the broadcast media; and if he will make a statement. [3284]

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. and hon. colleagues and I take every opportunity to present this Government's policies on the broadcast media. Thanks to this Government's policies on deregulation and competitiveness, there are now many more such broadcast outlets than ever before.

Mr. Fabricant: I ask my right hon. Friend to continue putting across Government policy on important issues, including our spending commitments, and not to go down the road of the Labour party and try to compress party policy into soundbites while making no spending commitments. I ask my right hon. Friend also not to follow the example of the sinister spin doctors—such as the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who tries to compress everything into five words while not expressing any Labour commitment.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I support my hon. Friend's remarks, particularly in the context of the recent Budget of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, in which we saw not only significant increases in expenditure on key services such as health, law and order and education but the beginning of a determination to lower levels of taxation.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that, since the Conservative party came to power, there has been a huge increase in the number of Government press officers and that the amount of money spent by the Government on propaganda by the various media outlets has also increased hugely—by as much as 600 per cent., according to some estimates? We now have an expensive additional Government position known as Deputy Prime Minister, whose holder's main function concerns Government propaganda. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that anything that is so expensive to sell must be a pretty shabby product?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been making inquiries into the records of Governments in the politicisation of the civil service. The only evidence that I can find of a Government's determination to politicise the media or press handling of government was that of the Labour Government, when Joe Haines was made a press officer at No. 10. The relevant question is whether or not there is any truth in the statements by Alastair Campbell, who is now travelling around the lobbies of the country, that he will be made a press officer in Downing street if Labour wins. The country is entitled to receive the answer.

Deregulation

7. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what new proposals he has to improve the results of deregulation. [3285]

Mr. Freeman: Some of the most recent results from the deregulation initiatives are the programme of joint working on pay as you earn and national insurance and simplification of national insurance procedures for the self-employed. The first deregulation orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 have now passed through Parliament. They are just the first of many.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Government bonfire of regulations and standards the main reason why our civil service, which has long been the least corrupt and least politicised of any in the world, is accused of leaking private information directly to the Conservative party? Is the civil service now so deregulated and so demoralised that civil servants consider themselves the servants not of the nation but of the Conservative party?

Mr. Freeman: Civil servants are not the servants of the Conservative party, the Labour party or any political party. We have the finest, most impartial civil service in the world. The recent civil service code, which I published, protects the rights of civil servants from any interference, political or otherwise, in the discharge of their duties.

Mr. Steen: The problem with deregulation is in curbing the deregulatory tendencies of officials. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in spite of the court throwing out the case against the Lanark blue cheese maker, officials in the Scottish Office have now published a code of conduct for specialist cheese makers? It is no good us doing anything in this place if officials continue to dream up codes of conduct and practices that undermine what the Government are trying to do with their deregulation thrust.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend is right when he says that it is not just the regulations themselves, either European or domestic, but how they are enforced that really counts, or counts as much as the original legislation. I am pleased to say that my colleagues in other Government Departments are considering either reducing or amending the codes of practice that they issue in relation to what civil servants may or may not do. We need a much more user-friendly system of enforcement of regulations in this country.

Mr. Skinner: If the Minister wants to ensure that civil servants are kept out of the arguments about political activities, will he guarantee that Sir Robin Butler will not be regarded as the scapegoat to carry the can for the arms to Iraq affair, as was announced in the press last weekend?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman must not believe what he reads in the press.

Mr. Stephen: I congratulate the Government on their efforts thus far to relieve the burden of regulation from

British business. Will my right hon. Friend accept nevertheless that businesses are still reluctant to take on new staff, due largely to the burdens and risks imposed on them by the employment destruction Act, sometimes known as the Employment Protection Act?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend must be right when he says that the burdens of new regulation and social legislation can easily destroy jobs; they make businesses less profitable. Smaller businesses are clearly the engine of growth, and we must do everything possible to make their business life as easy as possible. That is what the Government are dedicated to doing.

South Western Electricity

8. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effect of the takeover of South Western Electricity on competitiveness. [3286]

Mr. Willetts: The takeover was completed only in September and it is too soon to assess its effects, but exposing the utilities to the full opportunities and disciplines of the marketplace has provided an enormous boost to UK competitiveness.

Mr. Jamieson: What has the Minister to say to my constituent, Mrs. Ray, who, with thousands of others in the 1980s, bought shares in South Western Electricity, thinking that she was participating in popular capitalism? Now that Southern Electric of Atlanta, Georgia has taken over the company, she and many others have had their small shareholdings compulsorily purchased against their will. Does the hon. Gentleman understand why shareholders across the south-west are dismayed that the Government have allowed their shareholdings to be taken away and allowed this vital public monopoly utility to be taken over by a wholly foreign-owned company?

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman does not appear to understand how takeovers operate in this country. It was perfectly clear that as soon as Southern Electric's bid received the requisite majority of support, other shareholders, sadly, would be obliged to accept its terms.

Deregulation

9. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about his tour of European capitals to discuss deregulation. [3301]

Mr. Freeman: My discussions with other European Union partners have shown that both Ministers and business leaders recognise the need to lift the burden of European regulation on our businesses. My call for urgent action received strong support in the Internal Market Council on 23 November.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that what matters with any regulation regime is equity across the single market? Will he confirm that Britain will never be put at a competitive disadvantage in the way in which regulations are implemented across the European Union?

Mr. Freeman: It is certainly the intention of Her Majesty's Government to ensure that where—sometimes by qualified majority voting—a directive is agreed, it is applied uniformly throughout all member states of the Union.

Mr. Corbett: Will the Minister now answer the question of his hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan)? Did he or his right hon. Friend tour foreign capitals, at public expense, to flog this dogma? If so, how much did it cost? Why did those who were interested not come here at their own expense?

Mr. Freeman: Unlike the Labour party, the Government take the issue of deregulation very seriously. I visited eight European capitals, and I propose to visit six more. I am very pleased that the results of those visits were so successful.

Regulation and Social Legislation

10. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what analysis he has made of the effects of regulation and social legislation on jobs. [3303]

Mr. Freeman: Over-burdensome regulation destroys jobs because it stifles innovation and growth, raises prices and drives companies elsewhere. Deregulation, by reducing the burden of unnecessary regulation and paperwork, is central to improving businesses' competitiveness and so helps to create new jobs. It is also a helpful feature for attracting inward investment.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while the ultimate aim of socialism was for all jobs to be regulated and for people to know where they stood, the result was that no one knew where they stood, nothing really happened in industry and all vitality was lost? Is not excessive regulation such as that contained in the social chapter and similar provisions destined to fail?

Mr. Freeman: The Conservative party is the party of deregulation; the Labour party is the party of regulation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa (Education)

28. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent aid to southern Africa is oriented towards the provision of education. [3312]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Support for education is one of the focus areas for our bilateral aid programme to South Africa, the priorities of which have been agreed with the South African Government. In 1994-95, implementation of our education projects involved expenditure of more than £6 million, some 38 per cent. of total expenditure. We plan to maintain a substantial programme in the education sector.

Mr. Spring: Does my right hon. Friend share my view that, following the royal visit to South Africa and the visit made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, relations between our two countries are of the highest order? What progress has been made following the signing of a memorandum of understanding by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Mandela?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with my hon. Friend. Relations between South Africa and the United Kingdom are excellent: we are even allowing the South Africans to draw at cricket, to avoid—of course—a defeat for them.

My hon. Friend mentioned the memorandum of understanding signed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Mandela in relation to our bilateral aid programme. It represents some £60 million of the bilateral aid commitment over three years, and projects valued at more than £37 million have already been approved and are being implemented. Of that £37 million, just over £12 million is for natural resources, over £10 million for good governance, £6.5 million for health, £4.5 million for small-scale enterprise development and about £3 million for education.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May we have an assurance that the moneys allocated to the South African authorities for higher education will not go to institutions that provide such education predominantly for whites?

Mr. Hanley: Education, including higher education, is one of a number of priorities that we have assessed. We do not sub-allocate to any particular sectors in any one year. We are trying to help South Africa to reform its education policies, and ensuring that it becomes free and fair and reverses the problems and disadvantage caused by apartheid. That is part of our policy.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister assure us that, despite the 7 per cent. overall cut in the bilateral aid budget that has been announced, there will be no cut in education provision for either South Africa or southern African in general?

Mr. Hanley: The aid budget will be maintained as the fifth biggest aid programme from the fifth biggest economy. I cannot give specific assurances about the individual items because they still have to be worked out.

Aid Programme

29. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been received on the overseas aid programme arising from the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" proposals. [3313]

Mr. Hanley: We have had no formal representations, but my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has met senior representatives of the non-governmental organisations' community to discuss the broad implications of the financial statement proposals.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that organisations such as Oxfam which are much involved in overseas aid criticise the claim that Britain is the fifth biggest contributor? In relation to national wealth we are joint 13th with Italy. Is it not time that we stopped hovering at 0.31 per cent. of GNP and moved towards the 0.7 per cent. target set by the United Nations?

Mr. Hanley: Our aid programme is extremely effective. Other G7 donors are finding that, in difficult economic circumstances, they are unable to move towards the target. Italy's aid expenditure fell by 36 per cent. last year; Canada is reducing its aid by 20.5 per cent.; and the United States, which contributes only 0.15 per cent. of GNP to aid, is reducing its programme still further, but the Government have consciously avoided cuts of a similar magnitude. The hon. Gentleman might like to know that the United Kingdom's ODA-GNP ratio in 1994 was 0.31 per cent. That is higher than the average for all development assistance committee donors, which is 0.29 per cent. and the UK is likely to remain at or near the DAC average.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Although any reduction in our overseas aid budget must be a matter for concern, does my right hon. Friend agree that the figures should be put into perspective and that the planned expenditure for next year is only about £90 million less than the expected outturn of more than £2,150 million this year? As the expenditure outturn is always varied by the degree to which programmes have been completed, will my right hon. Friend confirm that next year's planned expenditure should in no way be inhibited by the very small reduction?

Mr. Hanley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The programme for next year is still very large and the money will be extremely effectively spent. The problem that, I suppose, has given rise to some of the comments about the ODA is that our bilateral programme will shrink over the next three years compared with our multilateral programme. There is no doubt that the bilateral programme will be reduced over the survey period, but much of the reduction in 1996-97 will be accommodated by lower than previously forecast spending on multilateral programmes, especially on the European development fund, and that will help to offset the pressures on the bilateral programme.

Miss Lestor: Will the Minister cast his mind back to what the Chancellor said in his Budget statement and not play around with figures? The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that

> "the planned allocation for bilateral aid is likely to be little different from that set out in last year's departmental report."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol.267, c.1060-61.]

Will the Minister confirm that the figures in the report show that bilateral aid was scheduled to fall anyway from £1,100 million in 1995-96 to £1,019 million in 1996-97—a cut of 7 per cent. or £81 million, which is no mean figure at all? On that basis, will not the bilateral aid budget, far from being protected or little different, as the Chancellor implied in his statement, be cut next year, the year after and the year after that on the basis of the figures announced on 28 November?

Mr. Hanley: I am surprised that the hon. Lady criticises the reduction in the bilateral programme, which is due almost entirely to the increase in the multilateral programme. I thought that her party was the party of Europe and that it believed in multilateral donations at the cost of national interest. To consider the bilateral aid programme alone is to be dishonest because, after all, the budget will be £2,154 million in 1996-97. Yes, that is an overall 5.4 per cent. reduction in cash terms, but the budget is planned to rise by £47 million to £2,201 million in 1997-98 and by a further £69 million to £2,270 million in 1998-99. That is, therefore, a substantial aid budget.

Miss Lestor: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I will take it at the end: I take points of order after questions. *[Interruption.]* I will deal with this. All hon. Members must be treated equally in this respect.

Know-how Funds

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the use of the know-how funds. [3315]

Mr. Hanley: The main objective of the know-how fund, Britain's programme of bilateral technical assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, is to help countries in transition to democracy and a free-market economy by providing advice and expertise. Total expenditure in 1994-95 was £77.2 million. The annual report for 1994-95 and a list of implemented projects are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and for his report on the work of the know-how fund, which has been widely welcomed by the recipients. Does he agree, however, that it is even more important that we should be willing to trade with those countries, and that the European Union should adopt a less protectionist and more liberal trading philosophy when dealing with them?

Mr. Hanley: The European Union assesses its aid priorities regularly. The know-how fund is a British institution and a British initiative.

Mr. Battle: Although under this Government overseas aid has been redirected not only to the know-how fund, which is welcome, but to the multilateral programmes, does not the bilateral aid cut mean that the poorest sub-Saharan African countries are paying the price for that shift and for those cuts? Government cuts in the programme are not being made up for by shifts to the know-how fund or to multilateral funding.

Mr. Hanley: In answer to an earlier question from the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), I implied that she had been dishonest in her figures. I should like to withdraw that and say that "disingenuous" may be a more accurate word. The hon. Gentleman mentions exactly the same thing. The aid budget remains large; it is still the fifth largest in the world. The bilateral programme, because of our international agreements, is shrinking, but that does not mean that the proportion of bilateral aid or our proportion of multilateral aid is such that there is a reduction in aid to the poorest countries. We are maintaining three quarters of our aid to such countries.

Dr. Spink: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the great contribution of the British Council in working alongside the know-how fund? It works cost-effectively and delivers an excellent service in those eastern bloc countries and brings trade and jobs to this country.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to the British Council and all its works.

Nigeria

31. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how British aid to Nigeria is being used to encourage its ruler to introduce democracy. [3316]

Mr. Hanley: In concert with others, we have made it clear that no aid will be given in support of the Nigerian military regime. Since 1993, our good government scheme, administered locally, has allocated about £100,000 a year for initiatives related to the rule of law, respect for human rights and sound government.

Mr. Cunningham: Given the Minister's answer, will he explain why in mid-October the Foreign Office held a reception for the Nigerian chamber of commerce? What signal does that send to the Nigerian people and, in particular, to victims of the regime in Nigeria?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is aware of the programme of restrictions that have been introduced by the Commonwealth and, subsequently, by the European Union against Nigeria. There is not a trade ban with Nigeria, but other initiatives are being considered.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Following last week's visit to the House by Dr. Owens Wiwa, brother of Ken Saro-Wiwa, does my right hon. Friend agree that persuasion or diplomacy of any sort is not producing any results in relation to a more humanitarian regime in Nigeria? Is it not time for the British Government to consider an oil embargo, which would be universally exploited, and the freezing of Nigerian leaders' assets in Europe as they seem to have salted away about $12.3 billion of unaccounted for oil revenue?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend will know that on 4 December the European Union announced the adoption of further common positions that extended measures in three spheres: the withdrawal of all military personnel attached to diplomatic representations of EU states in Nigeria and the expulsion of military personnel attached to Nigerian diplomatic representations in member states; further visa restrictions to ensure that members of the Nigerian regime and their families in possession of long-term visas are not admitted; and an interruption of sporting contacts through the denial of visas for official delegations and national teams. That means that we are considering actions as they become appropriate.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said last week, the problem is that the United States of America takes some 50 per cent. of Nigerian oil, and an oil embargo would have to be policed by naval forces. That is being considered at the moment, but no firm decision has yet been made.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that there is a difference between consideration and advocacy? Are the Government advocating the imposition of oil sanctions? Is he further aware that the freezing of bank accounts could have an even more dramatic effect?

Mr. Hanley: As I have said, we are considering what further actions to take in the light of discussions with our allies.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the stand taken by many developing Commonwealth countries in Africa—countries that are, of course, in receipt of aid and assistance from the British programme—in condemning the situation in Nigeria?

Mr. Hanley: Indeed I will.

Social and Cultural Development

33. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what

provision is made to help with social and cultural development in the third world; and if he will make a statement. [3319]

Mr. Hanley: We do not set aside a pre-determined provision for social and cultural development in our aid programme. We prefer to integrate this aspect into all our projects and programmes.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware of the concerns of the Council for Education in World Citizenship about how the savage cuts in overseas aid will adversely affect its work of educating young people in the third world to understand their culture, rights and responsibilities? Does the Minister understand that cuts in overseas aid will have a tremendous effect on the organisation's work? Is he going to do something to safeguard the interests of the young people who depend on assistance from the Government to help them understand their culture, responsibilities and rights?

Mr. Hanley: The central objective of the aid programme—I have already mentioned how substantial that programme is—is to improve the quality of life of people in poorer countries. That objective includes social and cultural developments and certainly includes helping to rectify the disadvantage suffered by many young people who are forced to work when they should not be doing so. It also includes improving the condition of young people such as street children who exist in far too many countries. That work will not cease; it continues because of our substantial aid programme.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I thank my right hon. Friend for the answer that he has just given. Despite the wild speculation about the recent financial settlement—a settlement that is much to be welcomed—does he agree that it is not the total cash that counts but the quality of the individual aid programmes?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is one of the reasons why the aid that we give and the way in which we give it is praised worldwide. Of course, we would all like to have more money to give, but it is also important that this country's economy remains healthy. Our aid budget of £2.23 billion is still massive and we use it extremely well. We also lead the way in promoting debt relief, which is extremely important. In addition, the United Kingdom is the third largest source of private capital, so our record is very good, not only in the provision of aid but in the way in which we deliver it.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Business (Co-ordination)

11. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on what further co-ordination of Government business he has undertaken. [3288]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I continue to contribute to the collective consideration of business, especially by chairing the relevant Cabinet Committee: the Ministerial Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy.

Mr. Winnick: I should like to deal with the subject that was not raised in previous questions. Will the Cabinet give very clear and full consideration to the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the shadow Home Secretary, about tightening legislation on knives? Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that in view of last week's terrible tragedy—the murder of a very brave man carrying out his duties and responsibilities to his pupils—there is undoubtedly a case for strengthening the law on knives, as many of us have argued over the years? If the Cabinet were willing to respond, would not a united House of Commons response to a very important social problem be useful?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter and for the way in which he did so. I am sure that the entire House is wholly sympathetic to his concern, and deeply shocked by the appalling event to which he has referred. Although the immediate responsibility for an answer to that question must lie with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will make representations to my right hon. and learned Friend that he make that position as clear as he can as early as possible.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Unfrocked Priests

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many priests have been taken off the payroll of the Church Commissioners as a result of being unfrocked; out of what total in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [3320]

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Commissioners do not hold this information. Clergy are added to or taken off the central payroll in response to instructions from dioceses. A clergyman may leave the payroll for a variety of reasons, such as taking a job outside the parochial ministry or overseas, and the Commissioners are not generally informed of the circumstances.

Mr. Greenway: Do not clergy sometimes resign for sad reasons? May I pay a warm tribute to the vast majority of clergy for their wonderful and dedicated service and work? Should there not be effective safeguards against serious and devastating abuses such as those that occurred recently at the Sheffield nine o'clock service?

Mr. Alison: These matters lie a little outside the immediate scope of my responsibilities, but I can tell my hon. Friend that a carefully maintained check-list is kept at Lambeth palace of clergy, against whose names an asterisk is placed due to some uncertainty about their performance. Those on the list are informed and may make representations if they consider that their name should be removed from the list. The list enables the sort of monitoring to take place which I know that my hon. Friend would wish.

Income

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what proposals the Church Commissioners have to maximise the income available to them. [3321]

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' aim is to optimise returns over the long term from their investments. They are currently re-balancing their portfolio and investing in a spread of assets with good growth prospects, while avoiding undue risk from over-concentration in any one area.

Mr. Banks: May I suggest that one way of maximising income would be to build congregations? I would not encourage the Church Commissioners to follow the hands-on policy of the rave vicar of Sheffield, but there are ways in which the church service could be made more interesting. A church in the United States, for example, encourages its congregation to bring their pets along to join in the service. Perhaps the best idea would be to privatise the Church of England, to get in a regulator—Ofgod, or something like that—and a few consultants, and then start marketing the Lord who is suitable to the 21st century.

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman must be careful of using the word "pets". It may have a connotation in Newham that is different from the one in the files of the RSPCA. The hon. Gentleman is full of bright ideas and I can think of nothing better than his arming himself with a barrow and parading up and down parish churches in the Newham district advertising his strong faith in the prospects and benefits of the Church of England.

Mr. Alexander: May I offer my right hon. Friend another bright idea? Why do only a few cathedrals, such as Ely, charge for admission, whereas nearly all the others allow tour operators to offer their clients and visitors to this country free admission? Surely we should be maximising the potential rather than handing round the begging bowl to those who otherwise visit them?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend makes a good suggestion. Again, the Commissioners do not have direct responsibility for the way in which different cathedrals are run. Among the 40 or so dioceses, there is a variety of practice and performance and there is no doubt that some are much more effective at fundraising than others. Our aim must be to maximise performance in respect of all the historic value locked up in our marvellous cathedrals.

Church Investments

36. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what new proposals the Church Commissioners have to improve the ethical content of Church investments. [3322]

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners have always managed their investments within clinical guidelines—I beg your pardon, Madam Speaker, I meant within ethical guidelines. In recognition that ethical issues are becoming increasingly complex, we established an ethical working group in October 1994. The group is chaired by the First Church Estates Commissioner, Sir Michael Colman, with representatives from the Church Commissioners, the central board of finance, the General Synod's board of social responsibility and the Church of England's pensions board.

Mr. Flynn: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Church Commissioners have added greatly to their credibility by their swift action in initiating talks with Shell—because of the Church's investment of £24 million in that company—about its connection with the odious and murderous regime in Nigeria? Can he tell us the outcome of the talks?

Mr. Alison: The holding is valued at £29 million, which shows how the portfolio has increased since the hon. Gentleman looked at the figures. We have regular contact with Shell regarding the company's Nigerian operations, and have had for the past two years. We are continuing carefully to monitor Shell's operations in Nigeria. The hon. Gentleman will know of the critical importance of oil income to the Nigerian economy. Overwhelmingly the greater part of Nigeria's earnings from foreign trade comes from oil revenues. Anything that sought to inhibit or diminish the viability and buoyancy of that trade would have catastrophic effects on millions of ordinary people outside the ranks of the Government.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given you and the Home Secretary notice of this question and I am grateful that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is present. On the Order Paper for 6 December questions 180 to 189—10 questions that I asked—related to the Home Secretary's responsibilities. The questions were for a named day. Four related to information concerning consultations that he had had, or had not had, with various bodies, including the high commissioners for the Commonwealth, three police consultative committees relating to the federations of the police and the London consultative committees that have been established. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he would answer those questions, along with others that are not relevant to this point of order, as soon as possible. Of course, those answers, and the questions, did not appear in the *Official Report* for that day. As hon. Members might know, if a holding answer is given, the question is not published until the holding answer becomes a substantive one, so no one would know that the questions had been asked, or that the Home Secretary had not replied to questions that fairly related to what he had or had not done up to that time.

My point of order is to ask whether our practice could be adjusted to ensure that non-printing of such questions and answers be confined only to matters that you or the Table Office reasonably regard as unanswerable at the time. Otherwise, other Ministers could fail to answer reasonable questions, as the Home Secretary has—in this case, he has failed to do so in time for a debate that is taking place today.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. The questions were printed on the Order Paper. He is quite right that they did not appear in *Hansard*. As I know that he is careful not to abuse the system of tabling questions for answer on a named day, I have some sympathy with his point of order. Ministers will have heard this exchange. I cannot, of course, oblige them to answer in any particular case. I believe that the Home Secretary is seeking to catch my eye. Although I will not allow a debate on the matter, the right hon. and learned Gentleman must be able to answer the point raised by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) for giving me notice of the question that he proposed to raise. I have had the matter investigated. I apologise for the fact that the hon. Gentleman's questions were not answered in time for the debate. In so far as it is possible so to do, the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), will answer them in her winding-up speech up this evening and we shall answer the remainder as soon as possible—I hope within 48 hours or so.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is in his place on the Front Bench, may I ask whether there has been any indication that we might have a statement on the law relating to the carrying of knives, bearing in mind the murder of my constituent, Philip Lawrence, on Friday? It is of great importance to St. George's Roman Catholic school in Maida Vale, its acting headmaster, staff, pupils and teachers, that they should know that they will have proper security in and out of school. Is there any chance of a statement?

Madam Speaker: I cannot allow the Home Secretary to go on answering questions. The point of order is for me. I have not been informed that there is likely to be a statement on that issue. However, senior Cabinet Ministers are available on the Front Bench and will have heard the hon. Gentleman's request.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I regret that I have not had the opportunity of giving you or the Home Secretary notice of my point of order.

Clause 1 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which we are about to consider, empowers

> "the Secretary of State to designate by order countries where there is in general no serious risk of persecution."

That is the so-called "white list".

You will know, Madam Speaker, that I and several other hon. Members have, over the past month, been asking when the Home Secretary intends to publish the list. I have just been told by the Home Secretary's office that it is intended that the list will be contained in a statutory instrument under the negative resolution procedure. That means that the list, and the powers that flow from the Bill, will be in force before the House has an opportunity to debate or consider properly the countries on the list. As these matters are truly concerned with life-and-death issues, would you reflect on whether this procedure is appropriate for such a vital matter, bearing in mind that Second Reading takes place today? If you share my reservations about the proposed procedure, will you prevail on the Home Secretary to adopt a more appropriate procedure?

Madam Speaker: This is a case where hon. Members who oppose the procedure must persuade the Home Secretary to change it during the course of the debate. It is a normal procedure of the House. Although the hon. Gentleman has put his own connotation on it to say that the matter is more serious and important than anything that we have touched on or debated for some time, these are matters that must be discussed in exchanges across the Floor of the House today. We must now get on with the debate.

Orders of the Day

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Home Secretary, I must tell the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrat party. I have had to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock this evening.

3.38 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government are firmly committed to maintaining a tolerant society in which the diverse cultures and backgrounds of those who are lawfully present in this country are fully respected. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

> "I believe passionately in the equal rights of everyone in this country—whether they be black, brown, yellow or white. That is my firm conviction and it has always been my firm conviction. That will be this Government's policy for as long as I sit on the Front Bench."

I wholeheartedly endorse the Prime Minister's sentiment. Our race relations are as good as—if not better than—those of any other country in Europe. Firm but fair immigration control is a necessary condition for such a society. That is the context in which this Bill should be seen.

The Bill has three objectives: first, to strengthen our asylum procedures so that bogus claims and appeals can be dealt with more quickly; secondly, to combat immigration racketeering through stronger powers, new offences and higher penalties; and, thirdly, to reduce economic incentives, which attract people to come to this country in breach of our immigration laws. The Bill would erect a stronger defence against unauthorised employment and provide powers to restrict entitlement to housing assistance and child benefit.

Britain has a proud record of giving refuge to those fleeing genuine persecution, but we cannot ignore the fact that our procedures are being abused. Only 4 per cent. of those claiming asylum are deemed by the Home Office to be genuine refugees and just 4 per cent. of appeals are upheld by independent adjudicators.

Asylum applications are rising rapidly—up from 2,500 a month at the start of 1994 to more than 4,700 last month. Action is being taken to process claims more quickly. We employ seven times more case workers than in 1988. Between June 1994 and June 1995, they took 25,000 asylum decisions—10,000 more than in the preceding 12 months. In February, I announced that £37 million would be spent on extra asylum case workers and adjudicators over the next three years.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Home Secretary accept that, despite the 4 per cent. figure that is bandied around so much, an additional 20 per cent. are accepted, even in terms of the Home Office's fairly tough criteria, as people who might be in some kind of danger, were they to return home, and are given exceptional leave to stay? Some of those cases even include torture. So although they do not fit the 4 per cent. description, they come within a much broader category than he admits to the House today.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has a point in relation to applications, but not appeals. It is important to appreciate that none of those who comes into the category that he has identified is relevant to the consideration of appeals. Only 4 per cent. of appeals from the decision of the immigration officer to independent adjudicators actually succeed.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Could the Home Secretary assist the House in considering the Bill by providing us with two pieces of factual information? Both today and when he made his statement last month, he gave monthly figures. He is now giving the November figure whereas he previously gave the October figure. Could he give us the cumulative figure of applications for the 11 months of 1995? Secondly, could he give us the number of applications outstanding, as of the most recent date?

Mr. Howard: I shall give the right hon. Gentleman the cumulative figure in a moment or two. I can virtually answer his question by saying that we expect the number of applications for the whole of the current year to exceed 40,000. The number awaiting determination is currently 66,000. As I was about to point out in my speech, the relentless rise in applications is outstripping our ability to deal with them. I have just told the House of the measures that we are taking to increase our capacity to deal with those applications. Many other western European countries have taken action to tighten their procedures. As a result, asylum applications are falling in the rest of western Europe—down from 500,000 in 1993 to 320,000 last year, while applications in this country rose by about 45 per cent. during the same period.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who I think was the first to get up, but I must make some progress.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is placing a great deal of emphasis on the number of applications. Can he give an assurance that he foresees no likely reduction in the number of people who are afforded asylum in this country as a result of the Act hitting the statute book? Surely he agrees that it would be outrageous if people were sent back to their deaths in countries such as Nigeria or Sri Lanka—countries where we have a special interest. That would rest very heavy on our conscience.

Mr. Howard: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I do not foresee any diminution in the number of genuine applications that we accept in this country. I have always made it clear that it is no part of our intention, in making those proposals, to place any further obstacles in the way of refugees who are genuinely entitled to asylum; but we must be a haven, not a honeypot. That is the motivation behind those proposals.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton) *rose—*

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) was the first to rise, so I give way to him.

Mr. William O'Brien: Will the Home Secretary explain how great an extra work load will be placed on

[Mr. William O'Brien]

employers by the legislation in the Bill which obliges them to ensure that anyone whom they employ is a bona fide accepted refugee? Does he understand that that will impose an extensive work load on employers, and what will he do about it?

Mr. Howard: Employers will not have to do anything of the kind, but I shall come to our employer provisions in due course as I explain the provisions that are contained in the Bill.

We need, against the background that I have explained—

Mr. Gerrard *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I must make a little progress.

We need an effective sifting mechanism, so that manifestly unfounded claims can be dealt with more quickly. It is the unfounded claims that the measures in the Bill are designed to deal with. All other comparable western European countries have such arrangements.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): As someone who has pursued many genuine asylum claims in this country and also assisted with a case in one of our European partners, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether the provision that he has just mentioned will enhance the opportunity of genuine asylum seekers to have their cases heard speedily?

Mr. Howard: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend, and I propose to explain how that will happen in a moment or two.

Parliament has already endorsed the principle that I have just described. The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 enables certain claims to be certified as "without foundation". That triggers an accelerated appeal. If the independent adjudicator upholds the certificate, there is no further appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.

However, case law has effectively limited the use of the special appeal procedure to cases where we intend to remove a person to a safe third country. We now need to extend that mechanism. The Bill would introduce wider criteria for its use. Clause 1 would allow an accelerated appeal if the grounds for the claim do not fall within the terms of the 1951 convention; where the grounds are manifestly untrue or fraudulent; where the grounds cited no longer apply; and where asylum is claimed only after action for removal has been initiated. The existing "frivolous or vexatious" test would be retained.

Those criteria would, for example, enable us to certify a claim openly based on poverty rather than persecution; or fraudulent claims, such as that by the Ethiopian teenager claiming that his mother had disappeared after arrest, but whose parents turned out to be living safely at home and in well-paid state employment; or that by the large group of Pakistanis who claimed asylum because of membership of the Pakistan People's party and who appealed against refusal of their applications even though that party had since become the Government of Pakistan.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the Minister explain who will not be subject to the fast-track appeal mechanism? According to the clause and the criteria that he has outlined so far, it seems that virtually anyone could be subject to fast track. Will the Minister give examples of cases that will not be subject to fast-track appeal?

Mr. Howard: Many people manifestly do not fall into the categories that I have identified. Such people include genuine asylum seekers and genuine refugees for whom this country will continue to be a haven from persecution. However, we must go further than the steps that I have identified so far.

There are countries that generate large numbers of asylum claims but few, if any, genuine cases. Why should genuine refugees—my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) raised precisely this point—from Iran or Iraq have to wait longer for a decision because we give equal time and weight to the thousands of bogus claims from countries such as Poland and India? Clause 1 would enable the holder of my office, subject to parliamentary approval, to designate selected countries as not giving rise to a serious risk of persecution. There would be a presumption that claims from such countries were not well founded.

However, every claim would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Applicants from those countries would have the right to appeal to an independent adjudicator, but they would not have a further right of appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. Germany, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands already operate a system of that kind. I intend to apply three criteria to the selection of countries for designation.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The fact that other countries apply the procedure does not make it intrinsically right. Will the Secretary of State give more details about why appellants under the system will be denied the right to appeal to the tribunal on a point of law? In the absence of such an appeal, how will the adjudicators receive any direction as to the correct interpretation of the law?

Mr. Howard: I do not follow the hon. Gentleman's point because I do not see how that will arise. The purpose of the exercise is to provide a fast-track procedure which will take place against a background of a presumption of designated safe countries. Every application will be considered on a case-by-case basis and there will be an appeal to the independent adjudicator. It is not necessary to make an appeal to the immigration appellate authority to receive proper guidance on points of law.

Mr. Straw: I must press the Secretary of State on that point. Will he confirm my interpretation of the case: the Home Office will have right of appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal even though the appellant will not? If that is the case, large numbers of applications for judicial review will be generated because there is no other means of allowing the courts to give directions to adjudicators about the proper interpretation of the law.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's assertion that that is the only way in which the objective can be achieved. The Labour party failed to recognise the truth when the matters were last debated in the House and apparently it fails to recognise it now. If we are to deal with asylum claims in a way that will enable genuine applications to be dealt with quickly—as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has urged—we must streamline the procedures. We must take action to deal with the existing interminable appeal procedures. We are prepared to grasp the nettle, but the Labour party is not.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Home Secretary explain to the House why genuine refugee status seekers will have their benefits cut on 8 January?

Mr. Howard: I shall turn to the benefit provisions in a moment. They are important and, if the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I shall deal with them at the appropriate point in my speech. *[Interruption.]* I shall now make some progress, as I think that the hon. Gentleman will be interested in the criteria that I intend to apply. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Home Secretary.

Mr. Howard: I intend to apply three criteria to the selection of countries for designation: that there is in general no serious risk of persecution; that they generate significant numbers of asylum claims in the United Kingdom; and that a very high proportion of claims prove to be unfounded. Contrary to the assertion in the reasoned amendment, designation will not amount to a declaration that we necessarily consider countries to be universally safe, or to have political and judicial institutions that function to western standards. We could not possibly accept an obligation to apply such standards, and no such obligation exists in international law. What we will be saying is that a country has functioning institutions, and stability and pluralism in sufficient measure to support an assessment that, in general, people living there are not at risk.

Designation will be by order, and orders will be laid before Parliament under the negative resolution procedure. I can tell the House today that the countries that I currently propose to designate are Bulgaria, Cyprus, India, Ghana, Pakistan, Poland and Romania.

If conditions deteriorate in a country, the Bill will allow me to make an order cancelling its designation. And it will also be possible to add other countries to the list.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can the Home Secretary explain on whose decision a country would be taken off the list, and on the basis of what evidence and information? Does he accept that a country might have a veneer of democratic government, but underneath it might have a brutal police force, a brutal army, or a drugs problem or other criminal activities which would make a claim for asylum just as legitimate as if the country in question had a military dictatorship?

Mr. Howard: It would be for Parliament to decide whether a country should be added to or taken off the list, in accordance with the negative procedure that I have identified. It would be for the Home Secretary to make proposals for additions to or subtractions from the list, and he would take into account all relevant information about conditions in the country concerned, including all the points to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Next, the Bill would make appeals against removal to a safe third country—such as France or Germany—exercisable only after removal. The 1951 convention on refugees does not confer a right on would-be asylum seekers to travel freely to the destination of their choice. There is an internationally accepted principle that they should claim asylum in the first safe country they arrive at. But our existing arrangements make it impossible to apply the safe third country principle effectively.

Over 80 per cent. of third country removals are to France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. The rest are to other European and western democracies. It is absurd that removal to such countries should be delayed while applicants seek to dispute the safety of those countries.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: I must complete my explanation.

The Bill would impose a clear obligation on the Secretary of State to remove only to those third countries where the applicant would not be at risk either of persecution or of being returned to his own country contrary to the 1951 convention.

There is nothing unusual in requiring immigration appeals to be exercised from abroad. It has long been the case, for example, that a person refused leave to enter because he does not have the necessary entry clearance can appeal only from abroad.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Naturally enough, in giving examples of third countries to which asylum seekers might be sent, the Home Secretary chose the uncontentious examples of France and Germany. Unfortunately, that is not what the Bill says. Clause 1(2) states that asylum seekers can be removed to any country where there is something described as

"in general no serious risk of persecution."

What on earth is meant by that?

Mr. Howard: I am explaining the current practice, the difficulties that we face, the problems with which those who want to take these matters seriously have to deal, and the way in which we propose to deal with them. The Bill gives us the authority to deal with them effectively.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Howard: The power given in the Bill enables action to be taken along the lines that I have mentioned. If the right hon. Gentleman has any points to make about the detailed wording of the Bill, no doubt he will be the first to join the Standing Committee. I am sure that his presence will be greatly welcomed.

Mr. Hattersley: I would be happy to serve on the Standing Committee if the Whips allowed me to do so. I served on every other attempt that the Government have made to tighten up the regulations and I would be happy to do so again. Will the Home Secretary do the House the courtesy of answering my question? What is a state in which there is no "general" fear of persecution? It is the word general that interests me.

Mr. Howard: I have told the House precisely what the power is designed to achieve. If the Opposition are suggesting that the we should not return people who have come to the United Kingdom through France, Germany, Belgium or the Netherlands, they should say so. The power in the Bill is designed to enable us to deal with that problem.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I give the Home Secretary a lesson in geography. It is difficult to reach the

[Mr. Tony Banks]

United Kingdom without going through Germany or France and that throws a great burden on those countries. How will the provision operate? One reason why people might not want to stop in Germany or France is that their lingua franca is English, therefore Britain is a more relevant place for them to go. Otherwise, because we are an island, we will never take anyone and the entire responsibility for refugees will fall on the continent.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman does not appear to have heard of the aeroplane, although a large number of asylum seekers come to the United Kingdom by other means of transport. They arrive by aeroplane and apply for asylum and we deal with their applications. In most cases, the provisions are unlikely to be of assistance in dealing with such applications, so they will not be relevant, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks that we have an overriding obligation to invite to the United Kingdom anyone fleeing persecution or claim to flee persecution who has more English than French, his approach is completely misguided and misconceived.

There is a well-recognised principle that those in danger of persecution apply for asylum in the first safe country in which they arrive. It is generally accepted internationally. The French and the Germans accept it and so do we. The difficulty is that we take so long to deal with such cases that the French and the Germans will not accept the people back. That is why we have to streamline our procedures.

The propaganda put out by the Opposition on precisely this aspect of our proposals is entirely characteristic of their dishonest approach. I have here a briefing note issued by the Labour party which suggests that the number of successful appeals against safe third country returns in 1994 was 30 per cent. and if that were a true figure it would be a serious matter which would need to be dealt with. Let me tell the House the truth. The number of without-foundation appeals allowed was 4 per cent. The remainder were cases returned to me for decision precisely because of the length of time that had elapsed since the arrival in the United Kingdom of the person concerned. In other words, many of those people could no doubt have been removed to a third country had their claims been dealt with promptly. They are not successful appeals; they are part of the problem which the legislation is intended to remedy. I call on the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) now to withdraw that disgraceful piece of propaganda and apologise to all those who might have the misfortune to read it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

The Bill would also remove other obstacles to the effective operation of our asylum procedures. In particular, provisions in schedule 2 would ensure that a refused asylum seeker would have only one time-limited opportunity to appeal against deportation. At present, refused asylum seekers can go to ground secure in the knowledge that they still have an opportunity to appeal when the deportation order is issued. That cannot be justified. Schedule 2 also would bring dependants of asylum seekers within the scope of the power under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1993 to curtail existing leave when refusing an asylum claim.

Deterring bogus asylum applicants is only part of the story. I am equally concerned about racketeers who prey on people who are often poor and illiterate with promises that cannot be delivered. Racketeering is a growing problem. So far this year alone, there have been 110 reported incidents, resulting in the arrest of 171 facilitators in cases involving 501 illegal entrants. Racketeers unscrupulously abuse our procedures—frequently, for example, stowing their unfortunate clients in lorries or among cargoes in dangerous and inhumane conditions.

The existing law does not enable us to deal with all aspects of the problem. There is an offence of facilitating the entry of an illegal entrant, but that by itself has proved insufficient to deal with the scale and complexity of the current problem. We propose that in future, it will be an offence to facilitate the admission of an asylum seeker to the United Kingdom for reward. Those last words are important. It is not our intention to criminalise the activities of persons who act for altruistic reasons to help asylum seekers to enter Britain—the Bill specifically exempts them. The measure is carefully aimed at persons who seek to profit from the plight of others.

The current legislation does not prohibit facilitating further leave by deception after entry. Persons who run, for example, bogus educational establishments and the organisers of marriage rackets are deliberately challenging the integrity of immigration control but are not committing an immigration offence at present. We need to send a clear signal of our determination to deal with those deplorable activities. The Bill makes the acquisition of leave to remain in the United Kingdom by deception a criminal offence, and it creates a corresponding offence of facilitating the acquisition of leave to remain by deception.

The Bill will increase the powers available to immigration officers to search for documents used for travel to the United Kingdom, by giving them a power to search ships, aircraft and vehicles. It will extend the existing powers of search and arrest to include overstayers and unauthorised workers. The Bill will also increase the financial penalty on conviction for immigration offences.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): That being so, will the Home Secretary explain why the Bill does not include the promised closure of the Jackal loophole—ready access to birth certificates for the purpose of creating false personalities? The Government promised to close that loophole five years ago, in 1990, but consistently use the argument of lack of parliamentary time for not doing so. In my constituency, a person took the personality of a baby that lived for only one day in 1967. Hon. Members can imagine the trauma caused to the family concerned, and it is beyond belief for them that such a loophole is legal. The Government have done nothing to close it. Why does not the Bill include a proposal to do so?

Mr. Howard: I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's important and serious point. I looked at the possibility of including such a provision but was advised that it is outside the Bill's scope. I accept the importance of the hon. Gentleman's point, and I certainly believe that we should look at the earliest possible legislative opportunity, possibly through a private Member's Bill, to deal with that matter.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I support the intervention of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) because one of my constituents was hugely distressed by someone using a birth certificate and other details to impersonate her. The impersonator was convicted and sentenced to three months' imprisonment, but she was released after six weeks and cannot be deported because nobody knows her country of origin. The system is in a terrible mess and urgent action is needed.

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree. It is desirable that we find an opportunity to legislate on that matter as soon as possible.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), but then I must make some progress.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I am grateful to the Home Secretary. Is it racketeering when employers have to apply for work permits, for example, to employ a nurse from a foreign country who may have trained in this country? Is it right that employers can charge for that, because, in a case that is currently before a tribunal, £1,000 was requested to obtain a work permit on behalf of a trained nurse? Has the Home Secretary included that as racketeering in the Bill? If so, would the Bill outlaw it?

Mr. Howard: I am not responsible for work permits. If the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred is currently before an industrial tribunal, it would not be wise for me to comment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will draw his concerns to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

I now come to a proposal in the Bill that I am confident that both sides of the House will welcome: that all detained illegal entrants should be able to apply for bail. It will apply also to those who are detained but have been granted leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal. The Bill would also eliminate the last remaining sexually discriminatory provision of the Immigration Act 1971 by making it possible for a man to be deported as the dependant of his wife.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any indication of the proportion of those who are currently granted bail but then abscond and do not turn up?

Mr. Howard: No, I cannot give my hon. Friend that information, but perhaps I can allay his anxieties to the extent that the probability of absconding is a matter that the court would take carefully into account in deciding whether bail should be granted in a particular case.

I now turn to the Bill's third objective: reducing the incentives that attract economic migrants to Britain who do not meet our immigration rules. Illegal working is a substantial problem. Although its precise scale is unknown, the immigration service detected more than 10,000 people working here illegally in 1994. In 1988, the comparable figure was fewer than 4,000. But the absence of controls acts as a strong incentive to people to come here to work illegally. Every other member state of the European Union, except the Republic of Ireland, has recognised that and done something about it. I believe that we need firm action here, too.

Clause 8 will help to tackle the problem. It will create a criminal offence of employing a person who is not entitled to work in the United Kingdom. The maximum penalty would be a level 5 fine, currently £5,000. Employers would have a defence, as clause 8 makes clear, if they could prove that the employee had produced one of a range of documents before their employment began. The details of the statutory offences, including the documents in question, will be set out in secondary legislation. We provided an outline of the defences proposed in the consultation document, which we made available to the House on 20 November. We will produce for the Committee a draft statutory instrument to aid consideration of the clause.

As a Government, we are committed to reducing burdens on business wherever possible. I do not expect my proposals to impose significant new burdens on employers. The defences that we envisage will keep the demands on employers to a minimum. One of the defences that we propose would be based on national insurance numbers and on existing practices and procedures with which employers are currently familiar. But I will listen very carefully to suggestions made by employers and their organisations, in response to our consultation document, and introduce changes where necessary.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Is the Home Secretary aware of the report from the Social Security Select Committee which showed that there are 20 million more national insurance numbers in circulation than there are people entitled to them? In dealing with the problem in the way in which he has outlined, is not he creating yet another avenue for fraud?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Lady's conclusion. No one suggests that national insurance numbers are perfect, although they are progressively being made more efficient and effective. I think that they will be a very helpful and useful check as part of our approach to dealing with illegal employment.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: Yes, but then I really must press on.

Mr. Evans: I am extremely grateful. As my right hon. and learned Friend knows, I run a small business and am vice-chairman of the small business bureau. When he consults businesses, will he pay particular heed to smaller businesses and ensure that any rules and regulations that are introduced will not overly burden them?

Mr. Howard: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's concern. Indeed, my hon. Friends the Minister of State and the Under-Secretary of State have been paying particular attention to the views of small business organisations in the discussions that we have had on these provisions.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I really must make some progress now.

I fully appreciate the need for employers to have appropriate guidance and advice about what they might need to do under the arrangements proposed in clause 8. An important part of that advice will clearly concern the avoidance of recruitment practices that are discriminatory, or might appear to be so. I shall be consulting the

[Mr. Howard]

Commission for Racial Equality and others to make sure that the advice that we provide gives employers any help that they may need.

Clause 9 restricts entitlement to housing. It is unacceptable that people who are here illegally, or who have come here on the understanding that they will not rely on public funds, should have access to housing at the taxpayer's expense. At present, local housing authorities have a duty to such people if they are found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need. That has meant that hard-pressed housing authorities have had to use scarce resources to accommodate people from abroad with no genuine claim to assistance, at the expense of local residents in housing need. That cannot be right. Those claiming asylum after entering Britain, and those whose applications have received an initial refusal, will no longer have housing entitlement.

Clause 10 restricts entitlement to child benefit. Hon. Members will recall that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has presented to the Social Security Advisory Committee a package of measures to limit further the benefit entitlement of some persons from abroad. Among the proposals are measures to prevent people given limited leave to enter the UK, on the understanding that the cost did not fall on public funds, and illegal immigrants, from claiming the non-contributory social security benefits.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: No.

The Government explained in their memorandum to the Committee that, while it is possible to limit access to most benefits through secondary legislation, primary legislation would be needed to curtail entitlement to child benefit. Clause 10 introduces a regulation-making power to make that possible. Let me make it clear that there is no question of our applying restrictions under clauses 9 and 10 to people who are settled here—in other words, those who have been given indefinite leave to enter or remain.

Mr. Kaufman *rose—*

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Mr. Tony Banks *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I will give way to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), but I shall not give way again after that.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said that the conditions relating to child benefit will not apply to people who have been given indefinite leave to remain. Clause 10(2) states:

> "No immigrant within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 shall be entitled to child benefit for any week unless he satisfies prescribed conditions."

The definition clause, clause 12, states that

> "'immigrant' means a person who under the 1971 Act requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom (whether or not such leave has been given)."

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconcile what he has just said—that the entitlement of someone with indefinite leave to remain will not be removed—with the statement in the definition clause that someone who has required leave to remain, whether he is given that leave or not, is subject to the condition?

Mr. Howard: I understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. The wording of the clause mirrors wording in comparable social security legislation: the right hon. Gentleman will understand that it is, in effect, a social security clause. I have no doubt that the precise wording will be scrutinised carefully in Standing Committee, but I have clearly indicated how we intend the powers to be exercised.

Mr. Kaufman: This is an important point. What the Home Secretary says, on the Floor of the House, that he intends to do is not a substitute for what is stated in an Act of Parliament, and the future Act of Parliament that he is asking the House to approve states clearly and unequivocally, in clause 12(2), that

> "'immigrant' means a person who under the 1971 Act requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom (whether or not such leave has been given)."

This is not a matter of social security legislation; it is a matter of Home Office immigration legislation. The Home Secretary must either clarify it, or give the House a commitment to amend the Bill to fulfil what he has just said from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that a prescribed condition under clause 10 can be that the person has no restriction or condition placed on his leave to remain. That is precisely the way in which we intend to exercise this power. The right hon. Gentleman is so clearly fascinated by the detailed wording of the Bill that no doubt he will join his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the Standing Committee. It promises to be an extremely interesting Committee.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: I have already given way to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and I must make progress.

I now come to the question of the Special Standing Committee procedure. On this matter I wholly endorse the view that has been expressed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It has always been clear that the procedure was designed for Bills that have a degree of cross-party support. The Bills for which it has been used have been relatively technical and non-controversial. Regrettably, and not least because of the reactions of Opposition Members, from the outset this Bill has not fallen into that category and has attracted substantial controversy.

Parliament's normal procedures are designed to subject legislation to detailed scrutiny. I have no doubt whatever, especially after what we have just heard, that the Bill will have ample scrutiny as it makes its way through our normal procedures. All hon. Members agree on the importance of preserving good race relations, and all say that they agree on the need for fair and firm but effective immigration control. That being so, it should be possible for the House to have a constructive debate on the Bill. However, for that to be possible it is essential that hon. Members in all parts of the House should be prepared to address our specific proposals. We are entitled to expect that those who disagree with them will say whether they accept that urgent action is required to deal with the problems that I have described; and, if they do, what alternative action they propose.

Some have suggested that this is an immoral Bill. I reject that utterly. It is not immoral to protect our asylum procedures against the current massive level of abuse. It is not immoral to declare that, in our judgment, the conditions in some countries do not give rise to a serious risk of persecution. It is not immoral to insist that people arriving from other safe countries should return to pursue their claims there. It is not immoral to seek to protect employment opportunities for those entitled to live and work here, and it is not immoral to combat racketeering.

Our position has always been clear. This country has a proud record on good race relations. I am determined to do everything that I can to maintain that record. Firm control of immigration is vital to achieve that objective. That involves a readiness to identify abuse and to take the action necessary to deal with it. The Bill is a measured response to the problems that we face. It is necessary, it is urgently needed and it deserves to reach the statute book as soon as possible. I commend it to the House.

4.22 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Britain has been immeasurably enriched by the contribution that has been made to its economy and its society by successive generations of immigrants. Long before the United Nations came into being, Britain was often a beacon of liberty for those who had been forced to flee their native countries, as many in the House can testify from their own family experiences. Those of us who have so benefited have a special responsibility to remember that asylum policy is about the protection of that most basic right, the right to life.

The appalling events in Nigeria in recent weeks remind us yet again why Britain must honour its own history and retain an asylum system that is just and humane. Race relations in Britain are much better than in many other European countries, but we have to tread carefully to ensure that they stay so. Above all, we must act in a way in which prejudice is not fanned, and people must not be led to believe that immigration is out of control. If that happens, racial tension will rise, and the whole country will be the loser.

The Secretary of State says that immigration controls must be firm and fair. He is right, but, by that phrase, he recognises that there must be a balance between fairness and firmness, between justice and control. It is central to our case that he has failed to achieve that balance in this Bill. The Bill may not deal effectively with some of the worst abuse, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), yet it may deny refuge to entirely genuine asylum seekers, conflict with our obligations under United Nations treaties, harm the interests of many people from ethnic minorities who are lawfully settled here, and, in so doing, damage race relations.

In his speech on the Loyal Address, the Prime Minister said:

> "While I lead it, the instincts of my party will not be to play race at any time".—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 39.]

The Secretary of State has offered the same commitment. He said in his statement on the Bill that he agreed with

> "the desirability of taking this issue out of party politics."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 338.]

He went on to assert, however, that there was a "simple way" for that to be achieved—the people who have the most profound reservations about this measure should simply agree with him.

The Secretary of State said that his Bill was "a balanced response", but he must know that such an approach—take it or leave it—is no recipe for consensus, but only for conflict. What makes his position all the more threadbare is that the House has established procedures that could achieve the consensus that he says he seeks.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Bill's provisions will apply to Poland, where the people are white, as it does to Ghana, where the people are black, and that it is the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party who are playing the race card?

Mr. Straw: Of course I accept that: Poland is on the white list, so what the hon. Gentleman said is absolutely correct.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) said to his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary:

> "Surely there can be some mechanism whereby people can give evidence on what my right hon. and learned Friend is seeking to do, before the passage of the proposed legislation, in an attempt to make it work, and therefore to prove to all that what we are seeking to do is fair and effective, and fulfils our international obligations."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 343.]

The hon. Member for Broxtowe was right. That procedure is the Special Standing Committee procedure, and a motion to commit the Bill to such a Committee is on the Order Paper, backed by hon. Members from almost every Opposition party in the House.

Mr. Marlow: With a few exceptions, all the measures that the Government bring before the House are fair, effective and not in conflict with our international obligations, and the hon. Gentleman opposes them. Will he oppose this Bill or support it?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has only just woken up, but of course we will oppose the Bill. If he cares to listen, he will find out why. We would much prefer the Bill to be examined on an all-party basis by a Special Standing Committee. If he had thought about it, he would have recommended that for the Maastricht Bill.

The Secretary of State claims, as we have just heard, that the Special Standing Committee procedures are only for non-controversial legislation, but he has been unable to find a single convincing text in support of that restriction. First, on the "Today" programme, he quoted from an obscure and long-discredited White Paper on "Scotland and the Union", forgetting that the scrutiny of Bills is a responsibility of the House, not of the Government.

When that ruse failed, the Secretary of State sought support in the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who, he said, had written to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition,

> "referring him to a finding of the Procedure Committee in the 1989-90 Session which clearly demonstrates that [the Special Standing Committee] procedure would not be appropriate for the Bill".

I have that Procedure Committee report here. It contains no such finding. In his letter, the right hon. Member for Honiton quoted a single phrase from that report. The phrase was:

[Mr. Straw]

"in particular those Bills which are not controversial in party political terms".

I am afraid, however, that he did not put that phrase into its proper context, because the Committee was highly critical of the way in which the House scrutinises legislation, and of the Government's refusal to countenance reform.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that I was then, and remain, a member of the Select Committee on Procedure, and that I was therefore party to the report? Although it is true that we said that, "in particular", the Bills that were not party political could be referred to a Special Standing Committee, we certainly did not work on the assumption that all measures that might be considered controversial in party political terms should not be considered by such a Committee. I am certain that, had such a Bill as this come before the Procedure Committee for consideration, we would have accepted that there was every possible justification for its going to a Special Standing Committee.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is entirely right. The words

"in particular those Bills which are not controversial in party political terms"

was not a finding for the House but a recommendation to the Government following the most serious criticism of the Government's refusal to make use of the Special Standing Committee procedure in almost any circumstances.

Indeed, contrary to what the Home Secretary just claimed about the way in which Parliament can effectively scrutinise legislation, the Procedure Committee recorded at paragraph 312:

"There is widespread dissatisfaction with the way in which the Standing Committee system operates".

It continued:

"We . . . strongly believe that the best way to harness the positive attributes of Select Committees to the scrutiny of legislation in appropriate cases is through Special Standing Committee. The necessary procedural machinery already exists in Standing Orders and we have urged on several occasions that proper use should be made of it . . . All that is lacking is the necessary will on the Government's part".

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Is that not simply a rather long-winded way of saying that the Special Standing Committee is a fig leaf that will enable the Labour party to appear to be on both sides of the issue? Will the hon. Gentleman answer two specific questions? Does he recognise that there is a problem with the number of asylum seekers? If so, what are his proposals to deal with that problem?

Mr. Straw: Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise the danger of not subjecting the Bill to proper scrutiny—a danger which, as the hon. Member for Broxtowe pointed out, has led to the failure of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993?

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I must make progress.

As Madam Speaker pointed out two weeks ago, there is no restriction on which Bills the House may commit to a Special Standing Committee. As she said, the bottom line is that it is for the House to decide.

When, in 1986, these Standing Orders were introduced, an attempt was made to restrict the circumstances in which Bills could be committed to such a Committee. Ministers sought an automatic veto over any Bill that could be remitted to a Special Standing Committee, but the House rejected that notion. There was a rebellion on both sides of the House, and the man who led it was none other than the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. He said that the right to commit Bills to such Committees should not be reserved for Ministers.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is doing what he always does when he is on a thoroughly bad point, which is to address his argument to a different point altogether. No one is disputing the fact that the House, in its wisdom, can decide, if it so wishes, to subject any Bill to any procedure, including a Special Standing Committee. That is not the argument; the argument is whether this is an appropriate Bill to be subjected to that procedure.

The Government made their view clear in the White Paper on Scotland in 1993. My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, made clear his Committee's view in his letter. In order to avoid the issue, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) keeps talking about the completely different question of whether the House can decide to send the Bill to a Special Standing Committee. Of course the House can decide that if it so wishes, but that is not the point.

Mr. Straw: The Home Secretary is as badly briefed today as when he appeared on the "Today" programme. It is no good quoting a White Paper, as White Papers are published by the Government. It is for the House to determine its own procedure.

The Home Secretary mentioned the Procedure Committee. The question of the nature of the Bills to go to Special Standing Committees was debated in 1986. The issue then was whether Bills should be non-controversial and whether they should be referred only by Ministers. The House came to a different view from that which the Secretary of State and the Chairman of the Procedure Committee are recommending to the House.

Mr. Flynn: Did my hon. Friend observe that the Home Secretary failed to honour the promise he made to me in response to my intervention, and explain why genuine asylum seekers will be deprived of all benefits from 8 January? Does my hon. Friend agree that one reason for a special Committee is that it would remove that injustice, which will leave thousands of families penniless in a few weeks' time?

Mr. Straw: Yes, of course I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he thinks that this House will not properly scrutinise the Bill, given that the right hon. Members for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) have volunteered to serve on the Standing Committee? Why on earth will it not be properly scrutinised by Members from his side of the House as well as ours?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman shows a profound misunderstanding of the way in which Standing and Select Committees operate.

Mr. Arnold *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: He asked a serious question, and I shall give him a serious answer. The value of the Special Standing Committee procedure is that it enables evidence to be taken from practitioners and others on how the Bill might work in practice. As his hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) pointed out in the House on 20 November, had that procedure been available during the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the Act might not have turned out to be the failure it has.

Mr. Alton: May I support the hon. Gentleman in what he is saying? Surely, if the Act has served us so badly and we are having to find new legislation only three years after it was introduced, that in itself is a justification for calling witnesses to find out why it has not worked.

Is there not an additional argument? Do we not need a more bipartisan approach to these matters? We seem to use such matters with monotonous regularity in the immediate run-up to general elections as a chance to whip up emotion. Is that not the wrong way to go about things? Would not the right way be to look at the questions properly and concisely in the atmosphere of a Special Standing Committee that has the ability to call witnesses, so that we could reach firm conclusions that the whole of the House could back?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There is no need for this measure to be controversial. There is agreement across the Floor—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes, there is agreement on the need to cut abuse and delays, while meeting our international obligations. The issue is how that should be achieved; how that balance between firmness and fairness should be struck.

I shall now spell out why the Bill needs the scrutiny of a Special Standing Committee.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): If the hon. Gentleman has finished his diatribe about the Special Standing Committee, may I say that it would have been fair of him to point out one or two matters that, for some reason, he found it better to neglect? It was not at the suggestion of any person.

Mr. Straw: Where is the question?

Sir Peter Emery: I am asking you a question so that you understand what you are doing wrong. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Sir Peter Emery: First, does the hon. Gentleman understand only too clearly that the letter I wrote to his leader starts with the words:

> "I refrained from interrupting your speech"?

It was the speech of the Leader of the Opposition that brought about the letter. It was nothing to do with the Government Front-Bench team or myself. That is quite clear.

Secondly, does the hon. Gentleman understand that, in fact, the entire proceedings of the Committee's meetings, which I chaired on both occasions, made it absolutely clear, as I said in the letter—which again was neglected—that

> "Apart from the Handful of Bills each Session which excite great party political controversy, there are many which, though controversial in parts involve no party commitment".

If there was ever any proof that this Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has been in the House a very long time, and he knows that interventions should last about a minute. So far, I have given him the latitude of just over two minutes. I hope that he will be winding up his intervention immediately.

Sir Peter Emery: I understand only too well, and will do so, but I have not interrupted a number of times, although there have been many comments about what I have said.

Will the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) understand that the majority of members of the Procedure Committee never suggested that this sort of controversial Bill should go to a Special Standing Committee?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman took a very long time to get to the point. Given the length of that intervention, he was wise not to intervene on my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. [Hon. Members: "Answer."] I have given the answer. It is in the right hon. Gentleman's report and in the Standing Orders, the change to which he moved in 1987.

Let me explain why we need a Special Standing Committee. We need to know why the 1993 Act has failed. We need much better evidence about the scale of the problem, and why enforcement is so poor in so many areas. We need to know whether the proposed offences aimed at racketeering will be effective. We also need an examination of other measures that might be taken, such as reception centres and the registration of so-called asylum advisers, to exclude the unscrupulous self-styled advice centres that make money from other people's misery.

The Secretary of State said in his statement three weeks ago that the 1993 Act had not worked as intended because

> "we did not anticipate at the time that that measure was enacted that the increase in the number . . . would be on such a scale"—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 340.]

That is simply not correct.

The Home Secretary's predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), was explicit when he said on Third Reading:

> "we must expect that even greater numbers of people will want to come to this country".

In virtually the same breath, he said that the 1993 Act would provide a quicker way to deal with applications and

> "a better and more sensible way"—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1993; Vol. 216, c. 731.]

to deal with fraud.

An increase was anticipated—at least to the numbers now reached. The numbers were higher in 1991 than they are likely to be this year, and they fell spontaneously by 40 per cent. the following year, without any change in legislation. The previous Secretary of State promised a three-month time limit from initial application to disposal of appeal. Those time limits have been missed, not by a few weeks, but by more than a year. Three months has become 19 months.

The Secretary of State points to an increase in resources, but while the number of staff has undoubtedly increased, the number of decisions went down from 35,000 in 1992 to 21,000 in 1994, before making some recovery this year. Could it be that the hon. Member for Broxtowe was right again, when he told the House that one of the reasons why the 1993 Act "has failed"

[Mr. Straw]

—his words—was because the suggestions of practitioners who offered evidence were "not taken into account" by Ministers when framing this Bill?

With the Home Secretary's refusal to allow effective scrutiny of this Bill, is there not every likelihood of another piece of badly drafted legislation ending up on the statute book?

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman now do his bit for effective scrutiny of the Bill by withdrawing the disgracefully misleading claim in the document that he put out for the parliamentary Labour party, that, in 1994, 30 per cent. of appeals under the fast-track mechanism were successful? He must now know that that is a complete distortion of the truth.

Mr. Straw: The reference came directly from a brief provided by Amnesty International. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Contrary to the mockery from the Conservative Benches, that organisation has a high reputation for accuracy. If the information is wrong, I will be delighted to withdraw it.

The House and the country deserve a much better analysis of why numbers have risen. Ministers insinuate that, because applications for asylum have risen from 4,000 in 1988 to around 40,000 now, while acceptances have fallen, bogus applicants must account for almost all the increase. Of course there are bogus asylum seekers, but that is not sufficient explanation for the increase.

The end of the cold war was of huge importance in reducing the prospect of thermo-nuclear conflict, but since its end, the world has in many ways become a much more dangerous place. Let us look at the areas of internal disruption and civil war, and consider the trend in the figures. Look at Algeria, the Sudan, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and, of course, Nigeria. As conflicts develop, so the number of applications for asylum shoots up.

Mr. Stephen *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I have already given way enough.

Let us look at those areas in which some semblance of peace has been restored, and where applications have generally fallen. Applications from the Lebanon have fallen by 90 per cent. since 1990, and there were half the number of applications from Iran last year as compared with 1986. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees commented:

> "in our view, the rise in asylum claims may be more rationally seen as a consequence of the unprecedented scale of global conflict which produces refugee flows".

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, which was forced through the House? The fines that resulted from that Act were uprated in the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. Does he concede that that Act in itself makes it much more difficult for people to flee persecution and in effect gives rise to an illegal trade? It gives racketeers a market opportunity to smuggle people into this country who ought legitimately to be able to board a plane and travel without the airlines acting as bogus immigration officers.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. Evidence should be taken by the Special Standing Committee on exactly those issues, before, not after, judgments are made.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North) *rose*—

Mr. Straw: I have already given way sufficiently to the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends.

The Home Secretary never ceases to repeat his mantra that the number of asylum seekers in continental Europe is falling, while the number in Britain is rising. The fact that the numbers shot up in other European countries in 1992 while they fell here by 40 per cent. did not stop Ministers rushing forward with the ill-drafted and incompetent 1993 Act.

The huge increase in refugees that Germany faced in the early 1990s was in the most part due to immigration across its land borders because of the disintegration of former communist bloc states. Numbers in Germany have fallen, but last year they were still treble the United Kingdom level, while in the Netherlands they rose 40 per cent. in a year from 1993 to 1994.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that his thesis is entirely wrong? Numbers did not fall spontaneously, as he put it, between 1991 and 1992. The fall was due to the fact that screening was introduced, and because the 1991 figures contained a large number of multiple applications. Does he further accept that the screening procedures introduced in 1991 were reinforced by fingerprinting in the 1993 Act? Does he think that that had any effect, or was it all somehow spontaneous?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Lady looks at the figures country by country, she will see that my point is made. As a conflict develops, numbers rise, and as a conflict is settled, they fall. In any event, there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that, with the tightening of the asylum regime in continental Europe but the weakening of border controls, many would-be asylum seekers have simply gone underground.

At the end of last month, the Secretary of State deferred agreement on plans for a European Union directive against racism. He did so on the grounds that Britain has

> "better race relations than almost any other country . . . and more comprehensive legislation".

He is right about our record on legislation, but the Conservative party can take little credit. After all, the Conservatives voted in this House to block the Race Relations Acts 1965 and 1968.

Race relations have indeed been better in this country than in other European countries. That is not only due to our race relations legislation, but because our system of immigration control has generally been fairer, less arbitrary and less capricious. That is one reason, among many, why Labour is determined that policies relating to immigration, border controls and asylum are for the UK Government and Parliament to decide and not Brussels.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I have already given way quite sufficiently.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must recognise that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is not giving way at this point.

Mr. Straw: Our obligations under the United Nations convention require that each application should be considered individually, but the proposed white list would treat applicants from the countries on the list in bulk unless an individual could meet what could, even in well-founded cases, be an almost impossible burden of proof.

If the Home Secretary wants to rely on other countries' experience, why does he not look to that of the United States? The State Department in the United States of America actively considered a white list in the 1980s, but rejected the idea both because of the adverse consequences for relations with countries omitted or dropped from the list, and because it felt that such a list would be an open encouragement to asylum seekers from the countries that were on it.

Ministers must also recognise that there is huge anxiety about the justice of the current arrangements even without a white list. The whole world now knows about the brutality of the Nigerian regime, but there is much more to be told about the corruption of that regime and the involvement of the military junta in all sorts of international rackets, such as drugs, social security benefits and illegal immigration—rackets that could endanger those who dare to speak out against the regime. While that is all known to our Government, they have consistently played down the threat to human rights in Nigeria.

Is it not incredible that, of 1,495 applications for asylum from Nigeria last year, only two were accepted? It is incredible, until we learn that, as late as September this year, while Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues were awaiting trial for their lives, the Home Office was still advising its staff:

> "there is no evidence to suggest that Ogonis . . . face persecution from the Nigerian authorities"

for membership of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People—the very organisation that Ken Saro-Wiwa led, and in respect of which he lost his life.

What a mockery of justice will be created by the new regime for so-called "safe" third-country appeals. Asylum seekers who enter the United Kingdom via a transit country—typically, another European country—will be returned to that country, from where they could, in turn, be bounced back to a fourth or fifth country.

Under these new, Kafkaesque rules, asylum seekers, as we heard from the Home Secretary, have a right of appeal, but they cannot appeal as to whether they are genuine refugees, or even as to whether the countries to which they are to be dispatched are safe for them. The only right of appeal they have is as to whether the Secretary of State has acted unreasonably in asserting that that country would be safe. The final injustice is that the application can be made only from outside the United Kingdom—from the very country that the applicant believes to be unsafe.

In interventions, the Home Secretary tried to justify the extraordinary provision in the Bill under which there will no further appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. One of the problems with the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 is that, in attempting to produce fast procedures, it over-complicated its procedures in such a way that a large number of cases have ended up before the High Court for judicial review. If the right of appeal on a point of law to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal is taken away in such cases, the Home Secretary will only encourage more expensive, complicated and time-consuming appeals to the divisional court.

The rights of appeal for safe third-country cases are so elusive that they will almost certainly put Britain in breach of its international obligations, as the executive of the UNHCR has categorically claimed.

The Home Secretary again prays Europe in aid on employer checks. He said that Britain and Ireland are the only EU states that do not have such checks, but where is the evidence that they work and are fair? It certainly does not come from Italy, which has a huge problem of illegal migrant workers; certainly not from Germany, where the Government have just reported that there are an estimated 500,000 illegally employed immigrant workers in the construction industry alone.

The employer checks will be neither firm nor fair. They have been questioned by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment herself. In a letter of September this year, she said that she believed that they could result in "racial discrimination". She is right. The checks have been criticised by all the main employer organisations. Mr. Tim Melville-Ross of the Institute of Directors has said that the proposals are "unacceptable" and have clear and adverse "racial implications"

Mr. Howard: May I reassure the hon. Gentleman about his anxieties on that point? I have today received a letter from Mr. Tim Melville-Ross, who says:

> "I wrote to you in October expressing concern about aspects of proposed legislation on this subject as reported in the press. I have now received the Consultation Document dated 20 November. Whilst we have yet to prepare a detailed reply, I am bound to say that the concerns we raised do seem in large measure to have been met. I thought I should write to you at this stage to express my appreciation that our views have been taken on board, in particular since I shall be making a statement to this effect to the Press."

I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman about the Institute of Directors.

Mr. Straw: It does not provide any reassurance at all. Four days after the Secretary of State published his consultative document, Mr. Tim Melville-Ross, in *the Financial Times*, said of the proposals that it was too much to expect businesses to act in such a policeman's capacity, and that they had plain "racial implications".

With 20 million spare national insurance numbers, the checks will not deter those intent on fraud. They will deter the small and medium-sized employer, who will be scared away from taking any risk with the employment of applicants with black or brown skins or foreign-sounding names.

The 1951 convention places Britain under a clear obligation to provide social security to "refugees lawfully staying" in the contracting state. Until now, that obligation has been interpreted as including those whose application for refugee status is under consideration. The Home Secretary complains that the benefit bill for asylum seekers has increased to £200 million a year. The reason for that increase is not so much because the number of asylum seekers in Britain has risen as because of the time they stay while their applications and appeals are being considered.

If the 1993 deadlines had been kept to, the benefit bill would be not £200 million but £40 million. How typical of the Government that, instead of seeking to cut delays, they cut people's benefit. Under the proposals, there will be no benefit: not for those in severe hardship or ill-health; nothing for babies, infants or children; not a

[Mr. Straw]

penny for pregnant women; none for the victims of torture. To mock the plight of those people even more, Ministers say that these asylum seekers can apply for a social fund crisis loan, when they know that no such applications can be accepted because the asylum seeker will have no benefit from which to pay back the loan.

What is saved on benefit may have to be spent elsewhere, because many of the refugee children made destitute by these changes will become the responsibility of local authorities under the Children Act 1989, to be taken into care, at a cost of £870 a week, to save benefits of around £100 a week.

Of all the measures in the Bill, the one which most cries out for proper scrutiny by a Special Standing Committee, and which meanwhile has raised the gravest doubts about the Government's motives, is that relating to child benefit. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) quoted from clauses 10 and 12. Clause 10 plainly states:

> "No immigrant within the meaning of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 shall be entitled to child benefit for any week unless he satisfies prescribed conditions."

Clause 12 defines an immigrant in the widest possible terms, and states:

> "'immigrant' means a person who under the 1971 Act requires leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom (whether or not such leave has been given)."

In the interview in the *Independent*, the Prime Minister said that he did not want to deal with the problem of immigration and asylum seekers in a way

> "which may unsettle people who do not deserve to be unsettled".

If that is his view, what on earth was he doing allowing the Secretary of State to proceed with this appallingly wide provision?

The new and derogatory definition of an immigrant is so wide that it provides the power to remove child benefit from anyone who has been here for more than 10 or 20 years, made Britain his home and paid his taxes like anyone else, but who does not have an EU or UK passport. Such people can only be "unsettled" by this provision. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State is babbling. If she does not intend to use the power as widely as it is drawn, why take it in the first place?

Miss Widdecombe: The power that we have taken is clearly restricted in the Bill by the words "prescribed conditions". If the hon. Gentleman cannot understand the words "prescribed conditions", I suggest that he takes a reading course.

Mr. Straw: I am glad that I allowed the Minister to intervene, because she makes my point entirely: Ministers are taking a power to prescribe the condition. Although they now say that they will remove child benefit only from those with limited leave to remain, the Bill empowers them to remove child benefit from people with indefinite leave to remain. If Ministers do not want to use that power, why do they want to take it?

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister's silly and illiterate intervention fails in every way to take account of the Bill. The stupid Minister does not understand her own vicious Bill. It is not a question of "prescribed conditions" letting somebody out; nobody defined as an immigrant under clause 12 qualifies without having to undergo the prescribed conditions. They make black and brown people separate from white people.

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We look forward to the Minister's wind-up speech, when she can explain, after long notice and a bit of thought, why Ministers are taking a power potentially to remove child benefit from a million people who are lawfully resident here, without limited leave to remain, but who do not have EU or UK passports.

The Prime Minister said that he strongly believes in racial tolerance, and I believe him. The problem for him, however, is that his party has long been split on the issue of race. We may trust the Prime Minister, but bitter experience has shown that his party can rarely be trusted to follow his lead.

Recently, Mr. John Taylor, the Conservative candidate for Cheltenham at the last election, complained about the Tories. He said:

> "They alienate ethnic minorities by pandering to xenophobic voters with promises of crack-downs on immigration."

The more desperate the Tories get, the more unscrupulous their tactics become. The line between public and party interest breaks down. Last week, we had the extraordinary spectacle of Ms Sheila Gunn, a press officer from Conservative Central Office, touting detailed personal information about asylum seekers to any journalist who would take it. I am not surprised that the Minister is embarrassed by that. It is wholly unprecedented for the Home Office to use Conservative Central Office as a spin doctor for giving out such information.

Mr. Howard: The Minister of State and I have nothing to be embarrassed about. As the hon. Gentleman knows full well, the information given out by Central Office was already in the public domain. Asylum applications are treated in confidence, unless and until an applicant or his representative chooses to put in the public domain a thoroughly misleading account of the facts. We then reserve the right to tell the truth.

Mr. Straw: All that I can say is that, if the Secretary of State is not embarrassed about what Conservative Central Office did, he has no shame. It was disgraceful, and it is high time he managed to distinguish between his public duties as holder of his office and the political, partisan interest of Conservative Central Office.

As the Prime Minister said, huge numbers—especially of Asian and Afro-Caribbean British citizens and residents—are bound to feel "unsettled" by this measure—by its gratuitous breadth and by the extravagance of its powers. Like the Churches, community relations organisations and employers, who are all ranged against this Bill, they feel "unsettled" because they doubt the Government's motives for introducing the Bill and then refusing to commit it to proper scrutiny.

Those doubts have been fanned by the now notorious advice from Mr. Andrew Lansley, then head of research in Conservative Central Office but today an official candidate for the Conservative party. He said that immigration was an issue that the Conservatives raised successfully in 1992 and again in 1994. He said:

> "It played particularly well in the tabloids, where it has more potential to hurt."

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have been asked three times to repudiate those chilling words; they have refused three times to do so.

It is little wonder, therefore, that *The Times* has condemned the proposals for their "covert racism". The words of Mr. Lansley are not those of a party committed to good race relations and fair and firm immigration controls; they are those of a party ready to stir up racial tension in a desperate effort to garner votes.

The Bill has been rushed before the House less than three years after Ministers told Parliament that they had found the answer to the problem of asylum abuse in the 1993 Act. This enabling, blank-cheque Bill gives the Secretary of State wide and ill-defined powers to use in regulations. It cries out for proper scrutiny and, so long as Ministers resist that, suspicions will be raised about the real motives behind it.

We oppose the Bill because it is inconsistent with our obligations under international law; it will damage race relations; and it will be neither firm in its effect nor fair in its intent. We shall vote against it tonight.

5.7 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Although I am speaking before seven o'clock, I shall do my best to keep my speech within 10 minutes.

The burning of straw has, latterly and perhaps happily, been outlawed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. After the quietude of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) sought to set the House alight. He will forgive me if I remark that what resulted from his endeavour was largely smoke. A casual bystander might wonder why smoke was so important in setting out the Opposition's stance on the Bill.

As I remarked in a previous debate on another subject, we all bring to the House the impedimenta of our pasts, and mine includes having been chairman of the Camden committee of community relations. We were a predictably all-party, multi-ethnic body, yet I do not recall anyone on the committee disagreeing with my view, as chairman, that while such a committee should be concerned with immigrants' rights, good race relations nevertheless require a sense in the host community that the law of reason is being applied to the level of immigration and the degree of assimilation or integration that is thus required. Good race relations will be determined at street level, not by fiat from on high.

I was therefore distressed at the Opposition's reaction to the Prime Minister during the Queen's Speech when they implied that the Bill was racist. The cause of good race relations is not assisted by racist taunts. By their votes in the House, Opposition Members have demonstrated their support for, and sympathy with, immigrant issues, which some Conservative Members might feel is disproportionate but which are just as amenable to the law of reason.

I would never dream of applying the word "racist" to the Opposition or to individual members of it because they had adopted that stance, but they can readily see how ill the cause of race relations would be served if the charge were thrown at them.

Anyone opposing the Bill must demonstrate that it is unnecessary. Simple but sheer statistics, as quoted by my right hon. and learned Friend, demonstrate that new legislation is required, and I support my right hon. and learned Friend in introducing the Bill.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brooke: Of course, but I did say that I would take 10 minutes, so the hon. Gentleman must be quick.

Mr. Spearing: Some amendment to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 may be necessary—the right hon. Gentleman has said that it may be, and it may be—but the key thing about the debate and everything that has happened is that the Home Secretary is insisting on this solution, whereas Opposition Members say that there might be other solutions, especially if evidence from committees, such as that of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member, is able to be fed into the legislative process. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman agrees with what I have just said.

Mr. Brooke: The question came rather late in the statement that the hon. Gentleman—who is an old friend—made. I support the principle of the Bill that my right hon. and learned Friend has introduced.

To be charitable, perhaps the reaction to the Bill is coloured by the parallel regulations of which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has published a draft. Some of the people who have written to me have perhaps not been aware that "draft" means draft, that my right hon. Friend has consulted the Social Security Advisory Committee and that the committee's consultation period ended a month ago, although of course that date does not represent the conclusion of the committee's recommendations.

The fact that the recommendations are not public, and that my right hon. Friend has not yet laid the final regulations, are testimony to the seriousness of the consultation. It would be a mistake to allow the shadow of the regulations to colour today's debate before the regulations have finally been laid.

That said, even a charitable bystander might say that there appears to be evidence of inadequate interdepartmental consultation before the original announcements. We are now potentially in the Lewis Carroll position that local authorities under other legislation, will have to provide, at a heavy and sometimes interim cost, the services that the regulations threaten to deny to a majority of asylum seekers. I acknowledge, as do the Government, that that is primarily a Greater London problem, but that simply exacerbates the problem for the local authorities concerned.

The issues, as Ministers would be the first to agree, are very complex because of the way in which people present themselves. As 70 per cent. of the cases in an average surgery of mine, in an inner-city seat, are asylum seekers or other immigrants, I can endorse that. However, whether a person is genuine or not genuine, the duties placed on local authorities by other statutes oblige them to pick up the burden as long as other legislation remains unamended.

It is difficult to quantify the financial effects on a central London authority, not least because those who have placed themselves in accommodation are a relatively unquantifiable variable, but present best estimates,

[Mr. Brooke]

conservatively stated, are that, especially before enactment of the Bill, the cost to Westminster city council might run at £8 million a year.

There was already some backlash in Westminster before the 1993 Act, when 220 asylum families a year were being afforded permanent housing, with a necessary effect on home housing cases. The House can imagine the effect on race relations in the indigenous community if that extra charge of £8 million fell on council tax payers. I fear that, in purely practical terms, local services may prove unable to cope.

I would add, at the level of a footnote, outside the issue of interdepartmental consultation, that the Home Office would make it much easier for local authorities to stay on top of some of those subjects if it kept local authorities better informed on the progress of individual asylum seekers' cases.

I want to illustrate the mild incoherence of government, in the proper sense of that word, by the case of unaccompanied refugee children, who are not covered by the Bill but who, ironically, by local authority action, illustrate my support for the Bill.

Half a dozen central London authorities are especially affected by unaccompanied refugee children. Once those children have passed through immigration controls, they throw themselves on local authorities, under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The Bill will not affect them or that.

The number of such children in Westminster has jumped from 44 to 71 in the past six months. They frequently come in family groups and are thus not suitable for fostering. In residential care, they now cost £2.5 million a year, which is in addition to the £8 million that I earlier quoted, and it is a long-term cost. There was a special Government grant when the numbers were smaller, in 1993-94, but none in either of the two successive years.

The Home Office is responsible for control of entry, the Department of Health for the administration of the 1989 Act, the Overseas Development Administration for relations with some of the countries from which the children come and the Department of the Environment for grant settlement.

I realise that there is strength in numbers, but central Government should take a concerted lead in deciding how the problem should be solved, as its council tax implications, with their consequences for race relations, are clear. Obviously, the children have no prior connection with the local authorities to which they go.

I said that treatment of that issue by local authorities reflects back to the Bill and its origins. I understand that Camden borough council, of whose committee of community relations I was chairman, now takes a much tougher line in the interpretation of its duties under the 1989 Act, with consequences of the children then presenting themselves elsewhere.

I would not remotely suggest that Camden borough council is being racist in its decisions, but it is imposing transferred burdens on other central London local authorities, just as the tightening of asylum laws in other EC countries has exercised pressure on Her Majesty's Government to introduce the Bill in the interests of good relations in this country. I reiterate my earlier support for it.

5.16 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): This is a deplorable little Bill, made all the more squalid by the fact that it is generally unnecessary.

I could, were I to take up more of the House's time, make the case for the fact that the Bill is not needed at all. Even those who believe that not to be so will be hard put to explain, if the Government's only intention is to deter bogus asylum seekers from applying and speedily remove them from this country if they have applied to come here, why it is necessary to include the housing clause, the employment clause and the social security clause.

Let us have no doubt about what the social security clauses mean. I have no doubt that, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will discuss that aspect of the Bill—clauses 10 and 12—in some detail, but let it be said at the outset that, as those clauses now stand, everyone who is in the country with leave to remain, be it permanent or temporary, is disqualified from the receipt of benefit.

The Secretary of State may promulgate regulations that then include those people in the benefit provisions, but it will be done by his grace and favour. If the House had any real understanding of the needs of democracy, it would always vote against a Bill about which the Minister virtually says, "What is written in it may be deplorable, but trust me—I will make it less deplorable by administrative means." If I may say so, if I had to trust a Minister to make a Bill less deplorable than the words suggest, the Home Secretary would be the last member of the Government whom I would expect to move in that direction.

I have no doubt that the Government's intentions are political. The peroration, if that is how it should be described, in the Home Secretary's speech, not to mention the interventions of some Conservative Back Benchers, show that the Bill is supposed to improve morale in the Tory party and, as was said by Conservative party briefers, challenge the Labour party and, in so doing, embarrass it.

Let me make my position clear beyond doubt. I should have been embarrassed only if the Labour party had not met the Bill head on, described its inadequacies and stated that it will vote against it at 10 o'clock tonight, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on doing just that.

I have only one criticism to make of my hon. Friend's speech. He announced, as though it were a surprise to the House, that the Home Secretary was shameless. I should have thought that that was the most established fact in current political understanding. Were that not so, he would not have blandly replied to my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton and me that we should join the Committee—which I am happy to do—to understand the Bill, because he was unwilling or unable to describe its individual provisions.

I wish specifically to address the Bill's employment provisions. They concern me as, in many ways, they will bear hardest on the black and Asian British—such as my constituents—who are not asylum seekers but who are as British as the Home Secretary and I. Before I turn to that issue, I have two questions about the legislation that I hope the Minister of State will condescend to answer when she replies to the debate.

The first concerns a point that I put to the Home Secretary and which he demonstrated he did not understand in the slightest. Clause 1(2) enables the Home Secretary to remove applicants through the fast-track procedure and to send them to what I shall call a third country so long as there is

"in general no serious risk of persecution"

in that country. The Home Secretary gave us the examples of France and Germany, and I think that we all agree that there is no serious or general risk of persecution in those countries.

But what is meant by the words "no serious risk of persecution"? If a country persecutes only one small tribe does it qualify as a country in which there is general persecution? If a leader of a political party has been assassinated but none of his followers has been killed, does that amount to a serious risk of persecution in a country? It seems as though the Bill has been cobbled together in something like a hurry.

New sub-paragraph (3) states that certain things shall be legal so long as they are done in a way that appears to the Home Secretary—"to him"—to be proper. If ever a clause were designed to save a Minister who is constantly contradicted by judges, it is one that contains the words "appears to him". Anyone who has had anything to do with drafting legislation knows full well that "appears to him" means that the Secretary of State can do whatever he wants and, if he gets it wrong, he cannot be held to account.

I ask the Minister of State a second question, which I hope she will answer when she replies to the debate. Clause 4 makes entry into the United Kingdom by deception a criminal offence. There are no exceptions. Does the Minister not understand that, by the nature of their dilemma, asylum seekers do not go to embassies and high commissions, queue to apply for visas and then write in the appropriate box, "I am applying for entry to the United Kingdom because I am being persecuted by the Government of this country"? If that is to be the invariable rule, many genuine asylum seekers will be prevented from entering this country.

Miss Widdecombe: Surely the right hon. Gentleman recognises that people who are obliged to leave their countries by deception can be completely honest and say what they are about when they arrive at our ports. In that way, they would enter our country on a clear understanding.

Mr. Hattersley: That is not what the Bill says. I am hypothesising about a person who may arrive at a port with a visa to which he or she is not entitled. The hon. Lady says that such an applicant could then demonstrate that the visa was obtained deceitfully for a good reason, but she should write that into the Bill because it does not say it at the moment.

In 1934 Mr. Willy Brandt left Germany with a visa to visit Oslo as a student, although he had no place at any educational institution in Norway. The Government of that country—being more progressive than this Government—realised on his arrival that he was a fraudulent applicant, but fortunately they allowed him to remain and to avoid Nazi persecution. In a similar situation, under the terms of the Bill as it now stands, Mr. Willy Brandt or anyone else would not be allowed to enter this country.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is it not also true that if the sort of people to whom my right hon. Friend refers were to spend a few minutes in a country that the Home Office designates as a safe third country their applications would be refused and they would be returned to that safe country?

Mr. Hattersley: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is disturbing to note that Labour Members obviously understand the implications of the Bill far better than Ministers do—or are prepared to say that they do. The Bill does not say that an asylum seeker who deceives the authorities with good reason will gain entry to this country. The hon. Lady must face that fact.

Mr. Stephen: With respect, it appears that the right hon. Gentleman has not understood the Minister of State's intervention. Clause 4 makes it an offence

"if, by deception, he obtains or seeks to obtain leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom".

If a person forges some documents—we all accept that he might have to do that in order to get out of his country—arrives at Heathrow and then says, "These documents are bogus but they had to be forged in order for me to get out; I am a genuine refugee and I seek asylum in this country", how can it be said that that person seeks to enter this country by deception?

Mr. Hattersley: That is what should occur, but the Bill does not say that. If the hon. Gentleman and I serve on the Committee that considers the Bill, we may move an amendment to the clause to ensure that it does.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) *rose—*

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way once more, but I wish to limit my remarks to about 10 minutes as other hon. Members have done.

Ms Abbott: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the comments of Conservative Members reveal that, unlike Labour Members, they have not dealt with immigration cases and the personal problems that arise from them day in and day out? It is that lack of knowledge—or it is malice—that characterises the legislation.

Mr. Hattersley: My final and main point illustrates precisely that. I remind the House and the Home Secretary of the undoubted adverse effect that the Bill's employment clause will have on black and Asian British citizens who are not asylum seekers and who were born here or who became British by registration.

Mr. Deva: We need this Bill now in order to support and engender good race relations in this country.

Mr. Hattersley: I am more pleased that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman than I first thought as his intervention allows me to make another point. I grow sick of hearing people say that repressive legislation is necessary for good race relations in this country. The constant reiteration of the idea that every immigrant is a problem or a threat is bad for race relations. That is what Bills such as this pretend and that is the impression that they create.

I return to the main point of my speech: the Bill's effect on black and Asian British citizens. The consultation document, which addresses how an employer shall decide whether an applicant is entitled to seek and obtain work, begins by being ambiguous about whether national

[Mr. Hattersley]

insurance numbers are sufficient to prove that point. I hope that the Minister will tell us categorically whether the simple presentation of a national insurance number constitutes proof. Eight other ways in which an employer may determine whether an applicant is genuine or bogus have been suggested. The consultation document states that, having obtained some sort of written information, it is the employer's duty to be convinced that the information is prima facie honest and genuine.

To the Secretary of State, with his vast industrial experience, that may not seem like an immense burden on an employer—and it will not be a burden on employers such as ICI or a nationalised industry. However, black and Asian British people live mostly in areas where there are many small employers. Most of the employers in my constituency run two-man businesses that employ six or eight other men and women. There is now 40 per cent. male unemployment in the northern ward of my constituency—and the figure will be higher among the black and Asian British. Half of the black and Asian British people in the northern ward of my constituency are unemployed. When a small employer places an advertisement in the local newspaper for a couple of labourers, 100 or 200 people apply for the positions. An example may be an engineering, tool-making or metal-bashing firm whose books are probably kept by the wife of the boss. It is the type of firm that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister are always saying is oppressed by bureaucratic regulation, that tries to get rid of form filling and is worried about authority. That firm will be told, if the Bill becomes law, that it must ensure that the new man or woman whom it takes on is not a bogus asylum seeker or an illegal immigrant.

The boss of the firm will immediately cross out from the list of applicants all the people whom he or she thinks might possibly be bogus asylum seekers or illegal immigrants. The people crossed out will not be called Howard and Hattersley: they will be called Khan and Patel. I do not suggest for a second that in doing so that employer would be intentionally racist. However, he would be doing what so often happens in this country. Without wishing to and almost without knowing, he would be discriminating against one section of the population.

My primary, overwhelming objection to the Bill is that time after time it forces the British public, British authority and, especially, small British employers to discriminate. I hope that when the Minister of State replies she will tell us—

Miss Widdecombe *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hattersley: She says that she will. That is something to look forward to. I hope that she will tell us whether the scenario that I have described is a figment of my imagination, of the imagination of the trade unions, of the employers' federations, of the Confederation of British Industry and of the chambers of commerce. My fear is that she knows it to be true and does not care, because the object of the Bill is not to improve race relations or to prevent bogus asylum seekers entering the country but to put the Labour party on the spot. Thank heavens we are not on the spot, because we are doing what is right and we are resisting the Bill.

5.30 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) did not make it clear whether he agrees that there is a problem with bogus asylum seekers in this country. He never said so. Nor was it clear from his speech whether the hon. Gentleman has proposals to deal with the problem—if there is one—because he never said so. I am not sure whether he wants everyone who comes from any country which has internal trouble to be allowed to settle in the United Kingdom or not. He did not make that clear either. Anyone wanting to know what the Labour party thinks about the rise in numbers of asylum seekers—about the abuse of the system, about illegal employment, about the drain on taxation, about the burden on housing, and about slowing down the queue of genuine asylum seekers—would be bitterly disappointed after hearing the hon. Gentleman's speech.

The only positive suggestion that the hon. Gentleman made was for a Special Standing Committee to consider the Bill. I would have some interest in a Special Standing Committee as it would comprise the Home Affairs Select Committee—I think that that is what is envisaged by the procedure.

Mr. Spearing: No, it is not.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Whether that is so or not, it would be the type of Committee on which the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee might wish to sit, so I can safely say that I have some interest in the suggestion.

Mr. Spearing: Just for the record, is not the hon. and learned Gentleman aware that a Special Standing Committee is a Standing Committee selected to consider the Bill in the normal way under a Chairman from the Chairmen's Panel, but which is allowed to have three sessions of oral evidence to consider matters relating to the Bill? Does he agree from his judicial and court experience that that would enable the Standing Committee that followed to be better focused, and to produce better discussion and even better legislation?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I served on a Special Standing Committee many years ago, so I doubt whether that would be the end achieved. We considered the Criminal Attempts Bill. The general conclusion was that the Special Standing Committee was a total disaster. As a result of that experience, the Government have set up very few Special Standing Committees.

There was no cross-party conflict about that Bill or its terms. The proposals had received much academic consideration and thought in that Committee, and the Government and the Opposition agreed that some changes needed to be made. It was thought perfectly sensible and desirable that opinion should be tested by the Home Office and representatives from all parties. That was the justification and the reason for that procedure. I cannot claim that in the end we had a much better Bill, and the procedure caused much confusion both in the Special Standing Committee and in what we achieved. One only has to look at a number of the decisions by the Court of Appeal to see how misguided some parts of that legislation had become by the end of the thorough Special Standing Committee procedure.

Mr. Straw: The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the 1981 Criminal Attempts Bill. His experience differs from that of the Minister who served on that Committee and who is now the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. and learned Member for Tunbridge Wells (Sir P. Mayhew). He gave evidence to the Procedure Committee in 1986 recommending the extension of the Special Standing Committee procedure. Based on his experience, the Secretary of State said:

> "I had the very salutary experience of cross-examining two of the leading authorities on criminal law . . . as to the likely effect of a Bill about whose provisions I was already experiencing a sinking feeling . . . At the end of the final sitting of the Special Standing Committee, the draughtsman informed me that not only did the Bill not do what it was supposed to do but that it could not be made to do it."

The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) said in May 1986 that every Minister who had given evidence to the Procedure Committee about his experience of Special Standing Committees said that they had greatly improved the Bills that were brought before the House.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I beg to differ. There is no virtue in prolonging this discussion.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): You have lost the point.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: No, I have not lost the point. I stand by my view that that Committee was a total, utter and complete waste of time. If that conflicts with the conclusions reached by any of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I am sorry. I am entitled to give my opinion and conclusions in the House, and I hope that no Member of the Opposition would want to stop me.

We must ask what a Special Standing Committee would contribute to the problem that we face. Would it tell us any more than we would otherwise learn as the Bill makes its leisurely way through the House? The Bill will have a Committee stage that can last weeks; it will be referred to the House of Lords, where there will be a Second Reading debate and a Committee stage; and it will come back to this House for consideration on Report. The whole procedure will take many weeks and months.

Is it seriously suggested that those who do not like the Bill—because of their membership of a group or lobby or their representative experience—will not be able to make their views known to hon. Members and those in the other place during that time? Will we not know what their objections are to the legislation, on what statistics they will rely, what their individual cases and experiences of hardship may be, what they are prepared to do, how strongly they feel, and how racist they will brand every attempt that is made to curb immigration? What is it that we shall not learn about the fabric, the detail and the intentions of this Bill from the ordinary proceedings of this place? The answer is nothing—as Opposition Members, especially, know. We know from our experience of this place that any section of the community wishing to express a view will not only be able to write to us but will do so. We shall be deluged with material from all sorts of people. There will be nothing to be gained from a Special Standing Committee, except one thing.

Ms Corston: As Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, the hon. and learned Gentleman rightly makes it clear that members of that Committee should form cross-party judgments on the basis of the evidence, not of dogma. What is so different about this Bill?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: But that would be a reason for putting every Bill into a Special Standing Committee, so no legislation, however necessary, would ever be passed by any Government. The hon. Lady makes a fatuous suggestion. However imperfect the process may have been in its initial stages, I am not against the idea that some Bills might benefit from the sensible consideration of more of the evidence—but not a Bill as contentious or as urgent as this one. It is perfectly clear that everyone with an interest in it can make their opinions known to the House one way or the other.

Mr. Madden *rose—*

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I would rather not perpetually answer questions. Like everyone else, I am trying to confine my remarks to 10 minutes, although I am not obliged to do so.

The only real reason for a Special Standing Committee is to delay the Bill so that it cannot reach the statute book in this Session of Parliament. The Opposition spokesman earlier made it clear that the Bill will be fought at every stage of the parliamentary process, both here and in the other place, so it is unlikely to reach the statute book before spring at the earliest, even without a Special Standing Committee.

That being so, a Special Standing Committee would serve only to slow down the legislative process, and perhaps to stop the Bill altogether. That prompts the question: should the legislation be stopped? How urgent is it? I do not know whether Opposition Members believe that there is no abuse of asylum even though there has been a massive increase in the numbers applying for it, at the same time as a massive reduction in the numbers applying for asylum in other European countries. Those countries have tougher rules and do not act as magnets to asylum seekers. Here there is massive expenditure of public money on income support and housing benefit, and sometimes even on jobs—

Mr. Bernie Grant *rose—*

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will catch the Chair's eye at some stage.

I am explaining why the subject is urgent. The statistics prove that there is a great deal of abuse; that is why something must be done about it. In the coming year there may be as many as 70,000 bogus asylum seekers. We know that most of them are bogus because once the tests have been applied only 4 per cent. of them are found to be genuine. I am not going just on the statistics of the independent assessors and adjudicators who have to consider these matters long before they reach Ministers. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary detailed some of the more outlandish cases which Members of Parliament who have to deal with these matters know present themselves every day. Something has to be done about the problem, and quickly, or ever more people will seek to come here and genuine asylum seekers will be kept waiting, not knowing their fate, which is an injustice as great as any injustice that will be discussed here today.

We know that it is not necessary to allow people continually to come here from third countries when the rules state that they should stay in the country where they first arrive. We also know that it is ridiculous that students should be able to complete their courses and then claim to be asylum seekers when they are due to go home. That is a disgrace. Others come as visitors and do not claim

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

asylum while they are visiting, but when the time arrives for them to go home at the end of six months, they suddenly claim asylum. People in the great world outside may not realise that all a person has to do is say "asylum", whereupon the whole contraption of welfare support and assistance comes into play immediately, just as it does for genuine asylum seekers.

Apart from anything else, that is not fair to the many people waiting for housing in London, or to the people complaining about the inadequacy of their social security payments. A great deal of money is being wasted on people who do not deserve it, do not need it and have no right to it. Action must therefore be taken—and it will certainly not be taken if we set up a Special Standing Committee.

Is the Labour party really keen to do something about bogus asylum seekers? I believe that the party is split. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has always branded all legislation to do with home affairs and immigration as "squalid", though he uses the word so frequently that it loses its meaning. There are some like him, however, who honestly believe that this legislation should not be passed—and thus that bogus asylum seekers should continue freely to come to this country, and that illegal immigrants should be able to come and work and take jobs away from those who are not illegal immigrants.

There are also hon. Members among the Opposition parties who, like the overwhelming majority of the British people, think it a matter of common sense that this country has for far too long acted as a magnet to people with no right to come here, although we ought of course always to remain—and under this Government we always will remain—a haven for those genuinely seeking to get away from torture and persecution. The Labour party is therefore torn down the middle. Instead of resolving the matter by an act of positive decision, it proposes to kick the whole issue into touch: "Let's have a Special Standing Committee—let's not ask too closely what we will gain from it; let's just take the saucepan off the boil, put it on the back-burner and talk about other things."

The Labour party is thus not genuinely asking for closer examination of the matter; it is trying to resolve its own internal problems. There is no reason why Opposition Members should go along with such an imperative, and there is certainly no reason why Conservative Members should pander to the Opposition's desire to pretend to appeal to the great British public at the same time as opposing what we are doing. We must do what is right and the Bill demonstrates our determination to do just that.

We are determined to stand up for those who are genuinely and honestly seeking asylum because of persecution and fear of torture. But we must continue to have no truck with people who come here just because they want to improve their lives, and who in so doing drag down the genuine refugees and the lives of those who need jobs, housing, more money to be spent on them and the concern of British people and the British Parliament.

I support the legislation because it is sensible. I thoroughly reject everything that we have heard from the Opposition in the House, on television and on the radio. The House would be senseless if it did not take the opportunity to address a problem that is growing every day.

5.50 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> That this House, while recognising the need to prevent fraudulent claims for asylum, declines to give the Asylum and Immigration Bill a Second Reading because the Bill will adversely affect genuine asylum seekers; believes that designating countries as safe by order is contrary to the law and spirit of international human rights; and further condemns the removal by order of social security provision for asylum seekers, noting that social security spending on asylum seekers amounts to only 0.25 per cent. of the total social security budget, as this will result in the widespread destitution of asylum seekers awaiting the result of appeals against refusal.

I support the amendment standing in my name and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends precisely because, as the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) put it, I care about the reputation of my country and the House. However, it would have been right for the Bill to have been considered by a Special Standing Committee.

The hon. and learned Gentleman said that a range of matters needed to be considered in greater detail. If that is true, surely the less adversarial and combative atmosphere of a Special Standing Committee that could consider the evidence and hear the witnesses would be preferable. Instead, we are now embarked on an exercise which, as the Chairman of the Conservative party put it, has more to do with smoking out opponents than examining issues. Yet again, we are embarked on the legislative process of introducing another Bill, just three years after the 1993 Act and at enormous cost to our reputation, not to mention time and money. It is better to be smoked out as caring about asylum seekers and refugees than to use them as a smokescreen behind which to hide. I fear that the Bill seeks to do just that.

It would have been better to have reviewed the 1993 Act, found a common approach with our European neighbours and accepted the proposal for a Special Standing Committee that the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has placed before us again this evening, and on which I hope there will be a vote.

I want to examine the necessity for and nature of the Bill and to refer briefly to what others have said about it. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) rightly rebutted the charge that it is racist. I agree with him, and I do not believe that the Home Secretary or the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), are racist, but the distinction was well made by Paul Goodman in the *Daily Telegraph* on 26 October:

> "Mr. Howard's proposals are not racist since they will not apply only to ethnic minorities."

He wrote:

> "Mr. Howard is certainly playing, to use that most dog-eared of metaphors, the race card . . . Mr. Howard is playing low politics for high stakes, and proposals to curtail the benefits of asylum seekers, through the responsibility of the Department of Social Security, are essentially part of his package."

The Economist agreed with that and said of the legislation:

> "What difference will it make? It may win a few votes for the Tories. It will make a few people suffer. It will make Britain look mean. And it will erode the liberal anti-authoritarian tradition that sets Britain apart from much of the rest of Europe—which is an odd thing for Britain's nationalist tendency to want to do.".

The Times, in an editorial on 26 October, referred to the 1951 United Nations convention on the status of refugees and said that the Government, in introducing the legislation,

> "could put Britain in breach of that legal obligation . . . They could also sour race relations in this country.".

That bears out the point made by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). It continued:

> "Britain is anything but a 'soft touch' for would-be refugees . . . the way to cut these costs is not to pauperise innocent refugees, and their children, along with illegal immigrants; it is to speed up Britain's sluggish asylum procedures."—

to which I shall refer in just a moment.

My last reference to the opinion of people outside the House is from the Catholic bishops' conference and states:

> "the effect of such a decision would be punitive and de facto will mean the denial of the right of appeal to the very poorest of this vulnerable and disadvantaged group. It is tragic that only two years after giving the right to appeal to asylum seekers, an opportunity to exercise that right is being rendered meaningless. We call on the Government to withdraw these proposals and allocate adequate resources for cases to be decided on efficiently and fairly in keeping with our obligations to the 1951 United Nations convention on the Status of Refugees."

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to tell us what other people say and think, but can he answer the question that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) conspicuously avoided? Do he and his party recognise that there is a problem and, if so, what are his remedies for doing something about it?

Mr. Alton: I shall deal with those points later in my speech. The reasoned amendment on the Order Paper on which there will be a vote this evening sets out my party's position, and I intend to say more about it. First, I want to put the debate into perspective.

Justice, not numbers, should be the issue. All the evidence points not to bogus applications, but to bogus refusals and unjust determinations. The overwhelming number of lengthy delays are caused not by the applicants themselves, as Conservative Members have implied, but by the Home Office. The Bill seeks simply to camouflage the Government's failure to deal with applications efficiently and to provide adequate resources.

The facts that the Government may wish to ignore are undisputable. Prior to the 1993 Act, the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), in a speech issued by the Home Office and another issued by the Conservative party central office, quoted a figure mentioned at the Vienna conference. He said that some 7 million Russians would seek to come here. Before the last general election, he said that some 7 million Russians would wash up on our shores and those of every country in Europe and deluge us. According to the statistical memorandum published by the Home Office in June this year, since 1991 just 1,500 applications have been received from the former USSR and just 10 of those potential 7 million people were accepted as refugees.

If those figures do not impress, the House should consider that between 1986 and 1994, just 30 people were accepted as refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Since General Abacha's coup in 1993, there have been 9,000 asylum applications from Nigeria. Just four of those applicants have been given refugee status and 15 have been given exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. Those facts put the matter into perspective and entitle us to some gentle scepticism when we listen to the repetition of the same scaremongering canards when such Bills are introduced.

It is an incontrovertible fact that Britain receives fewer applications for asylum than many other countries. Germany receives 10 times more than the United Kingdom per million of population. We receive 380 asylum applications per million of our population.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I know that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to give the wrong impression. The reason why so few asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia have been granted asylum is that thousands of them have been allowed to settle temporarily in Britain pending the conclusion of the war.

Mr. Alton: Thousands is a gross exaggeration. The figure is below 2,000. If the hon. and learned Gentleman wishes to make such interventions, he should give the House the facts. Last year, more people left the United Kingdom than arrived in it, with 215,000 people emigrating and 210,000 people immigrating, of whom 90,000 were British citizens. Just 825 were allowed here as refugees and 3,660 were given exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom for a limited period. Only a handful of cases have been deemed to be without foundation, as frivolous or vexatious under the terms of the 1993 Act. Nevertheless, based on that experience, five new categories are being introduced under the without foundation procedures. One is where any evidence submitted in support of an application is clearly false. Anyone who has seen "Schindler's List" knows that refugees have always fled using false papers. In Hollywood, that is worth an Oscar—in this country, it will be worth seven years in prison.

Another awkward fact is that far from making unreasonable demands on our national social security budget, last year asylum seekers accounted for one quarter of 1 per cent. of claimants. Let us view the matter in perspective. Many of those cases would, by definition, have been genuine.

Some individuals will undoubtedly seek to abuse any system, but the greatest reason for unnecessary payments has been Home Office delays. That is an uncontrovertible fact. The Minister of State, who is in her place, has provided me with the information that 3,333 people have waited for five years or more for their applications to be processed—more than 13,000 since 1991, 23,000 since 1993 and 49,000 for more than 11 months. At 31 October this year, 66,000 applications were still awaiting an initial decision.

As the system fails the refugee and the asylum seeker, instead of devoting more resources to tackling the backlog we make a molehill into a legislative mountain. The Minister also informed me that the Bill will require 8,000 hours of civil servants' time and will cost the Home Office—and other Departments will be involved—more than £210,000 to promote. Think how many asylum cases could be processed or refugees helped with that time and those resources.

Many other hon. Members will try to disentangle myth from reality, as I have tried to do, but time does not permit me to do so in more detail. Instead, I shall address the Bill's practical effects and the white list. The Government

[Mr. Alton]

have said repeatedly that all claims will be considered individually and on their merits, but that no longer can that be the case if there is a white list. Little account will be taken of changes in Governments, the risks of real unfairness and the idiosyncrasies of some Governments. Sri Lanka and India, which the Home Secretary mentioned, are likely to be listed—but regional variations, minority questions and local discrepancies make the white list approach wholly undesirable.

The Government point to international experience. They always mention Germany, but fail to mention that countries that do not operate a white list include Italy, Spain, France and Austria. Belgium introduced a designated list but abolished it in 1993. In Germany since 1993, appellants have been given the opportunity to show that, despite the general situation, they are subject to political persecution. The German constitutional court is considering whether that procedure is unconstitutional. A judgment will not be produced until February and use of the procedure has been abandoned in the meantime, yet the House is being offered that procedure today.

The Bill allows the Home Secretary to draw up a white list where it appears to him that

"there is in general no serious risk of persecution."

The fast track is expected to take 10 days, reducing the time available to prepare a challenge. The House should examine that provision closely. The words

"in general no serious risk"

could be interpreted as meaning that, as most of the general population do not claim to have been persecuted, there is no risk of anyone being persecuted. That is nonsense. That provision directly contradicts the 1951 convention.

The Bill uses the term "serious risk of persecution". The 1951 convention only requires the asylum seeker to have a

"well-founded fear of persecution"—

a rather less onerous yardstick. The Government, who have been the casualty in so many judicial reviews, will live to regret the day that they included those words in the Bill. The 1951 convention is being used as a trap, which it was never designed to be, and that use of it is completely against the spirit of the convention.

Today, we have been given the names of countries on the white list on which we have not had a chance to reflect. We have simply been told about them in the course of debate. The Minister recently informed me that designation orders would be laid before Parliament under the negative resolution procedure and that the list of designated countries would be subject to amendment by the same procedure: that is, without debate other than in rare instances—and that could take months, by the time that we have prayed against, tabled motions and the orders have been discussed in Committee. Rarely will they be debated on the Floor of the House. We should jealously guard our privileges and the right to speak out for people for whom nobody else will speak.

In addition to the white list's practical effects, the restriction on the right to appeal, removal of asylum seekers to third countries, denial of any right of appeal while in the United Kingdom, introduction of new immigration offences, employee sanctions that will endanger good community relations, the driving on to the streets of destitute, frightened people—causing incalculable hardship—is a deeply immoral measure. I use that word in response to the Home Secretary's earlier claim that the Bill is a moral measure. It is deeply immoral to place people on the streets, without any concern about what will happen to them. We all know that the burden will fall on local authorities and charities, which are already sufficiently hard-pressed.

Of all the issues on which the Home Office might seek legislation—the availability of knives, age of criminal responsibility, exploitation and degradation of women through computer pornography, prosecution of British nationals involved in international child abuse or any of the other pressing problems of law and order, policing, prison reform and drug abuse—why has the Home Office chosen refugees and asylum seekers yet again? We last considered the matter in 1993. How many letters have Back Benchers received on the subject? I have received not one letter urging action from any of my constituents, but over the past month I have sent the Home Office hundreds of letters from constituents about policing levels in Merseyside. Britain would do better to take a more proactive role in asserting to despotic regimes the importance of human rights.

The United Kingdom values its place in the Security Council and its role as a leading Commonwealth country. The Prime Minister talks about Britain being at the heart of Europe. When the UK fails to give a moral lead, that debases British currency and encourages others to do likewise. At home, law also creates climate. It conditions public opinion—if it is legal, it must be right. Law and public morality are closely aligned. It is time that we recognised and affirmed the contribution that many migrants make to our country.

The Secretary of State and the Minister know well the Torah. In the Book of Exodus, God speaks to Moses about how Israel should live. In the same discourse that contains the 10 commandments, God says:

"Do not ill-treat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt."

If we expect mercy, we must show mercy. Deuteronomy goes further:

"Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien."

Under the terms of the Bill, the Secretary of State would have sent his own family back to Romania.

Miss Widdecombe: That is not true.

Mr. Alton: It is absolutely true.

The recipients of mercy have a special duty to show it to others. The House should recall the last war, when a boatload of young children were repatriated to Vichy France, then sent to Auschwitz because of our failure to allow them to come to this country.

I will conclude with the story of a young, middle eastern couple with no visible means of support, who would have been caught by the terms of the Bill. The young woman was pregnant, and the parentage of the child was controversial. The penalty for alleged adultery was likely to be brutal. The couple were living temporarily in a hovel. The civil authorities were said to abide by a judicial system based on upholding the law, and no doubt would qualify to go on the Government's white list. The local despot was indifferent to such niceties and ran a ruthless, coercive population policy of eliminating children of one gender. He butchered his way to power. The fearful young couple fled with their child. They made it to a safe haven in a foreign land. A home was secured. They worked, and an income was obtained. They stayed until the danger was past. In common with most refugees, they returned home as soon as it was safe to do so. When the boy became a man, he would one day ask this question:

> "When I was without shelter did you give me a roof, when I was without food did you give me food?"

The Bill should be judged against those Judaeo-Christian principles, which were designed for the whole of humanity. It fails to uphold an ancient duty that stretches back 3,500 years. It looks tawdry and disreputable. It deserves not to succeed. I and my right hon. and hon. Friends will be in the Lobby tonight to vote against the Bill and in favour of the amendment.

6.9 pm

Mr. Nicholas Baker (North Dorset): The speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), for whom I have a high regard, leads me to conclude that the passion that he has generally has blinded him entirely: first to the facts as to the need of the Bill; and, secondly, to what the Bill contains, about which I hope to say a little more in a moment.

It is to my intense regret that I am not playing the part that I had hoped to play in introducing the Bill, but I am grateful for the opportunity to welcome it from the Back Benches. It was a privilege to serve in a minor capacity with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. No one seriously interested in law and order in Britain could do other than admire the consistent, energetic, fair and determined way in which he has pursued the promotion of crime prevention; the encouragement of communities to play their part; and the modernising of the police, prison and punishment systems during his term of office. I feel privileged to have been a partner in that endeavour.

I also take this opportunity to say what a privilege it was to work with the civil servants in the Home Office. They served their office well, and none more so than the private office that served me and which now serves my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), the Under-Secretary of State. My resignation was reluctant, but my support for the Prime Minister and the Government is whole-hearted.

I shall briefly address the question of why the Bill is necessary. Immigration—we heard this echoed in some of the comments this evening—is an area where far too few people, even in this place, are prepared to look realistically at the world as it is rather than as we would like it to be. Let me clear out of the way some outdated and, frankly, silly political nonsense: the suggestion made by old Labour—in which, perhaps, until this debate I had included the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and others, including his side kick the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—that this is a racist measure and that there is a race card to be played by its introduction. Such a suggestion is an insult to the British people. In regurgitating that soundbite of the 1960s, the Labour party demonstrates that it is quite out of touch and unfit to govern.

The truth is quite the reverse. People in Britain who are unaffected by immigration, such as my constituents, believe that good race and community relations and firm and fair immigration control are essential, and they will vote for a party that works for both of those. I strongly believe that firm and fair immigration controls are essential to good race relations and that any threat to our system of controls today is also a threat to the good race relations that we fortunately enjoy. In fact, I believe that taking no action on these matters, as many Opposition Members, I fancy, favour, would indeed be an encouragement to racism and would damage our race relations.

I hope that I will be pardoned for saying a little about the good state of race and community relations in Britain today. Thanks to the tolerance, good sense and patience of the white majority and the ethnic minority communities, we are singularly blessed. We can cheer that state of affairs, but we have no right or justification to be complacent in any sense. A great deal of important work is being done to keep our communities together, to ensure that ethnic minorities are encouraged to see and take the opportunities that being British offers. My right hon. and learned Friend is a strong advocate of that approach. Positive work is being done by the Commission for Racial Equality. Opening up the talent of ethnic minorities to the opportunities, for example, in business today is much to be commended, as are the realistic and pragmatic policies that are pursued by Herman Ouseley, chairman of the CRE.

Mr. Bernie Grant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall proceed—

Mr. Grant: The hon. Gentleman is scared to face me.

Mr. Baker: I may be scared, but I do not want to detain the House longer than I should.

Differences in race and colour matter a great deal less in Britain than they did, but numbers matter very much indeed. They matter regardless of race and colour; they matter because this is a relatively crowded island; they matter because of the pressure on the British taxpayer; they matter because of the importance of keeping our communities, diverse as they are, together as Britons. Changes in population put a strain on that task. There is no escaping the fact that those strains threaten good race relations. Any responsible politician who cares about our country and our people—of all ethnic groups—must accept that numbers have to be restrained, and firm and fair immigration controls are essential. Leaders of ethnic minorities understand that and, privately, say so.

I urge Opposition Members to look for a moment at what is happening to the world beyond our shores. More and more people are on the move, because they want to improve their standard of living. The democracy and prosperity that we enjoy in this country are far from universal. Governments in the third world who observe what we would regard as minimum standards of competence and democratic accountability are a minority. Opposition Members may like to pretend that that is not so, but they are deluding themselves. As means of communication, travel and information spread, more [illegible]ple seek to go to countries where there is stability, prosperity and the rule of law.

In September, I visited four countries in Africa to discuss mutual problems in that field, and met considerable and welcome co-operation. One of the

[Mr. Baker]

problems was that of unaccompanied children, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) referred. The Governments there pointed out to me, sharply, that to their citizens—often the most enterprising or determined ones—the raft of social security benefits and jobs available in Britain today constitute a powerful magnet to come to the developed world. Further, when would-be immigrants use the asylum-seeking method, it has to be part of their case that they face persecution in their own country. Thus, by what we offer, we are enticing some good people away from their country whom their country does not wish to lose, and in the process they are giving their country, in the majority of cases where the claims are bogus, an undeserved bad reputation. That can affect the attitude of aid donor countries and investors. The complaints of countries in that position, as represented to me, are understandable.

No one looking at the number of asylum seekers coming to Britain today could be other than very concerned. From 4,000 in 1988, the figure, as we have heard, is approaching the 1991 peak of 45,000, and there is a growing backlog of 66,000 or more. The present system of control, administration and appeals is in danger of being overwhelmed, despite considerably increased resources being applied. I was not impressed by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, who asked for more resources and then complained about the very resources that are being applied in the Bill to strengthen the controls that we need.

The Government would be irresponsible not to address these issues and tackle the magnetic package of social security benefits, housing and jobs which is exerting a strong pull today on economic migrants from countries in east Europe, Africa and elsewhere in the third world. Failure to act would have serious consequences for race relations in Britain. There would be a further consequence of such failure. At present, Britain abides strictly to its commitment to the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees. Nothing in the Government's current proposals or the Bill would affect that commitment. But the 95 per cent. of current asylum seekers whose claims are found to be bogus not only threaten our control system and the taxpayer but crowd out the genuine refugees. Those of us who want Britain's commitment to the 1951 convention to be maintained must be concerned about the consequences of failure to reduce the flow. Those consequences might require a review of our commitment, which my hon. Friends and I do not want.

Parts of the Bill address the little-known but growing trade of racketeering, and are particularly welcome. I am delighted that facilitation of the entry of an asylum claimant for reward and acquisition of leave to remain by deception are to be criminal offences. Some of the poorest people in the world are being exploited by that evil trade, which operates internationally.

Racketeering operates at different levels. In one set of cases, sharp-eyed immigration officers noticed that a number of unrelated asylum applicants were giving precise details of the torture and other treatment of their relations, which, although they related to cases apparently many miles apart, were exactly the same. It emerged that their cases featured no similarities, and that they were singing from hymn sheets provided by racketeers.

When I visited Ethiopia recently, I was presented with a document. I have it here. It is a genuine Somali passport which was obtained in the market place for the equivalent of £10—part of a consignment of genuine Somali passports that had been stolen and given to would-be illegal immigrants. At Campsfield house I met Chinese peasants from a village not far from Beijing, who were existing in relative comfort and good order. They were furious with the racketeers who had relieved them of their life savings in return for a clear passage to this country and jobs at the end of it—an expectation in which they had been deceived.

In China, Asia and Africa, racketeers are promoting the trade of misleading poor people about their prospects in Europe, relieving them of their life savings and arranging transport and advice on how to break our controls. Others in Britain and on the continent are participating in the rackets. It is good to know of our increasing success in catching racketeers, and of provisions in the Bill that will be of great assistance in preventing exploitation and circumvention of our controls.

Racketeers exploit the poor, and prejudice the genuine refugees to whom we are committed. They should be pursued vigorously, and punished. Greater international co-operation will be required to tackle the problem, and the "good governance" condition of the provision of aid for third-world countries should include co-operation on the part of their Governments.

I hope that the Bill will give a clear signal that abuse of our asylum procedures will be checked. Coupled with other measures—including benefits restrictions—it will make it clear that Britain is not a soft option, and cannot provide housing, education and jobs for those who are moving for economic reasons. Our commitment to genuine refugees, however, will remain.

I support my right hon. and learned Friend's commitment to firm and fair immigration controls. I hope that, if further action becomes necessary, he will consider it in due course; meanwhile, the protection of our frontiers, the preservation of good race and community relations and the interests of our ethnic minorities in particular require that commitment to be maintained.

6.23 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) paid tribute to race relations in this country, and praised the patience of white people. But good race relations does not mean whites tolerating blacks; good race relations means people of all ethnic origins co-operating to create a harmonious society. What is wrong with the Bill—and the reason why I shall vote against it—is that it will damage race relations, and will make ethnic minorities the objects of discrimination and scrutiny that I, as a Jew, would not tolerate or accept.

Let me say immediately that I do not believe that bogus asylum applicants should be allowed to remain in this country. Not only should illegal immigrants be given no work in this country; they should not be allowed to be here.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Let me proceed for a moment or two.

The Government, however, have provided no evidence that the Bill will deal with those problems. In his statement in the House last month and his speech this afternoon, the Home Secretary presented carefully manipulated figures relating to both illegal immigration and asylum seekers that bear no serious scrutiny. He says that the number of known illegal immigrants has risen: he talks of a figure of 10,000 now, compared with 4,000 a short time ago. That does not mean that the number of illegal immigrants has risen; it merely means an increase in the number who are known about.

The Home Secretary said himself this afternoon that the precise number of illegal immigrants was unknown. The Bill will not reduce the number of such immigrants; what it will do—as I shall illustrate, and as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) pointed out—is place people who have every legal right to be here under intolerable pressure.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the right hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to a time when he was certainly in Parliament, although he may not have been a Minister? The then Labour Government granted an amnesty to illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. Did the right hon. Gentleman support that policy? He has just told us that he is opposed to people remaining here illegally, and to the bogus asylum seekers whom he is trying to expose.

Mr. Kaufman: That Labour Government were dealing with a backlog dating from a time when there had been extreme discrimination against immigration applications. I think that it was Mr. Roy Jenkins who, as Home Secretary, cleared the board. As one who represents many thousands of members of ethnic minorities, let me make it clear that I am against illegal immigration into this country. The Bill, however, does not establish that there is now more illegal immigration than there was. It does not quantify illegal immigration, and nor do the Government; they simply give the figures they know.

As for the Government's statistics relating to asylum seekers, they are as bogus as any bogus asylum seeker. In his statement foreshadowing the Bill, the Home Secretary boasted about the number of additional places provided for Yugoslav asylum seekers. Today's *Daily Telegraph*, however, points out that this country has accepted 7,000 Yugoslavs since the beginning of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, while Germany has accepted 350,000. The Government do not seem to have anything to be proud of, and it struck me as bizarre that the Home Secretary should boast about the matter.

Mr. Deva: Is it not a fact that Germany took a large number of Croatian refugees because it had had a close relationship with that country for many years?

Mr. Kaufman: Of course there is a good reason why Germany has taken more refugees. I am saying that it ill becomes the Government to boast of having taken 7,000, as though that were an achievement. Let me also say to the hon. Gentleman, in every good spirit, that he reminds me of the Germans in the late 1930s who believed that racial discrimination would never hit them. We are all together in this. As a reasonably prosperous Member of the House of Commons, the hon. Gentleman thinks that he is all right. He is like the German Jews in Berlin who thought that they were all right, but in the end they came for all the Jews, and in the end they will come for everybody in ethnic minorities.

The Home Secretary spoke about the trend in this country being different from that in the rest of western Europe, but that depends upon which parts of western Europe we choose. *The Daily Telegraph* published figures today which show that, last year in Holland, there were 52,576 applications for asylum 52,576, compared with 32,800 in this country. That was a rise of 50 per cent. in Holland. The Home Secretary says that, in some countries, there has been a big fall in the number of applications. There has been a big fall in Germany, but it is to 127,000 applications, compared with 32,800 in this country.

The Home Secretary said that the number of applications here has grown from 2,000 a month at the start of 1994 to 4,500 in October, and he gave a higher figure for November. But monthly figures are meaningless. He says that this year's applications are expected to top 40,000, but in 1991 there were 44,840 applicants. There is nothing exceptional about this year.

I am glad that the hon. Member for North Dorset is in the Chamber. He compared the number of applications last year—32,830—with only 3,998 in 1988. He did not say that the number of acceptances in 1994 was 825, and that in 1988 it was 628. The issue is not the scale of the applications but the number of acceptances, which have fallen. Last year, 825 refugees were accepted, a lower number than in all but one of the previous five years. Exceptional leave to remain was granted to 3,660 last year, which is far lower than in 1992 and 1993, and lower than in three of the past five years.

Today's issue of *The Daily Telegraph* states that 4 per cent. of applications are accepted, compared with 8 per cent. in Germany and 28 per cent. in France. Therefore, this country is not being flooded with refugees. The number of people admitted, either as refugees or as persons given exceptional leave to remain, is small. The Government are policing asylum seekers quite effectively. Let us look at the question of applications, because that is what we are being scared about—people clamouring to come here. But hardly any are allowed to remain.

At the end of last year, there were 55,255 outstanding applications. In response to my intervention, the Home Secretary said that there are now 60,000. In 1991, there were 72,070 and there are not many more now than there were in 1992 or 1993. A tiny number of people are granted asylum or given leave to remain. The Home Secretary told us in a statement last month that applications will be processed far more effectively. On 20 November, he said that he was allocating an extra £37 million to the processing of applications.

The problem is not the number of people who are being given asylum or exceptional leave, because hardly any are. It is not the processing of outstanding applications, because they have not risen, especially compared with recent years, and more money is being made available to deal with them anyway.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Madden: The hon. and learned Gentleman would not give way to anybody during his speech.

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to him.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: If the right hon. Gentleman is right, why on earth does he support a Special Standing Committee?

Mr. Kaufman: I support it because it would be quite useful for hon. Members to be able to interrogate the

[Mr. Kaufman]

Home Secretary, so that the Home Secretary and his Minister of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Ms Widdecombe), who is winding up, cannot engage in obfuscatory flannel. In a Select Committee, people can be interrogated and forced to answer, but the Home Secretary and his Minister of State do not want to be forced to answer, because they cannot answer questions about the Bill's clauses. As I shall later show, the Government seem totally unaware of the implications of those clauses.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I mentioned him. After that, I shall not give way, so that other hon. Members may participate in the debate.

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman quoted me, although not absolutely accurately. However, he was broadly right. Does he accept that the asylum figures emanate from a system that is independent of the Government, and that the number is therefore determined independently? Secondly, the figures he quoted show that the number of bogus applicants has risen dramatically, thereby showing the need for the Bill.

Mr. Kaufman: No. Bogus applicants are turned down, and do not somehow get in in another way. The Bill will not improve that situation at all: it will remove benefit and access to housing and so on, but it will not reduce the numbers. Conservative Members seem obsessed with the number of black and brown faces in this country.

Mr. Deva: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. I have given way to the hon. Member for North Dorset, and I should like to proceed.

What measures are being taken? The Government document on the compliance cost assessment shows an admission by the Government that employers' costs will be absolutely enormous. There will be an initial cost and a continuing cost. The initial cost will be £13,524,000, and, according to the Government, every year there will be a cost of £11,451,000.

The way in which the Government quantify those costs would make Monty Python envious, because they deal with the notional costs of photocopying for those who own photocopiers, and notional costs for those who do not. The document has been compiled by a berserk infant, but let us accept the figures. Employers will simply not accept such costs, or the burdens that will be imposed upon them of looking at all kinds of documents, passports, photocopies, naturalisation and birth certificates and so on.

Employers will say, "We are not going to be bothered with all this." The more than 1 million small employers whom the Government cannot even quantify, and the number of which they are guessing at because they do not even know those figures, will say, "We are not going to do this." If they receive an application through the post, and the applicant involved has an easily discernible Asian name, that applicant will never be seen. Employers will not subject themselves to that.

If an applicant has a name such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), he might get as far as walking through the door for the interview, but, once employers find that they must go through all the procedures laid down in the Bill, they will not do it. The Government are therefore building in to this whole procedure a prejudice against the possibility of employing either black or Asian people.

There is discrimination in relation to benefit. The Minister of State, Home Office has told us that we can rely on her good will and charm. If that were the case, I would emigrate myself. I ask her to respond specifically to the points that I, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) have made about clauses 10 and 12. I and my Asian constituents are not looking for her good will, because, as I said, they are sensible. We are looking for her explanation of how a Bill that says that no immigrant

"shall be entitled to child benefit"

is tolerable.

Miss Widdecombe: Such people must satisfy prescribed conditions.

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister keeps babbling away and talking about the escape clause of satisfying prescribed conditions, but one must satisfy the conditions: the Bill says that one is not eligible for child benefit unless one satisfies the conditions. All the rest of the population are eligible for child benefit without having to satisfy the conditions. Only black and Asian people must satisfy conditions before they are eligible for child benefit.

The Bill has racial prejudice built right into it. There is discrimination in child benefit, there is discrimination in treatment of applicants, there is discrimination in considering documents, and there is discrimination in interviewing procedures.

I fear that, by participating in the debate at all, I too am joining in the worst discrimination of all. Millions of our fellow citizens are being talked about as though they cannot hear. Our Asian and black constituents are being talked about as potential invaders of our country, and as potential bogus applicants for housing benefit and for social security benefit. They are being talked about as though they cannot hear what we are saying, and as separate, different and inferior. I find that absolutely intolerable on behalf of my constituents.

I as a Jew find it utterly intolerable that anyone should introduce legislation that does not affect me now, but that would have affected my parents and the parents of Conservative Members, and they would not like to be talked about as though they were not there either. The Bill's implicitly racist condescension is even more despicable than the intentions of the Bill itself.

In a letter that I received today, the Bishop of Manchester said about the Bill:

"The ultimate concern is that we find ways of honouring and valuing one another as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in one human family. That is not to say that this country should have entirely open borders"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I started by saying that myself. The Bishop continues:

"but it is to say that we need to find ways of establishing goodwill rather than enmity and insecurity"—

which the Bill establishes. The Bishop goes on:

"So the character of our legislation and regulations is important; and the way in which we talk about this subject, the language and tone that we adopt, is crucial."

The language and tone of Conservative Members explain why the Bill has been introduced. The problem is not illegal immigrants, although I condemn illegal immigration. The problem is not bogus asylum seekers, although I condemn the people who make bogus asylum applications. The problem is that the Government are 30 per cent. behind in the opinion polls, in the last full Session before the general election. They have run out of cards to play, so, as usual, the Tory party is playing the race card. It thinks that we are going to run away from it. Thank God the Labour party is not running away from it, and I will be honoured to vote against the Bill tonight.

6.45 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) may fancy his skill with a pen, but his grasp of simple mathematics is not much to talk about. The whole point about the numbers that he has toured through is that the number of genuine Geneva convention cases has not increased, but the number of bogus asylum seekers has, and that is what the Bill deals with. I and, I am sure, many people in the House will resent the politically correct pressure that he applies in seeking to ensure that this subject cannot be debated openly and without undue emotion.

I support the Bill but, in doing so, I shall urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to ensure that their proposals are seen to be fully workable, and that existing legislation is made to work effectively as well. Nothing in what the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has said justifies the need for a Special Standing Committee procedure, and nothing that he and his colleagues have said justifies the claim that the Bill is a racist measure.

The great majority of people in this country, regardless of ethnic origin, recognise that illegal immigration is a serious and growing problem that costs the taxpayer dear. That alone bothers fair-minded people, who are neither racist nor unwelcoming to the millions of visitors that the United Kingdom receives each year, nor resentful of the small number of genuine refugees who need our support and help.

Nowhere is the problem more obvious than in the rapidly growing number of bogus asylum seekers with which the Bill deals. Although the number of genuine Geneva convention cases turns out to be fairly constant, and the number of cases with exceptional leave to remain has been constrained, I am pleased to say, since 1993, the total number of applications has rocketed because more and more bogus claimants join the queue, as a way of staying on, courtesy of the British taxpayer. As a number of hon. Members have said, it takes far too long to process cases. Genuine applicants, suffering the trauma of recent persecution, can be held up in that queue without the help that they need and deserve, while, perversely, the attractions of making a bogus claim grow as the queue takes ever longer to process.

On 20 November, the Home Secretary told the House that 75,000 asylum applicants cost more than £200 million in benefit. I suspect that that figure errs massively on the side of caution. When the full range of social security still available to asylum seekers is added to the cost of local authority accommodation, school places and health care, the real cost of the asylum queue must be much closer to £500 million a year or more. Add to that the benefits, housing, jobs and school places taken up by unknown numbers of illegal immigrants and overstayers—here without so much as a "by your leave"—and the overall costs are, without a shadow of doubt, substantial. There is, therefore, good reason to consider fresh immigration controls, provided that they can be made to work and to deliver practical results, and provided that the new policy ideas do not divert attention from the key operational priority of making the existing legislation work as it should. New policies by themselves do not help the immigration service tighten its grip on offenders. That is achieved by the hard slog of middle-ranking officials away from the public eye who pursue case after case, asking only in return for sufficient resources, backing for their judgment with minimum interference and a consistent set of rules to apply.

Where the rules can be improved to extend the powers of the immigration officers, it must be done practically. Most practitioners in the Home Office's middle ranks would, I think, tell senior officials and the Ministers whom they advise that to process the queue of 75,000 asylum applicants will take additional resources, manpower and facilities—within the asylum division and the appellate section of the Lord Chancellor's Department—of substantially more than the £37 million announced by the Home Secretary.

I told the Home Secretary two years ago that as in business, so in Government, if one wants to remove large chunks of overhead, one sometimes has to spend first in order to realise savings. My estimate is that it will probably take £150 million a year for two years, including set-up and temporary redeployment costs, to reduce the queue to a manageable work-in-progress level of three months. That is an incremental outlay of £300 million to realise savings of much more than that amount year in, year out. To a public expenditure hawk like me, that must make good sense. Once the queue is removed, the very attraction of the bogus application is destroyed. If the Home Secretary can make headway in this respect, he will be hailed as a hero, but if the policy statements and debates subside into administrative inertia, doubts about the Government's competence will grow in the mind of the electorate who urgently want the problem resolved.

I deal now with specific aspects of the Bill, beginning with clause 1. There is no reason why there should not be a fast-track procedure for applicants from manifestly safe third countries. It has long been the practice of the asylum division to gather up-to-date information on conditions in other countries using a variety of sources, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, international bodies and, where appropriate, other friendly Governments. It must be reasonable that applicants from obviously safe countries should expect their cases to be heard under such a fast-track procedure.

The House may wish to recall that the terms of the relevant convention are necessarily narrow. People who are hounded in one region of their home country but who can live safely in another part of it do not qualify as Geneva convention refugees. In that regard, I should tell the House about my visit to Sri Lanka in, I think, 1992. While there, I came across clear evidence that some people had come to this country, applied for asylum and been placed in the queue but who had obtained a second Sri Lankan passport. They left Britain with it and travelled to India, down to southern India and across to Sri Lanka to holiday with their families before returning here on that second passport to resume their place in the asylum queue.

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

Despite all the terrible problems that we have witnessed in Nigeria, the question that must be asked in Geneva convention terms is whether there is any part of that country to which it would be safe for an asylum seeker to return.

I deal now with clause 5. Another welcome provision is the penalties against asylum racketeers.

Mr. Bernie Grant *rose—*

Mr. Wardle: I shall not give way although the temptation to do so is considerable. I sometimes miss the energetic exchanges that I had with the hon. Gentleman in Committee and on the Floor of the House, but, for the moment, discretion must be the better part of valour.

I was referring to racketeers, the shadowy gang bosses who manipulate and mistreat hapless would-be immigrants. Frequently, these racketeers fleece a whole village community in some far-flung country. The community subscribes to the plane ticket and protection fee for one would-be entrant. They put the new arrival to anonymous sweated labour here and collect his social security benefits. That is not acceptable, and we should do something about it. Indeed, the Bill deals with that problem.

The tightening of housing benefit and social security rules in clauses 9 and 10 is long overdue, but I suspect that town halls and Benefits Agency offices will need a great deal of encouragement to make the new provision work. It will be easier said than done but these changes are nevertheless urgently needed.

I am less confident about clause 8. The principle is fine, but, in practice, I suspect that we shall face problems. Clause 8 places a new responsibility on employers not to hire people who have no entitlement to work in this country. That is fair provided that the Government make available to employers a foolproof and unbureaucratic method of identifying those with a right to work.

Frankly, the Home Secretary has yet to convince me that the use of national insurance numbers for that purpose will do the trick for stronger immigration control. I suspect that it is likely to lead to endless legal wrangles and charges of prejudice in employment, some of which will be borne out unless a better system is put in place. I fear that employers will regard it—there is already some evidence to this effect—as a complete reversal of the Government's deregulation mode. Clause 8 will be in danger of having as little effect as the existing, long-standing but little used penalty for harbouring an illegal immigrant. While the idea behind clause 8 is a thoroughly good one, I believe that it will have real force only if it is accompanied by the use of identity cards. That is the way to tackle that important problem.

Employers and the electorate as a whole will also want to see that the Government are playing their part in immigration control by making sure that Britain's perimeter fence—our border controls—is secure. That is relevant to every piece of immigration legislation. The European Commission must not be allowed to have its way and dismantle our borders with the rest of the European Union.

While the Prime Minister's recent very public pledge that our frontier checks are not negotiable is most welcome, it does not sit easily with his repeated claim, or that of the Home Secretary, that the general declaration concocted by Margaret Thatcher at the 1985 Luxembourg intergovernmental conference will somehow protect the United Kingdom from the unequivocal objective of article 7A of the treaty with all that that implies for immigration in this country. It will do nothing of the kind, as Baroness Thatcher has now admitted. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who was Home Secretary during the Maastricht negotiations, has also admitted as much. I believe that the House was effectively misled in that regard when it ratified the legislation leading to a single market.

Officials and legal advisers have been consistent in their warnings that Britain is on a collision course with Europe over frontiers and that the British public will not tolerate that. Still the Government appear to waver, presumably hoping that the problem will not surface until the next Parliament, instead of tackling it, as they should, on the next IGC agenda.

In the words of two recently retired grade 2 Home Office officials,

> "The inevitable collision with Europe over frontiers"

will undermine the provisions of the Bill and all existing immigration law. It will mean a major redeployment of the immigration service and it will impose new burdens on the police which have not even been planned. To avoid that catastrophe and to make sense of the Bill, the Government must make clear their determination to amend EU law.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I remind the House of Madam Speaker's ruling that there is to be a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm.

6.58 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): While listening to the debate, I have had two overwhelming feelings. The first is that I have been here before and the second is that the general election cannot be very far away. In fact, we have been here seven times before because, since 1979, this Conservative Administration have introduced seven Bills relating to immigration, asylum and nationality. Coincidentally, the most recent two were introduced before the 1987 and 1992 general elections. Not only were those Acts viewed by many as wholly unnecessary—indeed, they still are viewed as such—but the Government bolted on to them some measures that became extremely unpopular and unworkable. Bolted on to the previous Bill concerning asylum was the abolition of appeal rights for those refused a visitor's visa, which, as many hon. Members know, has resulted in widespread disappointment and misery for many people who have been denied opportunities to visit this country.

Recently, a Foreign Office Minister and officials at the Department admitted to me that processing the 7,000 representations made every year by Members on behalf of people who had been denied visit visas costs more than the right of appeal used to cost.

Bolted on to this Bill is a scheme to penalise employers who are found to be employing illegal entrants, and other measures that will cause extreme difficulty, especially the denial of child benefit to many who have been settled here for many years. That includes overseas students who are the parents of children and have previously been entitled to child benefit.

Mr. Stephen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Madden: No, I shall be making a very short speech and I wish to make some further remarks.

The House must also realise the extraordinary difficulty that will be caused to thousands of asylum seekers, as well as thousands of children belonging to those asylum seekers, by the denial of benefit in the period between the refusal to grant asylum and the outcome of an appeal. That delay can now take up to two years. Is this House seriously asking the country to accept that thousands upon thousands of families will have no income at all for a period of up to two years?

We must question the necessity for the Bill. It is widely seen outside the House as extremely bad. The Immigration Law Practitioners Association says:

> "Even on a cursory reading this bill is poorly drafted, ambiguous, uncertain in its ambit and draconian in scope. It is likely to result in extensive and costly litigation. A number of its provisions will be unworkable in practice and expensive to administer."

I was very pleased to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle)—the previous Minister but three responsible for immigration. Most of us would regard his speech as not exactly that of a full-hearted supporter of the Bill. Indeed, I was interested to note that, as recently as March, the hon. Gentleman said:

> "It is important to ensure that the Asylum Act of 1993, which has only been in place two years, works before we rush through a future piece of legislation."

He has said much the same today. He pointed to what needs to be done. We do not need more legislation, we need sufficient resources to ensure that those who are seeking asylum are dealt with efficiently, promptly, expeditiously and according to natural laws of justice. That can be done by administrative action. It does not need further legislation.

In his statement, the Home Secretary said:

> "We also need to do more to speed up asylum appeals. A consultancy report last year found evidence of deliberate time wasting."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 337.]

I understand that that report, by KPMG Peat Marwick, said:

> "there is little incentive for appellants and their representatives to co-operate with the Home Office and the Immigration Appellate Authority in moving appeals briskly through the system."

However, KPMG said that it found no significant evidence of the appellants and/or their representatives deliberately seeking to delay the process.

In its briefing to Members before this debate, Amnesty International United Kingdom said—I apologise for the length of the quotation but it is most important:

> "These figures indicate that most of the delay in resolving asylum applications is caused by the Home Office itself: of the 18.4 months it takes, on average, to fully resolve an asylum application, 12.8 months—or 70 per cent.—is taken up by the Home Office's initial determination (8.7 months) and its processing of the appeal (4.1 months). And there is little if anything that applicants and their advisers can do to prolong the Home Office's processing of the appeal, as it is simply a case of waiting for the Asylum Division to prepare its response to the appeal and send the appeal papers to the IAA. Accordingly, until the appeal is listed by the IAA, applicants and their advisers have no means of delaying the appeal process, even if they wanted to. Moreover, the Home Office has failed to produce any significant evidence of appellants and or their representatives delaying appeals listed by the IAA."

That could have been said by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle. Clearly, as a Minister who was on the front line for several years, he knows where the problem lies: in the bureaucracy of the Home Office and its failure to process claims in an expeditious, fair and just way.

The designated third country—the so-called white list—will give rise to more and more problems. On the radio on Friday, I heard the Minister, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), commenting on a Nigerian who was seeking to campaign against deportation back to Nigeria. The hon. Lady said that the issue was not that he came from a country which had a nasty regime, but that the applicant must prove that he would face persecution if he were returned to that country.

Miss Widdecombe: Of course.

Mr. Madden: One wonders what the hon. Lady requires to be able to ensure an offer of asylum or a refugee place in this country. Even if that person were to offer a personally signed letter from General Abacha saying that he was not well disposed towards the person, the automatic response of the Home Office, and indeed the Foreign Office, would be to question the authenticity of the document. How many of us have faced time after time in case after case allegations that the documents offered by applicants were false and therefore should not have any heed paid to them?

The Minister is rapidly acquiring a reputation, which she began gaining at the Department of Social Security, as the Madame Defarge of the Home Office. She makes much of her Christian beliefs, but we do not see much evidence of Christian charity or compassion surging through her veins. Still less do we see such charity and compassion flowing through the veins of the Home Secretary. I agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) that there is one certainty: if the Bill had been law when the Home Secretary's father sought refuge in this country, he would have undoubtedly been refused. That cannot be denied by any hon. Member.

I shall quote briefly from an editorial in *The Guardian* on 18 November, under the heading,

> "The exodus of the refugees
>
> Another Nigerian may be deported without proper reason".

The editorial described the case of a person who was seeking a judicial review, and it said:

> "But the judicial review can only look at whether officials went through the correct procedures—not whether they reached the right conclusion."

It concludes:

> "The question remains: what does it take to win refugee status in the UK today?"

That is the question that hangs over this debate.

The more that I listen to the Home Secretary and Home Office Ministers, the less convinced I am on this seventh occasion that this miserable legislation is required. What is required is a determination to deliver the resources to ensure that processing can be done fairly, expeditiously and in accordance with natural justice.

The alternatives proposed by the Bill will cost millions in additional public expenditure. What will be the cost of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for all those people

[Mr. Madden]

denied benefit? What will be the cost of taking thousands of children into care? What will be the cost of stripping child benefit and other benefit entitlements from people who have lived in this country for a score of years? The Government should think of the difficulties that they are storing up by pandering to the hysteria for something to be done about a threat that does not exist.

7.10 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): A thread of realism has run through all the words that we have heard so far. It was evident in the speeches of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) and it concerns the procedures necessary to implement existing legislation as well as the Bill.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for quoting me so much. Everything that I have said on the subject I have said because I feel strongly that race relations and asylum are important elements in our society. Everything that I have said and tried to do has been an effort to get it right this time. It has been said that, in 1993, many people could point to deficiencies in the legislation and the fact that it could not solve the problem. One is anxious that we do not fall into the same trap this time round.

I have much experience with refugees because I have been chairman of the Africa committee of the British Refugee Council for more than 12 years and have travelled widely in countries in which one has seen the disruption, concern and horror with which people are confronted. My concern is that the perception of the Bill will not be as helpful as many of us would like.

While I have been involved with the problem, the figures and the countries from which people have come have varied from year to year because asylum seekers, as opposed to economic migrants, tend to come from different countries for different reasons. Recently, an element of confusion has arisen from economic migrants using asylum as a mechanism. The truth is that most asylum seekers come from different countries for different purposes at different times.

In one sense it is understandable that we are seeking to introduce rules and regulations to prevent the system from being abused. We have heard a great deal about genuine asylum seekers, but I am concerned that the rules will be used to their detriment.

The 1951 convention is tight enough—Britain had a great part to play in it. Who could have imagined the events that the world community has seen since then? During the cold war, refugees were encouraged. They were subsidised in West Germany, if they were brave enough to cross the Berlin wall. Client states in Africa were subsidised by different countries to support one of the two major powers.

We have seen outbreaks of internal conflict, ethnic cleansing, civil wars and mass migration. Since 1951, there has also been two-way vision. People tend to forget that, while we watch the terrible events in Rwanda on television, the Rwandans can watch us and see our standards and way of life. With easier travel it is not surprising that there is pressure for people who seek a better way of life to come to this country.

In the past, we had the safeguard of exceptional leave to remain, which is an understandable and humane concept. All hon. Members must have had constituency experience of that. With a major university in my constituency, I have had to deal with many cases of people who would not have qualified under the 1951 convention. One's heart goes out to people in such tragic situations and one can give them exceptional leave to remain. Of those seeking asylum, 4 per cent. qualify and 20 per cent. are granted exceptional leave to remain.

The 1951 convention cannot define all the different human situations that people have to face. I was concerned to hear my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker)—an ex-Minister—say that we should look at that convention. It is tight enough already and it should certainly not be made any tighter.

I am worried about the overall impression that we are giving through measures that will deny support to people who are still using the legal right that we gave them in the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. Which people will be most affected? It will be those from Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana. Although one has no intention of involving race, inevitably the perception will be that those are the people whose benefit will be withdrawn. As my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said, it will be perceived that they are causing the problem and it is a London, not a Nottingham, problem. My real fear is that, for the first time in this country, we will create a sub-culture of totally dispossessed people, who will have no mechanism and no rights. In other countries, they talk of "illegals". We have not had that system here.

A further concern is that we are acting—or so we are told—to implement various European Community rules. One document—I have no way of proving whether it is true—concludes that

> "the Bill imports the restrictions of the EU resolutions agreed to by the UK, without importing all of the safeguards or qualifications."

I should like the Minister to clear up that matter. Anyone with any concern for human rights and refugee groups would want to know that we have done both—that, if we have imported one part, we have certainly also imported the balance.

Other hon. Members have mentioned employment. Again, it is the perception of the Bill that will cause the problems. It has already been proven that people with passports with exceptional leave to remain have been asked by employers to check with the Home Office and let them know that they are cleared. Because of the time that has taken, employers have said, "Thank you very much, but we don't want you any longer", even though the person concerned has an absolute right to work.

I very much welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister will clear up the questions over clauses 9 and 10. I suspect that the way in which the Immigration Act 1971 has been subsumed into this Bill will cause much concern among many people who are here legitimately and who work here and pay taxes. We need to clear up now exactly where they stand.

The hon. Member for Blackburn quoted exactly what I said when my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary introduced the legislation. I asked whether a mechanism could be found and I did so because I thought that the Special Standing Committee proposal placed my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in an unfair position.

I accept the word of the hon. Member for Blackburn that the Opposition did not intend to bounce the Prime Minister, but raising such an issue on the Queen's Speech without any prior warning was not the way to lower political tension and to take matters forward in a sensible and balanced way.

I still hope that a mechanism can be found by which all those who have a long tradition of involvement with refugees and immigration issues can test the Bill during its passage and ensure that it is right.

I am especially concerned about whether the Bill fulfils our international legal obligations. The sort of people about whom we are concerned—whom I have met and known through the years—have no voice here except for the voices of those of us who are speaking now. They have no spokesman to defend their rights other than the international agreements and the obligations that we freely enter into and observe. There is some doubt that the processes of the Bill fulfil those international obligations. It is essential that we clarify beyond reasonable doubt both the letter and spirit of the international obligations.

I am a troubled Back Bencher—not for the first time. This is an issue about which I am greatly concerned; it is one of the few issues that keeps me awake at night, and that is saying something. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and Ministers will accept that there is a lot to play for. I would deplore, and I know that the Prime Minister—I honour everything that he believes—deplores, this issue being used in any way at all that damaged race relations and the genuine interests of asylum seekers. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, we have had a proud record of being a haven for those who genuinely seek help—and that we should maintain at all costs.

7.20 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): The contribution of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) is welcome and in the spirit in which we had hoped the debate could be conducted in the Special Standing Committee. Alas, the Government have not agreed to that.

We are back once again debating asylum measures. As recently as 1993 the Government introduced substantial legislation on immigration and asylum. They have returned to the subject for two main reasons, apart from the fact that the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 was hastily put together and the holes in it are becoming apparent to all concerned.

The first major reason for the Government's return to the subject is, at the prompting of the European Union, to bring Britain into line with the most backward, racist and xenophobic elements in the EU. Secondly, they want to play the race card in the run-up to the general election, relying on racism and xenophobia to gain the Government votes at the expense of black and minority ethnic people and of asylum seekers.

One example of Britain slavishly following European Union diktats is the white-listing of countries, the so-called safe countries of origin criteria, under which the Home Secretary, without parliamentary debate, can designate certain safe countries. Applicants for asylum from those countries will have their applications dealt with quickly and without close scrutiny. That arrangement is lifted directly from the European Union. As the Home Secretary said, Austria, Germany, Holland, Denmark, France, Spain, Finland and Switzerland already have such procedures. Britain is following the worst possible practice in the European Union.

Anyone who thinks that Nigeria is a safe country—which is the clear implication when Britain sends people who are opposed to the Nigerian Government back to Nigeria—needs to speak to Chief Abiola or Chief Obasanjo, who are currently in gaol in Nigeria, or, if they could, to the graves of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight others who fought against that Government.

The European Union also changed the definition of who qualifies as being in fear of persecution to mean only those persecuted by Governments. That rules out being persecuted by opposition movements, cartels and so on. It follows that, if there is no Government to persecute, as in Somalia recently, asylum seekers from such a country could not apply for admittance to Britain. Perhaps the Minister could take that up later.

The Government are also playing the race card by refusing to set up the Special Standing Committee. I want to deal with the Bill's effect on race relations and stress the damage that it will do to them. The Bill comes at a time when racism is on the increase, so the dangers of its measures are multiplied many times.

The Commission for Racial Equality has expressed grave concern about clause 7, which deals with the power of arrest and search warrants. The Bill proposes to give the police new powers of entry and search in relation to offences under the Immigration Act. The most significant new power is that which would enable a warrant to be issued in respect of a person suspected of working without leave. That would authorise the police, using reasonable force, to enter the premises of a person's family members, employers, friends, college or social clubs to search for evidence.

The Commission for Racial Equality draws attention to the fact that at the time of the passage of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 Parliament was satisfied that the homes and offices of persons who were not suspected of any offence should be entered and searched only where the offence under investigation was very serious, such as treason, murder, rape or kidnapping, or where the consequences of the offence would be very grave, such as serious harm to the security of the state, death or serious injury. The Bill proposes to extend that special power to offences under the Immigration Act. It is a measure of the Government's thinking that they can put overstaying in Britain in the same category as murder, rape kidnapping and treasonable offences.

Experience suggests that the use of the new powers may result in conflict. There is concern that fishing raids to detect illegal immigrants have not produced the desired results. We are aware of a number of raids conducted under existing powers in the past two years with the purpose of detecting illegal immigrants. The most publicised raid in terms of press coverage was code-named Operation Elgar, in which more than 100 homes were raided in April 1994 by police and immigration officers after extensive research.

The Home Office said at the time that 24 of those who had been detained were alleged illegal immigrants. *The Voice* of 17 May 1994 stated:

> "During the operation, scores of wrong addresses were raided, and of the 70 people originally heralded as detained by the Home Office, only two were deported."

[Mr. Bernie Grant]

It should also be noted that an extension of such powers creates a climate of fear. On 27 April 1994, Kwanele Siziba died after falling from the 12th floor of her block of flats. She had thought that the police had come to her home to arrest her for immigration reasons and had previously told her sister that she feared receiving the same treatment that Joy Gardner had received during attempts to deport her. In fact, the police were accompanying a bailiff and were not there for immigration reasons. In any case, Kwanele climbed on to the balcony to avoid the police and fell.

Another death said to have resulted from fear of immigration controls is that of Joseph Nnalue, who fell from a building while hiding from police and immigration officers. The coroner at the inquest into the death called for a review of immigration procedures. Mrs. Nnalue, the wife of the deceased, said:

> "Great fear is being created in the black and ethnic minority communities."

It is no good the Minister or the Home Secretary saying the measures are not racist. The fact is that fear is being created.

On 3 March this year, *The Independent* ran a story about two women from Latvia who were thought to have committed suicide because of fears of deportation. Those examples highlight the possible dangers to and effects on ethnic minorities of being caught up in such raids and subjected to harassment.

The potential harm that the exercise of the increased powers is likely to cause to good race relations and co-operation between the police and black and ethnic minority communities heavily outweighs any benefit to law enforcement that they might offer.

Clause 8 deals with prevention of illegal working. The consultation document "Prevention of Illegal Working", issued by the Home Office, highlights the importance the Government allegedly attach to maintaining good race relations. It discusses that at great length.

The chief executive of the Industrial Society voiced concern in a letter to the *Financial Times* of 23 November this year. He said that the proposals

> "will deter organisations from employing people who look or sound as if they may be new to the country".

That concern will be shared by many, not least those in Britain's black and minority ethnic communities. The danger also exists that, initially, some employers may be over-cautious and may make mistakes resulting in applicants having offers of employment withdrawn.

That point is adequately illustrated by a case that is yet to be heard by an industrial tribunal. It involves an African who was offered a post in a finance department. The day after he started work, he was asked to produce a work permit. By the time the Home Office got round to issuing what amounted to a reason for him—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I call Mr. John Carlisle.

7.30 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) said that we had been down this road before. That feeling was echoed by the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant). Of course we have, and we shall no doubt go down it again because of the increasing problems of immigration and asylum that severely trouble many of our constituents, be they of ethnic origin, as 20 per cent. of my constituents are, or from the indigenous white population. It is right that the House should debate these matters and the enormous problem that has arisen since the 1993 Act.

We have also been down this road before in that, yet again tonight, we have seen old Labour. We have heard shouts of "racist", "squalid" and "extremist". The hon. Member for Tottenham made his usual attack on the police, which echoed his comments after the Broadwater Farm riot several years ago, before he came to this place.

The House should dismiss any cant from the Opposition, especially by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who came up with no solutions whatever to this problem. If, God forbid, Labour were ever in government and he became Home Secretary, the only solution that he would suggest would be yet another amnesty for all those illegals who shelter in this country. Such people number several thousand and they must welcome the thought of a Labour Government coming back to power. I noticed that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) did not accept my challenge when I asked whether he supported an amnesty for illegal immigrants. I have no doubt that that is what Labour's policy would include.

If I had any doubts about the Bill, they were abandoned this morning when I heard on the 8 o'clock news that the Bishop of Liverpool and other churchmen were against it. That immediately gave me a greater incentive to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and try to make a few comments. A letter in *The Times* said that they were worried about the effect that the Bill would have on race relations. What absolute nonsense. I speak with some experience on this matter. Those who live in this country are privileged, as we do not have the race relations problems faced by other countries. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) said, that is because of the tolerance of the indigenous white population as well as that of people who have chosen to live here.

To use a Luton phrase, one thing that gets up the noses of people who have gone through the tortuous immigration procedures is when people come here illegally. Many hon. Members will know about the immigration process because they have dealt with those cases over the years. Many people enter this country illegally or overstay their welcome and take benefits to which they are not entitled.

In the time available to me, I wish to express my support for three clauses in the Bill. The first is clause 10, which deals with social security. The hon. Member for Blackburn said that it was "unfair" to withdraw social security from people who are on these shores illegally. But it costs about £100 a week in social security for each such person. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) said that it costs considerably more than that. Unfair? It is not fair to low wage earners in my constituency who, sadly, still pay tax after the recent Budget, some of which goes towards keeping those people in some sort of comfort, albeit minimal, when they should not be here in the first place. Nor is it fair on newly married couples in my constituency who have negative equity. Luton has more negative equity than any other part of the country. Why should they pay part of their hard-earned money to keep people who should not be here in the first place?

It is even more unfair to the immigrants who have gone through the process of staying here legitimately. Having been granted UK passports, they see others waltzing in on an illegal ticket, overstaying their welcome and staying here for many years. Some of them know full well that, because of the long process of appeals, they will not be sent back home on the first plane and can stay here for some time. Perhaps the thought that a Labour Government would introduce an amnesty also encourages them.

I also fully support clause 8, which deals with employers and illegal immigrants. It is extraordinary to say that the clause places a great burden on employers by asking them to check, as they check other references in many cases, whether an applicant for a job is a legitimate citizen of this country. As one Opposition Member said, it may be a difficult task in view of the number of national insurance numbers in circulation, but we must take every measure that we can to ensure that jobs go to people who are allowed to remain in this country legally.

In my constituency, much illegal labour is used, particularly in lower-paid jobs. That must stop. I would say exactly the same whether those illegal workers were black Nigerians or, for the benefit of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), white South Africans. If people are not legitimate citizens of this country, it is not right that they should have jobs. We are therefore right to ask employers to check before accepting applicants. I see no discrimination in that.

The third and final clause that I wish briefly to deal with is clause 5, which seeks to come down hard on those who facilitate entry. Those right hon. and hon. Members who, like me, have experience of immigration cases—I have considerable experience—will know of the bitterness and anger caused by people who come here illegally. We all know of marriages of convenience. I dealt with one such case only a few days ago. An aggrieved wife was trying to get the Home Office to remove a husband who had married her solely for immigration purposes. That girl is going through enormous heartache. We all know of the anger and bitterness caused by overstayers and racketeers. Additional measures are obviously needed, and any measures that we can take to try to stop their trade are to be welcomed.

Opposition Members have no special prerogative for saying that they represent the ethnic communities. Every time a Conservative Member says that he or she represents an ethnic community, we are shouted down with all sorts of insults. Let me tell Opposition Members a little story in the short time that I have left. Hon. Members will recall that my party did not do particularly well during last May's local elections. In Luton, we finished up with just two Conservative seats. During the count, which I attended, there was a large group of Labour supporters, all wearing large red rosettes and all members of the ethnic community. I talked to them as they went by and they said, "John, don't worry about what has happened tonight. Although we have won, you will definitely get back because we admire you for how you stand up for our rights." I say that in absolute honesty—*[Interruption.]*—and I can tell the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who is laughing, that since 1979 my majority has gone up with great regularity. Members of the ethnic community admire the fact that I do not patronise them as the hon. Lady and some other Opposition Members do.

That is why the Bill is first class. Heaven knows, it is probably a bit late, and we should have passed it through Parliament some time ago. I very much hope that it receives a thumping majority in the Division tonight.

7.39 pm

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I hope to be very brief.

It is most instructive that any Bill of the type before us introduced by the Government never appears to start with any delineation of the rights of the individuals who will be affected by it. That exposes the moral vacuum at the heart of so much of what the Government are about. Nowhere in the British constitution are rights ever defined. That is why it is possible for proposals to be made which are as thoroughly disgraceful as those in the Bill.

I find almost the entire Bill objectionable, but I shall restrict my remarks to clauses 9 and 10. However, before doing so, I shall respond to one or two of the arguments of Conservative Members, especially about clause 4. They tried to tug on our heart-strings, describing the awful prospect and sight of the poor people—I think one phrase was "Chinese peasants"—who had been so awfully defrauded and the promises that they were given, before they were sent to this country, by people who took their money and documents from them.

As most other Members of the House must have done, I have received a briefing from the Immigration Law Practitioners Association, which says that currently:

> "It is a matter of law that entry by deception can include deception by third parties of which the entrant is entirely innocent"

and that clause 4, as it stands, introduces strict liability for that criminal offence, which is to say that there would be no normal requirement of any criminal intention unless there is some further definition or defence that we know nothing about. In those circumstances, Conservative Members should realise that those poor Chinese peasants about whom they are so worried are likely to be prosecuted for the fraud that is perpetrated on them by other people. That is a disgrace.

Clauses 9 and 10, regarding the restrictions on housing assistance and child benefit, need to be considered against a background of the recent proposed changes to social security entitlement of asylum seekers. Many hon. Members will also have received briefings about that.

I understand that the proposals will mean that from 8 January 1996, the regulations will remove the right to benefits from all those people who apply for asylum after their entry to the United Kingdom, and will remove the right to benefits from asylum seekers who exercise their right of appeal against a decision that has gone against them.

It is true that, currently, only about 30 per cent. of those people seeking asylum make an application at their point of entry, but it is equally true that the vast majority of the remainder apply within only one week of their entry, and an overwhelming number of asylum seekers arriving in the United Kingdom arrive with the precise intention of seeking asylum.

[Ms Roseanna Cunningham]

There may be many reasons why people do not immediately apply, not least of which must be confusion in their minds. How on earth are people in that position expected to know the UK requirements in advance? Perhaps we shall be reassured that information is helpfully handed out to potential asylum seekers in their country of origin, but I suspect not. It is outrageous to suggest that those people who do not apply at the point of entry are, by definition, not genuine. That cannot be decided until an application is processed.

I draw attention to the fact that it has been known for circumstances in a person's home country to change while they are in this country, perfectly legitimately, as students. I well remember being at university with Cambodian students who started their degree course in the full expectation of being able to return home at the end of it and with every wish to do so, but who were prevented from doing so by the unfortunate activities of the Khmer Rouge and ultimately had to seek asylum elsewhere. That type of thing can happen and needs to be taken into account, but the Bill does not provide for it.

At present, there is a wait of about eight months for an asylum decision to be made, and I understand that permission to work is not given until six months after the application is made. However, there is no guarantee of work, and work will be even less likely if clause 8 becomes law. That has been mentioned especially by Opposition Members.

As at 8 January 1996, about 13,000 asylum seekers plus families will lose all benefits. Then, presumably, many of them will lose their homes. The Refugee Council has warned of that and of the subsequent pressure on local authorities. As I understand it, the Scottish Refugee Council has been thrown into complete disarray, trying to to cope with the confusion that that will create and the difficulties that it will cause for that organisation. Destitution will be the result of clauses 9 and 10 added to the regulations that have already been passed but have yet to be brought into force.

The only relevant status for housing assistance should be the housing status of the individual, not their immigrant designation or other such status.

On the face of it, I find clause 10 especially invidious as it may well result in the removal of child benefit from immigrants, affecting British-born children of immigrants, because it is their parents who have to apply.

Mr. Deva: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Cunningham: I am sorry, but time is so short that I will not give way.

Clauses 9 and 10 are vague and, in spite of the assurances of Conservative Members, they are widely seen to be vague. Most people who have read the briefings will know that those are the two clauses which cannot be briefed on in any detail because of their vagueness, and which therefore give rise to enormous concern. Neither the Refugee Council nor immigration lawyers specialising in that type of work find those clauses especially clear.

The potential powers are wide ranging and potentially exclude whole groups of people already settled in the United Kingdom. In effect, it appears that the Government intend to starve people out of the country. Those are disgraceful measures, directed not only at the most vulnerable group of new asylum seekers, but at very many others, leading to incalculable insecurity and, most of all, financial insecurity.

In his letter of 20 November 1995, the Home Secretary said:

> "We face very real problems. The proposals outlined in this letter are a measured response to those problems."

Hon. Members might be forgiven for receiving the impression that the problems to which the Home Secretary refers have far less to do with illegal immigration and bogus asylum seekers and everything to do with the problems likely to be experienced by Conservatives at the next general election.

The use of legislation such as this Bill for purely political reasons draws attention to the desperate need for a written constitution and a Bill of Rights in this country, which may be used as a starting point and a benchmark. Right now we are creating groups of people with no apparent rights. In effect, we shall create a category of non-person.

I shall make some more general remarks about the things that the Bill represents, some of which were mentioned by Opposition Members. To me, "immigrant" is not a dirty word; it simply means someone who has moved from one part of the world to another. However, the Government's attitude and the rhetoric of some of their supporters are having the effect that the word "immigrant" is on the way to being regarded and used as an insult. That is most unfortunate.

I spent 16 years as an immigrant in Australia and I am a descendant of immigrants in a previous wave of immigration to this country. I and other Members of the House who are in a similar position would be appalled to hear that word, which historically has been used with a certain pride, treated in that fashion and to hear people using it in the pejorative sense in which it is used. I know that some Ministers are in the same position, although perhaps that is not an especially good advertisement for immigration.

People from this country have been welcomed elsewhere when they went in search of a better life and better economic circumstances. We should in turn welcome those from elsewhere, because immigrants help a culture to grow and change, and without growth and change a culture will die.

That anti-immigrant attitude is especially unfortunate. People in the House may be interested to know that in the by-election campaign which resulted in my being here I was attacked openly by Members of the Conservative party because my fitness to stand for election as a Member of Parliament in this country was brought into question as a result of my having spent my time between the ages of 8 and 25 in Australia.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is right to paraphrase Pastor Niemoller and say that once one starts that ball rolling, it does not stop. I was on the receiving end of it in Perth and Kinross, and I am certain that the experiences of many other people in this country would have been far worse than that.

It is a mean-minded attitude, and it is exemplified in the legislation before us. The Bill is redolent of the narrow-minded provincialism that colours so much of what the Government are about. It is deplorable that they should go along with the nasty attacks on asylum seekers and refugees. The Scottish National party strongly opposes that attitude, and I hope that all right-thinking people will do the same.

7.49 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I begin my short contribution to the debate by stating my unequivocal support for my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals to close loopholes in, and to speed up the implementation of, the law as it relates to asylum. It must be right to seek to investigate the claims of asylum applicants, and, where appropriate, to allow the appeal procedure to operate as speedily as possible. It is not acceptable that people should be locked up for many months in Rochester prison, which is situated just outside my constituency. Those people have committed no crime, but a purely bureaucratic process keeps them incarcerated.

However, the delay and obfuscation tactics employed by many who are patently economic migrants must come to an end. If it takes the withdrawal of our generous social security benefits and special housing treatment to encourage migrants not to seek to frustrate the process, so be it. Our European Union partners in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany have adopted a much tougher regime, and their rates of asylum seekers are falling fast, while ours are rocketing. The number of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom has risen from 28,000 in 1993 to 32,800 in 1994, and we have a staggering estimate of 40,000 this year.

I was astonished to hear my right hon. and learned Friend say that some 70 per cent.—or 28,000 people this year—of asylum seekers do not apply at a port of entry. Many of them are students, those whose entry clearances have expired and are therefore overstayers, or they are simply illegal immigrants whose presence has been detected by the immigration service. Almost none of those people can have any claim to deserving political asylum under the 1951 United Nations convention. In short, they are making a mockery of this country's generous welcome to people who have come to the United Kingdom to escape persecution—from the Huguenots to the Jews and the Ugandan Asians, to give just three examples.

Almost the only reasons why the status of students or visitors may change to entitle them to consideration for asylum is a major upheaval or revolution in their country or if they have indulged in political or terrorist activity that is hostile to the Government of their country which might render them liable to prosecution and conviction upon their return to that country.

I must express my concern at that point, because I do not believe that it is appropriate for visitors to our shores to abuse our welcome by indulging in acts which, if committed overseas by one of our citizens, would render him or her liable to the rigour of the law upon his or her return to the United Kingdom. It seems to me that preaching sedition or insurrection against one's country while enjoying the protection of our freedoms is an abuse of our hospitality.

I cite in that regard the Saudi dissident Mohammed Masari. His criticism of the Saudi Administration has so infuriated his country's Government that our major defence contractors are likely to lose a major export package. He should be left in no doubt that he is abusing the sanctuary that has been granted to him.

Mr. Corbyn: So guns come first.

Mr. Couchman: No, jobs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's speech comes first.

Mr. Couchman: Even more alarming is the recent news of the two Islamic terrorists who are being allowed long-term asylum here, when there is ample evidence that they have planned terrorist attacks in other countries. During his five-year postgraduate course at Durham university, Ramadan Shallah, the new head of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, was clearly actively involved with Islamic fundamentalist groups planning terror in the Middle East.

It is also clear that the Algerian Abdelkader Benouif, who was granted political asylum in the United Kingdom, and who French authorities believe is responsible for bomb outrages in Paris, is abusing our hospitality by his terrorist activities. However, owing to a weakness in the law, he cannot be prosecuted so long as he commits no crime here.

I am persuaded by those two examples—I do not doubt that there are others—that the Bill should include a clause requiring that foreigners resident in Britain, regardless of whether they are political refugees, should not take part in activity that is detrimental to this country's economic interests or its political and diplomatic relations with other countries. Asylum provides a priceless sanctuary from persecution, but abuse of that sanctuary can only make the host more sceptical of the claims of other supplicants.

The Bill consists of two quite distinct and disparate parts. I have mentioned the major section that deals with asylum—which, incidentally, I believe should be uncontroversial in all parts of the House. The second part of the Bill deals with illegal immigrants, and specifically the onus that my right hon. and learned Friend proposes to place on employers not to employ illegal immigrants.

During his recent statement to the House, I expressed a concern on behalf of small employers who may have difficulty conforming to my right hon. and learned Friend's new expectations. I asked then—and I repeat my request today—that my right hon. and learned Friend undertake to issue clear guidance to all employers directly, perhaps through the Inland Revenue or Department of Social Security mailing list, about the responsibilities that they are to assume in future.

I wish to probe my right hon. and learned Friend's intentions a little further. While I believe that there is a general recognition that some employers in particular employment sectors exploit illegal immigrants by employing them at low wages and under threat of exposure, many employers have little knowledge of their responsibilities now, let alone in the future.

In the catering and hotel trades, which I know well, staff are nomadic, moving frequently from job to job. Many are visitors to our shores. Whether they are Asian or Australian, Canadian or Caribbean, Filipino or French, they frequently arrive without a national insurance number. National insurance numbers are issued very slowly and often after the applicant has moved on. P45s are by no means the universal passport that they should be.

Therefore, in future, employers will have to become expert at reading birth certificates and passports which may not be written in English. I hope that, when my

[Mr. Couchman]

right hon. and learned Friend's officials undertake an investigation of alleged illegal immigrants, they will seek to guide or counsel rather than automatically prosecute an employer who may have unwittingly taken on someone who should not be working.

Perhaps, as with a customs and excise value added tax default, there should be a warning to an employer the first time that he falls down in his new responsibility. I am also concerned that the arrival of a new brand of official, presumably with rights of entry and inspection of employment records, will not be welcomed by the long-suffering employer, a disproportionate amount of whose time is spent dealing with the bureaucracy of Government.

The fact that my right hon. and learned Friend's consultation document stresses that all new and potential employees should be asked to provide proof of their right to be employed lends credence to his claim that the new duty will not lead to discrimination against ethnic minorities. Therefore, I am prepared to accept that it is not racist in any way. That is important for our race relations, which, while not perfect, are tolerably good, and must not be allowed to deteriorate.

I believe that some of the comments that we have heard about the Bill from what is broadly called the race relations industry have been very wide of the mark. Notwithstanding what my right hon. and learned Friend said on 20 November, some spokesmen for immigrant organisations continue to peddle—as they did this very morning—the suggestion that Nigeria will be among the countries on the so-called "white list".

Undoubtedly the operation of good race relations involves rooting out fraudulent asylum applicants and detecting and deporting illegal immigrants. The indigenous population are concerned that employment and the allocation of housing and social security resources are prejudiced by discrimination in favour of ethnic minority immigrants. Nothing feeds that concern more than less than firm treatment of those who should not be here.

The leaders of our ethnic minority communities understand that fact very well. They know that, if bogus asylum seekers and illegal immigrants are tolerated—and even encouraged—race relations will be jeopardised, and their communities will suffer. Far from endangering our good race relations, I believe that the Bill will tackle abuse of our immigration rules, which is itself the greater danger. I shall support the Bill.

7.58 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am glad to oppose this Bill, for three reasons. First, it is based on a wholly unquantified, exaggerated and apocalyptic notion of the threat that so-called bogus asylum seekers present to the British way of life. Secondly, the provisions of this Bill and of related legislation will inevitably affect tens of thousands of British nationals purely on the basis that they are a different colour. Finally, the effect of the Bill will be cruel and inhumane, and out of all proportion to the so-called problem with which it is designed to deal.

Conservative Members have risen to their feet one after another to talk about this so-called problem. But given Britain's size, our prosperity and our relations with many third-world countries, it is true to say that we have taken relatively few asylum seekers.

Mr. Deva *rose—*

Ms Abbott: I have no time.

In 1994, we took in about 42,000 refugees and asylum seekers; that compares with Germany, which took in 127,000. So how can Conservative Members jump up and claim that Britain is in danger of being flooded with refugees and asylum seekers?

Conservative Members insist on talking as if these people leave their homes thousands of miles away on a whim, perhaps in search of benefits and a damp council flat in Hackney. On the contrary, they leave because they believe that they have no option in the face of prevailing political and—yes—economic circumstances. In the past, refugees and immigrants have come to this country not just for political reasons that fall within the terms of the law but also for reasons of serious economic instability, from places such as east Africa, Turkey and Sri Lanka.

Conservative Members speak sneeringly of bogus asylum seekers who want to better themselves. Is it so wrong of people to want to better themselves? Many Members of this House would not be here today if their parents and grandparents had not wanted to better themselves.

I do not seek to extend the terms of the law governing refugees, but I think it cruel of Conservative Members to sneer at people as if they came here merely for benefits, and were not genuinely running away from economic instability and from the growing economic gap between the first and third worlds. It is the growing gap between north and south that has led to surges of economic refugees across the world. I would respect Conservative Members more if they dealt with the underlying economic issues: debt, the prices of raw materials, GATT and trade.

People come here because they are driven by poverty and economic instability of a sort which, fortunately, no one in this country has to face. So let us take the issues seriously and not sneer at people for short-term political advantage.

If there is indeed a problem of people seeking refugee or asylum status to which they know they are not entitled, much of it is caused by the interminable delays. If the Government took administrative action to clear the 50,000 backlog and made sure that applications were dealt with quickly and efficiently, much of the incentive for unfounded claims would be removed. It is therefore wrong to pursue this legislation when there are administrative remedies to hand which the Government have not explored.

The facts do not bear out the apocalyptic notion that the country is in danger of being swamped by millions of these people. This Bill, and the debates centering on it, which will inevitably drag on into next year, can only poison the atmosphere around race relations.

We all know that politicians speak in code. If we say "wet" in this House, people know we are referring to the left of the Conservative party. If we say "new Labour", people know that we are referring to the right of the

Labour party. People in the United States who talk about civil rights or confederacy or "the south will rise again" are clearly talking about race.

In Britain in 1995, if the issue of immigration is raised, people know that race is what is really being talked about. It is dishonest of Conservative Members to pretend, when supporting this legislation, that their only motivation is to clear up a few administrative processes. They know full well, just I have known all my life, that, whenever politicians raise the issue of immigration in public debate, it is always entangled with issues of race. So Conservative Members know that they are raising race as an electoral issue.

We have heard a great deal of unpleasant rhetoric from Conservative Members. They speak of dragging the country down, of taking jobs away from honest British citizens, of taking benefits and public resources that would otherwise go to honest British citizens, and so on. Such rhetoric can only poison people's attitudes to refugees and immigrants.

Some Conservative Members try to establish a wholly tendentious distinction between legals and illegals. The rhetoric, the sneering, and the assumption that people come here only to drain this country of benefits, will stick even to the genuine refugees and asylum seekers who are fully entitled to be here. They will be frightened to go and claim the benefits and enjoy the rights to which they are entitled.

This legislation will promote an atmosphere of fear, and will affect not just refugees and asylum seekers but anyone who is coloured. I am not alone in thinking that; the Secretary of State for Education and Employment wrote to the Home Secretary earlier this year as follows:

> "There is a danger that employers will concentrate checks on prospective employees whom they see as a risk, if not simply exclude them from consideration for the job. Either way there shall be racial discrimination".

If that Secretary of State realises that racial discrimination is implicit in the legislation, why has that fact eluded other Conservative Members?

If employers have to check, if benefits staff have to check, if those who run schools and colleges have to check, the legal status of applicants, what will be the first check they will make? As people walk through the door, they will look to see what colour they are. That will not affect most Conservative Members, but it will affect my friends and their children, and my constituents. The legislation will inevitably have consequences for how British citizens of colour are treated from now on. That is why I am proud to oppose it.

I turn finally to the related aspects—to the benefit cuts and the cuts in income support and child benefit due to take place in January. Conservative Members may smile, but my constituency has traditionally been a haven for refugees—first the Huguenots, then people from eastern Europe, and latterly people from Africa and the Caribbean. From January onwards, thousands of my constituents will have no means of support. Why? Is illegal immigration some terrible threat to this country? No, it is because this 16-year-old Administration, having run out of friends and alibis, are willing to scrape the gutter for votes.

My party is united in opposing the legislation, and we shall oppose it tonight. It has nothing to do with the real administrative problems relating to illegal immigration. It is about making race an issue in the coming election campaign. Conservative Members whose parents came here as economic refugees should be ashamed to go through the Lobby in support of such legislation.

8.7 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): I am pleased to follow the speech by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). She made an honest speech on behalf of the old Labour party—a speech that reflected the true spirit of the Labour party, whatever the new Labour party might want. I am also delighted to follow the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman).

I speak as an immigrant myself: I am proud to be one. I am now proud to be British as well. Good race relations are paramount, not only to people who have recently settled here but to everyone in the wider community. In the recent past it was clear that the French lacked firm and fair immigration controls; that resulted in Mr. Le Pen and the fascist right gaining such ascendancy in that country. I do not want that to happen here, which is why it is so important that fair and firm immigration controls be effectively applied and be seen to be so. That is why the Bill is so timely.

The Bill protects the interests of one particular group about whom we have heard not a word from Labour Members—those who are genuine asylum seekers. Genuine asylum seekers are stuck in a huge queue of people who are not genuine asylum seekers. They are in a state of limbo. They are left hanging around and no consideration is given to their prosperity or their prospects. That is the Bill's first consideration. Its second consideration is to support and assist those who are settled here, whether they are British citizens or people who are entitled to stay here, and to maximise their potential and that of their children. That is why the Bill is timely.

The processing of asylum application is not as it should be. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has produced a Bill simply and effectively to make the backlog disappear so that genuine asylum seekers can be settled here happily and bogus ones returned.

It is clear that our procedures are being abused. It does not require a genius to work out that if only 4 per cent. of applications are upheld by independent adjudicators, 96 per cent. of applicants are abusing the system. My mathematics failed me when the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) complained that the figure had gone down from 8 per cent. to 4 per cent. He failed to observe that the number of applications has increased, therefore the percentage has reduced.

As Labour Members are aware, applications are rising rapidly from 2,400 a month a year ago to 4,300 last month. When that happens, who suffers? Of course it is the genuine applicant, who is left wondering about his status as increasing numbers of applications are processed with seven times more case workers taking 25,000 decisions involving an additional £37 million in expenditure.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deva: I am sorry, but I have no time. Nobody had time to give way to me.

[Mr. Deva]

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that the relentless rise in applications is outstripping our ability to deal with them. That is why the Bill is necessary to protect the interests of the genuine applicant.

Labour Members appear not to care a jot about the genuine applicant, or if they do, they should tell us so. Clause 1 would allow an accelerated appeal provided that the grounds do not fall within the terms of the 1951 convention as being untrue or fraudulent, or if they no longer apply. However, the Bill recognises that that provision alone would not be enough to accelerate the procedure.

Some countries such as Poland, Romania, Cyprus, Bulgaria, India and Pakistan generate a large number of applicants. The Home Secretary has published a list of designated countries that do not carry a serious risk of persecution. He has given an assurance in the Bill that applicants from those countries would still have the right to appeal to an independent adjudicator. That is an important safeguard.

Last year, there were 2,030 applicants from India. Five were granted asylum by independent adjudicators and 30 were given exceptional leave to remain. There were 1,810 applicants from Pakistan, of whom five were granted asylum and 25 were given exceptional leave to remain. Although 97 per cent. of applicants from India were refused, in contrast to 99 per cent. of applicants from Poland, that does not mean that there have been no problems in India or Pakistan in the past few years.

There have been problems in the Punjab since 1984 but recently circumstances have improved immeasurably. Elections have been held and the Punjab is quietly settling down. There are still problems in Kashmir, but India is a vast country and it is difficult to designate a country as unsafe when one small province is experiencing political or human rights problems.

At this point I appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister and to the House. The world is becoming increasingly unstable. Ethnic and regional conflicts are increasing exponentially in the former Soviet Union, south Asia and Africa. Human rights are abused and political dissention abounds. Even as we speak, people are being killed in Karachi and Sri Lanka and abuses continue in Iraq, Iran, Eritrea and Somalia. That is because the Governments of those countries are inept, corrupt or worse.

I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Home Office and the Foreign Office to be firmer with those Governments. We must insist that they follow good governance criteria to establish the rule of law and protect constitutional and human rights. We must use our influence to ensure that we are not left to solve the problems that are generated by their mismanagement.

It is not enough, however, to recognise that we live in an interdependent world. We must also recognise that we are part of a community. Some of my constituents have relatives in south Asia and Sri Lanka, as I do. They all have their own problems, but we must look closely at our dealings with those countries. The Foreign Office and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary must be firmer with those so-called friendly Governments and ask them to protect the constitutional liberties and rights of their citizens.

Finally, I welcome the proposal to criminalise racketeers. I would like to go further. I would like all immigration advisers in the United Kingdom to be licensed or at least self-regulated. I deal with case after case of people who have been exploited and ripped off by so-called immigration advisers. The Bill is timely; it is effective, it is humane and it is imperative.

8.16 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I oppose the Bill as a dreadful piece of legislation guided by xenophobia and appealing to some backward populism which the Conservatives think will win them an election in 15 months' time. It smacks of the classic Conservative approach—if there is a problem, blame the victim. The Bill blames people for seeking asylum in Britain.

I ask those Ministers who say that the Bill has nothing to do with fear and racism to consider that a fortnight ago immigration officials arrived at a block of flats in my constituency in search of a Romanian who had applied for political asylum and had been refused. Officials battered on the door and when he did not open it, they kicked it down, cut the phone wires and rushed in to take the man away.

Their victim is a deeply disturbed person. He is disturbed as a result of his experiences in Romania and now by his experiences at the hands of the immigration officials. He ran out of the flat and on to the balcony intending to jump 10 floors down to his death in the car park outside. He was on that balcony for some seven hours until skilled police officers managed to talk him in and take him to a place of safety. The immigration officials agreed to defer his forced removal from the country. A big crowd gathered outside. The fire brigade, ambulances and television cameras arrived.

Do we want such scenes repeated time after time all over the country? That incident occurred less than a mile away from where Joy Gardiner died. We should also recall the deaths of Kwanda Siziba in 1994 and, more recently, Joseph Nnule. Those people were all told that they were illegally resident in Britain and would be forcibly removed. There have been deaths, suicides and attempted suicides. Those are the consequences of the xenophobic legislation and action by the Government. Ministers think that it has nothing to do with them. However, the way in which the removals take place has everything to do with them.

Every time legislation dealing with immigration, nationality or asylum arrives in the House, the Government say that it is necessary to control some problem or other. I remember the introduction of the visa regime in 1984 precisely because large numbers of Tamils from Sri Lanka were seeking asylum in Britain. The solution appeared to be to make it more difficult for people to come in.

The Government thought that would solve the problem. Members of Parliament were prevented by the 1986 change from putting an automatic stop on somebody's removal. The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 sought to make airline companies the controllers of migration to this country, which resulted in the growth of racketeers and overpriced fares.

The Government say that they will make collective presumptions of the likelihood of acceptance or rejection of asylum. As my hon. Friend the Member for

Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) pointed out when questioning the Home Secretary, collective presumptions are contrary to the terms of the 1951 convention. I have serious questions about the countries on the presumption against list, including India. The Minister of State must admit that people from India have been granted asylum because of the situation in Kashmir and the Punjab.

Miss Widdecombe: They will still be granted asylum.

Mr. Corbyn: I am glad to hear that. If that is so, why is there a presumption against people from India applying for political asylum in this country? I believe that the Government would like to include a number of other countries. I found to my astonishment that Austria has Iran on its list of presumptions against asylum, on the ground that Iran is a democratic and free society. The hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), who has left the Chamber—I will not say, sadly—apparently thinks that it is more important to sell guns, tanks and aircraft to the Saudi Arabian Government so that they may overarm themselves once more, than to consider the serious plight of people who have stood up against that autocratic regime and genuinely seek asylum in this country. If people like the hon. Member for Gillingham are to be in charge of the fate of people who have stood out against oppression, that is truly frightening.

Conservative Members ask why so many people seek asylum here. They continually draw a distinction between economic and political asylum seekers, but that distinction is difficult to draw in many cases. Anyone who stands up against a regime that imposes a structural adjustment programme that means cutting education, health, social services and rural development in favour of export-led growth automatically becomes a target for political oppression by that regime and is often forced to seek asylum.

Last week, I met the Minister in a television studio, but she was reluctant to discuss directly with me the case of Abdul Onibiyo. He first came to this country in 1972 but was forcibly returned to Nigeria by the Minister's officials more than six weeks ago. He was last seek talking to an immigration official at a Nigerian airport and has not been seen or heard of since. The British Government have washed their hands of the matter, saying "It is nothing to do with us. He is Nigerian, and whatever he is up to is his business." No member of Mr. Onibiyo's family has been able to find him. Friends gave him money before he was deported, to make sure that, if nothing else, he could get word back to his beloved family in this country that he was safe and well. Not one word has been heard from him.

The Minister, having put Mr. Onibiyo's son into detention, then tried to deport him. Over the weekend, the Minister has delivered a letter to Mr. Onibiyo's wife and others saying that they will be threatened with deportation. Joyce Onibiyo, in a moving statement at a press conference that I wish the Minister had attended, said that the actions of the immigration service were like breaking the fingers of her family one by one, as her children were thrown out of this country to suffer an unknown fate at the hands of the Nigerian Government, who have executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others and put under arrest the victors of election campaigns. An appalling scenario faces people who are deported to Nigeria, as to other countries.

The Bill is the product of the xenophobia that surrounds Europe, which knows full well the consequences of the economic policies that it is imposing on many countries but pretends that the result has nothing to do with Europe. We are in danger of living in a Europe surrounded by barbed wire, having the most draconian anti-asylum laws in each country as one group after another is hounded out.

Under the social security legislation implicit in the Bill and the draft regulations considered by the Select Committee, from 8 January 13,000 people will have no means of support. They will be thrown on the streets by private landlords, who are already refusing to accept asylum seekers as tenants, on the ground that their applications may be refused and they will be unable to obtain housing benefit. In that case, the landlord would have to go to court to secure eviction. That is a disgraceful scenario. That is precisely the sub-culture to which hon. Members have referred. Thousands of people will be trying desperately to make ends meet, to continue their battle to gain recognition of their right to asylum.

Local government will be responsible, under the Children Act 1989, for putting the children of those asylum seekers in a place of safety. That will put local authorities under a great burden, for which central Government will not compensate them in any way. The cost to central London local authorities will run into millions of pounds. The housing legislation will create similar problems.

The Government are forcing a horrifying spectacle upon us. The Bill will do nothing to improve race relations but will make them much worse. The Bill does nothing to enhance the reputation of this country as a place that is prepared to provide a safe haven for people fleeing from oppression. The Bill merely creates a climate of horror and fear. The Bill is the product of the Government's racism and xenophobia. I hope that opposition to the Bill, which is already considerable, will grow and grow to the extent that it will be repealed in the future—I doubt, with regret, that it will be defeated—so that a sane, sensible approach will be taken to asylum. We must recognises the causes of people seeking asylum and address them, as well as dealing humanely with people who flee to this country in seeking a place of safety under the 1951 convention—which this country is obliged to support.

8.6 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I give the Bill a firm welcome. Changes to the law to deal more effectively with illegal immigration and asylum seekers have been necessary for some time. It astonished me today that the Opposition's contribution has not addressed the problem. They have given no clear picture of what they would do. Opposition speakers have focused mainly on the difficulties of individual would-be asylum seekers and immigrants, paying little attention to the real concerns of the British public.

The sharp rise in asylum applications since 1993 makes the case for the Bill. There were 22,000 applications in 1993 and 33,000 in 1994, and they are likely to number more than 40,000 this year. Other countries in western Europe are seeing a significant fall in asylum applications. They have already tightened their regulations, and it is essential that we do the same.

[Mr. Mark Wolfson]

Illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers do nothing to foster positive race relations or the proper provision of asylum for people who really need it. The public—and this is where I totally disagree with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—want people who are granted entry to Britain as immigrants or asylum seekers to do so on proper grounds. The public want the rules of entry to be sensible, fair and strictly observed. Such laws need to work properly if they are to carry credibility.

Following the enactment of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, progress was made with the time taken to reach decisions, but the relentless rise in applications outstrips the ability to process them. Although some of my hon. Friends have argued that greater resources are necessary, unless the rising tide of applicants—many of which are bogus—is constrained, the problem will not be solved and persons who are genuinely seeking asylum will be delayed even longer than at present. Not only is that a heavy cost to the taxpayer, but growing delays lead to more bogus claims. Action is badly needed across the board to strengthen the legislation, to streamline decision making and the appeals process, and to deter bogus applications at their source. Because the Bill tackles those issues, I support it.

There can be little doubt that one of the reasons for the dramatic rise in applications to enter the UK, while elsewhere in western Europe applications are falling, is the social security benefits that are available to asylum seekers here. The arrangements require urgent review, and I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is doing just that and that his new proposals will come into force in the new year. It is surely right that individuals who have been allowed entry into this country on the undertaking that they will support themselves should be held to that undertaking, but I welcome the fact that the Bill contains an exception clause, and rightly so, for the Home Secretary to allow social security support where circumstances in the asylum seeker's country have undergone significant change since his or her arrival here. Again, it is my view that the public, who are traditionally fair-minded on these matters, are prepared to see genuine asylum seekers allowed to claim benefits while their claim is being decided. However, once a decision has been reached, and if the application is rejected, it is not unreasonable that those benefits, paid for by the taxpayer, should cease. If the benefits continue while the appeal is under review, it is an open invitation to use the appeal procedure as a form of delay. That would be an abuse of the appeals system, and it must be right to curtail it.

I want to deal briefly with illegal employment. As the immigration service caught more than 10,000 people working in this country illegally last year, there is clearly a problem that needs to be dealt with. Some employers take on immigrants to pay them less if their position here is illegal. Other European Union countries have experienced the same problems and acted accordingly. Until now, only the UK and Ireland had no controls in play. Initially, as we have heard, there was understandable unease among many well-respected employers and small businesses that the Bill might impose unreasonable requirements on companies, causing them to act in the role of immigration officers or—almost—policemen.

The Confederation of British Industry, as the representative of many firms, and the Industrial Society, which is well known for promoting good employment practices, were just two of the organisations speaking up on behalf of their members. They both aired initial unease on two counts: first, that additional burdens would be placed on business; and, secondly, that the aim of stopping illegal immigrants working, though laudable in itself, could work against the provision of equal opportunities in the workplace. The latter is an area where business has made considerable progress in recent years. It is important that that good work should not be undone. As I understand it, the CBI, after recent consultation with the Home Office, is very much happier with the planned proposals. When the Home Secretary opened the debate, he demonstrated how the concerns of the Institute of Directors on the matter had also now largely eased.

Concern has been aired in the debate about spare national insurance numbers in Britain. Nevertheless, using the national insurance number as the first gateway into employment can in no way be regarded as racist. I commend that approach. Greater action needs to be taken to get rid of unaccounted-for numbers if employers are to have real confidence in the system. Asking employers to look at the national insurance number is not a unreal burden. If they require further documentation—passports or birth certificates—when a national insurance number is not provided, we must ensure that any legislation that is introduced does not place unnecessary burdens on industry, get in the way of its efficiency or increase its costs.

We know already that, all too often, legislation that starts with the best intentions and which is said, euphemistically, to have "a light touch" ends up imposing time-consuming work on business. It works against proper objectives, costs businesses money and militates against efficiency. My plea is that that must not happen in this case.

My last point is on equal opportunities at work. We are dealing here with matters of culture rather than regulation; of judgment rather than of fact. As I see it, there is no intention in the Bill to single out any group for particular or special scrutiny when they are being considered for employment. The use of the national insurance number as the key entry to work is already a general requirement for employment. It is also worth emphasising here—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

8.36 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): A week ago today, on 4 December, I attended the launch of the Bristol campaign against the Asylum and Immigration Bill. It was attended by representatives from many institutions and organisations. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Clifton spoke out against the Bill, and there were representatives from the Methodist Church and the Church of England. There were also representatives from, among others, the Greater Bristol Ecumenical Council, Christian Aid, Bristol Race Equality Council, the Bristol West Indian Parents Association, the Keyboard Project and Refugee Action. A representative was also present from the Liberal Democrats. No Conservative was present to speak in favour of the Bill.

Nobody listening to the debate could conclude other than that the arguments used to justify the Bill are either inconsistent or not supported by the facts. First, the white list. It is obviously an abbreviated appeals procedure at the diktat of the Home Secretary, but there is a huge conflict between the obligation under the convention to look at each case individually on its merits and an automatic presumption that applications from some countries will not have the proper scrutiny that the convention lays down.

If it is right, as the Minister herself said on Radio 4 this morning, that the Government will look at each case individually and on its merit, how many human rights abuses must there be before a country is moved from the white list? For example, we were told a few weeks ago that Nigeria would be on the white list. Obviously, since Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight associates were hanged, it could not possibly stay on the white list, but is it right that that had to happen—it was a huge price to pay—before it was moved from the list?

As the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture said:

> "The proposal does not appear to be consistent with the intention."

We are also told that the problem is a flood of so-called "bogus applicants". I am not in favour of anything other than genuine asylum seekers, but administrative delays at the Home Office are unbelievable. The number of asylum decisions made by the immigration service fell from 35,000 in 1992 to 20,990 in 1994. We were also told that, at the end of 1994, there was a backlog of 55,000 cases awaiting decision.

Today, the Home Secretary told us that the figure is now 66,000. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has said that the delays are caused by the Home Office. Who could conclude otherwise? Surely the solution is for the Home Office to address its own inefficiency.

We are also told that there is a problem of illegal employment. Concern about that is not confined to Opposition Members; it is at the heart of Government. In a letter that she did not intend to be made public—although it was—the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said:

> "There is a danger that employers will concentrate checks on prospective employees whom they see as a risk, if not simply exclude them from consideration for the job. Either way there could be racial discrimination".

That concern is supported by the evidence. Writing to hon. Members, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux said:

> "There is already evidence from CABx that media speculation about 'employment of illegal immigrants' is resulting in an over-zealous approach from some employers to their new role. For example:
>
> A CAB in Surrey reported a black client who was registered with an employment agency. The agency had required the client to present her passport. The client felt she was unlikely to get any more work, and believed that it was the result of victimisation by an employer who had told the agency that she was an overstayer. The client was a British citizen.
>
> A CAB in Northamptonshire reported a client whose employer was demanding that all employees bring in their passports for inspection. The client objected, and wanted to know the legality of the request."

We are now told—or it is implied—that national insurance numbers will be used. We all know that there are 20 million more numbers in circulation than there are people to use them. Imagine that as a potential for fraud! The House could be creating a whole new layer of economic activity. No doubt the Minister of State will tell us in a few months that we need yet more primary legislation to close yet another loophole caused by the unintended consequences of the Government's own ill-thought-out legislation.

We are also told that people are posing as asylum seekers to take advantage of our social security system—

Miss Widdecombe: They are.

Ms Corston: The Minister said that in terms this morning, and I note that she has just affirmed it in a seated intervention. Why, then, has she—a Home Office Minister—ignored Home Office research paper 141 of 1995, entitled "The Settlement of Refugees in Britain", which concluded that the majority of refugees have left behind far more in terms of jobs, homes and future than they have gained by coming to Britain? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are all beginning to shout, but that evidence comes from the Minister's own Department. She must tell us if it is wrong. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Some confusion will arise if these seated interventions continue.

Ms Corston: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We understand that applications come overwhelmingly from countries where human rights abuses take place. Poorer countries such as Bangladesh do not feature. The argument that this is just economic migration will not wash.

Those are all reasons why we need a Special Standing Committee. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It is no good Conservative Members groaning. This morning, in an interview on the "Today" programme which provided fertile ground for those wishing to attack the legislation, the Minister said that if the Opposition were not going to make points there was a good case for a Special Standing Committee. She knows, however, that the adversarial nature of Standing Committees is such that, if the Opposition tabled a motion to the effect that today was 11 December, it would be defeated by an inbuilt Conservative majority.

We know that the adversarial nature of Standing Committees is not appropriate to legislation of this kind. The Minister and the Home Secretary know that the other reason why there cannot be a Special Standing Committee is that no individual, agency and organisation that would give evidence would say anything in support of the Bill. The evidence is all in the opposite direction. The Government's refusal to set up such a Committee can only fuel the "race card" suspicion.

Reference has been made to Andrew Lansley, the former director of research at Conservative central office. His assertion that the Tories play the race card has not been repudiated by the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister. A *Times* editorial of 26 October this year referred to the assertion that Britain should be a safe haven rather than a soft touch as "populist and xenophobic nonsense", saying:

> "Britain is anything but a 'soft touch' for would-be refugees. The 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act already imposes conditions on asylum seekers so stringent that they give the UN Human Rights Committee 'cause for considerable concern.'"

[Ms Corston]

Last week, "Newsnight" featured an item about the Secretary of State for Transport. We were told that he and the Prime Minister had become friends when they were councillors in Lambeth, and that the two things that united them were their opposition to bad housing and their opposition to racism. It is pretty outrageous that a Government headed by someone who claims to be opposed to racism should present legislation such as this.

In a statement which I think anyone would accept comes from a valid source, the Churches Commission for Racial Justice states:

> "There is anger about the treatment of asylum-seekers. The proposed measures are seen as racially biased. There is a strong belief that in the approach to the General Election the 'race card' is being played."

That was written by representatives of churches, one of which the Minister has left and another of which she has joined. Are those churches wrong? The Minister must tell us why they consider the legislation to be racially motivated and immoral.

The Bristol Racial Equality Council asked me

> "to oppose the proposals and ensure that one of the most vulnerable groups in British society, refugees and asylum seekers, are not singled out and treated in a discriminatory manner."

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's time is up.

8.46 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Sometimes I think that debates in the House of Commons do not take place in the real world. My constituents' view of problems is entirely different from that of the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston). I shall be politically incorrect: no doubt I shall be accused of racism by some of the boneheads on the Opposition Benches, but I will not be intimidated.

In no way am I a racist. Like other hon. Members, I value the different communities and cultures that are established and settled in the British homelands, and, as my constituents know, I would treat everyone's problems with the same sensitivity and concern regardless of their race and background.

Every time we open a newspaper nowadays, we are told that a time bomb awaits—pension. A far greater potential danger lies ahead. For far too long, the lips of our leaders have been sealed by moral blackmail. My grandfather was a Londoner. He died 30 years ago. In an answer that I received from the Home Office, I was told that a third of all children in London under the age of 16 are coloured. If the population were to stabilise at that level, in time a third of the population of our capital city would have a different cultural background from the native majority; but it will not stabilise. Differential birth rates and migrations mean that, on present trends, it is only a matter of time before half or more of our metropolitan population is not indigenous.

Mr. Spearing: This has nothing to do with the Bill.

Mr. Marlow: It is an immigration Bill.

If my grandfather could revisit his home now, he would be astounded. He would wonder how representative Government could have been so unrepresentative as to allow such changes to happen in the teeth of popular will. He would ask how it is that, in a democracy, the concerns of the Bishop of Liverpool and the European Court of Human Rights should have taken precedence over those of the electorate. London has been transformed, while its people have willed no transformation.

I do not condone racism, but I understand why it exists. It exists for the same reason as the mob is on the streets of Paris. It exists because for a generation or more elitist Governments have found it too difficult or embarrassing to listen or to tell the truth.

Good race relations are essential, as are sensible, pragmatic policies to help to bring them about, but, as has been said before, numbers are of the essence. In Ulster, a community divided by a mere detail of religion, there has been bloody violence for a quarter of a century. Therefore, how much greater is the risk in our metropolitan areas where the differences are visible and the ghettos more politically incestuous, and where the cultural divide offers much greater scope for incomprehension and mischief.

We may succeed in developing an adequately integrated coherent and tolerant society for 10 years or for 20 years, but in perpetuity? For our grandchildren's sake it is wise to assume that we may not succeed. The only safe course is to pursue today what will doubtless appear to be cruel and ruthless policies, otherwise there is a real risk that this country will face several urban Yugoslavias. The alternative, if we do not take strong action, could yet be undreamt of and unimaginable barbarism.

I support my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and his timely Bill. For all our sakes, white and coloured, he must go further. Many burglars, I dare say, are in some ways decent people—family men, disadvantaged and wishing to provide a better life for their heirs, their children. Burglary is a crime: so, too, should be illegal immigration. It is, after all, an illegal attempt to acquire something of value that does not belong.

We must, I am afraid, be ruthless. Anyone who is illegally in the United Kingdom must know that he will be expelled: no amnesties, never. Anyone seeking to aid or abet illegal immigration is trading in human misery and should be accorded the same contempt and rigorous punishment as that meted out to a drug dealer.

I have one further point and I do not know how to describe it other than to say that it is racist. The dangerous divides in our cities will be between the white British and the Asians, not the West Indian community.

The time must come to stop immigration from the sub-continent. Quite properly, families will wish to reunite but it must be done at the place of original family origin and not here because it is too dangerous for all of us. I know that that must sound monstrous and cruel, but sometimes it is necessary to take strong action. Sometimes it is necessary to be cruel in order to be kind. Frankly, the alternative is terrifying.

8.52 pm

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): In the past I have heard many speeches on immigration, including those about rivers of blood and the swamping of British culture by foreigners. They were made by leaders of the nation and, of course, leaders of the Conservative party. They were made to whip up racial prejudice and to use immigration for party political purposes and caused great damage to good race relations.

The present problem of bogus refugees and illegal immigrants is the creation of a Government who have been in power for 16 years and have failed to tackle the problem. Typically, the Government lay the blame at the door of others. Their immigration policies are in a mess. They are already in deep water on this matter and are getting panicky and taking hasty and unwise steps to rectify their mistakes. They are trying to make a virtue out of an evil. Because of their incompetence and stupidity the Government, and nobody else, are to blame for the crisis.

For the rest of my speech I shall concentrate on the three unacceptable aspects of the Bill. First, I am appalled by the motives of clause 8, which makes it a criminal offence to employ a person who has no immigration entitlement to work in the United Kingdom. The Government have made that proposal without consulting employers or their representative bodies. In the consultation documents that accompany the Bill they admit that the number of people working in breach of their immigration conditions can be no more than speculation. That was underlined by the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker), who is not in his place, when he was Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. At that time he described the figures for illegal immigrants as "wild-guess estimates".

The only reason for setting out to tackle a problem without knowing whether it exists or its extent can only be prejudice—racial prejudice for party political motives. The rejection of the offer to look at the legislation in a Special Standing Committee underlines my opinion and the opinion of the CBI and the Institute of Directors. The Home Secretary has said that both organisations are satisfied by his explanation.

The Government try to pretend that they are committed to keeping the burdens on business to a minimum, but clause 8 will add £25 million to business costs in its first year of operation and there will be a recurring cost of more than £11 million. Those figures are not wild speculation: they are from the Government's consultation documents. It is clear that those costs are to meet the minimum requirements and that a full check on immigrant status is likely to cost far more in employee time, thus adding to the burden on business. They will be imposed so that the Government can use race for political advantage. Given such a political lead, should we wonder when unscrupulous employers use the legislation to discriminate against black and ethnic minority applicants?

Discrimination is also enshrined in clause 9, which instructs housing authorities "as far as practicable" not to make available any accommodation or offer assistance to any immigrant. The operation of the clause will mean that immigrants who are classified as illegal, those who claim asylum status after they arrive in this country and those who appeal against refugee status will be denied access to local authority housing. That will add directly to the growing number of homeless people. In reality, local authorities such as that in my home borough of Ealing will continue to find accommodation for homeless immigrants, whatever their status, and will bear the costs. It is likely anyway that local authorities will have a duty to the most vulnerable asylum seekers under other social legislation such as the Children Act 1989 or the various parts of the community care legislation.

The effect is that, once again, central Government are pushing the cost of their legislation on to local councils and not providing any compensation. Local councils will be forced to make the invidious choice of either raising the council tax or cutting even further its services. The parallel with the Secretary of State for the Environment's raising of the capping limit, to pay for extra education spending through councils raising more from their council tax, shows that the tactics of loading central Government costs on to local authority precepts is not confined to the Home Office.

It is also instructive that the Government have not formally consulted local authorities about these changes. Do not they care, or has the Government's arrogance become so complete that any democratic opinion outside Whitehall no longer counts?

On the proposal to draw up a "white list" of so-called safe countries, the fact that Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Algeria—all countries experiencing political upheaval and internal repression—are rumoured to be on the list serves to underline how arbitrary it is. Home Office denials of the inclusion of those countries would be believed only if more than 95 per cent. of asylum applications from those countries were not turned down. It is clear that the Government are ashamed about that proposal because, should it ever reach the statute book with a fairly innocuous-looking list of countries, the Bill allows the Home Secretary to change the composition of the list without reference to the House or to any of its Committees.

I should like to question whether this proposal complies with international law such as the European convention on human rights and, especially, the 1951 United Nations refugee convention, to which Britain is a signatory. Under that convention, each asylum application must be considered on its individual merits and

> "without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin."

The way to tackle the problem of illegal immigration is not by this inhuman and potentially racist legislation but by tackling the root of economic and social problems in immigrants' home countries. It is clear from the recently announced massive overseas aid budget cuts that the Government are interested not in solving the immigration problem but only, in the run-up to the election, in using the race card for their own party political ends. I therefore ask hon. Members to vote against Second Reading and to throw this tawdry Bill out.

9.1 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): May I give the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) some immediate feedback from a constituent? He is my Member of Parliament and I did not agree with what he said. On that basis, I will not vote for him in the next general election.

While sitting here, I have been trying to remember whether I have spoken on immigration before. I do not think that I have made a speech on that subject, although I have made many speeches on race relations because I regard race relations as one of the most important issues in this country. We have differing groups, well typified by my constituency of Harrow, West, but if those groups do not get on together and understand the differences, and if society and the community do not expand to take account of those things, and grow as a result of the marvellous diversity that

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

immigrants have brought to this country, we have no hope as a society. It is against that background of my fundamental belief that I talk about the Bill.

My constituency contains many people who are and have been asylum seekers, and, especially in the large Jewish population, many people who are descendants of asylum seekers. Our schools and communities cope with the effect of asylum seekers in a way that the hon. Member for Southall referred to in relation to his constituency.

It is right, and something that I am proud of, that over centuries this country has offered a safe haven to the people who have needed it. There is no suggestion in the Bill that the Government do not intend that to continue to be the case. It is a fact, however—and the Labour party cannot wish this away—that many people have a wish and a desire to come to this country. Although that is understandable from their point of view, it is nevertheless a fact that they are not genuine asylum seekers and that they come here, understandably, to seek to improve their way of life. I have to tell the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) that to say that this country cannot cope with the many people who want to come here is not to offend against the Judaeo-Christian values that many of us hold dear. It is nonsense to suggest, as some Opposition Members are trying to, that all applications to come to this country must be genuine.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hughes: Labour's Front-Bench spokesman indicates that the Labour party did not say that. With respect, some people have been seeking to cast slurs on the Government and question the way in which asylum seekers are treated, but the only way to deal with those matters completely would be to abolish all controls and have no system of deciding which applicant was genuine. Only then would the problems go away.

It is all very well for the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to complain about what he regards as the spin put by Conservative central office on issues such as the designated list, but he forgot to mention the spin deployed by the Labour party when it suggested that Sri Lanka would be included on the list. That was, of course, preposterous and has the fingerprints of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) all over it. Anyone seeking to discredit the Government's aim would of course suggest that Sri Lanka would be on the list.

I suggest that the presumption that people coming from countries on the list are not genuinely in need of asylum is helpful to genuine asylum seekers. They would know where they stood. I believe that the Bill will help genuine asylum seekers, and nothing that the Opposition have said, nothing that I have read in any briefings or in any newspapers, including *The Universe* yesterday, has led me to believe that one genuine asylum seeker will be disadvantaged by it. Indeed, when the queues are reduced and when people who are not genuine asylum seekers are no longer part of the bureaucratic problem facing the Government and officials—

Mr. John Austin-Walker *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: No, I shall not give way because of the 10-minute rule. Genuine asylum seekers will benefit from the Bill.

There is one point on which I agree with the hon. Member for Blackburn. He mentioned an abuse which, as I understand it, is not covered in the Bill although it is one that Ministers should consider. I have been sickened by a number of solicitors and so-called immigration advisers who prey on vulnerable people seeking to come to this country. I stress that the problem lies not only with so-called advisers but with some solicitors. Of course, the Government must examine the problem, but the Law Society has ignored it for far too long. Some of its members are responsible and it should sort them out. The solicitors involved are an absolute disgrace to any reasonable society. One of their devices is the offer of judicial review.

Only a couple of weeks ago I telephoned such a solicitor. I said that I was not a lawyer and had perhaps missed something but that I could see nothing in a particular case that led me to think that a judicial review was necessary. The solicitor said that there was of course no case for judicial review but that the people involved seemed keen and he wanted to offer them something. I do not know how much it was costing but, as the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) rightly indicates from a sedentary position, some solicitors are behaving in this way to earn money. They are a disgrace and need to be sorted out.

The suggestion that the Bill should go to a Special Standing Committee is an attempt by the Labour party to appear to be on both sides of the issue, but the Labour party cannot have it both ways. If there is a problem, it needs to be sorted out. There is a degree of confusion in the Labour party on whether it thinks there is a problem. If it thought that there was not a problem, it would not want the Bill to be considered by a Special Standing Committee. Plainly, Labour Members recognise, although do not dare say it, that there is a problem that needs to be sorted out. The suggestion of a Special Standing Committee is merely a fig leaf.

The Labour party cannot expect to be taken seriously on this issue until it answers the central question: does it accept that there is a problem? Given that I think that it does, what would be its solution? If it does not answer that central question everyone will know that it is simply trying to play both sides of the issue.

Labour Governments have had to grapple with such problems before. Indeed, the right hon. Members for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) voted for measures to deal with such problems when they were in Labour Governments. Yet when a Conservative Government seek to grapple with the issues, somehow it is different.

I have found some of the speeches made by Labour Members and some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Blackburn to be simply playing a race card. They want to build up this issue so that Asian people believe that their only home is in the Labour party. I do not think that Asian people are that naive. Certainly, from all the contact that I have had with my constituents over the past few weeks, I do not think that they believe it. The Labour party will be condemned for playing race with this issue.

9.10 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The Bill is one of the nastiest pieces of proposed legislation that I have seen since I entered the House in 1992 and, as several hon. Friends have said, I am sure that it will greatly damage race relations in this country.

Repeatedly during the debate, a rationale for the need for the Bill has been cited. We have heard that there are increasing abuses in the system, that there is an increasing number of bogus asylum seekers, that the UK is a target, that we must follow the rest of Europe, and that nothing proposed is inconsistent with the 1951 convention.

We all know—anyone who has dealt with asylum applicants certainly knows—that there are unjustified applications. We all know, too, what is happening in the Home Office—and what has been happening there for years and years. There is an enormous delay in dealing with applications, which actually encourages the minority who want to make fraudulent claims. Why have the applications of more than 30,000 asylum seekers who applied before the introduction of Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 still not been dealt with? Even before they have been dealt with, another Act is on the way.

The Government have been trying to paint a picture suggesting not that some or a few applications are bogus, but that the majority of people applying for asylum are fakes. Indeed, the Government have made great play of the numbers. It is important to put those numbers into some perspective. The truth is that the numbers of refugees in Europe are not large compared with the rest of the world—and the numbers of refugees in the UK are not large compared with other European countries. Jordan, a country of 4 million people, had to cope with 400,000 people who fled there during the Gulf war—equivalent to 10 per cent. of the population. There were millions of refugees in Pakistan from Afghanistan. The poorest countries in the world carry most of the burden of dealing with refugees. So let us not hear this rubbish that the rich countries in western Europe cannot afford all the refugees. The poor countries are carrying the burden.

In Europe, Germany had more than 400,000 asylum seekers in 1992 alone, and 127,000 last year. The fact that some European countries are tightening up their procedures does not necessarily make it right or something that we should follow. In any case, the refugees who went to Germany would not necessarily apply to this country. Indeed, that is very unlikely. Germany has always taken refugees from eastern Europe, the former Yugoslavia and the like. The 1994 figures for this country show that 12,000 applicants came from former colonies in Africa, 6,000-plus from former colonies in Asia and 2,000-plus from the middle east. The figures reveal this country's colonial past and it is not surprising that people feel that they ought to be able to turn to a country with which they have links of culture and language.The application figures for the past 10 to 15 years—the ups and downs from different countries—show a history of repression and civil war.

What makes an application bogus? I suggest that it is a predetermined attempt to deceive. I do not accept that the fact that the Home Office turns down an application makes it bogus. Why were an average of 20 per cent. of asylum applicants given asylum between 1986 and 1990 and another 62 per cent. exceptional leave to remain, which makes 82 per cent. in all? In 1992-93, 6 per cent. were granted asylum and only 43 per cent. exceptional leave to remain—about 50 per cent. in all. Since the 1993 Act, 4 per cent. have been given asylum and 17 per cent. exceptional leave to remain.

What has happened to change the nature of asylum applications in the past 10 years? Are different types of people applying? I have seen no evidence of that. Judging by the asylum seekers to whom I have spoken during a long period of time—before coming to this House—I have seen nothing to suggest that there is any change in the nature of the applicants. There has been a political decision to tighten up. In evidence to the Social Security Advisory Committee about the proposed benefit changes, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said:

> "A country's recognition rate of refugees may more often reflect the narrowness or liberalness of that state's application of the refugee definition than the legitimacy or otherwise of individual claims. There are dangerous shortcomings in any assumption that the low refugee recognition rate in the UK is evidence of the extent of bogus claimants".

That is the view of the United Nations.

As I said during the debate on the statement, the white list is a clear breach of article 3 of the 1951 convention, which states:

> "The contracting states shall apply the provisions of this Convention . . . without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin".

The UN handbook on procedures is explicit that group decisions should not be made, except in urgency and then only to allow each member of a group to be regarded prima facie as a refugee. It is impossible to argue that the white list and the accelerated procedures are not discriminatory against people from certain countries, which is exactly the opposite of what the UN suggests.

It is nonsense to try to pretend, as Ministers have several times, that there will be an unbiased, prejudice-free determination of every individual, whether or not the country of origin is on the white list. If that were the case, why have the list? One does not have such lists except to do something with them. The consequences of the list will be the refusal of many genuine asylum seekers. I have no doubt about that. Clause 1 will mean that virtually anyone who has been refused will be subject to the fast track appeal—an appeal within days. Such fast decisions will mean more wrong decisions—of that there is no doubt. People will be sent back to third countries. The Minister will not even check that the countries will accept them before they are sent there.

Then there will be the farce of an appeal from a third country. At the beginning of the debate, the Minister asked why we needed appeals as only 4 per cent. of all cases that went to appeal last year were allowed. For those 4 per cent. the appeal was very important. It meant that they were not sent somewhere unsafe. The adjudicators referred another 30 per cent. of cases back for another look, but that procedure is also being taken away.

Finally, I shall deal briefly with clause 4. We all want to get rid of the con men and the advisers who give false advice. Clause 4 makes it an offence to obtain or seek to obtain leave to enter this country by deception. Anyone who deals with asylum seekers knows that many people have to come with false papers. They need a false passport or visitor's visa to get to Britain. Clause 4 criminalises those people.

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

I do not have time to deal with the other clauses. Suffice it to say that the rest of the Bill will poison race relations. The Bill is about one thing: turning people away. If the Government said that they did not want asylum seekers and that the Bill is designed to get rid of them at least it would have the merit of being honest. It is a destructive, dishonest Bill that will do enormous damage.

9.20 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The Bill should be about how this country can meet its obligations to itself and to the international community by providing a system of asylum procedures which reinforces our historic tradition, which dates back centuries, of providing asylum for people with well-founded fears of persecution, guarantees that a genuine asylum seeker can find safety in Britain, roots out bogus applicants and achieves those objectives speedily and fairly. I hoped that the Government also wanted to achieve those objectives. If they do, why have they brought forward this concoction of misjudged, unfair, inadequate and provocative measures?

It has been a controversial debate. Many hon. Members have asserted their views with considerable vehemence, which does not always happen in the House. The hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Baker) said that we needed to tackle racketeers and traffickers. The Opposition agree.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made several telling points in their contributions. They drew attention to clause 10, which states:

> "No immigrant . . . shall be entitled to child benefit . . . unless he satisfies prescribed conditions."

I put it to the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), and the Home Secretary, why such a wide definition? Is there something to hide? Is there another agenda? Will the Minister explain what those conditions are and will she accept amendments to define the prescribed conditions should the Bill go to Committee? Or is it another case of removing the authority of Parliament—a case of government by edict and withdrawal of child benefit by edict?

There has been criticism from Conservative Members. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) expressed concern that there had been insufficient interdepartmental consultation, especially in relation to the housing clauses. He drew our attention to the fact that under the Bill, Westminster council would have additional obligations and incur cost in relation to child care and other matters. I hope that the Minister will respond clearly to those points when she sums up.

The hon. Members for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), among other observations, gave considerable emphasis to the employment clauses and pointed out, in different ways, that they did not believe that they would work. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) argued that there was a need for regulation of legal advisers. We agree with him.

Many of my hon. Friends made speeches of great conviction, including my hon. Friends the Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) spoke about the often derogatory use of the word "immigrant". I agree with her about that.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) discussed the impact of the Bill and the social security regulations on the poor. I share his concerns and we shall be in the same Lobby as him this evening to vote in favour of the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Given the controversy and the many strongly held views, would it not have been both wise and reassuring for the Government to have agreed to refer the Bill at this stage to a Special Standing Committee? Would not it have reassured the country about the Bill's purpose? Would not it have allowed a wide range of experts to look at how accurately the Bill's assumptions relate to what is happening to asylum applications and assess the repercussions of any proposals?

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) said that the perception of the Bill would not be helpful. Much of the problem has been created by people like the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), whose contribution was extremely xenophobic—perhaps worse. He used different language to say what has been said by Andrew Lansley, the Conservative candidate for South Cambridgeshire and former head of research at Conservative central office. I know that Conservative Members do not want to hear about Mr. Lansley, but this is a key issue. He said:

> "Immigration, an issue we raised successfully in 1992 and again in the 1994 European election campaign, played particularly well in the tabloids and has more potential to hurt".

That statement has caused concern in the House, outside the House, with bodies who deal with race and community relations, in the editorial columns of *The Times*, and with church leaders.

I hope that the Minister of State will take account of the views expressed in this morning's edition of *The Times*:

> "We are anxious about the effect on race relations if the proposals are hurried through in a contentious atmosphere."

If the Bill is not about playing the race card for party advantage, will the Home Secretary repudiate Mr. Lansley's comments now? That question was put to him following his statement two weeks ago and again by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in today's debate. If he will not, the House and the country must assume that he agrees with his comments.

Mr. Marlow: Does the hon. Gentleman want the Bill to go before a Special Standing Committee because it is controversial or because it is not controversial? If it is because it is controversial, does he want all controversial Bills to go before Special Standing Committees? If not, does he want all non-controversial Bills to go before Special Standing Committees? Will he please come clean on this issue, because we are confused?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn has already made it clear that it would damage race relations if the Bill were considered in a controversial climate. It should be considered on the issues before us and, if it is considered in that way in a Special Standing Committee, we may make some progress.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: If the Bill were not to become law, how would the hon. Gentleman deal with paid marriage brokers who procure British-born Sikh girls to marry illegal immigrants? An example of such a marriage broker is former Labour councillor Talwar, who ruined the life of a young constituent of mine.

Mr. Henderson: I am not sure that the Bill deals with that serious issue. It is not the kind of issue that should be used for party political advantage. It should be examined in a cool fashion and we should hear advice from those involved in the case and try to come up with a sensible solution.

Other parts of the Bill are objectionable. Clause 1 empowers the Government to establish a so-called "white list", which they regard as necessary to speed up the process of asylum applications. They say that it also complies with the 1951 United Nations convention on human rights. How can the Government claim that all cases should be heard on their merit when, if the Bill is enacted, there will be clear differences in how applications are dealt with in the future? Is not it clear that there is a grave risk of infringing the 1951 convention because of an inability to convince that cases will be heard on their merit and that genuine applicants will be accepted, as the hon. Member for Broxtowe said in his contribution?

Is it really necessary to deny the right of appeal to applicants who have arrived through a third country and been refused admission, which is the realistic consequence of being forced to make an appeal in another country where one might not even be able to speak the language?

Are not those clauses all the more objectionable if the results of the Bill are that we are encumbered with that ineffective new procedure, the number of cases that go to judicial appeal continues to increase, the backlog remains, long delays build up in the system and, in addition, people feel that the procedures are unfair and damaging to our community and race relations?

Does the Home Secretary accept what the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle said in a statement two weeks ago and repeated in his contribution today—that additional resources need to be applied to the problems that exist in ensuring that immigration cases are dealt with speedily, and that, if those resources are applied now, it can have the effect that savings will be made in future? As an ex-Minister, who has practical experience of what is happening in the immigration and nationality department, is not the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle right? Is not the only effective way of reducing the backlog and of rooting out bogus applications properly to resource the immigration and nationality department and the judicial system?

Will not the House be damned by our successors if, instead of facing up to the real problem of providing those resources, we agree to the introduction of a demonstrably unfair, divided asylum procedure as a convenience for the Government and their not-so-hidden motives?

Many submissions have been made in the debate about employers' checks on immigrant people. What has possessed the Secretary of State to make that proposal? For 16 years, the Conservative party has made a great virtue of arguing for the relief of the burden of bureaucracy and paperwork on employers, especially small employers. I do not concede that it has achieved that, and many small employers in my constituency tell me that that is not the case, but I am sure that we have all heard the spin doctoring on that matter. Are not the proposals in clause 8 in complete conflict with what the spin doctors claim from Smith square?

The Home Secretary must now be aware of the opinions of the business community. I do not know whether he has had further correspondence with the Confederation of British Industry, but it initially said that it would find great difficulty with his proposals.

It came as a great surprise to us when the Secretary of State said in his opening statement that, after great difficulty, he had managed to reach an understanding with the Institute of Directors. I suggest to him that he has not reached the same understanding with the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who challenged him on how efficacious those regulations would be in relation to small business.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley was echoing the remarks of Mrs. Jacqueline Jeynes, who is the employment affairs chairman of the Federation of Small Business. She is not yet convinced. She says:

> "Mr. Howard's plan is completely at odds with the Government's deregulation drive and will hit those very employers the Prime Minister referred to in his recent conference speech as the 'heroes' and 'risk takers' of this nation."

Other people have also expressed their concern. The hon. Members for Bexhill and Battle, for Broxtowe and for Gillingham have said that they feel that many of the proposals that the Secretary of State is making about employers' checks are unworkable.

The Lord Chancellor also expressed concern. He said that there is an

> "unlikely viability of the scheme based on national insurance numbers".

The Social Security Select Committee, in its fifth report, dated 23 November 1995, found:

> "there are many more numbers than there are British residents aged 16 and over"

and that

> "we are concerned that the existence of millions of non-active accounts has the potential to allow widespread fraud of the system."

My principal objection to the proposals is that they will damage race relations. Will not they discourage employers from taking on people from ethnic communities? Does not it bring job apartheid to Britain when British citizens with ethnic characteristics find themselves ostracised from certain employment opportunities? Does the Secretary of State understand—as many hon. Members have pointed out during the debate—that black and Asian British people will perceive the measures in that light? For that reason, they will cause untold damage to race relations. Yet the employment checks will do virtually nothing to stop illegal immigration. Should not the Secretary of State devote his energies to measures that might have some impact?

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that he is helping race relations in this country by raising wildly unjustified fears? That does nothing to help race relations.

Mr. Henderson: I do not believe that the fears are wildly unjustified. The Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and at least four Government Members who have spoken today have said that they believe that the measures will not work. In addition—I believe that this is the most important point—they have said that the proposals will damage race relations in constituencies such as that of the hon. Member for Harrow, West. I am sure that he knows what I am talking about in that regard.

Much has been said about the impact of the new regulations on social security, and clauses in the Bill deal with that subject. Do the Government recognise that, in addition to further injuring race relations, the social security proposals will lead to obvious discrimination between those asylum seekers who have the means to support themselves while they proceed with their appeals and those poorer asylum seekers who will either be dependent on charity or will have to drop their appeals and return to the countries from whence they came—regardless of the consequences?

If the Government believe in justice, they must acknowledge that society will pay the price if the social security changes come into effect. More homeless and destitute adults and children will harbour under the railway arches of our cities. We will see them in the city centre of the oldest democracy in the world. Does not that prick the conscience of Ministers? Does it not leave them somewhat embarrassed? Is that the kind of society that they want to see in downtown London as we move to the new millennium? Is that the memorial that they want after 16 years of Conservative Government?

Will not the Government think again? It would be more honourable and statesmanlike to remove the issue from politics and to agree to investigation by a Special Standing Committee. The Government should listen to the views of those who deal with asylum cases and seek consensus. They should pursue a single, straightforward procedure—with a proper time period in which an applicant could prepare a case and make representations—and a fair appeals procedure which would apply to every applicant in every situation.

That would not necessarily mean untold delays in dealing with asylum applications. We want a speedy system but that must not be achieved at the expense of fairness. We must find the necessary resources to ensure that the backlog of cases is cleared. Cases must be dealt with speedily, bogus applications must be rooted out and genuine asylum seekers must find refuge and safety in our country. This week *The Economist* stated:

> "By promoting anti-immigrant policies the government risks encouraging racism and undermining liberty. It deserves contempt, not votes, for proposing this nasty little bill."

I agree with *The Economist*. The Bill is not the approach of one nation politics. It is not what the majority of hon. Members want or expect and it is not what the majority of reasonable people in the community want or expect. The Bill is not what we need to foster strong communities in a multi-racial society and it does not constitute the kind of approach that will stand the test of time. In short, the Bill is not right, it is not moral and the House should refuse it a Second Reading.

9.38 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): This has been an interesting debate, with a good deal of sense talked by Conservative Members and a great deal of evidence of embarrassment in the Labour party. It is quite right that the Opposition should be embarrassed. They know that there is a problem but they are too cynical to do anything about it. They are also embarrassed by their appalling record of ignoring the problem and by the revelation that new Labour has no new solutions—only the old voting patterns on this issue as on so many others.

Each time in the past 16 years that we have sought to protect this country against abusers of our immigration system, the Labour party has opposed us. The Opposition opposed the revision of the immigration rules in 1979, the British Nationality Act 1981, the Immigration Act 1988 and the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. Now they are going to let the people down by opposing this Act as well: no wonder they are embarrassed.

The Opposition say that we are playing the race card, and that we are introducing the Bill only in order to improve our electoral chances. Both allegations demonstrate the profound irresponsibility of the Labour party.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: If anyone is playing the race card—to use their own vulgar expression—the Opposition are. Even before they knew the contents of the Bill, they were stirring up fears that it would be racist. Firm but fair immigration controls underpin good race relations; alarmism and scaremongering destroy good race relations.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I must tell Opposition Members that during my preamble I shall not give way, but when I begin to amble, I will.

All communities, of whatever ethnic origin, benefit from the sensible and responsible use of public funds—a lesson that the Opposition either cannot or will not learn. Immigration and asylum issues must not become a no-go area of public debate, as the Opposition appear to think they should. It is an affront to democracy to claim—*[Interruption.]* It is an affront to democracy to cry "racist" every time a major issue of national importance is brought before the House.

Mr. Henderson *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not expect Front-Bench interventions from either side—I wish to hear what the hon. Lady is saying. Tolerance should be a mark of this House. We should listen even though we may profoundly disagree with what is said.

Miss Widdecombe: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Opposition do not want to listen because they do not want to be embarrassed by hearing the truth. Nevertheless I am delighted to welcome the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) to what I believe is his first occasion in this role. I hope that what he has to say is more sensible than what he said in his speech.

Mr. Henderson: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind remarks. Now that she has finished her preamble and has gone on a ramble, may I bring her back to the issue of race—in particular, to the comments, reported in *The Times* of 27 September, of Mr. Taylor, a Conservative candidate at the last election?

> "The Tory party think giving a few cocktail parties for Asian millionaires is race relations . . . They alienate ethnic minorities by pandering to xenophobic voters with promises of crackdowns on immigration."

Would the hon. Lady care to comment?

Miss Widdecombe: What alienates ethnic minorities is the patronising attitude of the Labour party, which does not even believe that we should discuss issues pertaining to those minorities.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): While we are on the topic of embarrassment, is the Minister embarrassed by the views of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)? If not, would she care to explain why not?

Miss Widdecombe: I was not at all embarrassed when my hon. Friend deplored the attitude of Opposition Members—he was absolutely right so to do.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my hon. Friend note that the Bill has considerable support from hundreds of my Sikh constituents, who in recent years have complained to me that the wage rates for their labouring jobs are being undercut by bogus applicants who are working for a cheap price?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and brings a note of much-needed good sense into the debate. Perhaps while he is on the subject of employers, I could turn to some of the concerns that have been expressed over the sanctions which we shall be imposing on employers.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall take one more intervention. Does the hon. Gentleman want to be that one?

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): During her preamble the Minister said her party was not playing the race card; it was the Labour party. If that is right, why did Mr. Andrew Lansley say that immigration plays well in the tabloids, that they had played it before the last election and they must play it again? Is that or is that not the race card? If the Minister thinks that it is not, the view of the Opposition and everyone else will be that it is a bogus claim by a bogus Government.

Miss Widdecombe: Addressing a serious problem and finding responsible solutions to it is not playing the race card. Stirring up fears even before knowing the contents of the Bill is playing the race card.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I said that that was to be the last intervention. It was a terrible waste, but I am afraid that it is all over.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will recall that at the beginning of the debate the Home Secretary told the House and Madam Speaker, in respect of my point of order, that the Minister would reply to the specific points that I had raised. I have not heard a reply. Nor is the Minister giving way, as I had hoped she might.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The content of speeches is not a matter for the Chair, as the hon. Gentleman will know, but I also note that the hon. Lady has not yet concluded her speech.

Miss Widdecombe: I agree. If the hon. Gentleman seriously wants a reply rather than just to make a point, he will wait and give me a chance to answer. He is now wasting time and that time will come off my reply to him and not to anybody else.

Various Members on both sides of the House raised concerns about the sanctions that we may impose on employers. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) both raised those particular concerns.

It is not the case that we shall be imposing undue burdens on employers—a fact now recognised by many employers' organisations. Nor is it a fact, as was claimed later in the debate, that the cost to employers will be enormous. Our compliance cost assessment works out that the cost is likely to be in the region of 65p per employee, which does not seem extravagant.

I turn now to the opening speech for the Opposition. There are times when I feel sorry for the shadow spokesman on home affairs. I nearly felt sorry for him tonight. There he was with same old approach, only this time he had to take shelter behind errors in the Amnesty International briefing rather than misprints in *The Guardian*.

The hon. Gentleman protested strongly when we refused to set up a Special Standing Committee. He might have been convincing had he not announced at the Labour party conference an intention to oppose our Bill some weeks before anybody suggested a Special Standing Committee. However, perhaps it is just as well that we shall not be having one as the hon. Gentleman does not appear even to understand its function. When one of his hon. Friends asked him whether it would not be an advantage that such a Committee would be able to examine the benefit changes, he agreed, but the benefit changes are not in the Bill so would not have been examined by a Special Standing Committee.

Mr. Straw: The Minister has not read her own Bill. What does she think that clauses 10 and 12 are about, if not about changes to the benefit regime?

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman would like to check *Hansard*, he will find that the reference was specifically to the benefit changes to the safety net in income-related benefits—which are not covered by the Bill. Opposition Members do not know what is in the Bill. They try to deny, from a sedentary position, that sanctions against racketeers are in the Bill. The Opposition do not have a notion.

The hon. Member for Blackburn said that he was concerned about the Bill's employer provisions. I am not surprised. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has in mind a Labour-controlled council. Perhaps he has in mind Hackney council, which has a good record of giving jobs to people not entitled to work in this country. On 2 September 1994, the immigration service detained a cook employed by Hackney council. She did not have any

[Miss Widdecombe]

permission to live or work in this country, and she should have gone in October 1992. That woman found a ready refuge in illegal working in Hackney.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): She must have been cheap to employ.

Miss Widdecombe: I do not know whether she was cheap, but Hackney council is where she found a place of work.

On 1 December 1994, an estate manager in Hackney's housing department was detained by immigration officials for working in breach of his conditions of entry. It did not stop there. On 17 February 1995, a personnel officer in the office of Hackney's chief executive was served with a notice of illegal entry. He was deported in February.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I notice that Opposition Members are rising to their feet in defence of Hackney—in defence of an illegal employer. We intend to draw those employers under the net of our sanctions.

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I made it clear that I had taken the last intervention, so I suggest that the hon. Lady sits down.

Ms Abbott: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I want to hear what the hon. Lady has to say.

Ms Abbott: Are the matters raised by the Minister relevant to the Bill? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] The issues to which she has just referred will not be dealt with under the terms of the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: If I could hear the Minister, it would be easier for me to judge.

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Lady has failed to notice that illegal working and sanctions against employers who take on illegal workers are not part of the Bill, she has not read very far through it because those provisions come fairly early on in the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) drew attention to a lot of expense incurred by Westminster city council—£8 million housing costs and £2 million in residential care. The deterrent effect of our measures, by reducing the number of people who will try to take advantage of our system, should lower the number of persons who are lawfully resident and who also have to be looked after while applying for asylum.

I come with some reluctance to the remarks of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who did not seem to understand the function of that which he persistently misnames the white list. In fact, it is a designated list. The right hon. Gentleman asked what is a general fear of persecution. He only has to look at current practice. Some countries have a 99 per cent. asylum application rejection rate but 1 per cent. are accepted. That conclusively demonstrates that we examine each case on its merits. We will continue to do so. I have no doubt that countries on the designated list will, nevertheless, still produce a small percentage of acceptances—as they do at present, despite their high rate of general rejection.

The right hon. Gentleman said that we are creating the entirely new offence of entry by deception. The law already makes provision for that, and all that we are doing is extending existing provisions. At present, the law makes it an offence to obtain leave to enter by deception; there is nothing new about that. Clause 4 extends that to leave to remain by deception. It seems to me totally illogical that we should make it illegal to enter by deception but not make it illegal to remain.

Mr. Hattersley: If the hon. Gentleman— *[Interruption.]* I beg her pardon. If the hon. Lady will check the record, she will find that I did not say that the offence was new; I said that it was unjustifiable. Will she now turn her mind to the point that I made: that an applicant for asylum is unlikely to turn up at a high commission or embassy and say, "I need a visa because I am being persecuted", and stand in line while one is provided? Will she deal with the real problem rather than the one that she has invented?

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman cannot tell the difference between lots of things, apparently. He cannot tell the difference between leaving a country by illegal methods and entering a country by illegal methods. If somebody leaves a country on a forged document because they have no choice, because they are fleeing an inclement regime and are in real genuine fear, that does not stop them when they arrive at our ports of entry declaring honestly that they are seeking asylum. In that case, they are covered.

I come now to a point that was raised consistently throughout the debate: the alleged 20 million missing national insurance numbers. The Opposition are enjoying their usual hyperbole, because the Select Committee's report shows that it is not in fact the case. There are some 65 million national insurance numbers: 9 million relate to people who are dead, but the records are kept *[Interruption.]* Yes, the records are kept because widows' entitlement may be affected. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members think that widows' entitlement is a joke, so let us record that fact. Ten million national insurance numbers relate to other known groups: the main group is people who are abroad but still entitled to claim; and 3.2 million people under the age of 16. Some 45 million adult UK residents are actively working and are in the system. Therefore, the discrepancies in the system are but a tiny fraction of the 20 million suggested by the Opposition.

I now turn to the interesting speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). Usually, I have quite a lot of time for the hon. Gentleman, but tonight he let me down very badly. First, there was—I say with regret—his tasteless and personal attack on my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in respect of his family position. He then had the gall, having launched that false attack, to quote scripture. May I quote it back?

> "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

And then, as if that was not enough—

Mr. Alton *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: No, I am running out of time.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is not the equivalent to bear false witness to lie? Has not the hon. Lady just called the hon. Member for Mossley Hill a liar? Should not she withdraw that remark immediately?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I did not hear anything that would cause me to ask the hon. Lady to withdraw, but I would add that there is sufficient noise in the House to make it difficult to follow. Therefore I ask the House to settle down so that I can hear what is being said.

Miss Widdecombe: As if that was not enough, we then had a false picture about the Home Office causing delays in the system and failing to address that. The hon. Gentleman completely overlooked the fact that, against 15,000 applicants *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If neither you nor the House heard the expression "bear false witness", will the Chair ask for an apology tomorrow, when the *Hansard* record shows that those words were uttered?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will examine the matter tomorrow.

Miss Widdecombe: That intervention says it all. The Opposition have not an argument to stand on; they are hopeless.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 319.

Division No. 13] **[10.0[illegible] pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles

Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Paul Tyler.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod

Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on second or third reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 284.

Division No. 14] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry

Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair

Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William

Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*

Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin

Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*

Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John

Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret

Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*

Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Ms Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second Time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee—[*Mr. Straw.*]

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 314.

Division No. 15] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville

Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Max Madden and
Mr. David Alton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*

Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, Sir David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet at half-past Ten o'clock:

1. in the New Parliament House, Edinburgh, on Monday 15th January 1996 to take Questions for oral answer and to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

2. in the Albert Halls, Stirling, on Monday 29th January 1996 to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

3. in the Highland Regional Council Buildings, Inverness, on Monday 5th February to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

4. in the Town and County Hall, Aberdeen on Monday 19th February to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

5. in Scotland on Monday 4th March to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

6. in Scotland on Friday 15th March to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

7. in Scotland on Monday 22nd April to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

8. in Scotland on Monday 13th May to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

9. in Scotland on Monday 20th May to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

10. in Scotland on Monday 10th June to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

11. in Scotland on Monday 17th June to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;

12. in Scotland on Monday 8th July to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee;—*[Mr. Burns.]*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ordered,

That Mr. Alan Duncan be discharged from the Social Security Committee and Mr. Edward Leigh be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Christopher Gill be added to the Welsh Affairs Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

A5209 (Lancashire)

10.40 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I beg leave to introduce a petition on behalf of the A5209 Traffic Action Group, representing 2,500 people in the villages of Wrightington, Parbold, Newburgh, Latham and Burscough. The petition declares:

> The A5209 . . . which links junction 27 of the M6 motorway to the A59 road at Burscough, is totally unsuited for the purpose of a feeder route into West Lancashire for heavy commercial traffic, by reason of its narrow, twisting and dangerous carriageway through a mainly rural area. This is causing hazardous conditions, destruction of the quality of life, and environmental damage affecting the residents of five villages which are situated on the route.
>
> The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons:—
>
> authorise the Department of Transport to hasten construction of the Ormskirk and Burscough bypasses, and on completion to place a 7.5 ton weight limit on the full length of the A5209 route."

I fully support that petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Farm Incomes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10.42 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): This is the first, and perhaps only, chance that we shall have to discuss on the Floor of the House the current collapse in farm incomes in less-favoured areas and the failure of the Budget to tackle those problems. I therefore hope that there will be an opportunity for one or two other hon. Members to intervene briefly, because I know that my anxieties are shared across party and across the country.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has acknowledged a decrease in those incomes. In the severely disadvantaged areas, in 1994-95, the specialist sheep farmers have experienced a downturn of 24 per cent. on 1993-94, when the hill livestock compensatory allowance rates were about 20 per cent. greater. Even MAFF's very optimistic forecast for the current year shows a drop of 18 per cent. for 1995-96.

The specialist beef farmers have experienced a downturn of 17 per cent. in the same period, and it is forecast that they will be down 19 per cent. this year. Mixed cattle and sheep farmers have experienced a downturn of 16 per cent. for the same period, and it is forecast that they will be down 12 per cent. this year. In the disadvantaged areas, cattle and sheep farmers have experienced a downturn of 26 per cent. for the same period, and it is forecast that they will be down 17 per cent. this year. The forecast for 1995-96 is very similar to the actual index for 1992-93, when HLCA rates were very much greater. The index is now 131 compared with 133 then. The MAFF figures fail to take into account the current problems for beef in the market.

The National Farmers Union for England and Wales is even more pessimistic. It says:

> "For the second consecutive year, the Government has chosen to ignore the great need of our hill and upland farms for extra support. Four out of ten farmers in Less Favoured Areas have incomes of less than £10,000 per year and their pleas for help have been roundly rejected. This decision calls into question the Government's claim of a genuine commitment to the hills and uplands. Furthermore, this reluctance to act is inconsistent with the spirit and words of the recently-published Rural White Paper which speaks of a concern to strengthen the rural economy. Under the terms of the Chancellor's Budget, HLCA rates have been frozen for the coming year 1996/97. The decision is particularly painful coming on top of a similar freeze last year and a slashing of payments in 1993 and 1994. When the Government originally made these cuts it stated that if hill incomes fell in future years, it would look at reinstating the payments".

Similarly, the National Farmers Union for Scotland writes:

> "A standstill in payments for next year means that the real value of these important payments to hill farmers will be reduced. The incomes of these producers are already unsustainably low, and where they are below the tax thresholds, will not benefit from the tax cutting measures announced in today's Budget. The Government has therefore missed an opportunity to support this most vulnerable sector of our industry. The absence of higher HLCAs for 1996 will further reduce the confidence of LFA producers and, in all probability, will drive still more livestock and producers from the hills".

The National Farmers Union in Wales writes in similar terms. It states:

> "The real value of HLCA payments has been consistently eroded in successive reviews. Net farm incomes in Wales which fell by 28% in 1994/95 remain inadequate to sustain farming families in

> the hill and upland areas, meet their investment needs and to make interest repayments. The Government has publicly committed itself to maintain the hill farming sector. This decision fails to reflect that commitment".

The Hill Farming Initiative adds:

> "The NFU, the HFI and the Newcastle Farm Business Survey in the North East Region are convinced that this year will be worse than last year. The late upturn in the market is no benefit to hill farmers. Hill farms ran short on grass because of the drought. Therefore the majority of hill farm lambs had to be sold in August/September before the late upturn in the store and fat lamb prices".

Logic points to the need for a substantial HLCA rate increase this year, and I know that hon. Members on all sides of the House—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friends the Members for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)—have met representatives in their communities who have expressed real concern about what is happening.

There is a 50-year commitment to maintaining the HLCAs as an effective mechanism, and successive Governments have endorsed it. As the National Farmers Union made clear, the rural White Paper refers specifically to that commitment as an important part of the armoury for maintaining incomes in rural areas. That point was reinforced by the Minister when we debated the matter in Committee on 25 October 1995.

Meanwhile, other European Union member states are using the mechanism to good effect. The Minister was kind enough to provide me with some provisional figures—I hope that he will be able to give us the accurate figures this evening—which show the way in which other member states are supporting their hill farmers. Not only do we appear to have the lowest level of support, but we are the only country in Europe that has cut its HLCA rate.

Persistent Ministry promises to compensate for adverse conditions in the less-favoured areas are being broken this year. It is a case of "Heads we win, tails you lose." In the past, when the Government have been able to point to some improvements in incomes, they have used that as a reason for reducing HLCA rates. The reverse should now apply.

There is broad cross-party support for an increase in the HLCA to meet the critical income fall. That was clear from the deliberations of the Committee that met on 25 October. There is a recognition that income levels that were considered acceptable in the 1980s have not been restored in the 1990s. Instead, the Budget contains a cut in real terms for all farmers in LFAs.

There is an extra cut for those in disadvantaged areas, as this year the Ministry decided to make a change in the eligible stocking levels for ewes. That represents a real cut. Farmers in the disadvantaged areas are facing some of the worst income drops. As the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) will know, we have that experience in Cornwall.

I want to make it clear that this is not a requirement of Brussels. It simply results from the Government's failure to maintain the severely disadvantaged area rates at a realistic level, so it becomes necessary to adjust the DA rates to maintain the ratio.

In recent weeks, a number of Conservative Members have expressed concern about the situation. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) is not here, as he has said that any cut in HLCAs would have Back Benchers voting against the move. He is quoted as saying that in *Farmers Weekly*. All hon. Members will recognise from what I have said that there has been a cut in the HLCAs for the DAs, and a general real-terms cut as a result of failure to maintain the rates at a realistic level and to keep pace with inflation.

Logically, all Conservative Members from the LFAs should be with us when the time comes—if the time comes—when we have a chance to vote against these figures.

On the Ministry's own farm income figures, we should expect at least a return to the 1992 levels of HLCAs. But its optimism is not shared by many other commentators, or by the industry generally. If its figures are found to be over-optimistic, this year will be even more disastrous for hill farmers.

The Minister and his team have a reputation for personal integrity. I ask, therefore, how they could possibly have endorsed the press release in my hand this evening. I have some experience in the public relations industry—I make no apology for that. But if anyone in my company or department—any professional PR officer—had produced this travesty of the situation, I would speedily have dismissed him.

The press release is headed:

> "No Reduction in HLCA rates in 1996".

That is simply not true. Worse, it is misleading, in that it fails to take account of figures included further down the same page. It is a worthless document, clearly written by an illiterate or innumerate spin doctor, not by a reputable politician. Ministers should have found some opportunity to correct the mistake made in their Department. The document is not even technically correct, and it reduces MAFF's credibility to an all-time low. It is a worthless bit of paper, and I hope the Minister will apologise for it.

Why are the Government not honest with the House? Why does not the Minister admit in the privacy of this night that he and his colleagues failed to persuade their colleagues at the Treasury? No one will hold that against them; an honest Minister is such a rare sight these days that it would be extremely helpful for someone to do just that. Why not own up, and promise to try again? If Ministers did that, they would gain our respect.

10.52 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing an Adjournment debate on this subject. I know that it is a subject close to the hearts of many hon. Members. He has already referred to the stimulating debate that we had in the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments in October, in the context of an amendment to the hill livestock compensatory allowances regulations.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view that farmers in the less-favoured areas play an essential role in the rural community. They are responsible for creating and maintaining some of our most beautiful countryside. They are vital in supporting living communities in some of the most remote parts of the country. Hill livestock farming is an essential element in our highly stratified livestock industry. Hill farmers fulfil these roles often in hard

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

physical conditions, with hard physical work. As the country owes so much to farmers in these areas, it is clearly right that we should all be concerned with their incomes.

It is perhaps worth reminding the House briefly of the nature of the less-favoured areas of the United Kingdom—hereafter LFAs, for short.

They are, by definition, areas in which extensive livestock farming is the only practicable form of agriculture. That is implicit in the criteria adopted for their designation. Grassland must account for more than 70 per cent. of the area used for agriculture, and the stocking rate must be less than one livestock unit per forage hectare. They are also, by definition, areas where farm income is below the national average. Farm rents must not exceed 65 per cent. of the national average, and family farm income per work unit must be less than 80 per cent. of the average for non-LFA farms.

The most recent figures relating to incomes in the LFA are those prepared for the 1995 autumn review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands, which considered the rates and conditions for the HLCA scheme for the 1996 scheme year. The tables were placed in the Library on 28 November. I should tell the hon. Gentleman that, of course, they reflect the outcome of discussions with the farming unions, and they are an objective measurement of the circumstances on which he drew for some of his figures.

The autumn review tables give information on three measures of income: first, net farm income, which represents the return for the labour and investment of farmer and spouse on the assumption that the farmer is tenanted; secondly, occupiers' net income, which is based on actual tenure and indebtedness to the farm; thirdly, cash income, which represents the difference between receipts and expenditure in the year.

I shall restrict myself to net farm income figures, which traditionally have been used to monitor economic trends. Although net farm income on average cattle and sheep farms in the LFA fell by some 20 per cent. in real terms in 1994-95, it is forecast to recover by 4 per cent. in 1995-96.

I remind the House that HLCAs are intended to compensate farmers for the permanent natural handicaps in the hills and uplands. In contrast, all factors which affect farming incomes in the years in question are taken into account in the tables prepared for the autumn review. The income figures which inform discussions on the rates of HLCA therefore also reflect short-term factors such as adverse weather conditions.

The fall in net farm incomes in 1994-95 to which I have referred was the result of a cold, wet spring and a dry summer, leading to higher than usual lamb mortality. In addition, the cold winter and long wet spring obliged farmers to draw heavily on their stocks of winter fodder. The dry summer restricted grass growth, especially in the east, leading to poor fodder production and high fodder costs in the autumn of 1994, but those factors were not universal. For example, the fall in income experienced in other parts of the United Kingdom was not recorded in Northern Ireland. Those regional variations reflect differences in weather conditions and market prices.

Nevertheless, many hill farmers started the 1995 season with low fodder stocks. In consequence, the drought in the summer of 1995, on top of a previously difficult year, has affected feed and fodder stocks and prices appreciably. I need hardly add that lowland farms suffered equally, if not more, from the dry summer weather.

Despite two years of unfavourable weather conditions, net farm income in the LFA 1995-96 is expected to be about the same in real terms as it was in 1992-93. While HLCAs compensate for the particular difficulties facing livestock farmers in the less-favoured area, it would be misleading to consider them outside the context of the total Government support for livestock in those areas. In 1995, it is forecast that some £610 million will be paid in direct subsidies to livestock farmers in the LFA. In 1996, it is forecast that the figure will rise to £655 million, of which only some £108 million will come from HLCA.

Moreover, special support for livestock farmers in the LFA does not come exclusively from HLCAs. The LFA supplement to the sheep annual premium is making an increasingly important contribution. Taking account of the recent devaluations of the green pound, that supplement in 1995 is expected to amount to £5.69 per ewe. The tables prepared for the autumn review show that the increase in food and other input costs during 1994-95 should be set against a forecast increase in direct livestock subsidies, including those that I have referred to, and better returns from sales.

For example, the rate of payment under the suckler cow premium scheme will increase from £115.12 to £143.04—a rise of 24 per cent. The payment made under the beef special premium scheme will rise 28.5 per cent.—from £85.09 to £114.03. The rate of payment under the sheep annual premium scheme is forecast to rise from £22.21 to £26.28—an increase of 18 per cent. Those figures do not take account of further increases in the rates of payment that will affect the 1995 sheep annual premium and the 1996 beef special premium and suckler cow premium, following the recent devaluations of the green pound.

Despite the remarks of the hon. Member for North Cornwall, returns from the autumn sales increased. Prices for all types of sheep this autumn were buoyant, and most cattle prices showed some increase over 1994.

Mr. Robert Hicks (South-East Cornwall): I am sure that the House appreciates the criteria used in determining the level of financial support given to hill farmers this year, but does my hon. Friend agree that, comparing the situation with our European counterparts, this country is not supporting its hill farmers to the same extent? Is it not relevant to take into account the contribution that hill farmers make to the management of the uplands in the overall rural economy? Is that not equally valid?

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, because he represents a long and continuing interest in the problems of farmers in his area, including hill farmers. We are lucky to have on the Hill Farming Advisory Committee Mr. Cornelius from Bodmin, and to have that Cornish influence and discussion of the affairs of that county.

Of course we compare our efforts with those made in other European countries. We have one of the largest LFA sectors, and, although the provisional figures are only being released at this stage and on a confidential basis, it is clear that we tend to have a larger overall unit level of payments, even if some direct headage comparisons are less favourable. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point about the importance of hill farmers to the wider rural economy. I prefaced my speech with a reference to that aspect, and I happily reiterate that recognition. We wish to do our best for hill farmers.

Trends in the labour force are more encouraging than the hon. Member for North Cornwall suggested. Figures prepared for the autumn review show that the agricultural labour force in the less-favoured areas is declining less rapidly than outside them. In England, the labour force on agricultural holdings in non-LFA has declined 1.7 per cent. per annum over the eight years from 1986 to 1994, while the equivalent reduction in the severely disadvantaged areas of the LFA is 1.2 per cent. In the disadvantaged areas, the decline was only 0.8 per cent. Those figures suggest that the Government's policy of providing support for hill livestock farming has been successful.

Farm incomes in the LFA should be viewed in perspective, and I will compare them with farm incomes in other areas. Two comparisons can easily be drawn. We can compare net farm income in the LFA with that for all types of farm. Incomes from cattle and sheep farms in the LFA are lower than the average incomes of all types of farm. Published figures on UK farm incomes show that, in 1993-94, average net farm income on cattle and sheep farms in the LFA in England was £18,000, whereas the average for all types of farm in England was £23,800.

But that does not compare like with like; it is more a reflection of the difference between extensive livestock farming and other more profitable types of agriculture, such as dairying or arable. Also, to some extent, the lower income of cattle and sheep farms reflects the fact that they are generally smaller than other types of farm, in terms of scale of enterprise.

Secondly, we can compare the incomes of cattle and sheep farms in the LFA with such farms in the lowlands. That comparison tells a very different story. In England, the average in the LFA, which, I remind the House was £18,000, compares favourably with net farm income for lowland cattle and sheep farms of only £9,400—barely half. The special subsidies available to LFA farmers helped to maintain that comparative advantage.

No debate on incomes in the LFA would be complete without some comment on the proposed rates for HLCA in the approaching scheme year, and the hon. Gentleman made a great deal of that. In reaching a decision on the rates, Agriculture Ministers have to take an overall view. This year's public expenditure round was very tough. Against the background of the rising cost of agricultural support on other fronts, and in particular a forecast increase in the level of expenditure on other direct livestock subsidies, to which I referred, rates of payment under the 1996 HLCA scheme were bound to come under severe pressure.

Farming interests argued in the course of the autumn review that the cuts in HLCA in 1993 and 1994 should be restored in full. That would have cost about £50 million. In the circumstances, it was not possible to agree to such an increase. Indeed, the increase in net farm income forecast in the autumn review simply did not justify such action.

Not surprisingly, those who argued for an increase concentrated on costs to the sector, especially those resulting from the poor weather conditions, and took no account of the increases in subsidies and market prices, which I think are essential to give a rounded picture. I say to the hon. Gentleman, who made rather a lot of it at the end, that we issued our press release. We believe it to be accurate, we stand by it, and I am in no sense minded to advise the House of any intention to withdraw it.

Mr. Tyler: I am following carefully what the Minister is saying, but will he acknowledge that the change in the number of ewes that are eligible in the disadvantaged areas results in a cut? It cannot be interpreted in any other way. I ask him to confirm that that was not required by any direction from Brussels.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning that point, as it has caused confusion.

As I think I have already made clear, the background to the announcement of a reduction in the stocking limit was precautionary, and it enabled us to allow the autumn review, which was reaching its conclusion, to consider the level at which the amount on payments in respect to the ewes in the disadvantaged areas should be fixed. As we have not announced the figures, because we need to await the announcement of the sterling ecu rate on 1 January, the hon. Gentleman's concern, although strongly felt and genuinely intentioned, is somewhat premature.

In the measures, including the rates that were announced by my right hon. Friend on 28 November, it is clear that the overall aim was to consider the economy in general—notably in respect of maintaining tight control of public expenditure and continuing to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement. Those are important parts of our programme and I do not resile from them in any respect.

Equally, it should not be forgotten that hill farmers, too, stand to benefit from the measures to reduce taxation and to control inflation which were announced in the Budget. Therefore, against the background of a difficult expenditure round, I am pleased that we were able to work hard to maintain the rates of HLCA at 1995 levels, as I have described to the House tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (PROPERTY AND ENDOWMENTS) AMENDMENT

ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Pension

1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about the state pension. [3566]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): I recently met representatives of Age Concern and Pensioners' Voice. On both occasions we had a useful discussion that covered matters relating to the state pension.

Mr. Winnick: I can well imagine. Is it not a fact that whereas in the 1970s the state pension amounted to one third of average earnings, it now amounts to one quarter? In view of the widespread poverty that undoubtedly exists among so many pensioners, why will those who are on income support not receive one penny of cold weather allowance simply because the freezing weather lasted less than seven days and seven nights? Does not that show how farcical the scheme is? Many pensioners continue to live in cold conditions, which Ministers would not like to do for one minute.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman has argued for the earnings link to be restored, and he has argued today for massive increases in spending. It would cost £10.1 billion to restore the earnings link. If he wants to impose on the working man further taxes of £8.58 a week, he should ask himself whether he should have been one of the honest men who voted against tax cuts last week.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend accept that occupational pensions have raised the income of pensioners tremendously over the past 15 years? What would be the impact of imposing a charge on pensions, as the French Government do?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right. Two thirds of people retiring now have occupational pensions. Britain has £500 billion of assets—more than the rest of Europe put together—in occupational pension schemes. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) should ask himself whether this Government have enabled pensioners to enjoy a far better deal than they ever did under Labour, when there was 27 per cent. inflation and not even the Christmas bonus was paid.

Mr. Skinner: As one of the 10 Members of Parliament who did vote against a reduction in income tax, I believe that it is possible to find £10 billion for pensioners. The Government are spending nearly £30 billion on keeping people idle, and if that changed there would be more money for pensioners. The Government have had £120 billion from North sea tax receipts and £80 billion from privatised utilities. There is plenty of money in the country. The truth is that pensioners have been robbed blind by the Government, and it is time that the Government were kicked out.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong—as usual. This country now has £16,000 billion-worth of assets invested overseas, thanks to the Government and their policies. The hon. Gentleman should have a word with his Front Benchers and tell them that he wants to see taxes rise, as do most Opposition Members. He is one of the honest men.

Benefit Reform

2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what incentives to work will be included in his reforms of the unemployment benefits. [3567]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): The key theme of our reforms is helping people back to work. Measures include the jobseeker's allowance, the back to work bonus and the scheme known as employment on trial, which will be extended to enable up to 200,000 people a year to try unfamiliar work without the fear of losing benefit if they give it up after a reasonable trial. We have a number of other measures.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest incentive to work is a low level of tax, and that those who are seeking an incentive to work should compare the reality of a tax system in which one in four pay only 20 per cent. with the mindless mirage of the promise of a 10 per cent. tax rate, accompanied by massive increases in expenditure?

Mr. Burt: The nation and the House remain confused about how the sums produced by the Opposition would add up. The Government's employment measures have seen United Kingdom unemployment fall by 710,000 since its peak. That is a record of which most other countries in Europe would be proud, and it has much to do with our fiscal measures and our control of tax and public expenditure.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister approve of situations in which supporters of the Government can boast that they pay their workers less than £1 an hour? Is that fair on the workers, and is it fair on the subsidising taxpayer?

Mr. Burt: I do not think that any of us condone poor pay. The Government believe that a job is better than no job, and that those who pay properly get a proper response from their employees. We do not want to see artificial barriers created, such as the minimum wage, that prevent people from coming into jobs. That is the sort of sensible package that most of my colleagues support.

Mr. Dykes: More important than tax cuts, does my hon. Friend agree that the most important incentive to work is a plentiful supply of new jobs? As the market mechanism will not supply all the new jobs in any economic system, including the mixed capitalist system, it is the Government's job to stimulate the economy to provide new jobs. Will my hon. Friend introduce the reforms in a caring way to ensure that the vast majority of people who are not unemployed through their own fault are not penalised?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend speaks a great deal of truth. The Government have ensured that there are very few barriers to people coming into employment, and we have used the benefit system and in-work benefits to increase the number of people in work. For example, some 300,000 people have moved from income support into work, and have obtained family credit. The mixture of controlling taxes and public expenditure and of preventing barriers to work distinguishes the Government from the Opposition, and distinguishes our economy from those of so many of our partners in Europe.

Ms Lynne: As the Government and the Front Bench of the Labour party are committed to some sort of workfare, will the Minister tell the House whether he honestly feels that it is acceptable to starve people into submission by withdrawing their benefits? Surely it would be better to create proper jobs and proper training.

Mr. Burt: I do not think that we are signing up to workfare or starving anybody into work. The Government want an economy that will encourage the creation of jobs. Despite the hon. Lady's frequent protestations and her demands for increased public expenditure, I recall very few job-creation measures coming from her or her colleagues.

Housing Benefit Fraud

3. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking in respect of housing benefit fraud; and if he will make a statement. [3568]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): As I said in my recent social security statement, I am stepping up the fight against housing benefit fraud. In particular, from next summer, I am setting up a central computer register to make it possible to cross-check people claiming from more than one local authority. I am strengthening the financial incentives for local authorities to crack down on fraud and I am introducing challenge funding to encourage them to develop innovative ways of tackling fraud.

Mr. Evennett: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his determination to combat fraud, the savings that he has made in his budget for housing and his efforts to direct money to those in greatest need. Will he contrast his policies with those of the Opposition, who have opposed all benefit reform and refuse to make any savings? Does he agree that taxes would have to rise to meet the bill run up by their policies?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will recall how, during the social security statement, the official spokesman for the Labour party condemned and opposed every single measure that we proposed to reform social security, including the housing benefit measures. That means that a Labour Government, if ever there were one, would need to meet extra expenditure of more than £1 billion from higher taxes. The Opposition, by and large, have not been honest enough to admit that, unlike the honest 10, one of whom, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), has declared that he recognises that a Labour Government would have to put up taxes, which is true.

Mr. Frank Field: Why should anyone take the Government seriously in their supposed crackdown on fraud? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that some time ago I asked him a question about the number of officers in his Department who had been reprimanded, sacked or prosecuted for fraud? Does he recall that he told me that such information could not be gathered without undue cost to the taxpayer? Why, therefore, when *The Sunday Times* asked his Department for that information, could it be provided within four hours? He told *The Sunday Times* that about 200 officers were involved in fraud, but why should we believe that answer when I am informed that in one London office alone 79 staff have been reprimanded, sacked or prosecuted for fraud? If he was serious about fraud, he would know those figures immediately.

Mr. Lilley: I certainly regret it if any information was made available to the press but not to the hon. Gentleman. I will certainly look into that.

We obviously take fraud immensely seriously. As I have often said before, the hon. Gentleman is probably the only member of the Opposition who takes it seriously, and probably the only one who, at the end of the Budget, wanted to vote for tax cuts, whereas the rest of them all wanted to vote for higher taxes—10 of them brought themselves to do so. Unless we are prepared to crack down on fraud, as we have, and therefore save considerable sums of money to the taxpayer, we must either reduce benefits to those in genuine need or put up taxes. We take the matter extremely seriously.

Mr. Deva: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his decision to introduce a new central register for housing benefit, which will stop people claiming benefit from more than one local authority. Does he agree that it will help to tighten the social security housing package?

Mr. Lilley: Yes. We believe that the introduction of the register could be an important measure to enable local authorities, which handle and administer housing benefit, and often have different and incompatible computer systems, to consult the central register and to cross-check whether anyone is claiming housing benefit in more than one local authority and whether there is any inconsistency with the central record, for example, of income support claims. That should help local authorities to improve greatly their savings in respect of fraud, which I am glad to say they have already doubled as a result of the measures that we have taken so far.

Mr. Bradley: The Labour party obviously supports actions that combat benefit fraud, but it is a little surprising that it has taken the Government so long to act. Of equal concern, however, is the Government's planned cuts in housing benefit to people under 25. Did the

Minister read the excellent speeches given at Centrepoint last week, which highlighted the plight of homeless young people? Does he not recognise that the increase in the non-dependent addition, and the limit on housing benefit, will force many more young people on to the streets or into multiple-occupation houses, with the consequent danger to their health as well as their physical and moral safety? Will he not therefore immediately scrap that plan and accept what the Princess of Wales said when she described the appalling dangers and vulnerability of young people who have been forced out on to the streets because of changes in housing benefit?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman said that it is obvious that Labour Front Benchers supported action against fraud, but anyone who has heard them sneer at, deride and describe as purely notional any measures to combat fraud would know that they do not support action against it. Anyone who heard the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) say that the Labour party had for too long been associated with freeloaders would agree that Labour has been too slow to get round to the need to attack fraud.

I deprecate the attempt of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) to bring the royal family into party political debate. He entirely misrepresents what was said. He equally misrepresents the policy change that we are introducing, which will limit benefits to those on income support aged under 25 to the average for shared accommodation in an area. We shall thereby end the absurdity of someone out of work being able to afford better accommodation than those in work. I am surprised that the Labour party wants that situation to continue.

Identity Cards

4. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to choose pilot areas for the introduction of the new cards for social security claimants. [3570]

Mr. Heald: The Benefits Agency is working closely with Post Office Counters Ltd. on the implementation of the new system of benefit payment. Consultations with groups representing customers are also under way. I expect to take a decision on pilot areas once the private sector service provider is selected early next year.

Mr. Field: As the Isle of Wight Liberal Democrat-controlled council has repeatedly called for the early introduction of identity cards and has recently scrapped the direct payment of housing benefit to good landlords, which has given rise to unconfirmed reports of an increase in the fraudulent encashment of cheques, will my hon. Friend consider introducing new cards for social security claimants to the Isle of Wight as a pilot study? After all, its boundaries are finite and I think that I can promise him that he would have the support of the entire community and that the pilot study would lead to a thoroughgoing success.

Mr. Heald: No one fights harder for the interests of the Isle of Wight than my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Banks: It says here.

Mr. Heald: No.

I shall consider early next year the benefits paid on the Isle of Wight when considering pilot areas. The new benefit payment card is one of several measures to deal with instruments of payment fraud. These measures are succeeding and the new card will save about £150 million a year when fully implemented.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will the Minister guarantee that it will not be possible for smart cards for social security claimants to be used as general-purpose identity cards? Will he confirm that he, unlike the Home Secretary, has a regard for civil liberties and that he and his colleagues at the Department of Social Security would not agree to the concentration of large amounts of personal information about individuals in a form dangerously convenient to politicians and officials of an authoritarian bent?

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman knows that the cards are designed for those who wish to receive their payments through the Post Office. It will be a much more cost-effective, efficient and safer way of providing funds to them. If individuals wish to use the cards to assert their identity, that will be entirely up to them. That is freedom of choice. There is nothing illiberal in the proposed measure.

Mr. Thomason: My hon. Friend has referred to the role of Post Office Counters and the use of the cards. Will he confirm that the private finance initiative will extend and improve services? Will he consider the possibility of using the cards in sub-post offices?

Mr. Heald: Yes, my hon. Friend makes an important point. The cards will be used in sub-post offices. The private finance initiative will give us a system that, in many ways, will be far better than the present one, not least in combating fraud. The new system will provide the customer with immediate information and improvements in his or her benefit should that be required.

Deduction of Earnings Orders

5. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the imposition of deduction of earnings orders by the Child Support Agency. [3572]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): Such orders are imposed only when all other efforts to obtain maintenance payment have failed.

Mr. Spellar: Does the Minister recognise that that is a superficial approach to deduction of earnings orders? Does he understand that in many instances the orders are imposed when there is still considerable disagreement and that they have a devastating effect on the families concerned? Is he aware that quite often the agency's figures are found to be wrong? Will he comment on reports that the agency is proposing to introduce DEOs for clients when they have not returned their forms for assessment, even after as short a period as two weeks? Will that not give rise to considerable injustice and have a devastating effect on many families' finances?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman, who has taken a considerable interest in a number of technical aspects of the Child Support Agency, misunderstands the way in which deduction of earnings orders are used. They are imposed as a last resort to secure payments to the parent with the child or children. They are very effective in achieving that and are lifted if the absent parent complies and co-operates. The hon. Gentleman should recognise, therefore, that they are a most important mechanism within the power of the CSA to enforce maintenance payments so that they get through to the mother, the parent with care and the children involved.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware of the distress caused to my constituent, Mr. Andrew Collier, whose employers were openly contacted by the CSA about his fathering a child, long after he had had a vasectomy? Will my hon. Friend ask the CSA to take off its clodhoppers and urgently review its procedures?

Mr. Mitchell: I am aware of the case to which my hon. Friend refers. He is right to say that, where a mistake is made, his constituent is entitled to a full apology from the CSA, and my understanding is that such an apology has already been given.

Mr. Wicks: Will the Minister comment on the annual report of the chief child support officer—an independent officer—and in particular his finding that complete accuracy of the maintenance assessment is achieved only in 29 per cent. of cases? What proposals does he have to improve accuracy quickly and significantly, and therefore to improve public confidence in the workings of the CSA?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right to make it clear that we are determined to improve the accuracy of the agency. The Secretary of State has set demanding targets for accuracy this year of 75 per cent. of all cases. We reached 71 per cent. accuracy last month, which is a very steep increase on the figures for last year. I think that the hon. Gentleman will want to join me in making the point that this year the agency is increasing its accuracy significantly, but it still has a long way to go.

Personal Pensions

7. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the flexibility of personal pensions in retirement. [3575]

13. **Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the flexibility of personal pensions in retirement. [3581]

Mr. Heald: We will introduce age-related rebates for personal pension holders who have contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, which will make such pensions attractive across a broader age range.

Personal pension holders will also be allowed to draw an income from their fund each year and defer buying an annuity until a time of their choosing up to age 75. In addition, unmarried personal pension holders will no longer have to buy annuities that make allowance for a widow's pension.

Mr. Whittingdale: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that one of the greatest threats posed to the viability of personal pensions would be the guaranteed minimum pension, as proposed by the Labour party?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Opposition's proposals would not only undermine personal pensions but would impose a further tax. Sooner or later, the Labour party really must come to terms with the fact that all its policies involve increasing taxes, and that is what the honest men showed the other night.

Sir Michael Shersby: Has my hon. Friend seen the June 1995 economic outlook of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development? Is he aware that it concluded that the United Kingdom is the only country with a sustainable and affordable pensions policy? Does he agree that that is due to the fact that the Government have given encouragement to the pensions industry to provide such policies?

Mr. Heald: Yes, the OECD study confirms that the UK will be the only country with a sustainable state pension scheme in the next century. That is a tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in reforming pensions in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom also has more assets in pension funds than the rest of the European Union put together, and we now have 8 million personal pension holders.

Mr. Denham: Will the Minister confirm that the total cost to the national insurance fund of low earners opting out of SERPS into personal pensions has been more than £4.3 billion? Is not it true that many of the people on low incomes with personal pensions will now receive an even lower pension than they would have done under SERPS once insurance companies have taken their cuts, fees and charges? How can the Minister justify the typical Tory incompetence that has wasted taxpayers' money and cut pensions all in one go?

Mr. Heald: We have had taxation; now we have nationalisation. The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should nationalise schemes that have provided security for 8 million personal pension holders and have put this country in a better position than any other country in Europe.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is absurd for Opposition Members to talk of a national insurance fund? There has never been such a fund; the money is spent as soon as it comes in. Would we not do better to follow the example of countries such as Chile, which set up a fully funded pension system as long ago as 1981? Pensions in Chile are now 50 per cent. higher and other benefits nearly 100 per cent. higher than they would otherwise have been, and Chilean workers can choose between 18 different pension management funds, thus securing finance for their old age in a way that will not be possible in any western country apart from Britain.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right. Funded pensions have a part to play in providing for pensioners in Britain. In this country, however, we have private funded provision, of which I think my hon. Friend might approve. Only Opposition Members believe that every solution must involve nationalised state endeavour.

Incomes Gap

8. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the gap between the richest 5 per cent. and the poorest 5 per cent. of the population in the United Kingdom. [3576]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The vast majority of people are better off as a result of the Government's policies. Average income, which is up for all family types, rose by mor than a third between 1979 and 1992.

Mr. Simpson: I am not sure where the Minister obtains his figures. Would he care to comment on the fact that, statistically, it is accepted that the gap between the richest and the poorest is now wider than it has been at any time since records began, and that the gap has grown faster in Britain than in any other industrial country? Would he care to comment specifically on the fact that the number of people officially living in poverty has trebled since the Tories came to power in 1979, and now include one child in every four? How would the Minister respond to the Rowntree commission's damning conclusion that the combined effect of the Government's tax and benefit policies has simply served to make the rich richer by turning the poor into paupers?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman should know that the easiest way of helping people out of poverty is to get them back into work. Why, therefore, does he not hail the Government's success in knocking 750,000 off the unemployment total? Why does he not tell the House that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 12 per cent. in the past year? If he believes in increasing benefits, why did he not join the honest 10 the other night and vote for an increase in taxation—as he said he would on the radio—rather than remaining a member of the Mandelson muzzled majority?

Mr. Luff: Is it not inevitable that, after years of socialism and penal taxation policies, the gap between the rich and the poor should increase? Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that every income group is better off now than in 1979? Will he also confirm that the Rowntree inquiry, cited by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), excluded benefits in kind, thus invalidating its study?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He emphasises a point that I made earlier about the importance of getting people back into work. He might well also have mentioned the significant improvements in family credit, which have made a great deal of difference to 600,000 low-paid families on work benefits.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Minister not recognise that from 8 January the very poorest people in the country will be the 13,000 seeking asylum—in many cases, legitimately and genuinely—who will be deprived of any benefit? Does he accept that, when his officials appeared before the Select Committee on Social Security last week and were asked, "How are these people to live? How are they to feed their children?", they gave no substantive answer? Will the Minister now give an answer? Are those people to starve? How are they to live?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Social Security Advisory Committee is considering the plans put to it by the Government. He will have read the Home Secretary's outstanding speech in the House yesterday, which dealt with those points, and will know that only 4 per cent. of the people seeking asylum are ultimately found to be genuine. The Government have a duty to deal with that point. The Bill that received its Second Reading yesterday ensures that Britain remains a safe haven, as it has always been, and not a soft touch.

Benefit Expenditure

9. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total annual spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people and their carers; and what was the equivalent figure in 1978-79. [3577]

Mr. Burt: In 1978-79, under a previous Government, the nation spent £2 billion on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people and their carers. This year, we expect to spend more than £20 billion. That represents an increase of more than 280 per cent.

Mr. Riddick: Do not those figures demonstrate that, by targeting help where it is most needed and by cutting unnecessary spending, it has been possible for this Conservative Government to target help on the most vulnerable people in society—in this case, long-term sick and disabled people? Does he agree that, if one wishes to extend benefits to a wider band of people, one should be prepared to say how one would pay for that, something that the Labour party, with the exception of 10 hon. Members, is not prepared to do?

Mr. Burt: Yes, my hon. Friend has got it absolutely right. The way in which we have looked after the economy over the years has enabled us not only to honour our commitments to long-term sick and disabled people but to increase the range of benefits offered. It was this Government who brought into effect in 1992 the disability living allowance, which has so far brought some 460,000 people, who would not previously have qualified for support from the state, into some sort of benefit support. Only a Government who manage the economy properly can afford to take such care of long-term sick and disabled people.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We welcome the increase in money spent on the care of long-term sick and disabled people, but how much has been spent for and on carers? Will the Minister recognise that many of them have never looked for it, but that some of them require more financial help, especially if they are young women with no husband looking after disabled children, or spinsters looking after elderly parents?

Mr. Burt: Some years back, the Government significantly increased the invalid care allowance's coverage to married women. It is one of the fastest-growing benefits. Yesterday, I had a meeting with Francine Bates of the Carers National Association to discuss caring matters. Over the years, the Government have maintained substantial support for carers. We consider that matter constantly to find out whether we can make any further improvements. We welcome and value the care that families provide for the people whom they look after. Over the years, we have been able to expand our provision for them. We keep the matter under constant review.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Following the excellent supplementary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), does my hon. Friend the Minister accept that carers are the unsung heroes of our society? They take the major burdens in respect of people who have been put out into the community. Does he accept that the encouragement that we give them in respect of payments or in fiscal terms is minimal and that, if we need to do anything further to our social security system, it is to recognise the voluntary carer's vital and growing role?

Mr. Burt: We recognise that role. The amount of care that we have provided through invalid care allowance has grown substantially. The Government expanded its coverage to a great extent. We value and welcome families' role in looking after people who need care. As I said to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), we keep that matter firmly under control but, in a variety of ways over the years, we have expanded that provision, and we meet regularly with people who support and encourage other carers.

Child Support Agency

10. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further representations he has received in respect of abolishing the Child Support Agency. [3578]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Representations from the Liberal Democrats and other irresponsible groups seeking the abolition of the CSA are far outweighed by those from parents with care seeking stronger agency action in arranging and collecting maintenance due.

Mr. Kirkwood: I thank the Minister for that answer. All hon. Members on both sides of the House are hearing about distressing cases of people who are willing to make a contribution to their families, who are invariably in second families, and who are simply unable financially to make such a contribution. If the Minister is not prepared to abolish this Act because it is too inflexible, recognising the importance of the principle of parents making contributions to their families, will he consider those people who want to help but financially cannot, and who are being put into personal bankruptcy or perpetual debt as a result of the inflexible implementation of the Act?

Mr. Mitchell: Obviously, I shall look at any case that the hon. Gentleman brings to me. What he said today ignores the changes that Parliament made earlier this year. He will know that the Government have brought in a 30 per cent. limit, which means that no absent parent can pay more than 30 per cent. of his net income in current maintenance. Parliament has made changes, and there are further changes to come. There will be 90 technical changes to the work done by the child support computer in January and 10 days ago, we took 64 regulations through the House of Commons. Those changes will ensure that the Child Support Agency delivers the sort of service that absent parents and parents with care have a right to expect.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in order to ensure that the maximum amount of money goes to parents who are living alone with children, we must do all that we can to continue improving the credibility of the CSA? We can do without the irresponsible ideas of the Liberal Democrats and the irresponsible comments from those on the Labour Front Bench who have suggested that they would not rule out the abolition of the CSA. Is it not time that those hon. Members supported the all-party consensus on CSA policy, and that we continue to support the CSA?

Mr. Mitchell: I do not believe everything that I read in the *Observer*, and I am sure that the Labour Front-Bench team will remain true to the principles of the Child Support Act 1991. The CSA is improving significantly. Last year, it collected six times more in maintenance payments than in the previous year, and this year it has collected 100 per cent. more in maintenance support. The CSA is tracing absent parents, and it is making certain that its performance is improving in a whole range of areas. That is what the figures showed last month, and I have every confidence that they will continue to show that in the months to come.

Disabled People (Poverty)

11. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next expects to meet the Disablement Income Group to discuss the problem of poverty among disabled persons. [3579]

Mr. Burt: I regularly meet groups representing disabled people. I plan to meet the director of the Disablement Income Group on 17 January.

Mr. Evans: When the Minister next meets the Disablement Income Group, will he seek to explain why poverty among disabled people will increase savagely when the new incapacity allowance comes into operation in April while, at the same time, income tax has been reduced for the better-off?

Mr. Burt: Probably one of the points that I shall raise with the director of the Disablement Income Group will be the 280 per cent. rise in the amount that we have been able to spend on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled since 1979. A further point might be to compare and contrast the range of benefits provided by this Government with those provided by the previous Government, which would show a substantial increase in income for those people. Also, in four crucial areas—the disability living allowance, the disability working allowance, the independent living fund and Motability costs, on which we now spend £3.5 billion—we could not make a comparison with the previous Government because those benefits did not exist.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been a giant step forward in the interests of disabled people and comes on top of a threefold increase in benefits? Does he further agree that those who have opposed the Act have done nothing more than play politics with people's lives?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely fair point. Now that the Act has been passed, it is important for all parties to seek to ensure that its implementation is successful. Even those who have previously opposed the Act cannot have anything to gain by obstructing its workings. It is one of the most significant advances for disabled people ever. The Act will certainly fulfil its objective if all those who have the interests of disabled people at heart come together and work for its success.

Mr. Barnes: Is not one means of tackling poverty among disabled people enabling them to gain access to jobs? Although such access should begin to be provided under the Government's Act, why cannot we have a disability rights commission to ensure that it becomes a reality?

Mr. Burt: As the hon. Gentleman will know, there are different views about what is needed to ensure that the

Disability Discrimination Act works properly. We have taken the view that we do not need a commission in this particular case. There will be plenty of opportunity to enforce the provisions of the Act. I ask those who share the hon. Gentleman's view about a commission to recognise that the Act has been passed and to work with us to ensure that it is a success. There are significant advances to be made in enabling access to work for disabled people. If we move away from the arguments of yesterday towards the provisions of tomorrow for disabled people, we shall continue to make a real advance in their progress, which is what they deserve and what the nation needs to ensure that we use their skills for all our mutual benefit.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3596]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Michie: Does the Prime Minister share the widespread concern about the release to the press by the chairman of the Conservative party of the text of the Lord Chancellor's speech, which the Lord Chancellor himself had no intention of delivering? Is not it about time that the Prime Minister condemned the action of the chairman of the Conservative party and made a public apology to the Lord Chancellor, to which he is entitled?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman knew the Lord Chancellor, he would not have asked such a silly question. The hon. Gentleman is mis-stating the Lord Chancellor's view and the events.

Q2. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3597]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend confirm— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will have order in this House.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend confirm— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Try again.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the national health service is treating 1 million extra patients a year as a result of the Government's courage in introducing their NHS reforms? That being so, does my right hon. Friend agree with the comments made by the Labour party think tank that Labour policy on the NHS is dominated by sectional trade union interest and is neither thorough nor well informed—a perfect description of new Labour?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that the national health service is treating 1 million more patients, and of course treating them better, with a wider range of services, and more speedily than ever before. I am aware of the Fabian pamphlet, though I have not yet had the opportunity to read it. Perhaps I shall enjoy doing so in due course. The conclusion that I draw from it is clear. Views inside the health service and about the health service have moved on. The Opposition's views have not moved and are out of date and unsuitable for a modern health service.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister accept what Ministers have been denying for months—that the public subsidy paid to a privatised railway is set to rise dramatically after privatisation? What is the latest official estimate?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman tables a detailed question, I shall give him the estimate. I can tell him something else now—that rail privatisation will produce a better service for all passengers and, if he waits for the new franchise decisions, he will begin to see that for himself. He has been trying to smear privatisation when every previous privatisation has produced a better service for the customer. He will find out that that will be the case with British Rail as well.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. Gentleman can tell that to the customers of Yorkshire Water.

I am not trying to smear. I am simply asking for information. Even if the right hon. Gentleman cannot give me the exact figure, will he accept that the subsidy is set to rise?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman that what is rising is investment in the railways and the standards of service to the passengers. As the right hon. Gentleman neglects to mention each time, the operating services are already offering a range of new services and responding to customers more quickly, and new information services are being provided. That is a sign of a better service under privatisation than we ever knew under nationalisation.

Mr. Blair: I do not see why, as Prime Minister, the right hon. Gentleman cannot answer a straight question about privatisation. If he will not answer it, we shall continue to expose the costs and the chaos of the system. The railway network should not be used as a plaything for bankers and speculators. *[Interruption.]* No. It should be run not for bankers and speculators, but for British business and the British people.

The Prime Minister: Now we know the soundbite that we were working up to; it was not worth waiting for. If the right hon. Gentleman is as keen as we are on a modern railway service, he had better explain from where, under his plans, the finance to produce it would come. Will he spend more? [Hon. Members: "Yes."] Yes, they say. So by how much will taxes go up? Time after time, the right hon. Gentleman pretends that there can be more investment in the public service without higher taxes and a better service without higher expenditure. He pretends that he is a moderniser, but when it comes to trusting the private sector, he is as old Labour as any of his colleagues.

Q3. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3598]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents are outraged that they are still threatened with the possibility of water cuts by Yorkshire Water in the new year? The problem is that some of the managers of Yorkshire Water still think that they are running a nationalised industry in which customers do not count. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. We have little time.

Mr. Riddick: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the circumstances in which the Government would allow drought orders sanctioning water cuts are almost unimaginable?

The Prime Minister: I can tell my hon. Friend that Yorkshire Water plans to invest £2.5 billion over the next 10 years and more than £200 million this year for its customers' benefit. That is a substantial increase on anything that we have seen in the past. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Government will sanction rota cuts only if no other option is available. We have made it clear to Yorkshire Water that it should use every possible step, as it is seeking to do, to make rota cuts unnecessary. If, over the years, there had been proper management of the nationalised industry, the under-investment might not have occurred.

Mr. Corbett: May I renew my request to the Prime Minister to take a personal interest in the plight of my constituent Ms Louise Stack, the mother of four young children, who applied 11 months ago to transfer from a prison in Spain to complete her sentence in this country? Will the Prime Minister now promise me that he will raise the matter when he meets the Spanish Prime Minister this weekend?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly examine the papers again before Madrid, but I had better do that before I give the hon. Gentleman a commitment. I undertake to study the papers again, and I will let the hon. Gentleman know what action I propose to take.

Q4. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3599]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: After the tragedy at a school in north Westminster on Friday, does my right hon. Friend agree that the letter written by the small son of Philip Lawrence to Santa Claus was one of the saddest and most moving letters ever written by a child? Will he assure me that the Government will do everything that they can to learn lessons from the tragedy in an attempt to ensure that it is never repeated?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the whole House would wish to join me in sending sympathy to the family and friends of Mr. Lawrence after that dreadful event. The Government are considering what more can be done. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has been consulting the Association of Chief Police Officers about whether harsher penalties and further police powers are necessary to deal with the problem of knives. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to announce the outcome of those discussions and, perhaps, new proposals in due course. In parallel with that, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is talking to teachers' representatives about a range of issues covering the safety of staff and pupils in our schools.

Q5. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3600]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Lynne: Does the Prime Minister agree with the pensioners of Rochdale that the £10 Christmas bonus that they have just received is an absolute insult? If the bonus had risen in line with inflation, it would now be worth £68. Does the Prime Minister realise that £10 buys a small frozen turkey and a box of Christmas crackers—hardly a recipe for Christmas cheer?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure whether the hon. Lady and her colleagues took that view when they cancelled the Christmas bonus—the only occasion that that has ever happened.

Mr. Redwood: I welcome the fact that, at his recent meeting in Italy, the Prime Minister raised the issue of European worries about a single currency. Will he be pursuing those points at Madrid?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I shall be pursuing a number of the points that I raised in the last European Council meeting about the problems that might occur were a single currency to proceed with a small minority of countries in it and a larger majority of countries outside it. I believe that that raises a whole range of issues which have not yet been properly considered, and I shall be seeking further consideration of those points at Madrid this weekend.

Q6. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3601]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cohen: It has been estimated that, even allowing for the Budget settlement, schools could be £40 per pupil worse off next year. Despite an increase in the school rolls of about 116,000 children, the National Union of Teachers has estimated that there will be 9,200 fewer teachers this term. Does the Prime Minister think that that is clever?

The Prime Minister: I notice that the hon. Gentleman was not one of the 10 Labour Members who voted to increase taxation and to increase expenditure. He wants increased expenditure without admitting that it would lead to increased taxation. We have made an extra £878 billion available for schools—an increase of about 5 per cent. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that that is above the level of increased costs and is an increase in real resources.

Mrs. Lait: Will my right hon. Friend join me in sending sympathy to the millions of people in France who have been affected by the strikes? Is he aware that every Labour Member of the European Parliament has signed a resolution backing the strikers, thereby proving that Labour is still the strikers' friend?

The Prime Minister: It is certainly true that the Members of the European Parliament did that.

Mr. Prescott: What do you know about it?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the deputy leader of the Labour party just muttered, "Well, what do you know about it?" I hope that he knows that the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour Members of Parliament, never mind Members of the European Parliament, has also sent a message of support to the French strikers. I will quote from it.

> "The Struggle going on in France is one of critical importance to working people throughout Europe",

wrote the group secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour Members of Parliament. He went on:

> "Capitalism demands that we now dismantle employment rights, welfare benefits and the network of public services built up after years of struggle."

That is real Labour.

Q7. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3602]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: May I thank the Prime Minister for his great kindness last night to members of Chelsea's 1954-55 championship team? May I remind him that during the last war, thousands of civilians were killed in the blitz and that it is appropriate in this anniversary year that there should be a suitable memorial to commemorate those civilian dead? Will he give his support to the moves in the east end to build a suitable memorial to the civilian dead?

The Prime Minister: First, let me thank the hon. Gentleman for a very enjoyable occasion with some guests last evening. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I would not wish to do harm to an old friend. Let me assure the House that when we discussed football, the hon. Gentleman played on the left wing and I played on the right.

On the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, I willingly join him in paying tribute to those Londoners, east Londoners perhaps above all, who endured the blitz. I will invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage to consider the hon. Gentleman's proposal and advise further. The hon. Gentleman, I hope, will be aware that an application could be made to the national heritage memorial fund for consideration for lottery funding. That process is independent of the Government, but the idea that the hon. Gentleman suggests is certainly one that the fund could be prepared to entertain.

Bosnia (Peace Settlement)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): British armed forces have served in former Yugoslavia in support of United Nations missions since 1992. Their task has been difficult and sometimes dangerous. Eighteen British soldiers have lost their lives, and 41 others have been seriously injured in the course of duty. They have helped to save many thousands of lives. We are rightly proud of them, as they can be proud of themselves.

Since the summer, conditions in Bosnia have changed completely. At the London conference in July, the international community declared itself ready to take military action against the Bosnian Serbs. Britain took the lead with France in creating a reaction force, and was involved in the NATO action that followed. Since then, the international community has worked long and hard to support the American-led peace effort. At last, a settlement has been achieved.

The peace implementation conference, organised last week by the British Government, made substantial progress with planning the civilian aspects of the peace agreement. Carl Bildt was appointed to oversee its implementation, guided by a small steering board, which includes the G8 nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

We expect the peace agreement to be signed in Paris on 14 December. At that point, the military task will be transformed. Within a few days, NATO will take over full military responsibility from the United Nations and deploy forces to implement the agreement. Our mission is to oversee the separation of the warring factions and the return to barracks of their soldiers, and to provide the security necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish national institutions and hold free elections.

NATO's mission is rightly limited in scope. It is also limited in duration—to 12 months.

For the first time, we have a comprehensive peace agreement. Its implementation requires international forces that are capable of deterring any breakdown in the peace. Only a NATO-led force can fulfil that mission. It will be NATO's first ever land operation. The plan involves some 60,000 troops, of which over 13,000 will be from Britain. We will supply a brigade, and a divisional headquarters to command one of the three military sectors.

In addition, Britain has the leading role in commanding NATO's Rapid Reaction Corps, a British-led, multinational NATO force. We will provide most of the field headquarters controlling the whole operation, including its commanding officer, General Sir Michael Walker.

Britain's contribution is formidable. It expresses our willingness to fulfil our obligations as a key member of NATO and our international role as a member of the permanent five of the Security Council of the United Nations. It also indicates, in the clearest manner, the strength of our commitment to the security of Europe. Such responsibilities carry a cost which we are prepared to bear.

It is my duty to be sure that our forces are able to carry out their purpose and to protect themselves. Of course, they will use persuasion to implement the peace, and in the British Army even the most junior ranks have experience of making highly sensitive judgements on the spot; but when they need to take robust action, they will be equipped and authorised to do so. We shall be sending Challenger tanks, AS90 heavy artillery and armed helicopters. Our force will include the full panoply of signallers, engineers, medical teams, and logistic troops. They will have with them 7,500 vehicles and 7,000 tonnes of ammunition.

To move those forces rapidly to Bosnia involves a complex operation by sea and air, including, for example, 250 RAF transport flights. Military planners and civil servants have worked long hours to prepare a plan to deliver our forces and their equipment safely and on time.

We have done everything possible to minimise the risks to our people, yet there will be dangers. It will be important to them to know through this House that they have the undivided support of the nation. Once more, Britain's armed forces are deploying far from home, not to conquer, not to make war, but in the service of peace, this time as part of a NATO-led force. The Government know that they will carry out their responsibilities with great distinction.

I hope that the House will take this opportunity to express its support for the men and women of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force, and the reservists and civilians who accompany them. We wish them all success in their mission and, when the task is done, a safe return to their families.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank the Secretary of State for Defence for coming to the House to make this important statement. There will hardly be a Member who does not have a constituent out there in Bosnia serving peace, as the Secretary of State reminded us.

I am more than delighted to be able to assure the Secretary of State that he has the full support of the House. Our hearts go out to the men and women who are travelling to Bosnia to try to ensure that the peace sticks.

We have heard the Secretary of State announce what amounts to a new chapter in the sorry saga of Bosnia, a chapter which the whole House hopes will have a happy ending. Some people, especially in the press, have sought to denigrate the role of the UN and UNPROFOR but, happily, no one in this House has done so. As we look forward, may I say how much we are indebted to the men and women who have served with such distinction in the past. As the Secretary of State reminded us, some of them have paid the ultimate price. We all know that they have saved thousands of lives, and they can wear their medals with pride. As we approach Christmas, we think of their families.

Similarly, we wish our troops who will serve on the new mission every success, and we trust that they will all return home safely. As the Secretary of State reminded us, their mission is worth while, but is not without great risks. The history, complexity and viciousness of the situation is there for us all to see. Some of us saw the terrible pictures on television. Within days of villages being transferred back to the other side, there was wanton arson and the burning of decent homes, which serves to remind us of the viciousness of the conflict and the difficulties therein.

The peace will be based on the will of the three parties. One of the new organisation's tasks will be to ensure that the peace holds. Our experiences in Northern Ireland will serve us well in performing the tricky task of brokering peace, and ensuring that peace continues between the three differing factions.

We welcome the strengthening of the rules of engagement, which is much to be desired. We have argued all along that, in those sometimes impossible situations, our troops should not be disadvantaged.

Will the Secretary of State make it clear to the House that this NATO-led operation will be covered by a United Nations mandate, and that, when the current UN mandate runs out at the end of January, it will be renewed? It is important that the operation has the UN's blessing and support.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also say a word or two about the heavy equipment to be transported to Bosnia? If our troops are to protect themselves and do the job, they need their heavy equipment: Challenger tanks, howitzers and so on. As the Secretary of State knows, in the past we could not provide equipment to our troops, because we simply could not transport it in time. I understand from a parliamentary question that we are to borrow two United States ships to transport some of the equipment. Will any further United Kingdom ships be involved in that operation? The House would expect that equipment to be in position when our troops arrive.

Will the Secretary of State also say a word about the delivery of aid to Bosnia? I presume that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will continue to operate. Our RAF Hercules have already taken 26,000 tonnes of food into Sarajevo. Will those mercy flights continue? What advice is the Secretary of State giving to organisations that wish to continue to send relief over land? What protection will be offered to those convoys? What role will NATO play in that respect?

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): It was part of the statement.

Dr. Clark: No, it was not part of the statement. I must ask the question, because aid will be provided. British people want to send aid, especially at this time, and the whole House wants to know how we shall co-ordinate separating the warring factions and delivering aid.

However, I believe that we are all conscious that we are sending our troops at a particularly special time. At a time when the rest of us seek to spend time with our families, we shall ask our service men and women to leave theirs and go to serve overseas. Therefore, as we wish the men and women godspeed and pray that every one of them returns safely, it becomes us all to think of the families who will be left behind.

Mr. Portillo: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the welcome that he has given to the statement, and for the words that he has spoken today, recalling that we do all indeed have constituents who will be travelling out to Bosnia.

I join the hon. Gentleman in praising what has been done by the United Nations. UNPROFOR has done much to contain the conflict; it has saved a lot of life, and it may take credit for its part in paving the way towards the peace agreement that we now have.

I also join the hon. Gentleman in condemning the scorched-earth attacks that we have witnessed on our television screens. Those have no part in the peace agreement that has been entered into by the warring factions. I shall now answer the hon. Gentleman's questions.

There will be a United Nations Security Council resolution. It is planned that that should be put into effect immediately after signature of the Paris peace agreement on Thursday 14 December, and would therefore cover the NATO deployment.

I can confirm the importance of heavy weaponry. I do not want to imagine the position in which we would need to use our tanks or heavy artillery, but it is important to face down possible confrontations from warring factions. Heavy weaponry is important for the protection of our people, and ultimately, if any of our people needed to be withdrawn from an area, it would provide the best possible cover for them to do that safely.

To transport that equipment, we shall use the shipping that is best suited to the task. The United States has a certain amount of specialised shipping, which we are making use of, but we may well need to make use of other shipping assets, including ferries. We shall charter ships as they are available to us. That will include a certain amount of United Kingdom shipping, but let me make it perfectly clear that we are not requisitioning ships; we are chartering ships on the open market, and it will be the ships that are available at the time. Their nationality is not the vital point; the point is that they should be available. A great deal of United Kingdom shipping is not available—it is working hard on commercial shipping projects.

Of course there will continue to be aid. The UNHCR will continue its operations in Bosnia. The RAF is available in principle for mercy flights, but much of the aid can now be delivered by road, which is more effective and more cost-effective. The purpose of sending in such a large force is to separate the warring factions, create a zone of separation and create safety and security, so that convoys and ordinary civilians are able to go about their business no longer in fear of their lives. Creating that position of security is a vital task for the implementation force.

Finally, although I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said, what is more to the point is that the armed forces will be very grateful to have the support of the Labour party.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I am sure that the whole House, and all the constituents we represent, will applaud the fact that 13,500 British troops, including about 750 territorials, all of whom are volunteers, will be sacrificing their Christmas at home to enable former Yugoslavs to enjoy, one hopes, theirs in peace for the first time for nearly five years.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that all the implementation forces will have robust rules of engagement? Will he say something about the new phrase that I believe he coined—"mission creep"—and say how far that NATO mission must creep to make it necessary for the NATO forces to be withdrawn before the 12 months are up?

Mr. Portillo: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I should perhaps emphasise that many of the forces going to Bosnia will still be able to enjoy Christmas in the UK. Given that the heavy equipment takes some time to move by sea, they will often fly out to join their equipment, and

[Mr. Portillo]

they will fly out in the days between Christmas and new year or in the new year. Some, however, are already in Bosnia, and others will be there in time for Christmas. I anticipate that the reservists will number 460. We will be required to involve a larger number, given that we must allow a margin for unfitness and so on. Those reservists will be most welcome. Generally, they perform specialised functions and will play an important part.

The rules of engagement are NATO-wide. All NATO forces have agreed to the same rules of engagement, which are robust but also sensitive—and they have benefited from a particularly strong British input, given our experience of policing situations in Northern Ireland.

I did not coin the expression "mission creep"—I believe that comes from across the Atlantic—but I am determined that the NATO operation will be limited in scope. We have no business inventing one task after another. The important point is that we have a clearly defined job. We shall do it in 12 months, then come home.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I express my support and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends for the operations that the Secretary of State has described. I share his confidence that our forces will fulfil their responsibilities with distinction and professionalism.

In a careful use of language, the right hon. Gentleman said that the mission will be "limited in duration" to 12 months. May we take it that that is a target and not a deadline? May we take it also that, if the peace agreement is on course for successful implementation, there will be no automatic withdrawal on the expiry of the 12-month period?

It appears from the right hon. Gentleman's statement that there are a number of important distinctions between the force now proposed and that which operated under the aegis of the United Nations. Am I correct in thinking that one of the most important distinctions is that the so-called dual key system will not operate, and that, if commanders on the ground require the full and effective use of air power, there will be no hindrance?

Mr. Portillo: I am most grateful for the hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks on behalf of his party. The mission defined for the NATO implementation force is perfectly clear and well achievable within 12 months. The separation of the forces, establishment of zones of separation, return of forces to their barracks and holding of elections can well be done within the 12-month period—and must be done. There is no point implying to anyone in Bosnia that they have longer than the 12 months specified in my statement—and by the other countries that are signatories—in which to implement those necessary elements of the Dayton agreement to which they are signatories.

There is a distinction between the United Nations operation and the NATO operation. There is no dual key but a clear command and control structure. The mission can be successful only if the civilian aspects of the peace agreement are implemented, by which I mean the development of the institutions of a free society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus of the London conference on Friday and Saturday was on making sure that, under Carl Bildt's guidance, those civil institutions come into existence—which will enable the NATO force to withdraw and leave behind a satisfactory situation.

It is certainly not intended to inhibit the forces from exercising the rules of engagement, up to and including the use of air power if necessary.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for telling the House so clearly that the operation will be NATO-led. I assume that he and the House understand that the difference between a UN-led operation and this NATO-led operation is that the latter is a peace enforcement operation to implement an agreement, whereas the other was a peacemaking operation.

Can my right hon. Friend give the assurance—which I believe he gave the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)—that there is total confidence in the ability of the NATO-led forces to operate as they think fit, without undue interference from the UN? Although I admire the work done by UNPROFOR working under the aegis of the United Nations, it is imperative to understand the need for an absence of interference.

What will happen if there is no peace agreement after one year has elapsed? I appreciate that there is no absolute deadline, but the House is aware of the pressure put on the American contribution by Congress—and that if the operation is not completed in one year, the Americans will go. In those circumstances, can my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the Government have contingency plans well in mind?

Mr. Portillo: I can certainly give a number of the assurances that my hon. Friend seeks. As he says, this will be a NATO-led force. I remind the House that we envisage possible contributions from 14 non-NATO countries, and that we are particularly pleased that Russia will operate alongside the NATO force. My hon. Friend is right to say that this means no undue interference from the United Nations. The political control of this operation is through the North Atlantic Council, which is the political council of NATO.

On the last point, when we enter and when we leave is not a matter for national decision making. Since this is a NATO operation, we will be all in, all there and all out together. Nobody will peel off halfway through the operation: we will act in concert in arriving and leaving.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I have the darkest misgivings as to whether this force will be able to withdraw in decent circumstances in my lifetime. May I ask a specific question about the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, which will presumably—and rightly—supply the armaments necessary? I am told that its official complement is only 316. If it is to be the tank regiment involved and it is to provide the cover that the House knows will be necessary, surely its complement should be extended very quickly.

Mr. Portillo: The tank regiment involved is the Queen's Royal Hussars, Catterick. I had the pleasure of visiting it yesterday. It has two squadrons of Challenger 1 tanks, and it will take with it about 26 Challenger tanks. The officers expressed no reservations yesterday about the state of the regiment's equipment, supplies, spares and fuel, even though I pressed them on that. Of course, we intend to ensure that our troops are well supplied in the field.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I echo my right hon. Friend's support for and admiration of our troops, and I thank him for the part he has played in the more resolute leadership of recent months. I would like him to make one thing plain. If the civilian population is threatened, will the NATO forces be able to react as if they themselves had been threatened?

Mr. Portillo: They will react, because they are there to implement a peace agreement that does not include the continuation of the slaughter of civilians. Therefore, the NATO forces will deal even-handedly with violators, from whichever side, who seek to undermine the peace agreement that they have entered.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Does the Secretary of State agree that the crucial date is not some day in December 1995, but some day in December 1996? I understand that the implementation force is required to be even-handed, but—as we have seen in the past—even-handedness can be on one side only. Ceasefire agreements have collapsed by the dozen over the past three and a half years.

What provision is there to review the position in 12 months' time, and is there the prospect of going the extra mile? We know that the United Nations has been criticised by all its member states, which have used the United Nations Organisation as a whipping boy for failing in the past. That has been unjustified, because the United Nations has come of age in the past five years over this issue. Will the Secretary of State do his utmost to ensure that our associated nations are advised that the United Nations may have the problem of picking up the pieces long after NATO has withdrawn in 12 months' time?

Mr. Portillo: I echo my agreement that the United Nations has come under unjustified criticism. It has done the job as well as it could, and some of its failings have been due to its member states rather than to its organisation. This is a robust military operation, and it is not surprising that there is no other organisation like NATO that can do it.

I dare say that there will be many crucial dates. In responding to the hon. Gentleman, however, it would not be right in any way to open the prospect of the operation continuing for more than 12 months. It is critical that NATO should know that it is 12 months, and that we should know that it is in this place. Above all, it is critical that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina should understand that, after a certain period if there is to be peace in their country, peace must be generated from within; it cannot perpetually be imposed from outside.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is my right hon. Friend able to give details of forces from Colchester, in my constituency, which are likely to be deployed as part of the operation? May I endorse his guarantee that 12 months is the absolute limit, which, both politically in Bosnia and throughout the NATO countries, is a very important one, and that, if the agreement begins to come unstuck before the 12 months has ended, we shall not seek, in my right hon. Friend's words, to try to impose a peace that the Bosnian and Serb peoples do not want?

Mr. Portillo: In the list of forces that I am reading, I see no reference to Colchester. I do not exclude logistical and engineering units, for example, which are based at Colchester being part of the force. I know that 24 Air Mobile is my hon. Friend's particular concern. The bulk of that force has returned to England. Those who have been left behind will be returning shortly. They will not be part of the operation. They are one of the few exceptions to the otherwise general rule that the British forces that are there with the United Nations mission will remain and be part of the NATO implementation force.

I emphasise again that I think that the 12-month limit is important. I am not getting into any speculation about what would happen if the mission failed. The mission is clear—separate the forces, return them to barracks and hold the elections. All that is achievable.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the biggest problems that we shall have to face among the different warring factions will be the movement of large populations from one area, village or town to another in the implementation of the so-called peace treaty?

Is the right hon. Gentleman really asking us to believe that he is requesting support from all hon. Members for a so-called 12-month operation, which is not clearly defined? It might extend a month or two, but we do not know for how long. We know that it is in some way connected to the American presidential election next year; it is probably connected as well to the election in Britain. If that is all true, and we have that knowledge, the Serbs, Croats and Muslims know that as well. Therefore, will the operation end in 12 months?

The chances are—it may as well be put on the record because many in this place know and understand this—that the operation will continue for much longer than 12 months, based on everything that we have known has taken place in the Balkans over the past centuries, and certainly over the past few years.

In this place, we are supposed to speak the truth. That being so, why is it not said from the Dispatch Box that British soldiers are facing an operation this Christmas—we are all worried about them—and that they could be facing it next Christmas and much longer after that?

Mr. Portillo: I do not say that because that is not the position. We have a NATO operation, which has been defined as lasting 12 months. A number of us have committed ourselves to that position. For example, the German equivalent Minister has made a commitment to his Parliament of 12 months. He has authority from his Parliament for 12 months.

It is true that Serbs and Croats take account of what goes on in the House. That is why I think that it does no service to the House, to the country or to our troops for the hon. Gentleman to start opening up doubts about 12 months, and especially to imply that the operation might extend by a month or two; I said no such thing.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): My right hon. Friend will be aware that this is not the first time in history that British troops have been involved in peacekeeping operations of this sort. Is he able to assure us that the supremacy that is required in the air to ensure that the troops on the ground carry out their tasks properly will be a continuing requirement throughout the period that our troops are involved?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, domination from the air is essential. Operation Deny Flight, as it is known, will continue, and the role of the air forces and, indeed, sea aviators will continue to be extremely important. Although we are talking today mainly about land forces being committed

[Mr. Portillo]

to Bosnia, we should never forget that there are already about 3,000 service men—mainly from the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force—serving outside Bosnia but connected to the Bosnian operation, many of them afloat but some of them at Italian bases.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Having helped to deliver aid to refugees from what were supposed to be United Nations safe areas, I think that it is a tragedy that this action was not initiated before the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa, and some of the other atrocities; but better late than never.

Will the Secretary of State accept that it is absolutely essential, not only for the people of Bosnia but for the credibility of NATO, the United Nations and the international community, that the operation, the peace, should succeed, even if it involves staying there into 1997 or beyond? Can the Secretary of State say anything about what may have been done to minimise the risk of casualties from friendly fire from the Americans or any members of the international force?

Mr. Portillo: There have been many tragedies along the way. I came to my position only in July and, from my perspective, I would say that only after the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa was it possible to put together the international consensus, which coalesced at the Lancaster house conference in July, to enable a more robust attitude to be taken against the humanitarian atrocities that we were witnessing.

The credibility of NATO is involved here, but as I have said, ultimately the people of that area have to love peace more than they love war for the peace to succeed. I do not think that it is possible for the international community to give a guarantee that peace will last. We can go any distance to create the conditions in which peace can be given a chance, and I believe that the international community is doing that on this occasion.

As far as avoiding friendly fire is concerned, that is of course an important matter. One of the attributes of the NATO operation is that we have the full panoply of intelligence provided by the United States and others at our disposal, and that means aerial photography, satellite photography and the most sophisticated forms of intelligence, so that we should be able to manage the battlefield—if we are involved in a battlefield—and have a good understanding of where our forces are, as well, of course, as the enemy forces if we found ourselves in that position. I still very much hope that it will be an operation of persuasion and peace implementation, not an operation of fire—friendly or otherwise.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Although we must hope that the process works and that our troops are safe and free from danger, the troubled history of Yugoslavia must cause us to exercise some caution. Will my right hon. Friend ignore the siren voices from the Liberal Bench and the Labour party, and make it absolutely clear that one year means one year as far as we are concerned?

Mr. Portillo: At every level of the planning of the operation through NATO, it has been understood that it was limited to 12 months, and that is the understanding of every participating country.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): While we wish the entire force success and safety, can the Secretary of State say what arrangements are in place to facilitate the exchange of prisoners, both military and civilian, and what determination there is within the force to bring to justice those who stand accused of war crimes?

Mr. Portillo: The Dayton agreement makes provision for the exchange of prisoners, both military and civilian, and the implementation force will play a role in supervising those exchanges.

As far as war criminals are concerned, NATO is currently drawing up guidance for its forces. I think it inconceivable that, if wanted war criminals fell into the hands of the implementation force, it would not hand them over to a competent authority for trial. One of the things that we need to establish is what precisely is a competent authority, in all the areas in which the implementation force would be operating. It is a difficult legal question, with which NATO is wrestling at the moment, but with the intention that, if the implementation force is in possession of war criminals, they will be brought to justice.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the Canberra aerial photography reconnaisance squadron from Marham, which has been flying over the former Yugoslavia on very long missions day in, day out? Does he agree that the security of Europe and NATO are synonmous? Surely these events vindicate the Government's line that NATO must be the key pillar for Europe's security and peacekeeping.

Mr. Portillo: I happily join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the aerial photography reconnaisance flights that have been carried out—as he says—day after day, in difficult conditions, bringing vital data for our forces.

As for my hon. Friend's second point, it is remarkable that we should recently have seen Russia's willingness to co-operate with NATO and French willingness to draw closer to it. When we need to carry out a robust military operation in Europe, it must be NATO that undertakes it: only NATO is capable of that. Moreover, for as far ahead as we can see, only NATO will be capable of performing such a function.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State give an absolute guarantee that the arms embargo will not be lifted while British troops are out on this mission? Will he also give a guarantee that the defence exports part of his Department will not be busy trying to make arms sales while another part is looking after the security of British troops?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important subject—the question of arms control. The Dayton agreement foresees that one of the conditions for lasting peace will be a better balance between the armaments possessed by the different warring factions. It is clearly preferable for that balance to be achieved through the disarmament of the Croats and Serbs to a level close to that of the Bosnian Muslims; if, however, we fail to make progress in disarming those factions, the Dayton agreement envisages the possibility of training and weapons being provided for the Bosnian Muslims.

There will be a conference on arms control in Bonn shortly before Christmas, and I think it extremely important for the international community to use all its resolve and muscle to ensure that we adopt the former rather than the latter route. Particularly with our troops on the ground, we want a reduction rather than an increase in the number of arms in theatre.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): My right hon. Friend may recall that, several years ago, before he became Secretary of State for Defence, I pointed out in the House on a number of occasions that British troops were being sent to Bosnia to police a United Nations—as it then was—ceasefire, and not to take part in guerrilla warfare.

As each Parliament goes by, even the youngest among us recognise that the House contains fewer and fewer right hon. and hon. Members who have any experience of service life, let alone active service. Given that a safe area is safe only if it is militarily safe—and given that the provision of aid, and other matters raised by some hon. Members earlier, may well be laudable aims—will my right hon. Friend not lose sight of the important fact that there is a long way to go before we attain a proper peace?

Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, through the rules of engagement, service men on the ground will be empowered to defend themselves adequately if they come under attack in the days and months ahead, as they may well do?

Mr. Portillo: The present situation is different, in that we now have a peace agreement to which the three parties have signed up, and we are going there to implement the peace agreement into which they have entered. The implication of that is that we shall use persuasion to ensure that they meet their obligations; but, if persuasion does not succeed, we shall use force. Certainly, if we come under attack ourselves, we shall respond robustly.

Of course, the rules of engagement cover self-defence, as they always have, but now they also cover the ability to implement the peace agreement to which those people have signed up. I very much hope that persuasion will be enough, but we are sending the weaponry that is necessary to give persuasion the best possible chance, and, if persuasion fails, to ensure that other methods succeed.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Although I have not conducted any sort of survey among Scottish soldiers destined for Bosnia, I am confident that our service men and service women would much prefer the heavy equipment that they will need to be carried in ships flying the red duster, rather than flags of convenience.

Will the Secretary of State assure me that he will do all he can to hire British ships to carry that equipment, even though our merchant fleet has shrunk to a ghost of what it was? Surely that equipment is better carried in our ships than in ships hired on what he calls the "open market". Pehaps he should give less emphasis to the "open market", and show much more confidence in the red duster.

Mr. Portillo: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is on a strong point. We are not deploying in a war situation or in an emergency, and we are not requisitioning shipping. We are moving equipment according to a carefully worked out plan, and we will take the shipping that is available on the days that we need to move that equipment.

I am pleased to say that much of British shipping is busy. It has contracts, and it is working. Those ships' owners do not want to be disturbed by British Government demands. We will take the shipping that is available. That will undoubtedly include some British shipping, but what our forces want is their equipment to be delivered to the right place at the right time, which we will do in the most effective manner possible.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Secretary of State talked about NATO forces' role in implementing the success of the agreement's civilian aspects. Will he acknowledge that that includes the right of return of refugees, as well as the free and fair elections that he mentioned? Is it not essential to NATO's credibility that neither of those be thwarted by force over the next 12 months?

Mr. Portillo: Yes. The right of return for refugees is an important part of the Dayton agreement. Naturally, I have been concerned, as others will have been, at the stories, especially those about Sarajevo, implying that tens of thousands of people will feel it necessary to leave their homes as a result of the peace agreement. The point of that agreement is that people living anywhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina should be able to do so in security.

The point about Sarajevo is that that city should be able to return to its famed previous position as a multi-ethnic city at peace with itself. These are the implementation force's objectives: to ensure that, in the next 12 months, people feel that degree of security and that, where they have left their homes, they felt secure enough to return to them.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Sometimes it is wise to take 12 months at a time, and, although we are all aware of the problems that are faced with paramilitary forces and with the need to control any action or excess that is engaged in by those forces, we also need to realise the possibilities that exist in relation to civil society. Many people in Bosnia have always opposed the violence, intimidation and action that have taken place. The hope is in that civil society being built up and that, in those circumstances, troops go on to be in safer situations and can begin to be withdrawn.

Mr. Portillo: Of course, I try to keep my eyes well open to the realities and to see more than 12 months ahead, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that today the House is concentrating on an operation that has been designated by NATO, and that has a life of 12 months. He is absolutely right, of course, in saying that the success of that mission and of peace depends on the building of institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina that attract the trust of the people and that eventually make them desire peace more than war.

Point of Order

4.18 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given your secretary notice of exactly where it refers to—column 794-95 of yesterday's *Hansard*, when, at the end of the debate, I raised the question whether the use of the words

> "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour".—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 794.]

was the equivalent of calling a person a liar. I raised it in respect of the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe). I raise it again with you. Are those words interpretable as calling someone a liar, and, as such, should they require an apology to the House and to the hon. Member concerned?

Madam Speaker: I looked at the exchange this morning, and I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I do not accept the interpretation that he has placed on it. I believe that Madam Deputy Speaker dealt with it very well last night. The House does not go in for inquests about what happened the night before. It was dealt with at the time, and we must now move on.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I do not normally take further points of order, but, as it is close to Christmas, I will take this one.

Mr. Bermingham: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. Am I now to understand that I can use any quotation—from the Bible or from Shakespeare, for example—to call anybody anything, and that it will be permitted?

Madam Speaker: Not at all. As the hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members know, it very much depends on how the quotation is applied and interpreted at the time. The hon. Gentleman is making a great deal of last night's exchange, which I looked at carefully this morning. In the light of what took place, I believe that the Minister of State, Home Office was indicating that the hon. Gentleman had made a poor or a false point. As I have said, we do not go in for inquests. I interpret each comment as it is made, and I am sure that that is the right and just way to do it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The quality of mercy is not strained.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation)

EDUCATION (SCOTLAND)

That the Education (Assisted Places) (Scotland) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 1713) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the Training for Work (Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise Programmes) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 1752) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

CIVIL AVIATION

That the Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2943) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of Session 1993-94 on the Powers, Work and Jurisdiction of the Ombudsman (House of Commons Papers No. 33-I and II), the Fifth Report from the Committee of Session 1993-94, containing the Government's Reply thereto (House of Commons Paper No. 619), the Sixth Report from the Committee of Session 1993-94 on the Report of the Health Service Commissioner for 1992-93 (House of Commons Paper No. 42) and the Third Special Report from the Committee of Session 1994-95, containing the Government's Response to the Committee's recommendations on the Reform of the NHS Complaints Procedures (House of Commons Paper No. 334).]

Order for Second Reading read.

4.21 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As you are only too well aware, Madam Speaker, the House is often the cockpit of rather violent debate. It is sometimes the focus of international attention and the seat of controversy. I do not think that this debate is necessarily going to be one of those occasions and perhaps you will welcome that, Madam Speaker.

I was slightly concerned to note in the Peterborough column of *The Daily Telegraph* that this measure is the subject of no controversy at all, and that

> "Silence, it is hoped, will descend on the House of Commons"

from about now until about 6.30 this evening. We are enjoined to be quiet because "Gardener's Question Time" is apparently being recorded in the Palace of Westminster's Terrace Restaurant. On this important measure, however, I do not think that we will be quiet.

I was somewhat concerned to learn, however—I am sure that the House will share the concern—that you, Madam Speaker, have an interest in what is happening in "Gardener's Question Time" because you have a

> "sickly Busy Lizzie which has been struggling unpromisingly on the kitchen windowsill."

If we lose your presence during this important debate, we will understand why.

Although it may not be in the cockpit of controversy, this Bill is extremely important. It extends the jurisdiction of the health service commissioner. It is one of the main planks of our reform of the national health service complaints procedures. The Bill will touch not only on all those who work in the NHS but on patients. The Bill will introduce the most significant change proposed to the role of the health service commissioner—or ombudsman, as he is better known—since the inception of that post in 1973.

If Parliament approves the measure, patients and their relatives will, for the first time, be able to complain to the ombudsman about all aspects of the care and treatment provided by the NHS. The statutory bars that operate to prevent the ombudsman from investigating complaints about the exercise of clinical judgment and about family health services will be removed.

The Bill in essence would amend the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993. That Act provides that there shall be a health service commissioner for England, for Wales and for Scotland. For the sake of clarity, I should say that the Bill and the notes on clauses refer to commissioners, in the plural, or to a commissioner. All three offices have always been held by the same person, so I shall avoid such artificial language in this speech and refer to the commissioner or the ombudsman, which I think the House will find more comprehensible.

I turn to the origins of the proposals. If one works in the health service, I suppose that the understandable personal reaction to receiving a complaint is to feel negative and defensive. NHS bodies are also understandably institutionally nervous about encouraging people to complain because of the often simplistic, blame-oriented exposure given to complaints' numbers by the media.

The handling of complaints in a responsible and sensitive way is one of the services that patients and their relatives ought to expect the NHS to provide. If complaints are investigated fully and objectively without automatically finding fault with staff, valuable information can be gained on how to improve services for other patients. That is why we want a new system for complaints in the NHS.

As the House will know, an independent review of NHS complaints procedures was commissioned in 1993 by the then Secretary of State in response to continued and growing concerns about the complex and unfriendly systems in place. Different procedures apply to different parts of the NHS, making it difficult for patients to know how to complain at all. It was a maze through which patients were expected to travel and difficult for them to undertake.

The review committee, which was chaired by Professor Alan Wilson, vice-chancellor of Leeds university, considered more than 250 pieces of evidence before reaching its conclusions. The committee's report, "Being Heard", was published in May 1994. One of its main recommendations was to extend the health service commissioner's jurisdiction to cover all NHS complaints. The proposed extension of the ombudsman's jurisdiction was also recommended by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in its first and sixth reports of the 1993-94 Session.

Following an extensive consultation exercise on the report, the Government announced their acceptance of its main recommendations in "Acting on Complaints", published on 22 March 1995, and, at the same time, responded to parallel recommendations made by the Select Committee, which were later published as its third special report of the 1994-95 Session. Copies of these documents are, of course, in the Library.

The proposal to extend the ombudsman's jurisdiction and the other main recommendations made by the Wilson committee were widely welcomed in the 600-plus responses. The fact that there were 600-plus responses shows just how important the matter is. I am especially pleased by the broadly positive response of professional bodies to the Wilson proposals. The drive to improve complaints procedures sits well with the basic clinical objectives of ensuring the best for patients, rigorously auditing results and seeking to apply lessons from that audit.

I turn to the principles that will underpin the new system. The system is built on nine principles, which were all set out in the Wilson report. They are all fairly straightforward: responsiveness, quality enhancement, cost-effectiveness, accessibility, impartiality, simplicity,

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

speed, confidentiality and accountability. One extra principle emerged from our discussions on "Acting on Complaints": thoroughness. Those principles will be embodied in the new system.

The new complaints procedure will focus on satisfying complainant concerns, while being fair and being seen to be fair to practitioners and staff. The same basic procedures will apply to all parts of the NHS and to all types of complaint, with the minimum number of different features necessary to reflect different contractual arrangements, the need for professional advice, and so on.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister confirm that the ombudsman does not have any power to inflict any kind of sanction against an organisation or individual guilty of, say, gross negligence? May I give him an example to consider? The day before yesterday, medical records concerning abortions carried out at the Rankin hospital in Greenock were found by a member of public. They had been left by administrative staff in the derelict hospital. I have brought the matter to the attention of the office of the Minister of State, Scottish Office with a view to making a formal complaint.

In this case of gross negligence, the health commissioner will not be able to impose any penalty on those found guilty. He will just issue recommendations and utter soothing words to those poor women, who will be terribly distressed by the affair.

Mr. Malone: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, there are other ways in which redress can be sought in such matters. He understands, I am sure, the purpose of the ombudsman's jurisdiction. The ombudsman has to report to the House and to make recommendations. Indeed, he can lay special reports if he feels that the circumstances warrant it. That is the purpose of the procedure and it is not the intention of the Bill to change the purpose of the ombudsman, as set out originally in the National Health Service Reorganisation Act 1973. If the hon. Gentleman is looking for further redress, he should realise that other avenues are open to people who feel that they have been affected in different ways and who need different forms of redress. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, who is sitting beside me, has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

I return to the outline of the new system. It will deal only with complaints, not with disciplinary matters; that underpins the point I made to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). We are discussing with the professional representative organisations how to separate the existing terms of service procedures for family practitioners from complaints procedures.

The reforms to the NHS complaints procedures will improve the way in which complaints are handled at every level. There will be a three-tier approach throughout the health service. The first stage—local resolution—will involve the local health care provider seeking to resolve the problem directly with the complainant, wherever possible through a speedy and effective informal approach. Clearly, that is by far the best way. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, he or she may ask a non-executive director or convener of the trust, health authority or health board involved to decide whether a three-person independent review panel should be set up to review the complaint, with independent professional advice on clinical issues. If both those measures fail, the third tier is for the complainant to refer his or her complaint to the ombudsman, who is completely independent of both the health service and the Government, and who is answerable directly to the House.

Many concerns have been raised about the implementation of the proposals; I now turn to the implementation timetable. The reforms to the internal NHS complaints procedures will be implemented on 1 April 1996 by means of subordinate legislation separate from the Bill. If Parliament supports the measure, and subject, of course, to Royal Assent, we hope that the provisions can be brought into force as close as possible to that date so that all patients have access to the third tier of the reformed complaints system.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Is the Minister satisfied that, by 1 April 1996, staff will be well aware of how the system will operate? If required, will training have been provided before 1 April?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. It is important that staff are trained. It is important that proper guidance is given to them and that they have the tools with which they can implement the procedure. I attended a conference at which staff learned about the introduction of the proposals and I was much reassured not only by the well-developed interest with which staff were taking the matter forward but by the fact that software systems had been well developed so that management of the system could be eased in. I know that the timetable is tight, but in the interests of all—both those who work in the health service and patients—it is important that we stick to a rigid timetable. We have in place all the necessary training aids and procedures. The deadline is tight, but we shall make it.

I come now to the detailed provisions of the Bill. Clauses 1 and 2 deal with family health service and independent providers. They add GPs, dentists, pharmacists, providers of NHS ophthalmic services and independent providers to the list of those whom the commissioner may investigate and set out his remit in respect of the investigation of complaints about these providers.

The point of bringing independent providers within the commissioner's jurisdiction is to put beyond any doubt—although I do not believe that any doubt was justified—the existing presumption that his jurisdiction already covers the services which they provide to NHS patients. The measure makes it clear beyond peradventure that an NHS patient will fall within the provisions of the complaints procedure, whoever is providing the service.

Ever since the National Health Service Reorganisation Act 1973—under which the commissioner's office was first established—the legislation governing the commissioner's procedures has been intended to allow him to investigate complaints about services provided to patients by independent providers under contracts with the NHS.

We are taking the opportunity in the Bill to clarify the existing powers of the ombudsman in section 7(2) of the 1993 Act by bringing independent providers expressly within the ombudsman's jurisdiction. Independent providers are covered only in so far as they provide services to NHS patients.

Clause 3 brings schedule 1, which deals with supplementary and consequential provisions relating to family health service providers and independent providers, into effect.

Clause 4 brings the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland within the commissioner's jurisdiction and specifies certain functions of that body which are excluded from investigation. This restores the position in Scotland to that in England and Wales, where the Mental Health Act Commission is already within the commissioner's jurisdiction.

The functions of the Mental Welfare Commission relating to visiting detained patients and investigating their complaints would be brought within the commissioner's jurisdiction. Those functions relating to the review and discharge of detained patients, which in England and Wales are carried out by the mental health review tribunals, would remain outside the commissioner's jurisdiction. This again reflects the position in England and Wales. Parity will now be restored across the three nations beyond any doubt.

Clause 5 deals with the availability of another remedy, and secures that the new NHS complaints procedures should have been exhausted before a commissioner can investigate a complaint, subject to his discretion to investigate where he considers it unreasonable to expect the complainant to exhaust the other procedures. There is nothing new in the measure, which reiterates a power that is expressed in a different way in earlier legislation.

The new complaints procedures will provide an opportunity for independent review within the health service, and it would normally be reasonable to expect a complainant to have attempted to resolve his complaint through this procedure before it could be investigated by the ombudsman. Although the ombudsman is keen to take on whatever work is put his way, all the procedures should be exhausted within their proper context. That will ensure that the proper number of cases get through to the ombudsman, but that the other routes are properly used.

It is recognised that there may be circumstances in which it would be unreasonable to expect this—for example, where there had been excessive delay in considering the complaint locally or, on certain occasions, where a member of staff wanted to refer a complaint to the ombudsman on behalf of a patient unable to act for himself or herself. It is possible for the ombudsman to use his discretion in reasonable circumstances to hear the complaint directly.

Clause 6 deals with the important issue of the exercise of clinical judgment—one of the fundamental changes brought about by the legislation. Clause 6 removes the statutory bar on the commissioner investigating complaints about action taken in consequence of the exercise of clinical judgment. When the office of commissioner was set up in 1973, complaints about actions arising directly from the exercise of clinical judgment were explicitly excluded from his jurisdiction.

The reason given at the time was to avoid impinging on doctors' freedom to treat their patients as they thought best; but the House will agree that the world has moved on considerably since those days. Of course we fully respect the independence of the medical and other clinical professions, and the special expertise and training which members of those professions hold, but it is very hard to explain to patients who simply do not understand that they may not ask the ombudsman to investigate the very complaints about which they often feel most concerned—those relating to the clinical decisions made about their care and treatment within the NHS.

In extending the ombudsman's jurisdiction to allow him to investigate complaints about clinical judgment—by any of the recognised health care professionals in the NHS, including doctors, nurses, midwives, family health service providers and others—it is necessary to ensure that the professional expertise involved in such judgments is fully respected, and also to ensure that those investigated are treated with scrupulous fairness. It would not be right to criticise professional judgments simply because they happened to result in hardship or suffering through no fault of the person who exercised the judgment, understandable though it might be for the patient to wish to complain in such circumstances.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Will my hon. Friend say a little, before he moves on to the next clause, about what action can be taken if the ombudsman finds that something has gone wrong which has left someone in a much worse state after surgery than before it? People, and certainly constituents of mine, have found it most difficult to take action in such cases.

Mr. Malone: I shall deal with that point later in my remarks. If it is appropriate to pass any information that is gleaned by the ombudsman to another forum where it can be used, that will be possible.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Before we deal with the process of the ombudsman, let us consider the case of a GP who is found guilty of professional misconduct. He appeals and, after appealing, is enabled to continue practising until his appeal is heard—perhaps for six or 18 months. What might the Government do to help assuage the fears of members of the GPs' panel?

Mr. Malone: On the hon. Gentleman's last point about the GPs' panel, I am not sure. We are discussing powers that we have taken in recent legislation to empower the General Medical Council to deal with such matters in a far more flexible way, as the hon. Gentleman knows, so that the outcome satisfies patients' rights and interests. That is a slightly separate, although parallel, matter to that which is before the House today.

I return to the detail of clause 6. In considering whether to uphold a complaint about a clinical judgment, the commissioner will need to take account of clinical advice. That is a central element in the changes that are before the House in the Bill. For example, the commissioner will need to take account of whether the judgment was of an acceptable professional standard. The commissioner has been helpful by making available to the House a paper setting out how he proposes to exercise his new jurisdiction, should Parliament approve the Bill. I commend the paper to right hon. and hon. Members, for it sets out in some detail—and, unusually for documents of this kind, in straightforward English and with clarity, which I welcome—how he proposes to approach questions about clinical judgment and other issues arising from the provisions in this Bill. I commend it to the House.

The 1973 Act which set up the office of health service commissioner made provision to enable the commissioner to receive independent advice. Those provisions are

[Mr. Malone]

preserved in the 1993 Act and enable the commissioner to obtain advice from anyone who, in his opinion, is qualified to give it. The commissioner's paper sets out the principles that he is minded to follow in seeking such advice.

Clause 7 deals with general health services. It removes the statutory bar on the commissioner investigating complaints about family health services and provides that he cannot investigate action taken by a health authority or health board in investigating alleged breaches of terms of service by family health service providers. This is entirely in line with the existing provisions in section 7 of the 1993 Act which prevent the commissioner from investigating personnel or disciplinary matters relating to service in the NHS.

Clause 8 deals directly with personnel matters. It amends the provision in the 1993 Act which provides that a commissioner shall not investigate action taken in connection with personnel matters in relation to service under the National Health Service Act 1977 or the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978, to include service under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. This is simply a tidying-up measure. Clause 8 also secures that a commissioner can investigate action taken by a health service body in operating a complaints procedure.

The general public have access to the commissioner to complain about, among other things, the way in which NHS complaints systems have treated them. Clause 8 ensures that NHS staff, family health service providers and independent providers and those working for them are given the same right to complain about the way in which complaints systems operated by health service bodies have treated them, in the interest of equity. Employees of health service bodies would, by virtue of the provisions in clause 5, normally need to invoke and exhaust established grievance procedures for dealing with such complaints before the ombudsman could investigate.

Clause 9 abolishes the requirement that a health service body should be given an opportunity to investigate a complaint. This is overtaken by the provisions in clause 5 about the exhaustion of the NHS complaints procedures.

Clause 10 requires a commissioner to send a report of an investigation to the health service body which is the relevant one when the report is made. This is simply a tidying-up measure to take account of the fact that health service bodies can be reconfigured during the period of an investigation.

Clause 10 also fulfils the Government's commitment to legislate on certain recommendations about reports made by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. It removes the requirement to inform the relevant health service body where the commissioner decides not to investigate a complaint, and requires the commissioner to lay special reports and annual and other reports on the performance of his functions directly before Parliament, rather than via the Secretary of State, thus enhancing the direct link between the commissioner and Parliament and, in particular, the House.

Clause 11 extends the exemption from giving evidence in proceedings to a commissioner's advisers. That is necessary because of the greater need to obtain advice from external advisers once the commissioner's remit is extended to include clinical judgment. The clause also allows a commissioner, at his discretion, to disclose information—this is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) made in relation to an earlier clause—to the appropriate regulatory or health service body or employer where he considers it necessary for the protection of the health and safety of patients.

At present, the commissioner is somewhat in the position of a confessor. Any information that he discovers during an investigation may not be passed to any person other than for the purposes of the investigation and any report of it, or for certain other very limited purposes. Therefore, if, during an investigation the commissioner discovers information that does not fall to be disclosed for those purposes, but indicates that a person constitutes a threat to the health or safety of patients—for instance, on grounds of health or conduct—he may not disclose it to any person outside his own office. Clause 11 corrects that defect in the 1993 Act. In the interest of natural justice, the clause requires the commissioner to inform any person about whom he discloses such information.

Clause 12 makes financial provision for the Bill. The Bill's provisions would increase expenditure by the health service commissioner's office under the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993. The cost of this is to be met by transfer from the relevant votes of the Department of Health and the Welsh and Scottish Offices. The costs arising from the Bill will be met from existing resources.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): The Minister says that the additional costs arising from the Bill in relation to the health service commissioner will be £5 million in the first year, rising to £6.5 million the following year. Taken as a whole, this change to the NHS complaints system will clearly have considerable costs across the system beyond those occasioned by the new role for the health service commissioner. Could the Minister say how large those costs will be and why they are going to be taken only from existing resources?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman will probably be aware from previous discussions in the House about the Wilson report that the view is that, once the Bill is implemented, it will, over time, be cost neutral. When it is implemented effectively, it will reduce the complexity of the diverse complaints systems in the health service. That will be very much a saving. He will understand that we have a whole family of complaints systems, which are frequently difficult to administer, take substantial time and often result in people taking complaints through all stages in the process because they do not get satisfaction. We are replacing that system with a more streamlined, single system which will serve the whole national health service.

I take this opportunity to set it on record that I hope that the Bill will result in far more complaints being resolved quickly within the body that is responsible for dealing with the complaint so that fewer complaints are passed up the system to the second tier and, eventually, to the ombudsman. That is the purpose of the Bill and the assessment is that, should the system be implemented in the way that we foresee, over time it will be cost neutral—and a better system, too.

The Bill is part and parcel of our reforms to the way in which complaints are handled throughout the NHS. It will, as I have said, improve the efficiency of the way in which we handle complaints and enable health care providers to learn valuable lessons from investigating complaints and so improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services generally.

Clauses 13 and 14 deal with repeals and commencement. Clauses 15 and 16 deal with the extent of the Bill and citation.

There are two schedules to the Bill. Schedule 1 deals with amendments to the 1993 Act, which are supplementary and consequential to the main provisions of the Bill on family health service and independent providers. Schedule 2 sets out the repeals to the 1993 Act provided for in the Bill.

I shall briefly outline the main provisions of schedule 1. Paragraph 2 enables the commissioner to investigate contractual or commercial transactions that relate to the purchase of services for NHS patients from independent providers by GP fundholders, who are newly brought under the commissioner's jurisdiction as family health service providers. That is simply a logical extension of the powers that the commissioner previously enjoyed in other areas. In addition, paragraph 2 excludes from the commissioner's jurisdiction complaints arising from disputes between family health service providers and health authorities or health boards about the arrangements made between them for the provision of family health services.

Paragraph 3 of schedule 1 provides for family health service or independent providers, or those working for them, to be given an opportunity to comment on any allegations in a complaint and ensures that family health service and independent providers are able to take action, such as disciplinary action, against a member of staff in relation to matters under investigation. In essence, it means that, when a complaint is made, other possible lines of redress will not close down while it is being dealt with.

Paragraph 4 extends the commissioner's powers to require information and documents to be supplied to cover the investigation of complaints about family health service and independent providers.

Paragraph 5 makes provision for reports about the investigation of complaints about family health service and independent providers closely following the existing provisions for complaints about health service bodies. Paragraph 7 adds family health service providers to the list of those who are ineligible for appointment as a commissioner.

I make no apology for going through the measures in the Bill in some technical detail because, although it is uncontroversial, it is fairly complex in its way. I have tried to give a thorough and businesslike review of the Bill's detailed provisions. It is an important measure and one which I have great pleasure in bringing to the House.

It is also a fitting occasion for us to set on record our appreciation of the work done by the health service commissioner and to look forward to the extension of his role. It is a role that will be brought to bear for the benefit of the patients. I believe that the measured way in which the Bill is drafted will be found to be for the benefit of not only patients but all who work in the service.

4.55 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I acknowledge the Minister's comments about the health service commissioner, Mr. Reid. The House will agree that the work that has been done so far has been excellent. He retains independence and impartiality. I hope that, as the Minister suggested, the new powers will be used with the same wisdom as were the previous powers.

It is important to state at the outset that we welcome the Bill. We embrace its principles and support its ideas but we believe that it can be strengthened in Committee. We shall wait for it to go into Committee before discussing strengthening measures.

While I praise the health service commissioner, it is also important to quote his words from his third annual report, for 1994-95, in which he states:

> "aspirations about more effective complaints handling are hot air. They need now to be matched by performance."

While progress has been made, the Government would agree that we could make more progress. Clearly, the commissioner shares that aspiration.

It is also right to pinpoint the fact that this is all about complaints procedure and the rights of patients. It is also about a service that needs to be responsive, accessible and, as the Minister rightly said, accountable. It is important to stress that we owe it to the professionals in the service to have a fair system. Part of any complaints procedure is the worries, fears and concerns that professionals have, especially if investigations take place over a lengthy period. For all those reasons, this is an important debate.

The Bill builds on the Medical (Professional Performance) Act 1995 which, in its way, extended the competencies of the General Medical Council into new areas of performance. That is in the patient's interest. The Bill complements the 1995 Act and goes a great deal further in terms of complaints procedure.

I endorse the Minister's comments about the new procedures that will be implemented in April 1996. I share the concerns of some people that the timetable may be too tight, but we need ambitious timetables if we are to make progress. Obviously, the Government will want to implement the measures with sensitivity and take on board some of the criticisms made by some health groups. The two-stage process, which will be complemented by the new work of the health service commissioner, will help the whole process. There is nothing better than a set of procedures that gain the confidence of patients and professionals and, at the end of the day, improve what is now an important part of the changing face of the health service.

The Minister also pinpointed the important areas into which the jurisdiction of the commissioner has been extended. We welcome the measures on clinical judgment. That is an important development. From the comments so far by the commissioner and others, including the British Medical Association, that will have to be approached very cautiously indeed because while huge sensitivities govern the activities of professionals, there is a great number of complaints about clinical judgment.

We welcome the fact that the commissioner's jurisdiction has been extended to family health service practitioners, whether GPs, dentists, pharmacists or optometrists. That is important and brings consistency to the application of his work.

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

The fact that the commissioner's jurisdiction will be extended formally to independent providers is also important. As the amount of money flowing into the private sector increases, it is vital that NHS patients using private sector facilities are covered by the ombudsman. We shall look into that in much more detail in Committee and explore how it will work. The proposals build on the three-step complaints procedure, but the first two steps do not exist with private health care. If NHS patients are to be part of that process, we must ensure that we know what is happening in private hospitals. Vital public resources now go into those hospitals through the Government's reforms and it is crucial that we understand what is happening.

The Minister rightly pointed out that these proposals are built on some substantial reports, including those of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Wilson review, which started in 1993 and has come up with proposals for a two-stage complaints procedure to begin in 1996. That review flags up the new powers that have been given to the commissioner.

The BMA and others feel that it is important for the ombudsman to deal with the question of clinical judgment and they have expressed a number of genuine concerns. Labour Committee members are concerned about inconsistency in the jurisdictions. In terms of maladministration, the merits of a decision taken in this process cannot be the subject of an investigation but, in terms of clinical judgment, that concern is waived and the commissioner can look at process and clinical judgment.

Mr. Malone *indicated assent.*

Mr. McLeish: The Minister nods. We may want to see whether the commissioner's responsibilities could be extended fairly and squarely to administration and clinical judgment.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for the Bill, on which there is cross-party unity in principle.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point, he will be interested to read the paper published by the commissioner, which runs to some 70 paragraphs and sets out in detail how he proposes to tackle those matters. That paper will form part of the debate in Committee, as it sets out most of the commissioner's thinking.

Mr. McLeish: The Minister makes a fair point. We shall read the paper with interest, and will make a stab at reading it all before Committee stage. There must be consistency in any extension of jurisdiction and I shall read the commissioner's comments.

May I deal with the first two stages of the complaints procedure? Stage 2 of the new procedure has an interface with the commissioner's role. The public, as patients and family representatives, are concerned about impartiality. At stage 2 of the complaints procedure, a non-executive director of a trust, for example, will be instrumental in screening a complaint to decide whether a panel should be set up to investigate it further. Although the commissioner will expect normal procedures to have been exhausted before he enters the frame, he has the ability to override those and enter the complaints procedure at an earlier stage. The Minister can ensure that public fears about partiality are allayed by going beyond having a non-executive director of a trust, for instance, as the key person who screens a complaint and decides whether it should go further. He must clear up any confusion that might arise if the commissioner decides to enter early into the complaints procedure rather than wait until all normal procedures have been exhausted. Clarity is the issue and I hope that the Minister who winds up will deal with that point.

The private sector's inclusion in the complaints procedure is an interesting development. We agree that there should be fairness throughout the system in relation to NHS patients. I imagine that, apart from a tiny minority of people, complainants will be NHS patients. Are we to believe, then, that the commissioner will have jurisdiction over those NHS patients? Whether they are treated in a private hospital through private health care insurance or because they have been referred by a fundholder or district health authority, they should be covered by the health service commissioner's extended jurisdiction. It would be a fundamental change if everyone were included in that extension. I hope that the Minister, who is writing feverishly, is responding at least mentally to my comments.

The complaints procedure in the NHS is a three-step process but, in private provision, two of those steps do not exist. In Committee, we shall seek to find out how complaints are processed in the private sector. There is an important interface between private sector patients and patients referred to private hospitals by the national health service. If the Minister's assurance that NHS patients will be covered by this measure is to be taken at face value, will he assure us that virtually everyone in Britain with access to independent provision will be covered? Will the Minister clarify that point when he winds up?

We must ensure that there is no confusion in terms of the patients charter and targets for accident and emergency and ambulance provision. Some people say that the new system should clarify current procedures, be effective and provide quality and fairness. Given the interface between the new procedures, we must avoid problems with existing Government targets and standards.

Professionals in any walk of life find change difficult to accept. Those in the national health service are no different. Any complaints procedure must generate trust and confidence and, at this stage in the development of the NHS, transparency is vital. Constituents who complain to me about the health service are often as concerned about the process and how they are treated as they are about the issue about which they wish to complain. That shows that, within any organisation, the culture is crucial. As the Government move towards implementing the new proposals, including extending the commissioner's jurisdiction, the issues of trust, confidence, transparency and accountability will become front-line issues for the public. We want to avoid confusion and delay, and the commissioner is concerned about the time that inquiries take. It is therefore important that we look closely at that matter.

As we have argued before, any procedure must be about quality. People will never be 100 per cent. satisfied and the rising volume of complaints within the NHS shows that we shall not satisfy huge numbers of people. Ultimately, the system must be not only fair in its application but seen to be fair.

The commissioner, Mr. Reid, made a vital comment when he said, in an important paragraph:

> "The best way to deal with a complaint is to handle it quickly, politely and effectively at local level."

The Minister said that earlier, and I endorse that. Mr. Reid continued:

> "I would be the first to applaud if the new complaints procedures reduced the number of complaints which had to come to my office. The effective involvement of lay persons as well as professionals in complaints arrangements locally should generate greater confidence in the objectivity and rigour of an internal investigation. It will help if staff in all professions look upon complaints not as a personal affront but as a valuable contribution to audit and to the improvement of service."

That paragraph contains several thoughts. First, Mr. Reid wants problems to be dealt with locally and effectively solved. That is what we should like. Secondly, he emphasises the crucial fact that, in a complaints procedure, people should be treated with civility and politeness. Far too often, the way in which people are treated is what generates aggravation, and that is often unnecessary.

I know that the Government and the Opposition cannot build that consideration into the culture of the NHS from the centre. Professionals owe it to patients to act with their best judgment, but it requires a commitment from Government to ensure that the complaints procedure is properly resourced and is applied consistently throughout the country. That will inform the confidence of professionals, which in turn will help the patient.

Last year, 90,000 people decided to write about their treatment in the national health service. Complaints to the commissioner have increased by nearly 28 per cent. in one year, to 1,782. Unfortunately, we are on a rising curve of complaints in the service. As the commissioner said, that does not necessarily mean that there are more problems in the national health service; it may mean that more people are aware that they can complain. That strikes at the heart of another consideration—the size of the NHS, and the need, in such a large organisation, for access points so that people may use the service complaints procedure.

The system should be simple for people to use. People need to know that their concerns will be treated sensibly by the professionals involved. However, one of the problems that the Government's reforms in procedures might involve is the issue of how the managers police the professionals in the NHS.

I return to the stage 2 process, identified earlier. I hope that the Minister accepts that it cannot be right to leave it entirely to a non-executive director of the NHS, in the instance that I quoted, to decide whether someone's complaint goes further than it currently does. Independent observers, community health councils and consumer councils are aware of the sensitivities in the NHS, but they want their fears allayed. The concerns of patients must be treated with the utmost seriousness. I hope that the Minister, when he replies, will be able to tell us that in Committee we may consider widening that stage 2 process, because it interfaces directly with the commissioner's role.

That leads me to the question of what role the community health councils will play in the procedure. In a system that will have been significantly changed, we shall need organisations with an advocacy role: organisations that are able to advise independently and, at each local level, organisations that can monitor objectively and feed that information back into the system for the benefit of all.

A readily accessible, understanding system is required. Without mentioning the community health councils, it seems to me that the Government have a vehicle that might be substantially improved in relation to the patient complaints procedure. I hope that, in Committee, we shall be able to consider ways in which those organisations might be better deployed in the process.

I have mentioned the perception of fairness. We all have a heavy responsibility to ensure that people consider the system to be fair. I believe that, in Committee, we must carefully consider ways in which to achieve a balance. I reiterate that we want to protect professionals, but the system must be transparent and accountable. It is crucial for patients to be able to obtain redress if the treatment is not what they believe that it should be.

An issue that affects the complaints procedure is the increasing fragmentation of the national health service. In some respects there has been no particular acrimony in the debate, and I do not intend to start any on that issue.

Mr. Malone *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McLeish: My comments do not cover some of the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), and that is healthy for democracy.

The increasing fragmentation of the NHS makes it more vital that complaints processes are simple and effective. Many organisations are worried about the uncertainty created by the reforms. The fact that more confusion and uncertainty exist, and that more paper is being pushed around than previously, does not help us to create a simplified complaints procedure.

I urge the Government to be aware, when we speak about resourcing those changes without extra funding, that obviously the funding will come from somewhere. It is important for the Government to remember that we cannot proceed with substantial reforms in complaints procedures without adequate resourcing, adequate energy and adequate commitment from the Government. Those are vital. That does not require a specific answer, but the Government must acknowledge the problems that lie ahead.

The other crucial issue is consistency throughout the country. The commissioner made some comments about the way in which complaints are handled throughout the regions. In the *Health Service Journal* on 13 April 1995, he was interviewed by a Mr. Matthew Limb, who says:

> "One area Mr. Reid has earmarked for further investigation is what he calls the 'mystifying variety' in complaints handling from region to region . . .
>
> In the former Oxford region in 1993-94, for example, there was only one formal investigation from a total of 4,268 complaints.
>
> By contrast, in the former North Western region, which received 5,338 complaints, there were 66 independent committee inquiries.
>
> Mr. Reid accepts that the discrepancies are 'very remarkable' . . . 'How they had exercised that discretion is not always explained and that is unsatisfactory,' he says."

The Government should be aware, not only that there is a general issue of a new complaints procedure and access to it, but that certain authorities are not doing as well as others in achieving effective outcomes of the complaints procedure. The systems may differ widely, and that must be acknowledged, but, wherever people live,

[Mr. McLeish]

they should have the same access to a fair system, regardless of the circumstances of the local health service. The Government should take that issue seriously.

I accepted, and I believe I agreed with the Minister, that the time scale is ambitious. However, we must ensure that we get it right. I welcome the fact that the commissioner has published that information document on what he will do, but the implementation of his proposals will probably coincide, in April 1996, with implementation of the wider complaints procedure. I urge the Minister not to dismiss some of the criticisms that are being made. He should keep on trying, but ensure that every possible area is explored, so that the complaints procedure, when introduced, serves the purposes that it is intended to serve.

My final comments are about my experience as a local Member of Parliament. I am sure that the Minister has shared that. Tragically, when a Member of Parliament receives complaints from constituents, it is often at the most sensitive time for any family. It may involve a death or serious accident. It may be a minor affair, but nevertheless it generates real passions—strong feelings in families, and often patients. Communication matters at such a time. Every professional must be able to communicate to patients what is going on.

If communication were qualitatively improved, it would prevent many complaints reaching a Member of Parliament's office, a complaints procedure or the ombudsman. I do not know how that may be achieved, but we should send a loud message from the House to everyone involved in the process that, in spite of the pressures under which they may operate, those are human beings whom we are dealing with. Sensitivity is critical in any service but, as I tell my constituents, it is a two-way process. Things are said in the heat of passion or bereavement, but professionals are human as well. We can legislate all we want, but unless patients and professionals have a common goal, the system cannot succeed. Self-regulation carries a tremendous responsibility. Independent advice is needed, but we also want the whole process to be successful. If there is good will, a commitment by Government and understanding on the part of professionals, the new process can work.

I look forward to the Committee stage. I hope and believe that we can improve the Bill. If the Opposition have been generous this evening in embracing the Bill, I hope that the Minister will be equally generous in Committee in confronting and accepting common sense and logic.

5.20 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) on many of his points. He was particularly right to emphasise the importance of communication. In many cases that came before the Select Committee, poor communication was the essence of the complaint. My hon. Friend the Minister referred to "Gardener's Question Time". For a moment, I thought that a significant concession had been made to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), and that his robust views on Europe had at last been recognised by the granting of his own question time. I was disappointed to realise that my hon. Friend's reference was to a radio programme, which I thought had been transferred to Classic FM.

My hon. Friend the Minister made a thoughtful speech. If I am fortunate enough to serve on the Committee, I will look forward to developing many of the themes that my hon. Friend outlined.

I welcome the Bill, which is in many ways a tribute to the hard work of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The Committee's recommendations have overwhelmingly been accepted and are incorporated in the Bill. The Committee is playing an increasingly important role in the national health service and in the resolution of complaints. I am pleased that several members of the Select Committee are present, and I have no doubt that we shall hear from them. I was delighted to hear the hon. Member for Fife, Central say that the Bill will enjoy the support of Labour Members. I believe that it will have the support of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend referred to communication and the work of the Select Committee. Does he agree that the Committee sees some of the worst cases that come before the Parliamentary Commissioner—some of which represent the most appalling treatment of extremely sick and sometimes elderly people in hospital through maladministration or mismanagement? Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good thing if more people knew of their right of complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner and that everyone who works in the health service knew of that right? That might produce improvements, which would avoid dreadful cases coming before the Select Committee.

Mr. Pawsey: The House will understand why my hon. Friend makes such an outstanding contribution to the Select Committee's work. He is right in all that he says. It is necessary for more members of the public to understand the complaints machinery. I endorse my hon. Friend's points.

The post of health service commissioner was established in 1973, and it is held by the person who is also the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—a case of two commissioners in one body. The Bill's background is the existing NHS procedure, which the Committee believes is

"designed for the convenience of the providers of the service rather than that of complainants."

The citizens charter task force stated:

"Complaints systems should be simple to understand and use . . . Procedures, where possible, should be consistent across different parts of an organisation and should cover the whole organisation."

The Select Committee argued that the NHS

"falls woefully short of that standard."

The patients charter maintains:

"Patients must always come first."

The charter has heightened expectations that may not always be realised. The public do not always get that which they have a right to expect. The Select Committee noted long delays in dealing with complaints, grudging apologies and general inadequacies that take a great deal of overcoming. Complaints are a benchmark of service that often identify poorly trained staff or bad management.

Complaints can and should improve service, and there ought to be changes to the philosophy of protecting one's own. From that reality of the NHS complaints procedure, the Select Committee and Professor Wilson recommended a comprehensive complaints system. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, that will be introduced in April next year.

The health service commissioner is established as the independent appeal mechanism above the health service's internal system. The commissioner's reports do much to improve and validate the internal system. In 1994-95, 91 per cent. of complaints to the commissioner were upheld. Even today the Select Committee still finds evidence of gross delays and failures in handling complaints—that, after procedures were introduced in line with the patients charter. The Bill will do much to improve complaints handling.

Currently, the commissioner can investigate complaints where he feels that maladministration has occurred and the complaint falls within his jurisdiction. As we heard this afternoon, that is unsatisfactory because many areas of the health service cannot be subject to the ombudsman's scrutiny as they are outside his jurisdiction. The Bill remedies that defect and represents a major step forward in the treatment of NHS complaints.

Clauses 1 and 2 add family health providers to the commissioner's jurisdiction. They include general practitioners, community dentists, opticians and pharmacists. The Select Committee maintains:

> "The current exclusions deprive the public of a right considered necessary in all other sections of the NHS. We believe this should be changed."

That important and far-reaching recommendation was endorsed by the Wilson report on NHS complaints procedures. The principal contact that most of the public have with the health service is through their GP, dentist or optician. It seems strange that those have so long been outside the ombudsman's reach. My only concern about their inclusion, which may be shared by some of my hon. Friends, is the great and rapid expansion in the number of complaints that are likely to reach the commissioner. When the public discover their new and necessary right, there will be a flood of complaints. In the early days, they may not be dealt with as expeditiously as we would wish. I will return to that warning note later.

The Bill also enables the ombudsman to investigate complaints about family health services, their staff or those who have been given delegated powers. As with all complaints, the complainant should first exhaust the new NHS complaints procedure.

The second, and perhaps the most controversial area to be added to the commissioner's jurisdiction, is action resulting from the exercise of clinical judgment by doctors and other health professionals, when they provide services in or for the national health service. The Select Committee is convinced that a lay element must be introduced into any clinical complaints procedure. That will certainly help to convince members of the public that the procedure is both fair and impartial.

Doubtless, the Standing Committee that considers the Bill will wish to decide how those lay members will be appointed, and what their qualifications should be. I believe that this will be a key matter and that the lay members will have an important role. I believe, therefore, that such appointments should be carefully considered.

The ombudsman has powers to obtain advice from any person who is appropriately qualified, and who will assist him in his investigations. That is particularly important in matters relating to clinical judgment, when the medical evidence may be very technical and more controversial than is usual. Those giving such advice can be paid fees or allowances as determined by the ombudsman, but by agreement with the Treasury. I hope that the Treasury will be forthcoming, because when the ombudsman's powers are widened, as envisaged in the Bill, that professional advice will be an absolute necessity.

I repeat that I am concerned about the impact that the Bill will have on the commissioner's work load. From my constituency experience, I know how many people come to my surgery or write to me to express their concern about their GP, or the way in which they—or, more usually, a relative—were treated in hospital. The Wilson committee urged the introduction of clinical judgment to the health service commissioner's remit, and when the Select Committee referred to the issue in the sixth report of Session 1993-94, it concluded that the extension was necessary.

An important by-product of the reforms may be a reduction in medico-legal cases. I believe that the public will soon come to realise that justice can be found more easily, and certainly more cheaply, by having recourse to the ombudsman than by going to the courts.

The changes contained in the Bill will have enormous implications for the NHS. Complaints about NHS care, wherever it is delivered, will become potentially subject to the scrutiny of an independent and impartial ombudsman. That constitutes both a major and a beneficial change.

I have little doubt that the two reforms will bring great changes, both to the work load and to the office of the health service commissioner. The reforms will improve the NHS, because complaints are "jewels to be treasured", as one witness said when examined by the Select Committee. I suspect that those two measures will uncover, if not a king's ransom in jewellery, certainly that of a duchess. *[Interruption.]* As ever, my hon. Friend the Minister shows the speed of his wit.

We should remember that, in the majority of cases, the ombudsman will not investigate complaints until the health service's procedures have been completed by the complainant. Incidentally, NHS staff may use the complaints machinery if they believe that they have suffered injustice as a result of the procedures operated by health service bodies.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said earlier, the commissioner can pass information arising from his investigations to appropriate regulatory authorities. This should mean, for example, that when a doctor or a surgeon has an infectious disease, that information can be given to a professional body or to his employers. The reason for this is that the infected person is likely to constitute a threat to the health and safety of patients. In all such cases, the ombudsman has a duty to inform the relevant person that such information has been passed to a third party.

All the proposals will significantly change the office of the health service commissioner, and will, as I have mentioned, substantially add to his work load. According to the explanatory memorandum, the cost of the changes will be about £5 million in the first year, rising to £6.5 million, in real terms, in subsequent years. That

[Mr. Pawsey]

seems to me to be a relatively small amount for the enormous burden of work that I believe will result. I hope that that sum will prove adequate for the reforms, which are the most radical since the office of commissioner was established in 1973. I am sure that the Select Committee will keep a watchful eye on finances, because it is not a job that anyone should try to do on the cheap if public confidence in the commissioner is to be maintained.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): My hon. Friend has raised the point that the population as a whole has a high level of trust in the health service commissioner, as opposed to any internal inquiry, however honourable. In those circumstances, it is important, as the Bill spells out, that there should be the opportunity to take further action after an internal inquiry. The essence of the Bill is very democratic and therefore it should not be underfunded. Sacrifices should be made in other directions rather than underfunding the health service commissioner.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. I am sure that the House and the Standing Committee will take careful note of what he has said. The Select Committee, some months ago, took evidence from one of the Warwickshire health authorities about a case from his constituency, so my hon. Friend is knowledgeable about those matters.

The Bill suggests that approximately 130 or 140 extra posts will be required to discharge the new duties. That explosion of new staff will pose a challenge to the ombudsman. Certain of those posts will be filled by medical staff able to provide advice on complaints relating to hospital specialities and, separately, on general medical services. My predecessor, Sir Anthony Buck, when he was Chairman, used to remind the Committee that justice deferred is justice denied. Therefore, it is essential that the new staff are trained as quickly as possible to deal with the expected avalanche of cases. The training must be thorough and comprehensive, as I believe the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) mentioned.

The need for new staff to come on stream quickly is underlined by the fact that in 1994-95, the time taken to complete an investigation was almost 60 weeks—a figure that compares unfavourably with 45 weeks in 1991-92. The principal reason for that increase in investigation time was the growth in the number of cases received by the commissioner's office. The number went up from 1,112 in 1989-90 to 2,226 in 1994-95. If, as a result of the reforms, the number of complaints increases to the degree that I envisage, that will substantially increase the work load of the ombudsman's office.

I was pleased that other recommendations made by the Select Committee have been accepted. For example, the commissioner will now present his reports direct to Parliament, rather than to the Secretary of State for Health. That will help to underline the commissioner's total independence from Government.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: I would be delighted to give way to my hon. Friend, who is one of the hardest-working members of the Select Committee. I would welcome his contribution.

Mr. Hargreaves: My hon. Friend is too kind. Does he agree that the Select Committee, as well as the Standing Committee which will consider the Bill, should be only too well aware and sensitive of the extra time that will be involved when the clinical element is included in the investigative work of the health commissioner?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. The Select Committee will keep a watchful eye on the time involved, and I hope that the Standing Committee will also give some consideration to it.

Currently, the Select Committee uses the reports of the ombudsman as the basis for its work. That procedure will continue. The Committee may well decide to take evidence from, for example, the family health services or indeed other independent providers where they provide services under arrangements made with various health authorities.

The ombudsman and the Select Committee are moving into uncharted waters with the two additions to existing powers. The specialised areas involved are likely to be highly technical and complicated, and they will require a careful introduction—the very point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves). I am pleased and reassured that Mr. William Reid, the current ombudsman, will be overseeing matters. He is careful, prudent and knowledgeable and has acquired enormous expertise in the administration of his high office. Those qualities will be needed to the full when the Bill is enacted. The avalanche of work that I foresee may, at first, be slow in coming, but come it will.

I acknowledge that resources have always been adequate for the efficient discharge of the ombudsman's duties. He has not had cause to complain about them. The reforms are designed to provide a comprehensive complaints procedure for the NHS in order to make it work even better and to give an improved and more reliable service to patients. Those are high ideals. I recommend the Bill to the House.

5.42 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am conscious of the Christmas spirit in the Chamber, so I do not want to be unduly critical of the Bill.

I welcome the broad ideas behind the Bill. My particular concern—I am sorry that the Minister left the Chamber as soon as I stood up—relates to the fact that I do not believe that the Bill addresses some of the weaknesses in what the Government have termed as stages1 and 2 of the complaints procedure. I hope that the dialogue in Standing Committee will cover some of the wider points that have not been picked up by Conservative Members who have spoken in the debate.

In a debate on the role of the health service commissioner, it is particularly important to consider the implications of the changes to the health service as a result of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. That Act fundamentally changed the procedures that must be followed by individuals who wish to complain about their treatment by the NHS.

Although the Bill relates to complaints, I should like to put it on record that, despite what the Government have done to the NHS—I am as critical as anyone else of their changes—the vast majority of people in my area receive a reasonably decent response from it. Today, I do not want to appear critical of those who try to give a reasonable service—GPs, nurses, hospital doctors, consultants or whoever.

Mrs. Peacock: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, generally, we all get an extremely good service from the NHS. About six weeks ago, I was taken to the accident and emergency department of the hon. Gentleman's local hospital on a Sunday evening after an accident, and I received excellent care. I received it not as the hon. Gentleman might think, because of who I am—no one knew who I was; I was just another casualty brought in on a Sunday evening.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My worry is that the hon. Lady might not have had such good service had the hospital known who she was.

We need to evaluate stages 1 and 2 of the complaints process before we consider in detail what is contained in the Bill. I was struck that the Minister used the word "maze" when describing what the public face when they want to make a complaint. As a result of the changes—or the reforms, as the Government describe them—in the NHS as a result of the 1990 Act, the simple fact is that the public are baffled about where they should go when they have a complaint about the NHS.

In my area, we have a community health trust and a community health council. If I were a betting man, I would wager that 99 per cent. of the local people do not know the difference between that trust and the council. They must understand those subtle differences, however, if they wish to make a complaint of whatever nature about the NHS. The purchaser-provider split introduced under the 1990 Act has confused vast numbers of people about who is responsible for what when they want to make a complaint.

As an example of such confusion, I should like to cite the case of a young lady in her late 20s, who came to see me in September. She had a complaint about the circumstances that led up to the surgical removal of her right breast. I felt that that young lady had a justified, serious complaint about the manner in which she had been treated by various elements of the NHS. Her complaint related to the role of the GP, and his initial diagnosis, when she consulted him about a lump in her right breast. Her complaint also related to the role and diagnosis of the hospital consultant; the seven-week delay before she was given a mammogram; and the delay before she received surgery for a serious condition. She also had cause to complain about the lack of proper follow-up arrangements provided by the community health trust, which is responsible for the provision of district nursing services, on her discharge home.

In the circumstances, and given the involvement of different elements of the new NHS, I thought it was appropriate to write one letter to the purchaser of the services. I expected to receive some assurance that a proper investigation would be carried out. I wrote to the purchaser and set out the young lady's complaints in detail.

In reply, the health authority said that it assumed that I had made representations to the various other elements of the NHS involved. That meant that I had to write separate letters to the hospital trust responsible for the treatment at hospital; the health authority about the role of the GP—the authority now undertakes the role of the family health services authority; and the community health trust concerning the lack of follow-up district nursing services. The letters were sent and the health authority advised me that the lady was out of time in lodging a complaint against her general practitioner because the normal limit of 13 weeks had been exceeded.

The woman had consulted her doctor in 1993. By the time that the process had been completed, there was talk of an operation in September 1994. She was excluded from making a complaint against her GP, because of the time taken by hospital diagnosis and subsequent treatment. Surely that was profoundly unfair. I make no judgment on whether the GP was right or wrong, because that is not my role. I am not an expert clinician. At face value, however, I feel that the woman had reasonable grounds for concern about the way in which she had been treated.

I do not know whether the Government have considered the impact of the internal market within the health service on the work load of Members. Having been in this place since 1987, I have seen a marked increase in the work that I have to undertake in dealing with complaints about the national health service. I could make a political point, and say that my increased work load is the result of the internal market. It is clear that it has more than duplicated the agencies to which we have to write as Members to establish on behalf of our constituents whether they have had proper treatment within the NHS.

In the case to which I referred, I had to write two letters to the district health authority, one to the community health council, one to the hospital trust and one to the community trust. I wrote five letters on the back of one specific complaint. In addition, there was correspondence with the constituent and her solicitor.

I have had experience of similar cases where the local authority has been involved. In some of those cases, there has been the issue of community care—in other words, a person has been discharged into the community, and the social services have been involved. The Government must be aware that the complaints procedures arising from the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 have resulted in a huge amount of additional work. That would be unnecessary if we introduced a clearer and more sensible local NHS complaints system.

Mr. Hargreaves: I, too, have noticed a huge increase in the NHS work load that results from my mailbag. I am sure that other hon. Members have shared the same experience.

I return to the difficulties that were experienced by the hon. Gentleman's constituent as a result of a mammogram. A close member of my family went through the same experience slightly more than a year and a half ago. There were exactly the same problems. It is my impression, however, that the Bill will enable the commissioner to examine the sequence of events from beginning to end, and to investigate it thoroughly and properly.

Mr. Hinchliffe *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We are moving away from the Bill. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) should confine his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Hinchliffe: In a sense, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not disagree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves). I am concerned that the Bill will not unravel the earlier stages of complaints. It seems that we are tackling the problem backwards rather than forwards.

If the Government were to consider establishing a one-shot, one-stop, complaints system as a first stage, as opposed to continuing with the various elements of the present complaints system, the huge increase in demand for the ombudsman's involvement might be reduced. In a sense, if complaints reach the ombudsman, the system has failed. If people are still aggrieved at that stage, it would seem that the system has failed. The system should allow people to receive satisfaction earlier, especially when serious complaints are made of the sort that I have described, as the result of local investigation.

I am concerned about self-investigation. I hear complaints about the police investigating themselves. Surely it is reasonable for people to think that it is wrong that a hospital trust should effectively investigate itself. The same applies to a health authority. I should like to see complaints procedures tied in much more to local level, and simplified at that level. If my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), the Opposition spokesman, wishes in some ways to reduce expenditure on the health service, tidying the complaints procedure would lead to a more effective use of scarce resources within the NHS.

One of the consequences of the 1990 Act is an increase in buck-passing when there are complaints within the NHS. There is a "not me, guv" attitude. It seems to be, "It is somebody else's responsibility, not mine." I have noted the attitude on several occasions in several areas.

I travel by train from Wakefield to King's Cross every week. Since the privatisation of the railways began, the "not me" mentality has developed within the railway system. Instead of an apology for the train being late and acceptance of responsibility by the provider of the service, the company which runs the service from Leeds to King's Cross blames Railtrack. In effect, it says, "Blame Railtrack, it isn't our fault, guv. It's somebody else's fault." That is happening with the NHS.

I am concerned that the Government have not taken account of the way in which various organisations are blaming one another. As I have said, I have seen the process developing within the NHS. The purchaser blames the provider, and the provider says that the purchaser has not provided enough money. There is argument about responsibility.

I do not wish to knock good officials in the local NHS area I represent, but I have received some difficult representations from general practitioners. Some GPs feel that their patients are not receiving proper treatment, because of the two-tier system that has arisen because of fundholding. I am sorry that the Minister has left the Chamber, because my argument relates directly to the commissioner's role in responding to complaints. My constituents' GPs, and some hospital consultants, feel that they are being badly let down by a two-tier system that gives priority treatment to fundholders in various ways.

Behind the scenes, off the record and privately, people say, "That is true. It is not our fault. It is their fault. It is not the hospital's fault, it is the health authority's fault." Or they might say, "It is not the health authority's fault, it is the hospital's fault." The buck is being passed. Perhaps I am not surprised that the Minister has left the Chamber, bearing in mind the fact that it is the fourth time that I have raised the issue. Indeed, it is the fourth time that he has avoided responding to a serious issue.

The commissioner should have the power to carry out detailed examinations in penetrating bureaucratic responses, which lead to agencies within the internal market blaming one another. There is a lack of response, of which I am becoming tired. Serious issues are raised, and my constituents are not receiving the responses they deserve.

Many of the problems that arise in the complaints procedure stem from the fragmentation of the service, and that has arisen with the implementation of the 1990 Act. The Bill does not meet patients' concerns and grievances.

The commissioner's role will remain far too limited. Despite the extension of that role, the commissioner will not be able to deal with certain issues. I shall localise my argument by referring to my constituency.

Until the internal market was introduced—I am not sure what the connection is between deterioration in service and the introduction of that market—the primary complaints that I used to receive about the health service in Wakefield turned on the quality of hospital food. It may be that people have become more willing or more prepared to complain since the introduction of the internal market. Unfortunately, we had a serious problem with the quality of hospital food, arising from the cook-chill system, and I have raised that issue several times.

The complaints that I receive about the health service in Wakefield are about basic caring provision at ward level. The picture I get is not of uncaring nurses, as I know many nurses personally; I have neighbours who are nurses, and they are decent people and well motivated. But they are so stretched at ward level that things are going badly wrong. They are under-resourced on the basics, and complaints arise through patients not receiving basic treatment that they have a right to expect.

The reason for that may well be underfunding. I query what the role of the ombudsman can be in the Bill where a complaint is about the allocation of resources, because, as you well know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from representing an adjacent area to my own and one that is within the same health authority area, my area has a major problem arising from the revised resource allocation formula introduced by the Government to allocate resources to individual health authorities.

Percentage-wise, my area has lost more resources than any other health authority in the Yorkshire and northern region. I am conscious that some of the complaints that will end up with the commissioner relate to simple facts about under-resourcing of services at the local level. The commissioner has a role to play in that context. I can see my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), the Whip, looking at me to say that it is about time I sat down—I used to like her.

I shall finish on a key issue for my constituents. The market forces factor introduced in the new resource allocation formula assumes that an area of lower property prices will have cheaper staff. That is nonsense. It assumes that the purchaser will drive down the wages paid by the provider. That is fundamentally wrong.

The other issue of which the commissioner should be aware, and which should be considered in the Bill, is the way in which the standard mortality rate, which is used in the allocation funding formula, penalises the areas where people tend to die younger. The area that you and I represent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has a history of mining and heavy industry, where people tend not to live as long as those who have not worked quite as hard in other areas or under such difficult working conditions.

We are penalised because we have fewer older people, despite the fact that hospital interventions are precisely the same as they would be with people dying later—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has tried hard to keep within the confines of the Bill. He has not always succeeded, and he is straying from it now.

Mr. Hinchliffe: You have been very patient, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I respect that.

I conclude with a point that needs to be explored, and it relates to the complaints procedures. We should contrast the way in which the Government introduced the Bill, on the role of the commissioner, with the manner in which they treat community health councils—supposedly the patients' voice. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central touched on that issue. In my area, community health councils are denied observer status at the board meetings of the community trust and the hospital trust, which I think is wrong. To the credit of the health authority, they can attend the health authority meetings.

Another point that I wish to raise is the current consultation document issued by the Department of Health on the membership of community health councils. We are in danger of undermining some of the strengths of community health councils by removing from their membership some very good people: experienced members, who have had a role to play in dealing with issues and complaints, which did not then have to go to the health service commissioner, whose role is examined in the Bill.

I notice that the Minister for Health has just walked back in, but I am sure that he will read my speech tomorrow morning and give me a response to some of the issues that I have raised.

The Bill is presented as a step forward, and I concede that. It is an enhancement of the important role of the commissioner. I am saying that the current system is unwieldy and expensive. It duplicates complaints mechanisms, and we must address that. The Bill does not look at some of the fundamental questions that need to be addressed within the NHS complaints procedure.

6.4 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): As my hon. Friend the Minister for Health said, the Bill is pretty central to the Government's plans to reform the health service, particularly the complaints procedures. I suggest that many of the reforms are much better. In fact, one of the main changes that I welcome is that my local hospital rather than the regional office in Harrogate now holds the contracts for all the consultants who work within the area. That has brought much of the administration and supervision to a local level.

As we heard, the measures in the Bill will be implemented in April 1996. I welcome that. As hon. Members have commented, it is a tight schedule, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will get the Bill through by then and ensure that the necessary training is in place to enable it to proceed.

The Bill is most welcome. I suggest that it is overdue. It is a measure that I have long thought we should introduce, to enable constituents, such as my own in Batley and Spen, to have their clinical complaints investigated. I realise that it is a sensitive issue where professionals are concerned; nevertheless, there are times when that facility should be available. For the first time, patients and relatives will be able to complain to the health service ombudsman about all aspects of care and treatment provided by the national health service, and that must be a step forward. The bar which, until now, prevented the ombudsman from investigating complaints about clinical judgments and family health services provided by general practitioners and dentists will be removed. I welcome that, particularly the inclusion of GP and dental services.

We have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House who have constituents who cannot afford to take the necessary legal action to instigate procedures against members of the medical profession when "accidents" occur and when surgical procedures leave the patient much worse after the surgery than before. In my 12 years in the House, I have had four or five cases where I felt completely helpless. Having exhausted all the procedures, I was not able to assist my constituents. They did not have the necessary finance to go to law to settle their grievances and they feel extremely let down—understandably so—by the NHS.

There was a very sad case where a constituent's mother died unexpectedly after so-called keyhole surgery. My hon. Friend will be aware of the immense work that was done by the late Michael Silverman, who lost his wife through keyhole surgery a few years ago. Tragically, he has now died, but he spent a lot of time and money in the past two or three years raising the issue of keyhole surgery and the necessary training for it. In another case, a constituent of mine, a fit and very active 51-year-old, went into hospital for what appeared to be a straightforward procedure and came out in a wheelchair, with no hope of redress against the health service or the consultants, because there was insufficient money to take legal action. I am not sure precisely how that will be resolved by the Bill and by the commissioner's change of responsibilities, but I hope that it will make a considerable difference, because I have seen at first hand how those families were devastated and their lives changed beyond all recognition. I am sure that their lives were changed in a way that is not easy for us to imagine.

I referred both those cases to Mr. Reid, the parliamentary ombudsman. He is always exceptionally willing to examine cases where we feel as Members of Parliament that we do not have any other avenue to go down, but he could not take action as they were outside the remit of his work. I therefore have a special interest in the Bill, and have looked carefully at what Mr. Reid said in his report. In paragraph 21, he notes that

> "the vast majority of legal claims for medical injuries or negligence are settled out of court. Where in such cases a complainant receives damages there may be no admission of fault or explanation."

That is fine, but I must repeat that many people do not have the resources to reach that stage, given that each medical report that they may need costs £350 or £500. They need that amount to obtain information from the consultant, and another £300 or £400 to obtain, perhaps, X-rays. That is far beyond the means of many of my constituents.

[Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock]

In paragraph 22, Mr. Reid goes on to say:

> "In considering whether to investigate in cases where there may be a remedy in the courts or a right to go to a tribunal, the Ombudsman expects ordinarily to have regard to the broad considerations in paragraph 21",

and specifically to one or two others. The ombudsman must also have regard to

> "whether it is evident that his or her primary concern is to obtain damages (as distinct from an explanation, apology, or action taken to put matters right)".

A person may be seeking damages in extreme cases. People whose lives have been ruined and who, at a very young age, find that they cannot work any more may, if they have no other recourse, seek damages if it is felt—and proved—that the consultant had a responsibility to avoid such an outcome. I hope that that aspect will be examined carefully in Committee.

I understand that the health service ombudsman will continue to investigate complaints about the way in which services are provided—failures to provide service, for instance, and maladministration—and that is welcome. I must say that the majority of objections to the way in which a complaint has been handled are resolved after I have taken them to my local health trust, Dewsbury Healthcare NHS trust. Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) spoke of a lack of communication; as with so much of our work—certainly mine—the problem here frequently relates to a blockage in the channels of communication that should make people understand exactly what is happening.

I note that the ombudsman will continue to be prevented from investigating complaints about disciplinary and other personnel matters. That is right: such matters should be resolved locally, in the shortest possible time. Consultants and other professionals should not be suspended on full pay for long periods when they are doing no work in the health service.

I believe that the national health service throughout the country takes complaints very seriously. The Dewsbury trust is excellent in that regard, but it cannot always resolve clinical complaints. The only option is for the patient or the family to take legal action, which—as I have said—is extremely expensive.

With respect to the General Medical Council, its various committees and the lay assistants who examine some of the cases, I must say that I am not convinced that the GMC has always had the necessary expertise to decide whether cases should proceed. That certainly applies to the cases that I have taken to the British Medical Association in the past. I feel that it is a bit of a closed shop, and that the Government should examine the position. In my experience, it is almost impossible to surmount the barrier: everyone closes ranks. That cannot be in the best interests of constituents with genuine cases against health authorities.

The latest six-monthly report from the health service commissioner shows that more than 8 million patients were treated in 1993-94, and 40 million were seen as out-patients. Only 1 per cent. registered complaints. Whatever I may say to my hon. Friend the Minister, I feel that we must see those figures in context. We are talking about a very small percentage—probably only a small percentage of that 1 per cent. of complaints represents serious cases in which no resolution could be found.

Nevertheless, although a huge number of cases clearly would not be referred to the ombudsman, the cases involved are important to patients and their families. Let me repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth said a while ago: we welcome the extra resources that will be put into the service, but I hope that, if extra money—let us call it what it is—is needed in future to ensure that the ombudsman can examine cases referred to him, my hon. Friend the Minister will put pressure on the Treasury in the usual manner to ensure that the service is not curtailed through lack of finance.

6.14 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): There is clearly general agreement that the Bill is a good thing. I join other hon. Members in welcoming it.

In its first report on the national health service complaints system, the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration quotes from a document entitled "Complaints Do Matter", produced by the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts. The document stated:

> "There is considerable dissatisfaction within the NHS, amongst the health professions and organisations representing patients and also amongst informed opinion, regarding the current arrangements for handling health service complaints. The arrangements are seen as being over-complex, failing to be user-friendly, taking too long, often over-defensive and often failing to give any satisfactory explanation of the conclusion reached."

The Select Committee concluded:

> "The current complaints system in the National Health Service seems designed for the convenience of providers of the service rather than of complainants."

That, I think, was very much the general view.

I have never understood the argument—or, rather, I have understood it but have never begun to support it—that the ombudsman should not have the right to investigate complaints relating to clinical practice. If we allow the Police Complaints Authority to investigate the professional job done by the police, it is absurd to say that the core job that is done in the health service cannot also be investigated. It was possible to examine the paperwork, but not to look into whether someone had been seen in the right way or had received the right treatment.

It has taken a long time for us to reach this point—although I note that things have moved quickly since the Select Committee made its recommendation in November 1993, and I pay tribute to it for that. In May 1994, the Wilson report was published. I commend that document: like others, it is very readable and hits the nail on the head. The Select Committee quickly picked up what the report said, and the Government presented proposals in March this year and legislated in November. Once the show was on the road, things moved rapidly. Throughout that time there was uncertainty about whether dealing with clinical complaints would feature in legislation, but we should be grateful that it has. I imagine that the profession felt rather defensive, and may still, but it serves as the servant of the public which must complain on the public's behalf. The purpose of the Bill is to give the lay public the right to make their health service serve them properly.

All of us—no matter how good the health service may be in our localities, and no matter how excellent our hospitals may be—present a succession of complaints when things go wrong. Guy's hospital is in my constituency, and many of my constituents visit St. Thomas's and King's College hospitals. Those are excellent hospitals; they are probably among the best in the country. Nevertheless, things regularly happen that should not happen. The Wilson report sets out the reasons why people want to complain about such things.

Complainants are not normally vindictive; they simply want an acknowledgement that things have gone wrong. They often want an apology from the authorities, an explanation of how the problem can have come about and a report on what has been done so that the mistake does not occur again. Sometimes they want compensation or redress. Sometimes they want punishment, feeling that someone should not be allowed to get away with bad practice, bad supervision and bad management. Often they want to ensure that they are heard. All those are very good reasons.

Like the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), I think it highly unsatisfactory if the only recourse that people have is the extremely unhelpful process of law. I say that as a lawyer. Taking a medical negligence action through the courts is about the most unsatisfactory form of legal action there can be. If there can be a procedure that, in a known system, deals much more quickly with the matter and does not require people to spend money that they may not have, that is far better.

It is also vital—this will be the merit of the Bill—that everyone knows and can understand the system. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) made the point that many people do not know the system at all. They do not know what the proper system is because, in large measure, there is not a proper system in the health service—it is very hit and miss. They may go to see their Member of Parliament, who may write to the chief executive of the trust or the health authority. Normally, something happens. There may or may not be a meeting. It may include only the people involved; but they may have left, so someone else comes. A person who has nothing to do with the incident may be involved. One gets the impression, however—let us not mince words on this—that people look after each other and defend their interests. Often, the reality is that people—if they do become involved—will not say anything about their colleague if that person has messed something up.

That is not the case all the time. The other day, I had occasion to complain about the treatment at St. Thomas's hospital of a relative of constituents of mine. The authorities whom we met said, "We apologise. We should not have behaved like this. The management on the ward was appalling. Various things should never have happened. Your relative was extremely badly looked after." Mercifully, that lady survived and is now being treated in another hospital, where the care and attention that she is given are much better. We must, however, have an impartial system, which is a good thing.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen cited the past two half-yearly reports and gave examples of some of the ombudsman's cases. In those examples, it is clear that things often go wrong. From those reports—it happens that those were the ones mentioned—it seems that they go wrong in London more often than elsewhere: 18 of the 52 reports involve London-based complaints. There are, I think, still more complaints per head of the population in London than anywhere else. I am sure that Ministers are aware that those are some of the things that the health service needs to sort out. If we have all these resources, it is bizarre that, in the capital city, things go so badly wrong so often.

It is clearly logical, therefore, that the ombudsman's powers will be extended, first, to deal with clinical matters and, secondly, to deal with other parts of the health service—things one's general practitioner, dentist or optician does or does not do. An unsatisfactory, very much "around the houses" system is still in place in relation to getting a GP. Shopping around for a GP, and trying to get another GP if one is struck off a GP's list, is still very hit and miss. That system needs to be reformed, but if we can have one that is fair, independent and speedy, which is important, so much the better.

The previous Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration reiterated the trite, but true, saying that justice delayed is justice denied. I endorse what he said. It is no good having investigations stretching out over months or years. People want investigations to come to an end. Often they involve a bereavement; often someone has died. People want to be able to wrap up that portion of their experience, which is often extremely unpleasant to recollect and go through. They feel they have to and they want it done quickly.

In addition, I welcome the Bill's two Nolanesque powers of direct intervention. The first—which is in clause 5, I think—is that the ombudsman can shoot through the system: he can say, "I am going to investigate that, no matter where it has got to in the system." That is a good thing. The second is that he can lay reports directly before Parliament—they do not have to go around the health service's hierarchy. That is good, because the ombudsman system works on the strange equilibrium principle that an ombudsman investigates and makes recommendations and that his authority resides in the fact that Parliament will consider his report and, presumably, hit the health service over the head if it does not act properly in response to his report. That odd, inconclusive, historical, constitutional balance often appears in Britain, but, even so, in general terms, it is better—if it is cheaper and quicker—than going to law.

It is even more important that we get this right because we have an undemocratic health service. Yes, we have Ministers at the top, but no one pretends that the local health commission or local health trust are democratic bodies. I argue that they should be. As long as they are not, and as long as all the people who run them are appointed by the Secretary of State for Health, it is even more important that we have a proper complaints system that works. The public cannot sack the management, other than at a general election, which may be a bit of an overreaction if one is trying to deal just with a problem in the local hospital and if one does not necessarily think that the whole of the management should go. In my constituency, people think that the management should not have been there in the first place, but that is a separate issue—one clearly needs to be able to have the best possible form of complaint.

The system fails to do two other things. It does not—this is not intended, but it is worth observing—provide a health service inspectorate. I strongly believe that we need a proper health service inspectorate, as we have in the education service through the Office for Standards in Education, in the Prison Service, and for the social services. There should be a body that can go in—the community health councils do this to an extent, but they

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

do not necessarily have the clout that a national inspectorate or a federation of community health councils would have. That is part of the missing link in an undemocratic health service.

The last, as it were, ambiguous thing that is left involves the ombudsman's ability to take up a matter where the complaint about the commissioning health authority is in terms of where, for example, it placed a contract and where a relative was treated. The ombudsman has the power to investigate such a matter if it causes, I think the phrase is, "harm to the individual". The individual still lacks the power to complain if a health authority asserts its right to treat the patient in a certain place or in a certain way. This is one of the failures of the present purchaser-provider system, which does not give the customer—the user—real power.

The new system will work if it has the resources. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen, the Chairman of the Select Committee—the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—and the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) made it clear that this will not work unless the money is put up front and enough people work for the commissioner to do the job. We do not want a system that results in a queue of cases, such as those waiting for asylum decisions, where a great pile is kept in an office corner because there are not the people to deal with it. That would be unacceptable.

I believe, and the ombudsman floats the idea in his report, that we should have regional ombudsman offices. People relate to the regions of England and to Wales and Scotland, and we should have regional offices in England too.

We should have the power and entitlement to have a stage 2 investigation, and it should not be at the discretion of some senior health service appointee who might arbitrarily decide not to investigate. People should know that they have a complainant's set of charter rights, deadlines and timetables, in the same way as they have patients charter rights and timetables for treatment. I hope that many things will be done to tighten the system slightly. Like the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), speaking for the Labour party, I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic. We have been nice to him and said that this is a good Bill and a nice framework. I am sure that, collectively, we can improve it hugely in Committee, go a bit further and fill in the loopholes. I look forward to a constructive Committee stage, good legislation that works on the statute book and an improved complaints system in the near future.

6.28 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I think that most hon. Members present will be aware that I am a lay member of the General Medical Council and perhaps, in the absence of any clear guidance flowing from the so-called Nolan resolution that we passed a few weeks ago, I should declare an interest in the sense that I receive a modest fee from the GMC in connection with my work as a lay screener, but that is what the fee is for. I am not an advocate for the GMC and, in any event, on this issue, the GMC takes a neutral stance.

Naturally I welcome the Bill for all the reasons that have been explained. As the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) said, this Bill and the Medical (Professional Performance) Act 1995 are complementary. Both make doctors more accountable and extend the rights of patients. It is important to be clear that it is the national health service which employs doctors, which requires them to comply with the terms of their contracts and which can take action should doctors not comply with those terms. The General Medical Council's role is to maintain a register of doctors, and no doctor can practise unless he is on it. The GMC lays down standards and ensures that doctors comply with them.

I want to examine the part of the Bill which gives the ombudsman the power to consider clinical judgments. As far as I can see, that expression is not defined either in the Bill or elsewhere. If a doctor sees a patient at his surgery or at the patient's home, my understanding is that the doctor's task will be to consider the patient's symptoms, to question the patient, to take a medical history if he does not already have one, to discover the patient's recent activities and what he has been eating and drinking and to carry out the prodding, poking and pushing which doctors tend to do if there is pain in certain parts of one's anatomy. It is the doctor's job, if he thinks it necessary, to carry out tests or to arrange for those tests to be carried out.

In other words—to use the phrase which the GMC occasionally uses in its correspondence—the doctor is obliged to

> "put himself in a position in which he can properly assess the patient's condition and the treatment needed."

Once that has been done, the doctor must use his clinical judgment to assess the patient's condition and decide upon and implement the appropriate treatment.

If the doctor has not followed the appropriate steps in making the diagnosis, then of course his action or lack of action could cause him to be brought before the local medical services committee, which will decide whether he has complied with his terms of employment. The doctor could also find himself before the GMC, possibly charged with serious professional misconduct. The circumstances will determine whether the doctor finds himself before the MSC, the GMC or both. The important question is whether the doctor has done the right things. If he has taken the necessary preliminary steps, it is for the doctor to make the judgment on diagnosis and appropriate treatment, or on whether to refer the patient to a specialist.

It is fortuitous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you happen to be in the Chair. You are perhaps in a better position than many of us to know that medicine is an art as well as a science and that people differ. We are all different and react differently. If you and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were to go to our general practitioner with similar symptoms, it may be that we would be found to be suffering from different conditions. Similar conditions may be given the same treatment, but with a different effect on different patients. A combination of symptoms might indicate a whole range of possible conditions.

A few years ago, to give a personal example, I had stomach problems. I shall not regale the House with the details, but suffice it to say that the doctor tried one or two treatments, on a sort of trial-and-error basis, before he decided that the problem was clearly my gall bladder, for which I subsequently had an operation. The symptoms could have indicated several other conditions.

There is a lot of publicity at the moment about meningitis, which is a notoriously difficult condition to diagnose. Certain symptoms could easily be the early stages of meningitis, but they could also be all sorts of other things. If all GPs were to send straight to hospital all the patients who presented themselves with symptoms that could develop into meningitis, the hospitals would be overwhelmed, particularly at the moment.

If a doctor has taken the steps that he should take to put himself in a position to make a clinical judgment, then surely that is as much as one can expect of him. It may be that his judgment is wrong, with distressing or even fatal results. However, if he has made his judgment in all good faith, as matters stand now, he would not normally be proceeded against by the GMC. We must bear it in mind that, quite apart from all the circumstances that I have described and the different conditions under which doctors have to make diagnoses, they are human. As in any other walk of life, it is possible for doctors to make mistakes.

I am not saying that the ombudsman should not examine clinical judgments. I am simply concerned that he should not treat harshly a single incident. If that were to happen, it could lead to doctors being ultra-cautious and to their practising defensive medicine, as tends to happen particularly in places such as north America. One of the effects of the Medical (Professional Performance) Act 1995 when it comes into force is that, although I have said that a single incident or misjudgment would not normally make the doctor the subject of consideration for the GMC, a series of similar acts indicating deficient performance could lead to his being brought before the GMC. So if it were found that in a number of instances a doctor's ability to diagnose, or his clinical judgment, were at fault, then he could certainly be brought before the GMC. That is to be welcomed.

I support the purpose of the legislation which is to ensure protection for the public and to add to patients' rights. I am simply anxious that the implementation of this part of the Bill does not so affect the way in which doctors carry out their professional duties that not only they but patients would be the losers.

I welcome clause 11. As my hon. Friend the Minister said in his introduction, it gives the ombudsman the power to notify regulatory agencies such as the GMC of material that his investigators have gathered; material which may not necessarily be disclosed for the purpose of the investigation but which he thinks ought to be looked at for the benefit of patients.

That power, although of course not mandatory, will give the ombudsman discretion, which he does not have at present, to disclose to the GMC information about a doctor when it appears to the ombudsman that there may be a threat to the health or safety of patients. That, like the rest of the Bill, is surely to be welcomed.

6.39 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) referred to the problems prevailing in the complaints procedures in north America, where massive litigation is going on all the time. I understand that that is one of the main reasons why practitioners there leave the medical profession. It is not because they are found guilty. It is because of the costs of the huge insurance premiums that they have to pay for adequate medical insurance to protect them from litigation. We need to ensure that our national health service complaints procedure stops us from falling into that trap. We need a complaints system that has the confidence not only of patients but of practitioners.

As hon. Members will know, legislation often originates from the direct experiences of their constituents; from people turning up at their surgeries or writing to them and drawing particular problems to their attention. Certainly, I have become interested in the work of the health commissioner because of issues that have been raised directly with me.

Although it has been interesting listening to the debate and to references to Select Committee reports, the Wilson report and so on, I am speaking in the debate because of the personal experiences of my constituents, especially the case of Mrs. Rhoda Quigley, which exemplifies the reason why we must grant the commissioner the right to investigate the clinical judgment of practitioners in the health service.

I shall briefly run through the rather tragic case relating to my late constituent Rhoda Quigley. She was diagnosed as having a serious heart problem and informed that she needed an operation on her mitral heart valve, which was to be performed at the London Chest hospital—some 250 miles from her home in Pembrokeshire. She travelled to the hospital on 24 August 1994 and was immediately admitted. It had been arranged beforehand: she travelled there by an ambulance car provided by the Pembrokeshire NHS trust and was operated on the following day.

Mrs Quigley's family visited her and were concerned that she did not appear to be making much progress following her operation. They were surprised when, on 31 August, they were informed that she was to be discharged on 3 September. They made their concerns known on the ward and to doctors there, but they were assured that Mrs. Quigley would be fit to travel on 3 September. The family inquired as to how she would travel back to Pembrokeshire, bearing in mind the fact that her husband, who had stayed in London with her, had already suffered two strokes and needed a stick to walk. The ward suggested that perhaps she could travel back by rail. The family were, however, well aware of the problems with the rail service, especially west of Swansea, and they decided to drive from Pembrokeshire, pick her up in London and take her back to Pembrokeshire.

While they were driving down the M4 back to Pembrokeshire on 3 September, Mrs. Quigley felt ill and was in pain. Her legs, which were badly swollen, were causing her great discomfort. They stopped at motorway services to purchase some painkillers, which Mrs. Quigley took. A mile after they had rejoined the motorway, Mrs. Quigley died in the back of the family saloon. I am sure that Members appreciate not only the tragedy but the personal involvement of a family when somebody dies—basically—on the hard shoulder of a motorway.

Following that, the family contacted the cardiologist, who explained in three letters why he felt that Mrs. Quigley was in a condition to be discharged. The family remained dissatisfied, not only in relation to her health at the time of discharge, but especially because transport had not been properly arranged to take Mrs. Quigley back home.

The family contacted me in January and I wrote to the chief executive of the Royal Hospitals NHS trust, as well as raising the issue of transport with my local NHS trust.

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

I was assured by my local NHS trust that, in fact, it had no record at all of being contacted by the Royal Hospitals trust or the London Chest hospital in order to provide transport, despite the fact that Mrs. Quigley's family had been told on the ward that that was the case and that the local trust had refused to help by providing an ambulance or any other form of transport.

I received a reply from the chief executive of the Royal Hospitals trust in which he said that he had investigated the complaint, had checked with staff and that the unanimous opinion of the staff was that, at the time, they had felt that Mrs. Quigley was fit to be discharged.

I then referred the case to the health ombudsman and received a letter dated 30 June, in which Mr. Reid stated:

> "I enclose a booklet which outlines what I can and cannot do. Section 6(b) of the booklet explains that I cannot investigate or question clinical decisions about the care or treatment of a patient."

He said that he noted from the trust's letter of 24 May to Mrs. Quigley's daughter, that when

> "the consultant surgeon saw Mrs. Quigley 48 hours before her discharge, he thought she would be ready to go home shortly after the consultation . . . As matters stand, I cannot question the doctors' judgments about Mrs. Quigley's medical condition. I believe that this restriction to my powers also prevents me from taking up the matter of Mrs. Quigley's transport."

After receiving that letter, I wrote back to the commissioner and pointed out that it would appear from what Mrs. Quigley's family had told me that there were members of staff at the hospital who believed that some form of transport should have been provided. Mr. Reid responded on 8 August, and said:

> "Even if some members of the nursing staff considered that Mrs. Quigley should have travelled by ambulance, the final decision was for the doctor responsible for her care. That decision was made in the exercise of his clinical judgment, and as such is not investigable by me."

That is a very good example of why I think it absolutely essential that the health ombudsman is given the right to investigate clinical judgments. All my constituents want is what they consider a fair and independent inquiry into their concerns. They are not looking for compensation. They want to get the truth about how and why their mother was discharged.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, the reasons why people complain and seek an inquiry are complicated in some ways, yet straightforward. In many cases, they want to put the tragedy behind them. If they do not think that they will get an independent inquiry, they become extremely frustrated and they find it difficult to put the sad memories behind them.

There can be no inquiry into the Quigley case when the Bill becomes an Act because it contains no retrospective element. That is right because if it did, the ombudsman would be inundated by complaints going back many years. However, I hope that his new powers will ensure that the tragedy that Mrs. Quigley's family faced will not be repeated.

I welcome the Bill and I especially welcome the inclusion of a clinical judgment element, but I have some points of concern about training on which I touched in my intervention during the Minister's speech. Staff need to be well acquainted with the new procedures, but there are cost implications. The complaints procedure has three stages and resources will be made available to the ombudsman at stage 3.

If stage 2 in particular is to have the confidence of patients, they must feel confident about the independence of the non-executive directors of the trust or health authority who will act in the screening process. My fear is that because patients may feel that the screening process will be carried out by somebody who has a vested interest in not serving their needs, far more complaints may go through to the ombudsman. People may receive a fair judgment at stage 2, but because there is a question mark over the independence of that stage, the ombudsman's work load may be significantly increased.

I understand, and to an extent welcome the fact, that we want the complaints procedure to be in place as soon as possible. However, the Government have not taken fully into account the training costs between now and April, and after that, or the human resources element. I imagine that, in large trusts, a number of staff would have to be designated to deal with complaints properly; that will have significant cost implications.

The question of clinical judgment does not refer only to the direct treatment of individuals by the hospital, by the GP or by other practitioners, such as dentists and ophthalmic surgeons. Presumably, clinical judgment will now include the discharge from hospital into private residential nursing homes. In many cases, as we know from our surgeries and from debates here, that is an extremely grey area. In the past, the health ombudsman could not address the question of whether it was right that an individual patient should be discharged from hospital or what level of medical and nursing care was required. That was not part of the ombudsman's remit. With the new element of clinical judgment, we may find that many complaints will involve questioning the clinical judgment involved in discharging patients from an NHS hospital into a private nursing home, especially when patients have to pay for that care.

Another worry concerns fundholders; I am not making a contentious point. From reading the Bill, I am not clear whether fundholding decisions in relation to finance will be covered by the ombudsman. If there is no maladministration, the ombudsman cannot become involved, but there are other cases and I quote a recent one in Wales. A GP in the constituency of Montgomery removed a family from his list because they refused to be inoculated. As a number of children were involved, the bonus that the GP would have received from his family health services authority was affected. For three or four days, the family was removed from the doctor's list until pressure was put on for him to put them back on the list. That is an extreme example, but there may be financial decisions by fundholders that relate to clinical judgment. I hope that the Minister will touch on that point because it is not clear whether such financial decisions are covered in the Bill.

I welcome the Bill and I should like to serve on the Standing Committee, Whips willing. As many hon. Members on both sides have said, it is clear that the national health service complaints procedure is not working properly. That causes problems for patients and for practitioners. We need to get the procedure right and I accept that the Bill is a step in the right direction.

6.56 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): There has been much agreement in the debate, although I had hoped that there might have been slightly less ambiguity from Opposition Front-Bench Members about toughening up and strengthening the Bill—I think that those were the words used by the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish)—in Committee. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who now speaks from the Back Benches, was a little more robust about some of the changes that he felt should be made. There is ambiguity about the Bill and about a number of other issues, such as GP fundholding and the private finance initiative, which were also touched on in the debate. I wish we knew what amendments Opposition Front-Bench Members intend to table in Committee; it is not entirely clear.

In view of the lateness of the hour, I intend to follow the example of my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), who spoke eloquently and with some brevity. Conservative Members believe that the public have a right, as my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen said, to expect that the NHS should be open and accountable to the patients it serves. In that light, the care that patients receive should be based on rights and standards, which have been clearly set out in the patients charter. The new code on openness, introduced in June, ensures that information is made available to the public so that they can make informed choices about their health care.

The Bill will be an extra step in making the NHS truly accountable. Despite the fact that the NHS continues to treat a record number of patients—8 million patients treated and 40 million seen as out-patients in 1993-94—only 1 per cent. of NHS patients have registered complaints.

I would like to place on record my satisfaction with the manner in which the Southport and Formby NHS trust and the community health services trust have dealt with complaints which I and other local people have drawn to their attention.

The Government are right to reform the complaints procedures, and this Bill is going the right way about it. For the first time, patients and relatives will be able to complain to the health service ombudsman about all aspects of the care and treatment provided by the NHS. This will alleviate any suspicion on the part of users of the NHS that their complaints to a range of professional bodies will prove fruitless, because those complaints will now be dealt with independently.

Clauses 1 and 7 of the Bill make it possible for the health service commissioner to investigate complaints arising from the most frequent point of contact between the public and the NHS—GPs, dentists, pharmacists, ophthalmic medical practitioners and optometrists. This is clearly crucial to any attempt to increase accountability within the NHS, while the consequential increase in responsibility and work on the part of the health service commissioner will be offset by the increase in funding envisaged in clause 12. I take due cognisance of the fact that extra costs will be met from within existing resources.

Clause 6 of the Bill, dealing with the exercise of clinical judgment, will allow the commissioner to consider the substance of a complaint about the exercise of clinical judgment, as well as the manner in which it has been handled by the health service. I am pleased to see that the Bill, in the interests of equity, allows those subject to the complaints procedures—the employees of health service bodies themselves—to have exactly the same right as the general public to complain about the way in which the system has treated them.

The independence of the office of the health service commissioner will be strengthened by clause 10, and I am pleased to see that special, annual and other reports on performance functions will be made to the Secretary of State. I am pleased also that copies of those reports will be placed before each House.

I am glad to see that the Bill will incorporate the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland in the list of bodies which the health service commissioner for Scotland may investigate. This will bring the position in Scotland into line with that in England and Wales. All too often, we are trying to get into line with Scotland, where—in so many respects—things are rather better than here in England.

The Bill makes the health service commissioner the heart of the NHS complaints system. Along with increased responsibilities, the commissioner will continue to investigate complaints about how services are provided, about any failure to provide services and about maladministration. With the provisions of the patients charter, the Bill will lead to improved accountability and openness of NHS services and to an improvement in the standards of health care.

William Reid, the present ombudsman, has said that this is the most significant measure to be introduced in the 22 years in which the post has existed. When one hears such a comment from someone of Mr. Reid's calibre, one should have no doubt whatsoever that we are moving along the right lines.

7.2 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): A body called the Citizens Charter Complaints task force laboured mightily, and eventually defined what a complaint was. It said—this is a wonderful phrase—that a complaint was

"an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response".

If we had time, we could perhaps reflect on that. None of us likes to have expressions of dissatisfaction requiring a response levelled at us. I suspect that hon. Members like them least of all, which is probably why Members of Parliament are the only remaining public servants who do not have a charter attached to them. We are not required to give a period of time within which we should answer letters. We are not required to be nice to people or to see people. We are not told how we have to behave. We are charter-free. So a certain humility is required when we pronounce upon the expectations that other public services have to discharge. Some hon. Members may say that if people do not like us, they can boot us out. That is true. But looking at Conservative Members, I am struck by the fact that there will be some booting out shortly; not because of individual deficiencies on the whole, but because of guilt by association.

I want to extend a hearty welcome to much of the Bill and to offer genuine congratulations to the Government on moving so firmly, clearly and quickly on it. They have behaved with commendable speed. Their targets for implementation are very ambitious, the central reform of finally separating disciplinary complaints from ordinary complaints is greatly to be welcomed and the ambition of establishing a unified system is essential.

[Dr. Tony Wright]

I have some questions and queries, and one particular squabble. The Bill is "long overdue". Those are not my words, but those of the British Medical Association. We have known for years that the NHS complaints system has been a disgrace and a mess, and we have done nothing about it. The state of the system was best summarised in the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration's 1993–94 report on the health service ombudsman, which said:

> "The current complaints system in the NHS seems designed for the convenience of the providers of the service rather than that of complainants."

It is striking and worth remembering that the handling of complaints has constituted the biggest category of complaints handled by the ombudsman. The complaint-handling system has been at the core of so much that has been wrong.

The Select Committee—of which I am proud to be a member—sees consultants all the time who claim not to have a role in the system, and who claim that there is no need for them to answer people's letters or to see them. We see managers who cannot manage, and other things which give rise to the need for what the Royal College of Nursing called a "culture change".

There is evidence of the failures of the existing independent professional review system, which varies around the country. There is a similar variability in terms of the family health services authorities' service hearings. There are inexplicable variations around the country in how the system works which we have known about for years but done nothing about. That is a scandal and a disgrace—thank goodness reform has at last arrived.

I have some questions about the reform. Why is the House being asked to consider only this Bill, which relates to an amendment to the powers of the health service commissioner, and not a general Bill about the ombudsman himself? This was recommended by the Nolan committee when it considered quangos and the need—as recommended by the Select Committee—to revise the jurisdiction of the ombudsman as a whole. I hoped that the Government would do that, but they have not taken the opportunity to do it in this Bill.

Why is this not a general NHS complaints Bill? The Government's ambition is to create a unified complaints system, and yet we have only a partial Bill which looks only at the role of the commissioner. It seems extraordinary to me that the House will not be able to consider the major elements of the new system, which are to be on the basis of the Hospital Complaints Procedure Act 1985 and the National Health Service Act 1977. The elements of the new complaints system, to which some hon. Members have referred, will not be available for discussion or amendment inside the House because the Government have not come forward with a unified complaints Bill.

Why has there not been at least an inquiry into the important related matters? In particular, why has there been no equivalent investigation into the area of medical negligence, which we know is fraught with difficulties and delay? Is it not crucial that, having had the Wilson inquiry into the complaints system, we now have a parallel and equally urgent inquiry to sort out the mess on the medical negligence side of the system?

I was not persuaded by the Minister's answer that the Bill would have a nil cost in the long term. There are substantial costs attached to making this cultural change inside the national health service. We should not apologise for that. I urge the Government to state that they are investing in setting up a good-quality complaints system. That is something worth doing and the Government want to devote resources to it. When I quibble with the Government, it is when they say that those resources must come from other areas of expenditure.

I suggest that in the longer term—indeed, perhaps the longer term has now arrived—we shall have to think about creating a separate, distinct NHS ombudsman rather than one wrapped up inside the larger ombudsman system. If we had had a decent Bill, we could have revised the term. Here we are using a sort of Sunday term "commissioner" when the popular term is "ombudsman". The Select Committee recommended that change and the Government endorsed it, but they have not legislated for it. That opportunity has been missed.

I have some questions about the variability of the stage one procedure. There is a need for consistency around the country. There are worries on that score. I have particular worries about complaints which relate to more than one NHS provider. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) spoke well about that. The fact that the Government have sought to disaggregate the health service into a system of separate bits is in a sense neither here nor there as far as we are concerned today. More important, that fact should not be here or there for the complainant. Complainants should not have to negotiate their way around a divided, fragmented and disaggregated system. There should be a simple point of entry and someone to help them through it.

The Government's interim guidance says that there will be separate, parallel complaints systems because a complaint may refer to different parts of the system. That cannot be satisfactory. It breaks down the unity that we strive for. I also have worries about the screening procedure for stage 2 and about who will do the screening. The non-executive board member will convene the screeners. Quite how that will be done raises all sorts questions that are yet to be resolved.

One major issue which I wish to register and which I hope can be discussed again in Committee is the role of the ombudsman in stage 2 or independent review complaints. When someone make a complaint, it will be examined under the informal first stage. If the chief executive refuses to instigate an independent review panel or stage 2 hearing, the chances are that the complainant will then appeal. The appellate court will be the ombudsman. The ombudsman will face a deluge of appeals against refusal of a stage 2 hearing. What will he do? Will he have the power to recommend or order that there shall be a stage 2 hearing? There is confusion about that. Will refusal to authorise a stage 2 procedure when one should have taken place be regarded as maladministration by the ombudsman? That matter has to be resolved.

My greatest worry is whether what we are doing shuffles the ombudsman to one side when we think that we are doing something different. Will the ombudsman be able to come into the picture and investigate only when the stage 2 process is exhausted? All the assumptions seem to be that that will be so. That was not the ombudsman's initial understanding. It may be the understanding that he has expressed in the longer paper to which the Minister referred, but in the ombudsman's initial response to the Wilson committee, which appears in the sixth report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in 1993-94, he said:

> "I would not intervene where the first stage procedures have not been exhausted. However, where a complainant has had a formal investigation at the behest of the chief executive, I do not consider it necessary or appropriate to expect in every case that the complainant should have to go to stage 2 before coming to me."

In other words, at that point the ombudsman believed that complainants would have the choice between going through the stage 2 or independent review procedure or going through the ombudsman procedure. There is an important point attached to that. One thing we know is that the ombudsman system has enabled citizens and, in this case, NHS complainants, to achieve a quality investigation of their complaint. My worry is that if we make it more difficult and diminish access to the ombudsman system, we shall think that we are extending the remit—in a sense, the Bill does so—but in practice we may finish up excluding citizens, patients and complainants from access to a system which has more than proved its worth.

My last point is one of language. Within the Department of Health there must be a sub-department of circumlocution. Whatever else has happened in the new health service, there has been a proliferation of byzantine language. Every person who appears before the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration these days bears a new and more extraordinary name. People involved in complaints are usually called something like customer relations officer or customer services officer. Sometimes it is more elaborate. Whoever handles complaints at local level will be crucial to the success and co-ordination of the system and access to it.

In the first response to the Select Committee, the Government called the local person a complaints officer. In the interim guidance they used the term "complaints manager". Let us have a complaints officer or CO. Why not link in quality, as we properly should when talking about complaints, and have quality and complaints officers or QCs? Let us have a robust name for a robust role; a clear name for a clear job. That will be essential to clearing up the mess that the present NHS complaints system is.

7.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I welcome the thrust of the Bill, but I hope that the Minister has taken on board some aspects referred to during the debate which may give rise to some amendments in Committee. One such aspect is the question of clinical judgment. It is a difficult definition to arrive at. It is important that we know how the Government believe that the phrase will be used in the context of the legislation and by whom. During his preliminary investigations, will the commissioner be empowered to call expert witnesses to examine the case papers which confront him and determine whether the complaint is a matter of clinical judgment or medical negligence? It is a fine dividing line. The House needs to consider it extremely carefully.

What will happen to cases that come before the commissioner which relate to matters that might go before the courts? In the paper, "Responsibilities of the Health Commissioner", published by the health service commissioner and placed in the Vote Office, there are some interesting paragraphs on page 9.

Paragraph 20, which deals with remedies in courts or at a tribunal, states:

> "If the Bill is enacted so as to bring complaints about the exercise of clinical judgment within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction there may be more complaints where he has to consider whether the person aggrieved has a remedy in the courts, or a right of appeal, reference or review before a tribunal to which a person has a right of appeal etc, and if so whether he may nevertheless investigate because he considers it would be unreasonable to expect the person to seek that remedy."

We all understand the thrust of the commissioner's statement but it is full of potential ambiguities.

In paragraph 22, the commissioner refers to cases where, in his view, the primary concern of the complainant is to obtain damages. He says that he will not deal with such cases. The matter involves some difficult definitions.

It may well be—and later in the paper the ombudsman acknowledges this—that people who initiate complaints may honestly not, at the outset, intend to seek redress in the courts. It may be that, as a result of the investigation by the commissioner, it comes to their attention that a matter is so serious that it should be subject to subsequent litigation.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) made some important points about people who were damaged—I think that was her word—in the course of treatment. The House may recall that recently my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) had an Adjournment debate on the issue of women who have suffered damage as a result of treatment of cervical cancers using a device known as a selectron. Incidentally, the Minister, in his new responsibilities, may want to consider commitments given by his predecessor, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who still owes me some detailed responses on dose rates and so on. I am sure that the reshuffle was not intended only to pass the buck on that. I look forward to a response. However, that case is a classic example of the fine dividing line between clinical judgment and pure negligence.

Clearly, many of the women who suffered damage in that case were the subject of experimentation. Fortunately, procedures have been changed. Unfortunately for those women, the Bill does nothing to deal with their problems because the commissioner states, and I presume that this is the Government's intention, that there would be no power for him to deal retrospectively with matters covered by the Bill. That is an example of a complex case where an experiment in the health service has had disastrous effects on a significant number of women.

In paragraph 21 of his document the commissioner states:

> "Legal proceedings provide no assurance to the complainant that any action has been taken to prevent recurrence of the matter complained about."

If the Bill had been in force and one of those women had taken legal action, it would not have stopped the practice in its tracks. The matter needs more rigorous attention from the Department of Health and perhaps wider powers for the commissioner.

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

The other side of the coin, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) said, is equally important—the rights of practitioners to a proper defence in such cases. The sort of mechanism that we put in place will be critical. As many matters of clinical judgment could end up in litigation, practitioners may not be encouraged to be as open as they should be with the commissioner because he may decide that there was a complaint. People who complain may, at the outset, genuinely tell the commissioner that they have no intention of taking the matter to litigation, but when the report comes out they may take such action. What rights will clinicians have in such cases? How much of the documentation will be in the public domain at that stage?

On independent providers, it may help if I take an example from dentistry and consider the case of a company such as Denplan. It would be helpful to know where the Minister thinks the buck will stop in respect of NHS dentistry practices that have sold out lock, stock and barrel to Denplan, as has started to happen in my constituency. Who will carry the can in the case of company structures such as that where the direction comes from the national health service but provision is through a private operator, which is, in turn, owned by another organisation?

Mr. Malone *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Miller: The Minister is shaking his head.

Mr. Malone: I was shaking my head because the hon. Gentleman's point is absurd. Denplan is an organisation that sells what is effectively a financial plan to reward independent dentists when they treat a patient in the private sector. It is a perfectly straightforward arrangement.

Mr. Miller: The Minister needs to learn more about his responsibilities because in my constituency, Denplan has bought out practices lock, stock and barrel.

Mr. Malone *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Miller: The Minister shakes his head. I suggest that he checks the facts. In those circumstances, where does the buck stop? Is it with individual dentists or with their employer? Who is their employer—the national health service or the directors of Denplan? The Minister needs to consider that carefully because there is a difference between the dentist up the road in Victoria street, who will provide people off the street—including Members of Parliament—with treatment under the national health service but has on his wall an advertisment for the insurance element of Denplan and the practices that are now owned by Denplan. There is a quite different set of circumstances.

Mr. Malone: I do not want to detain the House as we reach the closing stages of the debate, but let us get this absolutely clear. Even if what the hon. Gentleman says is right, it is clear that when dentists treat NHS patients, they are working in an NHS capacity and when they treat patients in a private capacity, whether or not Denplan is involved, they do so in an entirely different capacity. If a corporate organisation employed a dentist to give someone NHS treatment, it would fall within the definition of a provider of health care within the NHS and within the ambit of the legislation. The hon. Gentleman does not need to be confused. It is perfectly clear.

Mr. Miller: It is not perfectly clear; far from it. Different practices vary tremendously, from the pure NHS service to those that provide insurance-backed policies for some of their treatment, for some of their work, to those that are owned by a third party. The relationships involved are quite different. What would happen if a practice was no longer owned by the NHS but owned by an offshore company? Would it be covered by this Bill?

Confidentiality is an increasingly important part of the national health service debate. The hon. Member for Bolton, West made some interesting observations on the radio in answer to recent criticism of the health service in *The Times* or *The Sunday Times*. I discussed with him the role of the Data Protection Registrar. Will complaints about the misuse of confidential information held on computer records be subject to complaint to the commissioner under this structure, or will they be referred to the Data Protection Registrar? Given that the Government are undertaking a review of the Data Protection Registrar's office, which they announced on 10 May, will the Minister tell us when he winds up what discussions the Department of Health has had with the Home Office on that matter? Where does it fit into this legislation?

During this debate I had an intriguing thought: how would a clinician defend his judgment to ration a service? Would the commissioner be empowered to take evidence from the regional health authority, the Department of Health and Ministers? Would his remedies include the power to criticise or express a view on matters relating to the health service in cases where rationing was the reason why a patient could not get the treatment to which he or she was entitled?

All those matters are extremely complicated. Despite the fact that the Minister disagreed with me on dentistry, those matters need to be looked at seriously. I hope that, in Committee, the Government will take on board some of the points that have been made to ensure that we end up with a Bill which is not just good in principle but which works on a day-to-day basis. I am sure that the Minister would like to hold up a Bill that demonstrably works rather than being simply a good set of ideas.

7.32 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I am taking the opportunity of this debate to bring to the House's attention the circumstances in which a young boy died, because it illustrates some of the problems with the current complaints procedure.

On Thursday 7 December—last week—Nicholas Geldard, aged 10, collapsed at home. His mother found him lying on his bedroom floor. She took him into her bedroom and gave him the kiss of life and an ambulance was called. It took 20 minutes to arrive. Nicholas was admitted to the accident and emergency department at Stockport infirmary at 4 o'clock, where he was seen by a nurse. Arrangements were made to transfer him to one of the children's wards at Stepping Hill hospital. That transfer took an hour to arrange. The registrar decided to admit him to the children's ward, but not to arrange for a scan. By that time, he was conscious.

Later that night, Nicholas had a fit. It was decided that a scan was necessary. The scanner at Stepping Hill hospital, bought with £1 million of public subscriptions, was not available as it was staffed only from 9 am to 5 pm. He was anaesthetised and transferred to Hope hospital for a scan at 12.30 am. His parents were informed that he had a brain haemorrhage, a slow bleed at the side of his head, and the blood needed draining. The consultant at Hope hospital told the parents that Nicholas had a fighting chance, but no intensive care beds were available in the whole of Greater Manchester and he was taken to Leeds infirmary. He arrived at 4 am, 12 hours after he was first admitted to the accident and emergency unit.

Nicholas's distraught parents were informed that he was brain dead. The funeral takes place this Friday. I spoke to his parents last night. They had contacted the local paper, the *Stockport Express*, which in turn contacted me. His parents were shocked and distraught but, more than anything else, extremely angry. They want to know why the scanner was not available for use at Stepping Hill hospital and why no intensive care beds were available in the whole of Greater Manchester. They feel that lack of resources when they were needed killed their child and that the NHS let them down.

Questions must be answered. Why did the Greater Manchester ambulance service, which has just received its charter mark, take 20 minutes to arrive? I shall ask the chief executive. I shall ask the chief executive of the community care trust about the clinical decision not to refer Nicholas for a scan on admission to the children's ward. I shall ask the chief executive of the Stockport health commission why he funds the scanner's operation only from 9 am to 5 pm. And I shall ask the chief executive of the acute services trust why there has been a delay in discussing funding the scanner outside those hours. Part of the problem these days is that there are many questions to ask and many people to answer them.

I have also tabled a parliamentary question to ask the Minister to launch an inquiry into the circumstances of Nicholas's death. The Minister will no doubt respond by saying that those are operational matters. If they are, they are the consequences of the fragmentation of the NHS and a market-driven delivery of health care, in which each hospital and purchaser protects its own budget. I hope that I shall not get that response, as last week the Minister ordered a cut in management costs, which was also an operational decision. If he is willing to intervene on management costs in the health market, he should intervene in the case of a child's death.

Nicholas's parents can consult a solicitor, provided that they can afford to do so; I can refer the matter to the parliamentary ombudsman; and the parents can take up the clinical aspect through the complaints procedure. The Bill is to be welcomed as it extends the ombudsman's power to deal with clinical complaints, but it will not help in enabling constituents to challenge policy decisions locally. My constituents feel that those decisions contributed to their son's death. Policy is made by unelected boards. The NHS failed that child. It failed to provide the resources to enable him to have the best possible chance of life. The subsequent inquiry will no doubt come up with a number of explanations and that well-known person—nobody—will again take the final responsibility.

Ultimately, the Minister is responsible for the system. I hold him responsible for a system obsessed with sending out glossy brochures, with endless paperwork and with collating and collecting endless and sometimes meaningless statistics. Most of all, however, I hold the Minister responsible for a system that failed to deliver resources where they were most needed. I hope that he will undertake an inquiry.

7.37 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Whatever the circumstances of the case that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) has just described, the whole House will wish to offer its commiserations to my hon. Friend's constituents who tragically lost their son last week.

When we consider how the health service has operated for many years and the complaints that we have heard at our constituency surgeries, many of us could remark on the number of times we have wished that circumstances had been different. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) told us of the circumstances in her constituency. We could all recount cases that have been brought to us, involving not just people who have suffered tragedy but people who feel that the mechanism within the NHS has not provided answers to the questions that they or members of their families have posed. We all agree that that complaint needs to be sorted out. As has been said, Opposition Members support the basis of the new system, in which the investigation of complaints is separated from the punishment of offenders; we support the division of complaints from the disciplinary procedures in the national health service.

We also welcome extending the scope of the complaints procedure to family health practitioners and the so-called "independent" providers. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) asked the Minister whether he would say exactly how widely that extends in terms of the growing private sector in health care, and exactly whom the commissioner would inquire into.

I am pleased that clinical complaints will now be part of the commissioner's remit. The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said that that was not very clearly defined in the Bill, and it is probably not very clearly defined in all our minds. I hope that the commissioners will have clearly defined exactly what "clinical complaint" and "clinical judgment" mean. I am sure that many people outside the House will examine that closely.

The timetable is very ambitious because it does not stand on its own. The Bill is, if not an integral part, an important part of the change in the new complaints procedure that will come into being in April 1996. In general, we agree with that. The Patients Association believes that the details need to be clarified, and we would agree.

Specifically, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) said, we require more information about the status of the lay panel at stage 2. There is a contradiction between the contents of an earlier Health Select Committee report and what is in the Bill. We want to know about the panel's independence from the person or organisation being complained about, and we are interested to know the Minister's opinion on the automatic right of access to stage 2 for those patients who want it.

It would be nice to know more about the type of professional clinical advice available to the panel and about the type and number of clinical advisers to be

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

included in the 130 new posts in the ombudsman's department which are planned under the provisions of the Bill.

We wish to know what measures are in place, and what further measures are planned, to improve staff training in the new procedures. My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) mentioned that issue. Training will be crucial if we are to do effectively what my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood said that we should do—I hope that the profession will consider it—and to change the culture which has existed in the national health service and the wider areas in which we provide health cover. Changing that culture is crucial to the events of the next few months. In my opinion, if it is not comprehensive, and if it does not answer the questions that hang over it at the moment in its present early form, the Bill will fail to do that.

I shall briefly mention several matters. We shall return to these subjects in Committee, but it may help to move the Committee on a bit if we consider them now. One is the issue of the difference between the way in which fundholders and other purchasers are treated in the Bill.

On some of the specifics of the Bill, I should be grateful for clarification from the Minister about the meaning of clause 2(2)(1B), as there appears to be confusion in medical circles about the Government's intention. Will patients be able to complain about the way in which GP fundholders allocate their budgets? If that is the case, will the Minister tell the House whether complaints about decisions made by purchasing authorities will also be included in the procedures?

The Department of Health publication, "Being Heard", maintained that

> "there should be no change in the commissioner's current jurisdiction over complaints about purchasing."

It seems to me that, as the Bill stands, complaints about non-fundholder purchasing and allocation decisions are specifically excluded from consideration. If that is true, will the Minister amend the Bill to bring the procedures for complaints about non-fundholders' decisions into line with those planned for fundholders?

Another issue was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central and a couple of other hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. It will be useful to consider that. Will the Minister enlighten the House about the provisions of clause 2 as compared to clause 6 of the Bill?

Another discrepancy appears in the Bill. Apparently, the commissioner cannot investigate the merits of all decisions complained against. As I read it, under the terms of the Bill, the commissioner would be able to consider the mechanics of the procedure that resulted in a decision on a complaint, but not the decision itself, unless such a decision came about as a result of maladministration. That is reinforced in clause 2(2)(1C) yet that provision does not apply to clinical decisions, in respect of which, if we are to believe it, clause 6(2) amends the commissioner's remit to allow him to investigate the merits of the decision as well as the procedure adopted.

The Minister intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central when he made his contribution at the start of the debate, and said that we would have to read the consensus paper to examine the detail of what the commissioner would say in that area. That paper has become available only as the debate has proceeded. The glance that I have taken at it shows that that paper is to be sent out for general comment, which should be made on it by the end of January 1996. It is not definitive, and it may leave a gap in the Bill. I want the Minister's comments on that.

Although clause 10 relates to previous legislation which I confess that I have not yet read, it speaks about providing the final report to people who are involved, but it does not say whether the final reports considered by the commissioner are made available to complainants, as they are to the other people involved.

To summarise, we welcome the opportunity to strengthen and harmonise the complaints procedures in the NHS, and we support the general principles of the Bill. As we all know, the complaints process may be long-winded and delayed, and it can cause unnecessary anxieties for patients and health professionals. The new system should remove many of those failures and make complaining more accessible, but we want to work to make those improvements possible.

I hope that in Committee we shall further explore ways in which those improvements can be delivered to achieve a more smoothly running system and better to serve the needs of patients in the national health service.

7.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I believe that, when my hon. Friend the Minister for Health opened the debate, he felt that we were subject to some competition from "Gardener's Question Time". Uncharacteristically, he underplayed the point. We are actually subject to even worse competition by reason of the fact that today is the traditional annual Oxford and Cambridge rugby match, which is of considerable interest in medical and political circles, so we are under a double duress.

We should pay tribute to the diligence and virtue of all the hon. Members who attended the debate in the course of this afternoon because, in spite of the distractions, we concentrated on what is really important. The Bill is an important issue, whatever goes on outside the House.

I shall respond to some of the arguments that were made. I welcome the general Opposition support voiced by the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) in his opening remarks. If I remember rightly, he quoted the commissioner saying that we must translate hot air into performance; I certainly concur with that.

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the whole business of complaints procedures is something that the Government are tackling, not merely in the national health service, but throughout the range of public services. He will also know, as a student of those matters, that the Wilson committee was produced hand in hand with the Wilcox report of the committee chaired by Lady Judith Wilcox, which inquired into the issue of complaints procedures and evolved a model procedure for all public services.

We can assure the hon. Gentleman that the issue of complaints is being investigated, not merely deeply inside the national health service, but throughout the public services. It is an important matter. Very reasonably, the hon. Gentleman said that, whatever procedures are established, they must gain the confidence of patients and professionals—I emphasise, professionals. He said that we had to proceed cautiously, given the huge sensitivities involved, and I accept that. It is very important, and we shall try to do that.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether NHS patients will be subject to the procedures whether their treatment was from a public or private source. The answer is yes. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the independent providers of medical services that may be involved will also be subject—in the larger package, of which the Bill is only a part—to stages 1 and 2. The hon. Gentleman and others raised the important issue of resources. We are contributing a substantial, 150 per cent. increase in the commissioner's resources. The 90 existing staff will be supplemented by 130 or 140 additional personnel—a major change of focus of the commissioner's services, which is crucial to the exercise.

I doubt that we could proceed faster. When such a radical change is effected, there is always the danger of making the system worse by proceeding too fast. We must not overburden one commissioner by asking him to expand his services too rapidly. The hon. Member for Fife, Central mentioned regional variations. I would argue—I would, wouldn't I?—that we established the Wilson committee and are putting in place national procedures precisely because of regional variations.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), in an intervention, asked a question of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health that, with the assistance of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, I am happy to answer. That question related to medical records from Rankin hospital, Greenock. It is a matter of grave concern that sensitive personal health information came into the public domain, albeit as the result of vandals breaking into a closed building. The information that was taken comprised a computer printout detailing operation procedures between 1 January and 31 January 1985 of some former patients of the Rankin maternity unit. They were not individual case records but nevertheless contained sensitive personal information.

The Inverclyde Royal NHS trust much regrets any distress that the incident may have caused, and has set up a helpline so that former patients can speak to a senior midwife or, if necessary, a consultant about any concerns that they may have. Any members of the public finding printouts are asked to contact the trust, which will arrange collection. The trust has undertaken a full investigation and will provide the Scottish Office with a copy of its findings. Until those investigations are completed, neither I nor my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office consider that it would be appropriate to comment further.

Dr. Godman: I thank the Minister and the other Ministers concerned for their sympathetic response to a most distressing affair.

Mr. Horam: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) apologised for having to leave before the end of the debate—rugby seems to be invading this debate. I was grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks about the general value of the procedures that we are putting in place. He paid tribute to the work of the Select Committee—he would, wouldn't he? My hon. Friend is the Committee's Chairman. However, his tribute was well merited because the Select Committee has made a major contribution to our work.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) strayed a little in his remarks—but as a former student of Silcoates school, Wakefield, I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his common sense. As a consequence of my school days, I have always been an aficionado of people from the area that the hon. Gentleman represents. He talked a lot of good Yorkshire common sense about the complexity of the present situation. We are presenting the total package of stages 1, 2 and 3—the ombudsman being stage 3—of which the Bill is part precisely because of that complexity, to take a clearer approach than currently obtains. If the hon. Gentleman serves on the Committee, he will—I hope—find that we have clarified matters in a direction, if not at the speed, that he can support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), who has also left, mentioned the devastating effect of two particular cases. She eloquently indicated her support for the inclusion of clinical judgment in the ombudsman's clinical remit. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) declared himself to be not only a lawyer, which is interesting, but a critic of his own profession—which is rather more unusual. He made the point that medical negligence actions are profoundly unsatisfactory. They are—I have some personal experience of them, and they are the most inappropriate, time-consuming and costly way of pursuing difficult and heart-rending cases. If the procedures we propose can prevent such actions, we will do a great deal of good—even if the legal profession loses a certain amount of revenue. I am sure that neither the profession nor the hon. Gentleman would mind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) made a sound point about clinical judgment not being defined in the Bill. Neither is maladministration. We are establishing, by common sense and casework, a sensible approach. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to paragraph 42 of the commissioner's paper, which deals with his responsibilities and clearly shows his thinking. The essence of the concept is that clinical judgment is that which a health service professional makes by virtue of his or her particular skills, expertise and training, and that which a lay person could not make. That rough and ready definition is all that I can offer my hon. Friend for the moment.

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) made a telling speech about the case history of one of his constituents, Mrs. Rhoda Quigley, which we were all saddened to hear. He made an important point about hospital discharges, particularly of elderly patients. The commissioner can already examine discharge decisions, but the Bill will add clinical judgment—an important gain.

I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) is in his place and that he has not disappeared. Neither would he, because he is a stout man and sits through everything. I was delighted to hear his trenchant remarks welcoming the Bill. Members of my family work in the medical profession in my hon. Friend's area, so I am particularly glad to have his support on this occasion.

[Mr. Horam]

The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) congratulated the Government on their speed of action and ambition. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to apply that verdict on a larger scale before the general election. It was well merited in this case. The hon. Gentleman regretted the absence of a general Bill incorporating all the measures in question, but we already have legislation that enables us to act on stages 1 and 2—the internal NHS changes. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would regard it as strange if the Government introduced new legislation when they are able to act under existing measures.

The hon. Gentleman regretted also the absence of a general Bill on the ombudsman and his powers. We want to proceed rapidly, but if we open up the whole debate on the future of the ombudsman on which the Select Committee reported, that would lead to a slowing down of desirable measures that should be put in place as rapidly as possible. I beg the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood to bear that point in mind, but I am sure that his general point will be taken up at a later stage in the life of this Government or the next Conservative Government.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) made a characteristically professional and well-informed speech. He asked to what extent the commissioner would be able to call on professional advice. He will be able to do so at any stage when deciding on a problem regarding clinical judgment. The hon. Gentleman also had a little exchange with my hon. Friend the Minister, which, I am sure, he was totally satisfied by, about the distinction between the two roles of providers.

Mr. Miller: I will write to him.

Mr. Horam: Right.

When someone is providing a service to an NHS patient, that service will be covered by the procedures set down in the Bill. When that does not happen, the provider will not be subject to those procedures. I do not disagree with the distinction that the hon. Gentleman made, which fits in with the Bill. I will write to the hon. Gentleman in due course about confidentiality and the Data Protection Registrar.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) made a heart-rending point about an individual constituent, and obviously that person and her family have our total sympathy. What has happened is a tragedy but, in future, such a case would be subject to the procedures that we are discussing now. If they do nothing else, those procedures, which will mean that the circumstances involved in such a case would be investigated thoroughly, may help to prevent such a tragedy recurring. I hope that that offers some comfort to the hon. Lady's constituent.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) kindly kept his remarks short.

Mr. Miller: Hear, hear.

Mr. Horam: "Hear, hear" is rather too long. The hon. Member for Rother Valley is right to say that we shall have an opportunity to discuss various matters thoroughly in Committee.

The Bill offers a new three-tier system, which is simple, clear, quick and effective. It will save money, and it will help patients and doctors. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

HEALTH SERVICE COMMISSIONERS (AMENDMENT) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—[*Mr. Streeter.*]

Question agreed to.

Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

8.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill restores the law on the rating of caravans and boats to what we had always thought, and intended, it to be. It honours a commitment we gave in 1988 to the caravan industry that, for the purposes of local taxation, pitches for holiday caravans would be subject to non-domestic rates rather than community charge or, later, council tax.

We had thought that the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended, already had that effect, but a recent Lands Tribunal decision held this not to be so. In the view of that court, section 66(1) of the 1988 Act makes any caravan pitch domestic property even if the caravan is used as holiday accommodation; hence, caravans and their pitches would be liable for council tax. That case did not concern itself with moorings for boats, but the wording of the 1988 Act in respect of moorings is very close to that for caravans and their pitches. The Bill, therefore, deals with the situation for moorings as well.

If the Bill is not passed, valuation officers all over the country will have to change the list entries for more than 350,000 pitches occupied by caravans and moorings occupied by boats. They will have to be removed from the local rating lists, banded and placed in the valuation lists for council tax, at considerable cost to the taxpayer.

Local authorities would then have to refund, with interest, all the non-domestic rates payable on those caravans and boats back to 1 April 1990. Community charge registers have now closed, so no local tax would be recoverable for the financial years from 1990 to 1992-93 and local authorities, therefore, would incur considerable financial loss. Local authorities would then have to re-bill the 350,000 or so boat and caravan owners for council tax back to 1 April 1993, again at considerable cost.

Most of those caravan and boat owners would then face higher bills under council tax than they would have done under non-domestic rates. In some cases, those bills would be significantly higher. Therefore, the Bill restores the law to what we had thought was the status quo by amending the definition of domestic property for the purpose of rating. Pitches for caravans will be domestic property, and subject to council tax, only if the caravan is somebody's sole or main residence. It provides that moorings for boats will be domestic property only if the boat is someone's sole or main residence. If the caravan or the boat is not a sole or main residence, the pitch or mooring will be non-domestic and liable for non-domestic rates.

The Bill is concerned only with the definition of domestic and non-domestic property. It does not alter the law on the rateability of caravans or boats per se. As now, only those occupying their pitches or moorings with sufficient permanence will be held to be part of the property. Such caravans and boats will be assessed for council tax if they are domestic property as defined by the Bill. They will be assessed for non-domestic rates if they are not domestic property as defined by the Bill. Where a caravan or boat is not sufficiently permanent, the pitch or mooring alone will be assessed for council tax or non-domestic rates.

The Bill does not extend council tax to those parts of a caravan site or group of moorings which are there for the enjoyment of all users of the site. Only those appurtenances such as gardens or yards belonging to a pitch or mooring will be domestic property—as now.

The Bill also makes special provision for those ratepayers who appealed against their rateable value before the Lands Tribunal decision on 30 January this year. That is the date of the Lands Tribunal order. If they appealed on the ground that their property was domestic rather than non-domestic, and they did not withdraw their appeal before that date, they will have the fruits of their appeal. Nothing in this legislation will affect their position. If their appeals are successful, their caravans and boats will be subject to community charge or council tax. For all other holiday caravans the position will be as it was always intended to be; they will be subject to non-domestic rates. The Bill will have retrospective effect from 1 April 1990—the date of the introduction of the new rating system.

The Bill is a measure that will be welcomed by the caravan and boat industries and by the 350,000 or so occupiers of holiday caravans and boats who will remain liable for the lower rate of tax. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.6 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): I shall be brief and not detain the House for long.

As the Minister made clear, the Bill simply clarifies the law in respect of caravan sites and moorings for boats after a recent Lands Tribunal decision. The Opposition do not disagree with the basic tenet of the legislation, but I should like to raise a couple of issues.

I have a large number of caravan sites in my constituency, so I speak with some experience as a result of consistent lobbying from caravan site owners and caravan owners. The north Pennine area is a particularly beautiful part of England, so there are many caravan sites there. Caravan owners have faced a particular problem because of last year's business rates revaluation. That revaluation particularly affected property or land in the north because the resulting rates were exceptionally high. The Labour party is anxious to re-examine those revaluations.

The introduction of the non-domestic rate was not greeted with great glee in the north because the amounts levied on businesses were greatly increased. That happened because the Government were trying to level out the amounts paid in the south in comparison with those in the north. Many in the north suffered as a result.

At the time of the revaluations I had considerable correspondence about the matter with the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones). In one of those letters I spoke about the representations I had received from the British Holiday and Home Parks Association. It met Ministers of the Department of the Environment to discuss the rating of caravans, including

[Ms Hilary Armstrong]

the proposal that the rating of caravan parks should be changed so that caravans would be excluded from assessment. The Minister wrote that that would be

> "a fundamental change, requiring primary legislation for which we certainly have no slot available at the moment. However, we have undertaken to look again at the issue".

It is no longer valid to say that no parliamentary time is available. When the Minister wrote the letter from which I have quoted the Government were not expecting to introduce the Bill. We now have the Bill and parliamentary time is available for it. The Government might like to explain why they have decided not to respond to exclusion from assessment. Perhaps that is something that we can discuss in Committee.

I cannot disclose the date on which the Minister's letter was written, because the date stamp is not clear. In other words, I do not know the date on which the letter was sent. As it was sent fairly recently, however, we might be informed of the Government's view. Caravan owners should be told that, I suspect, the Government do not wish to proceed. There is no lack of parliamentary time.

There is little of contention in the Bill. I am happy to say nothing more until the measure is considered in Committee.

8.11 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I do not propose to detain the House for long, but there are not many hon. Members in their places to be detained. As has been said, the Bill is only a clarification of existing law. I understand that it has been welcomed by local authorities as a sensible way of simplifying their current revenue-raising responsibilities.

I seek an assurance on canal boats. My assistant, Nick Rijke, has contacted the Minister's office today. I gather that the Minister's staff gave the assurance that the Bill was not intended to extract tax from the bulk of boat owners—those whose boats are not attached permanently to any one mooring and who are therefore not currently liable for council tax or non-domestic rates. I was concerned that in his opening remarks the Minister seemed to suggest that all moorings would be subject to non-domestic rates. I understand that every boat, as part of its registration, has to be attached in a sense to a mooring. That seems to suggest that there might still be a worry for those who own boats that are not attached permanently to any one mooring. As the Kennet and Avon canal runs the length of my constituency form east to west, some of my constituents are concerned as the owners and users of narrow-boats.

For those who use their narrow-boats for their leisure, any new tax liability would clearly be nonsensical. A canal boat that is not used as a residence is akin to a caravan parked in a driveway, albeit in this instance a watery one.

The private assurance of the Minister's office has been most helpful but, given the importance in law of what is said in the House, I ask for the Minister's confirmation that the Bill will not lead to a new tax liability for non-residential narrow-boat owners in terms of their moorings, permanent or otherwise.

The Bill will be welcomed by many of those who might have been worried that large council tax bills would otherwise have been generated by their permanent caravans and boats. They would never have had that worry were it not for the iniquities of the council tax. Band A is much too wide. It does not make allowances for park homes, boats or other forms of accommodation of a lower value than other homes, whose inhabitants may follow a different life style. The owners of such dwellings usually place a lower demand than others on the services of local authorities.

I have argued on several occasions in this place and elsewhere for a new and lower tax band. Before us is one of many examples of how it would lead to more sensible and more equitable local taxation. Given the upward pressure that has been placed on council tax levels by the Government's miserly Budget settlement, the fairness of the council tax will be of increasing concern to many people.

There are those who may be happy about the Bill because it reduces one of their taxes. But how can it be sensible that people who use caravans and boats for their own leisure should have to pay a tax that is designed for the business community? It is not sensible, but that is what we have been lumbered with because the Conservatives have been unable to produce a fair system of local personal taxation. I admit that the Labour party has been similarly unimaginative, but that is no excuse for Conservative Members. Being more imaginative than the Labour party should not be too much of a feat, even for Conservative Members.

8.15 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): First, I declare an interest on behalf of my wife and me because we share the ownership of a static caravan in the north of Northumberland. That being so, I am on the receiving end of the Bill. I welcome the measure, however, because it will settle the concerns of many caravan owners. Over the past few months, if not before, many owners of static caravans—this may be true of boats as well, but I am not familiar with boats—have been in a quandary. Clarification for site owners has not been sufficient, because they, too, have not been properly informed. The Bill will benefit the consumer, the caravan owner, as it provides clarification.

My caravan is parked in the north of Northumberland. Other owners are generally young people with families who enjoy a leisure facility for their young children, including the accoutrements of a swimming pool, horse riding and golf. At the other end of the scale are elderly people. They probably retired with a small sum which they invested in a caravan so that they might enjoy a leisure facility. That is the general pattern on the rather large and attractive site where my caravan is parked.

The House will understand that the financial arrangements are crucial. Any changes in funding can be extremely important. Owners on the site where my caravan is sited faced increases in site charges as well as gas and electricity charges. There was uncertainty about whether they would pay council tax or non-domestic tax. Against that background, some of them decided to dispose of their leisure facility, something that they had cherished and enjoyed for many years.

The Bill is important for caravan owners and for tourism. Owners of smaller caravan parks who wish to lease or rent their caravans have faced uncertainty. They have been unsure about charges. They have wished, of course, to make a reasonable profit while providing reasonable facilities.

I would wish to see an expansion of opportunities for the caravan industry. At one time, I owned a touring caravan. What will be the arrangements for caravan sites where there is a tourist pitch facility? That is not clear in the Bill. Those sites do not have a caravan on them the whole year; they come and go, perhaps on a weekly or two-weekly basis, and that point is crucial to the site owner in terms of renting the pitches.

All the facilities in the leisure industry are important in my part of the world. That is why I wanted to participate in this short debate and clarify those points. I must tell the Minister that those on the receiving end—the caravan owners—have as much interest in the Bill as the caravan site owners.

8.19 pm

Sir Paul Beresford: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some interesting points were raised in this short debate. I have considerable sympathy with the concerns of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) about the various uncertainties.

The hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) raised a point about the discussions that have taken place between the Valuation Office and the caravan industry. Agreement has now been reached—satisfaction has spread about—on the method of valuation for caravan parks, and that will solve the problem. Therefore, there is no need for legislation or any further action—fortunately.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck also spoke about pitches. Pitches, but not the caravans that use them, will be subject to local taxation. That also applies to canal boats and to boats that regularly move. A boat must be static, and that is usually defined as for about a year minimum, otherwise it is considered a chattel and taxation does not apply.

This is an issue that has general acceptance and, therefore, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

RATING (CARAVANS AND BOATS) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

RATING (CARAVANS AND BOATS) BILL [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That any Act resulting from the Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill may make provision about liability to non-domestic rates in respect of pitches occupied by caravans and moorings occupied by boats.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 22 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 20th December, do adjourn till Tuesday 9th January.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Statute of the European Schools) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.

EDUCATION (NORTHERN IRELAND)

That the draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE REGIME

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8962/94 and COM(95) 434, relating to the reform of the fruit and vegetable regime and endorses the Government's position on the reform proposals.

FOOD AID

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9554/95, relating to food aid, and endorses the concerns expressed by the Government in ensuring that the regulation should take account of the United Kingdom approach to food security, provide arrangements for assuring the appropriate allocation of food-aid, its cost effective management, effective use of counterpart funds and the linking of European Community food aid programmes to its country programmes, and have a fixed duration or arrangements for comprehensive review after a fixed period.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

Walnuttree Hospital, Sudbury

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

8.22 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am delighted to have this opportunity to raise the question of the redevelopment of the hospitals in Sudbury, which is the main town in my constituency. I am especially delighted to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) to his new responsibilities at the Department of Health, and by our ability to debate this important subject on the evening of the day when Cambridge university had such a wonderful victory at Twickenham, in the closing moments of an extremely exciting game.

As we have a fair amount of time on our hands, I dare say that we could spend some moments usefully exploring the reasons for that victory, but you, Madam Deputy Speaker, might consider that that was going beyond the bounds of the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Do not push your luck.

Mr. Yeo: This is the first Adjournment debate that I have had the chance of opening for a number of years, although I have had the pleasure of answering a fair number in the meantime. The purpose of the debate is relatively unusual, in that I am not here to ask my hon. Friend the Minister for any extra money or to ask him for extra facilities for my constituency. I am not criticising his Department or complaining about its policies.

The purpose of the debate is to air the very intense frustration that is felt in Sudbury and the surrounding villages at the seemingly endless delay in getting the new hospital built which has been agreed. That delay is caused solely and entirely by the determined opposition of David and Colin Steed, farmers in my constituency, who own land on which they believe a new hospital should more properly be sited. I shall briefly trace the history and background to the proposal.

The West Suffolk Hospitals trust already operates two hospitals in Sudbury: the Walnuttree hospital and St. Leonard's. Walnuttree has 97 beds for rehabilitation, continuing care, and for the care of older people with severe mental illness. It also has a number of day places. St. Leonard's provides out-patient services.

Neither of those hospitals is on a site that could be redeveloped to provide the facilities that are now needed. Both of them are in poor condition. Both would require significant additional expenditure if their lives were to be extended beyond a relatively short period. Indeed, the main part of the Walnuttree hospital dates from 1836, when it was originally constructed as a workhouse.

Having said all that, the staff do an excellent job, and provide a good quality of service in what are quite difficult conditions, but nobody—not even the Steed brothers—disputes the urgent need for both those hospitals to be replaced. That was recognised more than a decade ago.

At that time, 10 possible sites were appraised. The site that was chosen, after considerable local debate, was Harps Close meadow, which is popularly known locally as the People's park. It is close to the centre of Sudbury, and is widely regarded as a suitable site. The regional health authority purchased it in 1987, and by 1992 considerable infrastructure work on the site had been carried out. By that stage, more than £1 million of taxpayers' money had been spent on the scheme.

Sudbury and the surrounding communities were well on the way to having their new hospital, a hospital that would provide 56 rehabilitation beds for elderly patients, and there is a rapidly growing number of elderly people in my constituency. The hospital would provide out-patient clinics capable of seeing 12,000 patients a year.

In a sparsely populated area such as south Suffolk, that out-patient facility is of particular importance. Most of those out-patients would be forced to travel a considerable distance to Bury St. Edmunds, to the West Suffolk hospital, where alternative facilities exist. That would be a considerable inconvenience to them, and often to their relatives. The new hospital would also provide 15 day care places and other facilities.

Alas, while the plans for the new hospital were gradually coming to fruition, the determination of the Steed brothers to block the progress of the scheme was also growing. In 1990, they unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the regional health authority to buy their land as an alternative site for the hospital. In 1992, they unsuccessfully attempted to have People's park registered as a village green. That application was rejected by Suffolk county council—rightly, in my judgment. At the end of 1992, the Steed brothers were given leave to seek judicial review of the county council's decision.

I am not a lawyer by training, and I certainly make no comment about the specific decision to allow the Steeds to seek judicial review, but I observe in passing that the enormous increase in judicial review does not seem to me always to promote good and efficient administration, or even to promote the public interest, although no doubt it is good for the incomes of certain members of the legal profession. At any rate, by that time, the actions of the Steed brothers had created such doubt over the whole project that work on the People's park site was halted.

In May this year, the Steed brothers lost their judicial review, but, alas, in June they launched an appeal, which is not likely to be heard before next summer. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that the existence of the appeal makes it well nigh impossible for the scheme to proceed, at least for the time being.

Feeling in the town is now extremely strong, and there is an impressive degree of unanimity. The issue transcends party politics: my political opponents and I are at one. Many of us have attempted, privately and publicly, to persuade the Steeds to drop their opposition. Mrs. Sylvia Byham, a former councillor, former mayor and indefatigable worker for many local causes and charitable organisations, has tried.

Last weekend, a petition was handed to me bearing nearly 700 signatures that had been gathered quickly in the inclement weather that prevailed on Friday and Saturday, requesting my continued support for the building of the hospital on People's park as planned. Among those involved in gathering the signatures were the Rev. David Parkes, representing the local clergy; Mr. Ray White, secretary of the Friends of the Sudbury Hospitals; and Sylvia Cann, a former mayor who now represents the local pensioners association. Many others, too numerous to mention, were also involved.

Hardly anyone in the town or the surrounding neighbourhood who is familiar with the shortcomings of the existing hospital facilities in Sudbury would now try to argue against immediate implementation of the plan. The situation is extraordinary: a protracted legal process is being exploited by opponents of the scheme—opponents who are now very few in number.

On this issue, the people of Sudbury have no quarrel with my hon. Friend the Minister or his Department; they have no quarrel with the regional health authority; they have no quarrel with the Suffolk health authority, whose excellent chairman Mrs. Joanna Spicer has been as supportive as she could have been; they have no quarrel with the West Suffolk hospital trust, whose board and management have done all that they could to implement the proposal as originally planned; they have no quarrel with Suffolk county council, which rejected the Steeds' attempt to prevent the hospital from being built on People's park; they have no quarrel with Babergh district council, which, as the planning authority, has co-operated with the various NHS agencies to facilitate completion of the whole scheme. I urge my hon. Friend to note that remarkable unanimity of purpose.

If the Steed brothers now agreed to abandon their opposition to the scheme, even at this late stage, they would have my full support. They would earn the respect that is due to honest people who acknowledge honest error, and they would certainly earn the gratitude of people in Sudbury, who are anxious for the project to be completed as soon as possible. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in appealing to the Steeds to do just that, and to end their resistance—a resistance that is surely doomed to eventual failure in any event, and which serves only to delay the provision of much-needed facilities.

Finally I ask my hon. Friend, through me, to reassure the people of Sudbury that, even if we are all forced to wait a few more months for work on the scheme to be restarted, his Department and the regional health authority will continue to back the scheme, and that the funds allocated for it will still be available. That reassurance may be all that my hon. Friend can offer this evening, but it would be greatly appreciated.

8.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am glad to be able to respond to my hon Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on an issue that, as he says, is of considerable local importance. I know that he takes a keen interest in health care matters—he is a former Health Minister—at both national and local levels. He is a tireless champion of health services in Suffolk, and I am well aware of his efforts to resolve the unique difficulties surrounding the development of a new hospital in Sudbury.

I understand that my hon Friend recently wrote to Sir Stuart Burgess, chairman of Anglia and Oxford regional health authority, regarding the matter, and that Sir Stuart plans to reply shortly with an offer to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the subject. The scheme has clearly enjoyed general support for a long time, and I hope that my hon. Friend and his constituents are in no doubt about the extent to which it is regarded as a sensible and necessary step for Sudbury.

Although I have not visited Sudbury in my ministerial capacity, I understand that Walnuttree hospital is one of two small community-style hospitals serving the people of Sudbury, the other being St Leonard's. Both form part of the West Suffolk Hospitals NHS trust, which is largely based in Bury St. Edmunds. Walnuttree hospital is a former workhouse, and St Leonard's probably dates back to a similar era.

There is no doubt that both buildings have passed their prime, as my hon. Friend pointed out, and the residents of Sudbury plainly deserve new, updated medical care facilities. That need has been long recognised by Anglia and Oxford regional health authority—and, since its inception in 1993, by West Suffolk Hospitals NHS trust, which now has management responsibility for Walnuttree and St Leonard's hospitals. As I have just repeated in response to my hon. Friend's request, that support remains as strong as ever.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, work on developing a new hospital for Sudbury began in the mid-1980s, when the regional health authority purchased some land in the town known as Harps Close meadow. The aim was to build a new 120-bed hospital on part of that land, with work beginning in 1991. Problems to which my hon. Friend referred meant that by 1993, when West Suffolk Hospitals NHS trust was established, no progress had been made on the development. As the problem continues to be unresolved, work on the new hospital remains at a standstill.

Over the time that elapsed, however, advances in medical technology—together with improved ways in which health care is provided—meant that the original plans for the hospital needed to be updated. In particular, clinicians and managers at the trust, supported by their colleagues in Suffolk health authority, felt that the proposals did not meet the changing pattern of elderly care and were not in line with local patient needs.

It was generally felt that the scheme offered no more than an exercise of replacing existing hospital beds with new ones. It did not reflect the moves that were taking place for the care of patients in the community and the provision of nursing home places for long-stay patients.

As a result, West Suffolk Hospitals NHS trust revisited the proposals. It sought the views of local purchasers in Suffolk, and also the view of those from the adjoining area of north Essex. The trust then prepared a new, revised business case that took account of the changing circumstances. It was submitted to the Anglia and Oxford NHS executive regional office, and in May 1995, outline approval was given for the new community hospital in Sudbury.

We are discussing the plans for that hospital. The hospital was intended to replace both Walnuttree and St. Leonard's hospitals, and—as my hon. Friend said—to include 40 elderly rehabilitation beds, 24 elderly mentally ill beds, 15 to 20 day case places, 20 interim placement/respite beds, and a community health base.

In addition, the trust outline business case proposed that the development should contain the opportunity for a potential GP surgery with a minor injuries suite staffed by trust nurses, a potential ambulance station, and a potential nursing home. We have no doubt about the need for the facilities that we hope to gain at the new Sudbury hospital, or about their scope and ambitiousness.

This new proposal clearly offers a considerable improvement in the level of services currently provided for the people of Sudbury—I am sure that my hon. Friend

[Mr. John Horam]

has no doubt about that—and in saying that, I mean no criticism against the staff working at Walnuttree and St. Leonard's, who, as my hon. Friend will confirm, are providing sterling efforts in what are obviously difficult, trying and outdated conditions.

I am therefore saddened to learn of the local problems that have delayed the building of the new facility. I understand that those focus around a claim that part of Harps Close meadow should be left as open space and designated as having village green status. That claim against Suffolk county council by two local farmers has already been the subject of a judicial review, when the courts ruled in the council's favour. I understand that the two farmers have appealed against that decision, and that the subsequent appeal is expected to be heard later next year.

I cannot, of course, comment on the merit or otherwise of the dispute. In this overcrowded world, I appreciate only too well the importance of open space and I know how much pleasure it provides for the community at large. I understand, however, local residents' acute impatience, graphically instanced by my hon. Friend, for work on the new hospital to begin as soon as possible.

I am informed by the Anglia and Oxford NHS executive regional office that, although the judicial review's outcome will not stop the trust from building the hospital—legal advice is that building a health facility will not be illegal—if the appeal is successful, any non-NHS use of the site may not be acceptable. As my hon. Friend has said, the trust's proposals envisage a degree of independent partnership.

I am told that the uncertainty over that land's future use is making the project unattractive to any private sector partners who may want to come forward to fund the proposed new development via the private finance initiative.

I am informed that, even following the judicial review appeal, the possibility exists that either party could refer the case to the House of Lords, and that that could delay a final decision for several more years to come. My hon. Friend and his constituents face a sad position, and obviously, I am genuinely sympathetic to the people of Sudbury's plight.

Apart from the support that, as I have said, exists at all levels for the building of the new hospital as early as possible, I intend writing to Sir Stuart Burgess, chairman of Anglia and Oxford regional health authority, drawing his attention to my hon. Friend's representations tonight, and asking him to consider what reassurances he can provide for local residents over their future new hospital. I shall do that as soon as possible.

The trust could do something for itself. It could instruct its lawyers to apply to the High Court to get the hearing on the appeal application expedited, so that it is heard as early as possible next year. That might resolve the problem, as there are clearly heavy costs for the litigants in this case. In any case, even if it does not quickly resolve the problem, it is a sensible next step to expedite the hearing as far as possible.

I add my words to my hon. Friend's in appealing to the family involved to recognise the people of Sudbury's needs and the wider health considerations. I therefore join him in making the appeal to that family to recognise the common sense of the position. As he says, they have fought for a particular point of view well and hard, but perhaps they should recognise that opinion has moved decisively in the hospital's favour.

Meanwhile, apart from writing to Sir Stuart Burgess in making my hon. Friend's case to him, I assure my hon. Friend that I will keep in close touch with the position on the ground.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 December 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Government Bills

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. McLoughlin.*]

9.34 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): There is widespread dissatisfaction with the working of Parliament. Some reforms, such as the work of Select Committees and the introduction of television, have improved the effectiveness and visibility of Parliament's role in governance, but the changes have not gone nearly far enough.

I am glad to have this opportunity to raise in the House matters for which the Government have responsibility and which require attention if the efficiency of the House of Commons as a legislative assembly is to be improved. The reform that led to the procedure that allowed the possibility of a debate such as this is itself a useful development that I welcome.

The issues that I want to raise do not reflect the concern that is frequently expressed that the contents of legislation are unacceptable. That goes far beyond this debate. The issues that I want to touch on reflect concern that the enactments of Parliament are defective and that the citizen is too often not consulted and dissatisfied. Criticisms are often made, which reflect dislike of the policies behind legislation, but I shall not be dealing with that.

I invite the House to consider, and the Minister to respond to, some of the proposals made by the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government commission's report on the legislative process, "Making the Law", which was published more than two years ago. The House has not yet had an opportunity of considering it, although a year ago almost to the day, in another place, there was an informed and valuable debate initiated by Lord Nathan. Many of these matters would be appropriately considered in this House. If the legislative process is to be improved, it falls to this House to take an initiative. I hope that the Government will welcome the opportunity of making clear their views about some of those matters and their willingness to consider some of the recommendations.

Perhaps a word is in order about the composition and working of the Hansard Society commission. It was chaired by Lord Rippon, and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), Sir Michael Latham—a distinguished former Conservative Member of this House—and I were members. The matters that the commission covered have been considered from time to time by authoritative bodies, some established by previous Governments. The Heap committee reported a quarter of a century ago and the Renton committee 20 years ago.

It is unfortunate that many of the recommendations made in those reports—and the public's grievances about the legislative process and the quality of legislation, its obscurity and user-unfriendliness, and the lack of consultation in its compilation, to which attention was drawn—remain effectively unaddressed. The problem has become more acute as there has been a great increase not only in the volume of primary legislation—although, in the past decade, Acts may not have greatly increased in number, they have hugely increased in quantity—but in the volume of subordinate legislation, for which adequate scrutiny processes are not, it must be admitted, in place.

The commission's report was thorough, comprehensive and based on a mass of evidence from a wide range of bodies. It all pointed to there being much wrong with our present legislative processes. I think it almost beyond the need to argue that the results have greatly exacerbated the sense of Parliament's incompetence and that, whatever view may be taken of the Government's aspirations in legislation, the product is too often so seriously defective that it requires early amendment. That cannot be a matter of satisfaction to the House or to any Government.

One need mention only the history of the introduction and ultimate abandonment of the poll tax to have a powerful example of what is wrong with the process. It is at least arguable, and was argued by David Butler, Andrew Dennis and Tony Travers in their book on the poll tax, that its defectiveness, not only in conception but in execution, with multiple steps to amend and ameliorate it taken by the Government, committed to trying to make it work, belatedly taking on board advice which had been given in consultation, but which had not been acted upon early, contributed to the Prime Minister of the day's downfall. That may have had a lot to do with the legislation's content and the policy that lay behind it.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is not the phenomenon to which my hon. Friend draws attention especially obvious in cases where Parliament adopts a knee-jerk reaction to an immediate problem? I am thinking of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which was rushed through this place and the other place at great speed, and now we are living with the consequences. Is there not something to be said for the saying, "Legislate in haste and repent at leisure"? Is not that a good lesson in relation to understandable responses such as that to the knife attack on the head teacher? We must be careful that we do not adopt a policy of reacting at such speed that legislation is defective.

Mr. Maclennan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Had he not done so, I would have drawn attention to the Dangerous Dogs Act, as it is an example of a measure that was too hastily introduced to the statute book and that has left serious problems. Recently, much criticism has been made of it by the judiciary. Almost inevitably, the measure will require amending legislation.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the hon. Gentleman be somewhat more cautious about what he is saying about legislating in haste? The House should take prompt decisions when problems arise such as the recent knife attack and dangerous dogs. Surely the problem in that case was not the speed of the legislation, but the degree of consultation that went into the preparation of the measure that went through the House.

Mr. Maclennan: The Hansard Society's report recognised that there were occasions when it was

[Mr. Maclennan]

appropriate for Parliament to act speedily. I signed that report and I therefore agree with the hon. Lady that there are such occasions, but the report said, and the House should reflect, that

"getting a bill right should always have priority over passing it quickly"—

not in every circumstance an overruling priority, but it should be the norm. That view was well expressed in evidence time and again to the commission. I refer to the evidence of the Association of British Insurers and Lloyd's, which said:

"it is better for legislation to be clear and workable than for it to be enacted at the earliest possible opportunity and, before long, have to be changed by further legislation or interpretation by the courts".

Another example of legislation that proved to be defective through lack of appropriate consideration and consultation was the Child Support Act 1991. I do not make these points as partisan points, as all parties participated in passing that Act and the Dangerous Dogs Act, although, in the case of the latter Act, the Opposition parties offered alternative proposals to establish a registration system that might deal with many of the problems raised by dangerous dogs. What is clear, however, is that too many significant Bills dealing with real problems are introduced in a half-baked form. That is what we must deal with, and the Government can play the most significant role in tackling it.

The first point of substance is that it should be recognised, as the commission put it, that

"proper consultation should play a central part in the preparation of bills".

I imagine that the Government would have no difficulty in accepting that general proposition, but what is lacking is an institutional requirement that, in a governmental sense, that consultative process be built into Bills' preparation to allow the public fully to participate in the construction of legislation, to know when it is appropriate to intervene, and to have an opportunity to intervene, to influence both the direction of policy and the practicality of the proposals that are made.

That consultation process should be as open as possible, involving all the relevant bodies, especially those that are directly affected by the legislation proposed. There should be, as the commission put it, the minimum secrecy and the maximum feedback to those consulted.

For major policy reviews, it is sensible to involve independent inquiries. The practice that grew up during the lifetime of the Governments led by Lady Thatcher of not establishing such inquiries and of avoiding the appointment of royal commissions, for example, was much to be regretted. The examples of work carried out by such commissions and introduced as a result of their recommendations, sometimes backed by the detailed work of other bodies such as the Law Commission, can be of immense help in avoiding errors that vitiate the purposes of Acts.

The worst Department in recent years for neglecting to follow such advice, where it has existed, is the Home Office, which has produced a number of seriously defective criminal justice Bills that have been extensively criticised in the higher courts and, in some cases, have had to be subsequently amended. The knee-jerk reaction to capture the headline "Crackdown on Crime" has become a way of life under successive Home Secretaries.

On the requirement of consultation, it is right that there should be quite clear and specific questions inviting specific responses. There should also be consultation on draft Bills and draft clauses and not merely on Green Papers and White Papers. The commission found it astonishing that the Law Society was under the misapprehension that it was a constitutional impropriety to disclose the precise contents of a Bill to members of the public. The Law Society, of all bodies, genuinely believed that to be the case. I hope that that view does not prevail, because such consultation is proper and desirable. However, it is a reflection of the widespread view that the language of legislation is couched in arcana, the secrets of which are to be divulged only on the date of a Bill's publication. That is not satisfactory if the end product is to be the result of consideration. There is some welcome evidence that the Government have taken that point on board.

There is still concern about rushed consultation, which can certainly be embarrassing to parties whose interests are directly involved. Complaints about the time that is allowed for consultation on Bills were made to the commission by the Trades Union Congress, the Law Society, the Magistrates Association, the National Trust, Shelter, the BBC, the British Railways Board, the community council of Humberside, the National Consumer Council and the Industry in Parliament Trust. The evidence was that in too many cases consultation was effectively pro forma. That must be avoided. It is desirable that, as far as possible, copies of consultation documents should be freely available to those who are affected by legislation or to their representatives. That is a further recommendation by the commission.

There is good practice upon which to draw in setting guidelines for consultation, which all Departments should prepare. The Department of Trade and Industry has drawn up such guidelines and that is extremely welcome. In that context, there has been one hopeful development on consultation since the Hansard Society commission reported, and it is contained in the provisions of section 3 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. I am not in sympathy with the whole of that legislation, but at least in respect of the required consultation and the publication of the results it marks a creep forward, which I welcome.

It would be worth the Government's while to study the practice in some other countries, notably that in New Zealand where, for the purposes that I have described, a legislative advisory committee monitors legislation before Bills are published. Systematic and thorough consultation as part of the legislative process is not a pipe dream. It is a reality in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act and it should be the practice for Bills and major items of delegated legislation. On that issue in particular, I should be grateful to hear the Minister's thoughts at the end of the debate.

More time and care must be devoted to the drafting of Bills. My ministerial experience occurred some time ago, although it extended over more than five years. I was concerned about the issue of ministerial responsibility for the work of parliamentary counsel. I understand that parliamentary counsel are answerable to the Prime Minister. Even a Prime Minister with an assiduous interest in detail—perhaps Lady Thatcher was an example—must find that the supervision of parliamentary counsel lies outside his daily interests and sphere of operation. The case for assigning to the Attorney-General responsibility for parliamentary counsel and for ensuring that legislation conforms to best constitutional practice and best legal drafting practice should be seriously considered.

In drafting the Consumer Credit Act 1974, I sought to make the language of the legislation more consumer friendly, but that was difficult to accomplish. The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) may remember that legislation, because he was interested in some parts of it. Each step involved enlisting the support of the lawyers in one's Department, and the argument, which was nearly always difficult to sustain, was that parliamentary counsel could have drafted a passage with greater clarity and without reference to other Acts. That would have avoided complex legislation that was less helpful to those who required to use it.

As a general principle, parliamentary counsel should be pulled rather more into the supervisory overview of those within government who are responsible for the law, and their work should be assisted by some addition to their resources, because if the problems have not been tackled in the years since we received evidence on them, there are difficulties with recruitment, training and staffing.

The style of drafting should be based on the requirements of the main users of the Bill, and draftsmen should seek clarity, simplicity and brevity. The commission took the view that certainty should be paramount, and cautioned against too great a reliance on statements of principle that left too much interpretation to the courts. However, we have tended to err in the opposite direction, and greater clarity is certainly to be sought.

Achieving those ambitions will require a considerable push from the Government, not mere aspiration and generalised instruction. The commission suggested that notes on sections should be published with Acts, and that they could be used by the courts as an aid to understanding. I know that, when the Broadcasting Act 1990 was considered, such notes were provided to members of the Committee. However, we still have to rely on the practice, which is not entirely satisfactory, of dealing with ambiguities in the manner of the ruling in Pepper *v.* Hart. It would be preferable to avoid the type of ambiguities that arose in that case by the Government assisting the process of comprehension in the way that I have described.

The commission took the view that, on balance, it would be right to make greater use of delegated legislation, but that was under the conditions of the provision of greater scrutiny for delegated legislation, and improved arrangements being made for the publication of statute law. The failure of Parliament to scrutinise that delegated legislation effectively is very troubling. The new procedures of the Deregulation Select Committee, to which I have already referred, in scrutinising deregulation orders for their approval by the House could be applied to major delegated legislation.

The commission also welcomed, and urged on, the Government's plans to establish a statute law database. Can the Minister say what has happened to that? It was originally intended to be ready by September 1993.

We also made a number of recommendations to reform the way in which Parliament should examine and pass legislation, including, for example, more pre-legislative examination of legislation by Select Committees; more evidence from experts and the public on Bills and in Committee; and systematic post-legislative examination of how Acts have worked out in practice. Those are matters for the House, and perhaps for another debate. However, it is unfortunate that those matters do not appear to have been considered or reviewed by the Procedure Committee recently.

The points that I have made depend on the Government taking the initiative to improve our legislation. None of this—better consultation, better and less hasty drafting, and proper scrutiny—would be possible without changes in the way in which the legislation is programmed. However, that also depends on the Government.

There must be acceptance of the need for timetabling of legislation in the House of Commons to ensure the passage of the Government's legislation, but as a concomitant of that, the commission recommended a move towards the adoption of a two-year legislative programme, leaving proper time for consultation and drafting. With longer and more complex Bills, that would not only avoid the total domination of the parliamentary timetable by such Bills, which is undesirable, but would allow proper scrutiny as they passed through Parliament.

The Legislation Committee of the Cabinet would have to consider such matters, and I would suggest that it should be responsible not merely for the business management of Bills, but for their content, constitutional propriety, clarity and drafting. The Committee should also ensure that the proper, published, clear and agreed consultative processes have been followed. I do not think that that is a counsel of perfection, because, notwithstanding the point that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) rightly made about occasions when it is necessary to legislate in haste, in most circumstances hasty legislation is not required and priority should be given to getting it right.

I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to raise those issues, and I look forward to the Minister's reply.

10.5 am

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I am very glad that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) secured this debate. He has opened it in a very interesting way.

I am also glad to see on the Front Bench my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who will speak from the Dispatch Box for the first time. I am sure that he will speak many more times, but it is good to be present on the first occasion on which an ornament to the Government Front Bench makes his first speech.

The House has, of course, two main duties. The first is to monitor the Executive, which incidentally is primarily done through the fact that Members of Parliament are the main members of the Executive, rather than by other processes. The second main duty is, of course, the passage of legislation. The record suggests, and the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland has suggested, that the House is not very good at scrutinising legislation. I do not quarrel with that, and I believe that we are bad at the drafting as opposed to the policy of legislation.

We often do not even attempt to draft legislation. For example, one frequently hears a Back Bencher say in Standing Committee that he is moving an amendment that he wants the Government to agree with in principle, and

[Sir John Cope]

that he is happy for them to redraft it using the proper words. In taking that attitude, which is common, we are negating our responsibility for the drafting completely. It is understandable, but it is an illustration of the way in which we fail to even attempt to look at the drafting of legislation.

For that reason, it is right to go back up the legislative chain and consider drafting as we are doing this morning. I have had experience in various Government Departments over 15 years, half as a business manager and Whip, but the other half in various Departments. I know, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland has said, that it is extremely difficult for Ministers and for Departments to deal with parliamentary draftsmen. They are a small, exclusive, highly skilled band. Incidentally, they occupy a very nice office in Whitehall which was formerly the office of the Paymaster General. However, by the time I became Paymaster General, that office had long been taken over by the parliamentary counsel.

Ministers are somewhat insulated from draftsmen by their departmental lawyers. Most of Ministers' dealings on the drafting of Bills are with departmental lawyers, and they only have contact with the draftsmen on relatively rare occasions. I fully recognise the difficulties that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland described in his dealings with the Consumer Credit Act 1974. I do not actually recall that Act passing through the House—he was kind enough to suggest that I might—but I recognise the difficulties that he had in dealing with the draftsmen. There are always good reasons, not bad ones, why it is difficult to alter the drafting, as Ministers sometimes wish. Often the process does not allow enough time for parliamentary draftsmen to do their work thoroughly.

Finance Bills represent a particular piece of the jigsaw puzzle. A number of reports have been published recently on the drafting of Finance Bills. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland founded the debate on that published by the Hansard Society, but the tax law review committee of the Institute of Fiscal Studies published an interesting one recently. Yesterday, the Inland Revenue published its report on clause 160 of the Finance Bill, which was considered earlier this year. I shall refer to that interesting report later.

Finance Bills are obviously long and obtuse. They represent the one part of the revenue-collecting machinery that is not yet in the process of a massive sea change. They are about to be so, however, as a result of the reports to which I have already referred.

Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue are already engaged in a massive programme of sea changes involving computerisation, the streamlining of offices and so on. The Inland Revenue used to have 104 offices, but in a few months time it will have just 29. That is one measure of the changing nature of the Inland Revenue. Another is the self-assessment of income tax, of which we are all becoming conscious.

Sometimes it is necessary to go through to complex procedures to reach simplification. The change involved in self-assessment is extremely elaborate, and legislatively and in fact the learning process through which people will have to go to get to the simpler system at the end—hopefully it will be simpler—

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Hopefully.

Sir John Cope: Yes, hopefully—that process is complex.

Both departments have made great efforts to make taxation more user friendly. While I was responsible for Customs and Excise, it won a number of plain English awards for its leaflets. I fear that the parliamentary draftsmen's office is still a long way from receiving such awards for its efforts to produce legislation. It is important to remember, however, that the preparation and drafting of legislation are the basis on which leaflets are produced. Those leaflets cannot be clear if the legislation is not clear. That is why I welcomed the recent report from the Inland Revenue and its positive attitude.

Tax legislation is included in Finance Bills by three routes. First, those Bills include the simple kind of tax legislation that implements a change in rates announced in a Budget. The Bill would act on the instruction to "delete 25p and insert 24p", to take the current example.

The second route relates to the complex changes to tax law announced in a Budget, and implemented straight away in the forthcoming Finance Bill. The third route relates to the slow-motion changes in tax law.

Even the simple change of rates can produce problems regarding drafting and complexity. I am glad to say that we reorganised the vehicle excise duty categories a couple of years ago. Over the years, the number of categories, of which there were far too many, had become encrusted with all kinds of detail. We were able to clean that up. Such problems are therefore evident even in the simple types of tax legislation.

The second type of change, the complex tax changes announced in a Budget, cause a much greater problem because of the speed at which they pass from the Budget speech—the first public announcement of the proposal—into law.

The third category, of slow-motion changes, should be the one that causes the least problem, because there is no time pressure. In the past 10 years, there has been a greater tendency to spend far longer on consultation during the period of gestation of such tax reforms. There has been far more consultation, more Green Papers and White Papers, including the publication of draft clauses to the Finance Bill in those White Papers.

Those changes are not, of course, considered in the House until the last moment in Committee, but intense consultation is conducted by committees and trade and professional groups outside the House. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland criticised the Government for the lack of such consultation, but I hope that he will acquit the Revenue departments of that charge. After all, the report of the Hansard Society specifically mentioned Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue as examples of good practice on consultation.

Such consultation documents often include draft clauses, and I believe that the Law Society has frequently commented on such documents, so the attitude that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland reported it as taking surprised me somewhat. It is certainly true that other professional bodies frequently comment on such documents.

The first reason for the complexity of tax law is a desire for equity. That is natural in politicians, but it helps to make for extra complications when extra categories of people must be dealt with and given special treatment.

The second reason for that complexity is the desire to prevent avoidance. Those reasons are policy reasons for complexity. Both are difficult to avoid, and both are at their worst when there are high rates of taxation.

There are other reasons for complexity. First, it feeds on itself. When one has complex laws, it involves great complexity to alter them. We must remember that the tax law and other legislation must reflect the increasing sophistication of the outside world, particularly the financial one.

Another reason for complexity is the parliamentary draftsmen's desire to avoid the uncertainty of novelty. That is why they constantly want to use the old words and phrases used in previous Acts. That is why they constantly want to bolt changes to the law on to existing law.

I have already said that avoidance rates are at their worst with high rates of tax. When the top rate of income tax was 98 per cent., there was a massive incentive for people to invent tax avoidance schemes. The Government therefore had to invent anti-avoidance schemes. They are largely responsible for the current complexity of income tax law.

The trouble is that, even though rates are now much lower, and the top rate is very much lower than it was, one cannot uninvent the tax-avoidance schemes worked out. One cannot therefore repeal that anti-avoidance legislation easily.

Complexity is also caused by the length of time a tax has been in existence. We have had income tax for a century and a half or more, so it is no wonder its legislation has become more and more complex. Value added tax is now getting complex because it is becoming an older tax. To start with it was a pretty simple tax, but it has now become extremely complicated. There is no serious accountancy firm that does not have a special department of experts to deal with VAT. An added complication are the various European Community agreements which we have made. They, too, are another reason for the complexity of VAT.

All those reasons seem to suggest to me that, to a certain extent, it is down to us as politicians—both the Government and the rest of us—to give a higher priority to the simplification of tax when putting forward policies and urging the Government to make changes.

I also think that it is important to examine our procedure in that respect. During the Budget debates, I drew attention to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said—in column 1066 of *Hansard*, appropriately enough—on that matter:

> "We in the House will need to look at our procedures, to see how that tax rewrite can be sensibly handled."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1066.]

He was referring to the rewrite covered in the Inland Revenue documents, which were published yesterday. My right hon. and learned Friend was right to draw attention to the issue and we should pay some attention to it.

Some say that the Finance Bill should be published earlier, perhaps before Christmas, so that there would be more time to consider it before it is debated in the House. I would prefer the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act to be altered, so that there is not the necessity, at the end of the Finance Bill, to complete it within the period presently allowed. The Finance Bill timetable could then move a little further around the year. Of course, changing the Budget date to November has already facilitated that to some extent, but it is not easy to achieve it within the context of the whole of the Government's legislative programme.

We may need to consider a different procedure for simplification Bills. We already have a special procedure for consolidation Bills, when we can discuss only whether it is an accurate consolidation. In practice, it means that those Bills are not debated. We now have the new procedures for dealing with deregulation. I believe that we also need a new procedure for simplification Bills, so that we would be allowed to discuss only the substantive changes, but not changes made to the wording simply to improve drafting and clarity.

I recognise that it would be extremely difficult to draft a Standing Order to distinguish between the substantive and the non-substantive changes, as they are inevitably wrapped up together. Such a proposal would work only with the good will of the House and a cross-party wish to make it work. If all the definitions were exploited by the Opposition or by others opposed to a particular measure for whatever reason—perhaps to delay progress on other matters, for example—it would be difficult for the Chair to manage the proposed system because of the difficulty of making a distinction between the substantive and the non-substantive changes. Nevertheless, if we are to make real progress with the simplification of tax and other legislation, we should give some thought to the proposal.

I am glad that there has been progress with the consideration of Finance Bills and the attempt to make the drafting of complex matters more readily understandable. Lessons for other legislation may be learned from what is happening with Finance Bills.

10.23 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I shall not attempt to follow the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), who has great expertise in these matters. All that I can do is humbly to agree with the majority of what he said. However, I do not altogether agree on self-assessment, which is a disaster waiting to happen. I attended an Inland Revenue briefing on self-assessment last week, hoping to learn how the system would work and how it would affect me and my constituents. I was so baffled and so uncomprehending at the end of an hour and a half that I had to be carried sobbing from the room. The Inland Revenue had not thought to provide grief counsellors.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on initiating the debate. It is characteristic of the earnest seriousness that he contributes to this House that he has taken up this issue and pursued it. I could barely stand the excitement of his speech. His intelligence and his devotion to serious causes are a credit to him and to the House, and no more so than today.

It is shocking that, after two years, the Government have still not dealt with the Hansard Society report on the legislative process. There has been no real reaction, despite an extensively signed early-day motion requesting one. We have not been given the opportunity to debate the report in the House, nor have the Government made any proposals to implement any of the report's recommendations. That is appalling. The report was prepared by a distinguished royal commission—not least because it had me as a member—

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

with a distinguished chairman. It heard a wide range of serious evidence and reached an effective set of conclusions that deserve implementation.

It is a shame that a Government who are obsessed with charters; who say that they want to listen to the citizen as the consumer; who say that they want to involve people and make them feel that their views are taken into account; and who are obsessed with improving the efficiency of government, have not done something in an area where that improvement in efficiency is desperately needed.

Instead of the cones hotline, the Government should have set up a legislative hotline, saying, "Turn in your MP; complain about legislation; what is your reaction to such and such a clause?" and so on. Of course, that is reducing the matter to a partial dimension, but if the Government really want to listen to the citizen, there is no more important area where the citizen, needs to influence and needs to be heard than the legislative process. The Hansard Society recommendations would have achieved that.

I am aware that the Government are prejudiced against royal commissions. Under the previous Prime Minister, there was even a prejudice against rational analysis—it was an exercise of will. The Government's failure to listen to rational argument and their failure to reform the processes will damage not only their reputation but that of Parliament, which is far more important. Parliament is not functioning efficiently; it is not consulting and listening to the people. It could do so if we implemented the reforms recommended in the Hansard Society report.

There is a chorus of complaint—we have heard a small echo of it this morning—about inadequate, badly drafted, incomprehensible legislation, which is causing difficulty for the courts, resulting in the necessity of amendments this year to legislation enacted last year or the year before. That is creating an inadequacy in and a problem with the processes, yet the Government have done nothing about that or about the Hansard Society report. It is a serious indictment of the Government.

Why have not the Government done anything about the report? It is because it does not suit their convenience to do so. Ministerial convenience is the essence of the problem. They want their convenience to hold sway in a knee-jerk reaction to propitiate public opinion—for example, in the debate about dangerous dogs, which resulted in disastrous legislation. They want their convenience to hold sway when it comes to the exercising of will—for example, the poll tax, which again proved disastrous. They want their convenience to be dominant when it comes to political posturing by the Home Office. If the courts do not trust the Home Secretary's judgment and overrule him, why should Parliament trust him in the legislative process?

The problem is that Parliament is ill placed to prevent ministerial convenience from holding sway. Our role is to check the Executive and to protect and represent the views of the citizen, but we do not have the power to do that, because the will of the Executive dominates and therefore Parliament is the creature of the Executive, through the party system. It is bound to be so. We have an elective dictatorship and the job of the Opposition is just to heckle the steamroller. If the driver of the steamroller will not listen to the complaints of citizens, put to him by the Opposition and by Back Benchers, Parliament is impotent. The parliamentary majority overrules all. In those circumstances, the Government have a responsibility to reform procedures so that we can be more effective and have a say.

Frankly, 45 per cent. of the time of this place is devoted to legislation, and it is a farce. Our influence, control and ability to provide better legislation and check it is minimal. Standing Committees are a total farce, because all the Opposition are trying to do is hold up the Bill in the hope that public opinion will influence the Government to make the changes that should be made. The Government do not make changes because the Opposition say so or because there is obvious good sense behind the proposed changes. They make changes only because of political pressure generated outside the House. The process is therefore really a waste of a Standing Committee's time.

We could introduce a statutory delay that would allow public opinion to become effective. To be able to consult the people, to give us as Members of Parliament a useful job and to give Parliament a useful role, we need to make the kind of changes envisaged in the Hansard Society report.

I shall concentrate briefly on two major points that arise from the report and the motion. The first is about the preparation of legislation. I certainly feel strongly as a Back Bencher that people often catch up with legislation only when it has been passed. We receive letters from pressure groups and citizens asking us what we are going to do about a Bill or what is wrong with some part of it—but it is too late; the legislation has gone through.

People and pressure groups are not given adequate notice of proposed legislation and do not know enough about what is going on in this place for it to be drawn to their attention. The people want to be heard. Although they certainly complain about legislation as it is passed, there is no effective procedure that involves them and enables us to consult them and listen to complaints in the wider community.

I recommend the New Zealand practice, which the Hansard Society report endorses. A major improvement has taken place in legislative processes in New Zealand which could well be adopted here. Legislation is introduced and is referred to what they call a select committee. It is a matter of terminology. It could be a Standing Committee or a Select Committee; the title does not matter. That committee has to go through a Bill before it is discussed formally and changes are made to its drafting. That is its purpose. To do that, it puts adverts in the papers saying that a Bill has been introduced on a certain subject, with certain provisions, and calls for citizen representations.

On controversial and major non-political matters such as family, divorce and social legislation, representations pour in. Pressure groups and concerned citizens make their representations to the committee, which assesses them. If the representations are considered serious, people are called to give evidence to the committee and are given the opportunity to put the case for or against what is being done and to suggest changes to the way in which the measure is proposed to be enacted. The committee then goes through the Bill with those representations before it in a process of influencing legislation in the light of what the public want.

The great virtue of such a system is that the people feel involved. They have had a say; they have been consulted in a way that does not happen here. That strengthens the role and the perception of Parliament. The committee considers recommendations for changes and it can produce its own Bill. It has a Government majority and a Government member as the chairperson. He or she informally consults a Government caucus—the 1922 Committee, or the parliamentary Labour party in our case, or a committee thereof—and the Minister concerned.

During that process of informal consultation, changes are made. It is a negotiation process. The chairman is representing the views of the committee, the Minister is representing the views of the Department, and usually some kind of compromise is reached so that legislation is changed by the committee. That means that Members of Parliament are effectively involved. The Bill then goes through the formal processes.

That is a much more effective way in which to deal with legislation, involving Members of Parliament by giving us a useful job, and involving the citizen. Why cannot we have a similar structure here? It would take more time and slow up legislation, but that would be no bad thing given the inadequacies of much of the legislation that has been introduced. I commend that idea in the Hansard Society report. It is important.

Secondly, we recommended a review of legislation by a Select Committee after a period of, say, a year or two. It would ask how the legislation had achieved the purposes originally set out and provide a chance to set those purposes out more clearly. It would ask whether it was working and what was wrong with it. Let us have such a review—again, one in which people can make representations—to tidy it up and avoid stupid legislation lingering on the statute book and causing enormous problems in the courts, as happens now.

The Hansard Society's report is important. It produced serious and workable proposals that should be implemented to bring Parliament closer to the people; to involve them in the legislative process and make them feel that it is to do with them rather than something remote carried on in legal gobbledegook by a bunch of remote people who cannot be influenced. Let us give Back Benchers something useful to do. That is one of my dearest aspirations, not only in the party but in Parliament.

After all, the Government have time. The Budget makes it clear that there will have to be another Budget next year. That means that the election will not be called until April 1997. There is nothing for us to do until then. What are we going to do—malinger round the streets? The Government could introduce serious proposals based on the Hansard Society's report. The Minister, a welcome addition to the Government Front-Bench team, brings a high intelligence to the job that should be employed in this area. Get on with it.

10.36 am

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on securing the debate, which has been useful. I also welcome the Minister to what I understand is his first debate in his new post. I ought also to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on making what is often a very dry subject somewhat more interesting and stimulating than it might otherwise have been. The amount of interest shown in the issue today is cause for regret, because we are discussing something that is fundamental to our role in the House. Much of the House's reputation is dependent on us getting legislation correct—leaving aside the political controversy surrounding it—yet, too often, that is simply not the case.

The issues raised have been the subject of many reports, and over the years many people have recommended changes. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who could not be here this morning, sent me a well-thumbed and well-marked copy of the Renton report of 1975, to which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland referred. On looking through it, it is alarming to find how many of the concerns that were expressed then remain concerns because nothing been done to tackle the problems. Indeed, in some very important areas, the problems have worsened in recent years.

Although I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland said and the stress that he placed on the need for Parliament to be more efficient, he must also emphasise that we must be effective. Despite very slightly improving our system of working with the Jopling proposals, we have not made any fundamental difference to the effectiveness of the House in either of the jobs mentioned by the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope): scrutinising legislation properly and monitoring the Executive. We must do more to improve the methods by which we fulfil those tasks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby ended by mentioning that we were having a somewhat unusual parliamentary year. It is not really typical of what has been happening over the past 10 or 15 years. Certainly, in recent years, the volume of legislation has been growing and intensifying. This year, that is clearly not the case, and although there is some discussion about the reasons for that, there are only two possibilities, neither of which reflects much credit on the Government.

The first possibility is that we have so little legislation because the Government have introduced so much enabling legislation in the past. Perhaps Governments no longer need to come to the House so often to bring about the changes that they want, because so much can be done without reference to the House. That in itself has significant implications for the role of Parliament.

The second factor is that the Government have run out of steam, and there is little that they want to do. The Minister will tell us, as the Leader of the House did during the Queen's Speech debate, that the number of Bills anticipated is even greater than last year. However, we should think about the significance of those Bills. How many of them are fundamental or controversial? Most Bills proposed for this year are relatively low-key.

I could ask what has happened to some of the other Bills that we were promised, such as that on nursery vouchers. I do not want to see that Bill, because I want not vouchers but places for children in nursery education. However, the Bill is a case in point, with rumours now surrounding what is happening to it, such as the rumour that Back Benchers are concerned because the voucher system threatens nursery provision in their areas. We also hear rumours that the Government have not yet been able to draft the Bill to take full account of all the technical problems that can arise from a voucher system.

Whatever concerns there may be, and leaving aside the parliamentary controversy surrounding the issue itself, even if there are outstanding questions such as the technical ones that I mentioned, at this stage in the process

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

we are expecting legislation in the current parliamentary year, and it will go through scrutiny in Standing Committee, along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, it is now more frustrating to be a member of a Standing Committee. There was a time when Governments of both parties would take on board many of the criticisms and suggested amendments from Standing Committees. They would not necessarily accept them there and then, but they would listen, then go away and redraft the Bill to improve it as it passed through Parliament. That activity seems to have diminished over recent years, which has led to the sense of frustration that my hon. Friend mentioned when he was talking about the role of Back Benchers.

That is not good for Back Benchers; even worse, it is not good for legislation. It is one of the reasons why we get into difficulties such as those that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland mentioned in connection with the Child Support Agency. Originally there was agreement in principle across all parties on the issue, yet because of the way that the legislation was forced through with insufficient consultation and discussion, it was clearly flawed and has brought about all the problems of which hon. Members are only too well aware from their constituency cases.

I am sure that the Minister will also tell us that there has been consultation on some of the proposed legislative measures in the Queen's Speech. That must be welcomed by Members on both sides of the House. Yesterday, we debated the Armed Forces Bill, which was shown to, and discussed with, a wide range of people. The fact that the debate finished early yesterday does not imply criticism of anybody; it may reflect the fact that, if one discusses things in the proper way, there can be agreement about the direction in which things are going, and we can make progress and get better legislation in the end.

However, in some areas there has been frustration when co-operation has been attempted. During the previous Session of Parliament, there was agreement about how we should treat some of the Law Commission Bills, but at the end of that process, after agreement had been secured in both Houses about the way to deal with the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, right at the last minute, internal opposition from Conservative Members scuppered all that good work. I suppose that the moral there is that, if the Government have consultation, they had better have it with their own side as well as with everybody else. All Governments, both the present Government and any Government anticipated in the future, must bear that fact in mind.

There is not time to talk about all the issues that we should mention in a debate of this kind. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby was right to say that we could do with more time for such debates, not least because the House is so slow to move towards change. I simply say that this year will be an extremely good year to experiment with new ways of dealing with legislation.

We should not underestimate the existing problems in scrutinising delegated legislation, or the problems with the Deregulation Committee. My hon. Friend mentioned the Hansard Society commission, one of whose suggestions was that we should be able to amend delegated legislation. Such issues should be given full consideration, because the quality of our legislation is threatened if we do not get our procedures right.

We need to improve our procedures not only for the preparation and drafting of Bills but for scrutinising legislation as it passes through the House. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland emphasised the fact that there must be complete agreement that proper consultation on legislation is the right way forward. He recommended that we look for institutional processes, so that consultation can become automatic.

I do not believe that there is one set mechanism that we should adopt for all types of legislation in all circumstances. We can and should have some flexibility. There is a role for Green Papers and White Papers, and there may be a role for pre-legislative Committees or for First Reading Committees. There is certainly a role for Special Standing Committees. We should have no illusions that it is easy to secure agreement to experiment with the way in which we conduct ourselves in the House, but there is now a degree of urgency that requires us to examine thoroughly the way in which legislation is prepared and passes through the House.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): May I begin, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by explaining that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is attending a Cabinet meeting this morning, and much regrets that he cannot be present?

I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on securing the debate, and on selecting such an interesting and important subject. I am pleased to have the opportunity to draw attention to the Government's achievements in improving the quality of legislation, in which my right hon. Friend and my noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal have taken a close and productive interest.

The debate reflects a growing interest not only in what legislation contains but in the quality of its preparation and drafting, and of the scrutiny that it receives in Parliament and elsewhere. At the beginning of 1993, the Hansard Society published an important report by a commission chaired by Lord Rippon of Hexham, which has already been mentioned several times in the debate.

The Government genuinely welcome that interest in improving our procedures. The quality of legislation is not an arcane technical matter of concern only to insiders. It affects everyone directly or indirectly. In particular, it has important implications for business, in which, as the deregulation Minister, I have a close departmental interest. In the second competitiveness White Paper, we clearly set out our view that

> "good clear legislation is an essential part of the infrastructure for a competitive business environment".

Over-complex or unclear legislation can be a burden on business and a brake on competitiveness.

Our aim is to produce legislation that is clear and coherent. On that, we have no difference with the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland or with the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor).

Many of the hon. Members who have spoken this morning do not appear to recognise how much has been done. I do not accept the remarks of the hon. Member for

Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who was thrashing around what, I must say, was a copy in a suspiciously mint condition of the Hansard Society commission report. The hon. Gentleman said that the Government have done nothing. The truth is that many of the ideas contained in the report have been acted on, although—in a typically British way—without any bravura announcements. It is simply a case of practical improvements in the legislative process gradually being introduced. Perhaps I can give some examples of that.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the subject of consultation. The White Paper on open government which we published in July 1993 said that the Government believed in the value of consultation. In recent years, the practice of consulting on the basis of drafts of Bills or parts of Bills has become more common. For example, important parts of last Session's Environment Bill were published in draft.

Of the Bills in the most recent Gracious Speech, the Armed Forces Bill was published in draft and was the subject of widespread consultation—so much consultation, in fact, that the hon. Member for Dewsbury thinks that we have debated the Bill already. That is, of course, a pleasure to which we look forward today, rather than yesterday.

In the second competitiveness White Paper, which was published in May and from which I have already quoted, the Government said:

> "Publication of draft Bills, in advance of introduction in Parliament, allows consultation to take place on clarity of structure and presentation, and on drafting detail, as well as on policy".

We have made it clear that we hope to move further in this direction. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced during the debate on the Gracious Speech that we plan to publish before long Bills on adoption, building societies and merchant shipping. These are all areas where there are important business and professional interests outside Government, and indeed outside Parliament, and many people will eventually use the legislation daily and be affected by it. They are entitled to the best possible advance consultation.

We must recognise that, inevitably, there are limits to the extent to which advance drafting can be used. There are bound to be occasions when legislation is required more urgently, and when the publication of Bills in draft will not invariably be the right course. Both my right hon. Friend and my Noble Friend who is Leader in another place believe that this initiative is capable of further development.

Mr. Maclennan: I had not realised that this was the Minister's debut. May I also congratulate him on that? Will he draw the remarks that he just made about what the Government are doing on pre-publication to the attention of the Home Office, which is guilty of not consulting properly? We have heard plenty of evidence of that, including as recently as Monday, when we were considering the new proposals on asylum.

Mr. Willetts: I have noted the remarks of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland about the work of that Department, and I will draw them to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. As the hon. Gentleman said, legislation needs to be drafted clearly, accessibly and with the eventual user in mind. First parliamentary counsel is himself wholly committed to this approach, and he has been looking at the experiences in Australia and New Zealand—which some hon. Members have cited—where innovative work is being done. The aim is for as great a degree of simplicity as is consistent with certainty. As the Hansard Society commission itself noted, there is no point in having simple statements of principle in statutes if, in the end, the law is uncertain. Certainty must be paramount.

I am not saying for a moment that we invariably get it right, but the objective is clear. I believe—as does my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—that in pursuing that objective, we are extremely well served by parliamentary counsel, for whom I have some ministerial responsibility in the Office of Public Service.

We are also looking to other sources of advice. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is conducting an experiment under which, after an open competition, several private sector contractors have been engaged to draft parts of this Session's Finance Bill. The purpose of the experiment is to test whether the preparation of legislation outside Government is feasible and cost-effective, and whether there is anything that the private sector can contribute on drafting style. It is too early for me to be able to give the House any sign at this stage of how the experiment is proceeding, but it is clearly worth while.

Mr. Maclennan: May we take it that the experiences of the Bank of England—of which we have evidence—which complained that it might not be permitted to talk to parliamentary counsel, will not be repeated? Will a body of that kind have something to lend to parliamentary counsel in terms of drafting?

Mr. Willetts: I am not aware of the particular example to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is important that parliamentary counsel are not bombarded with a variety of advice from a variety of sources, but I shall certainly take account of the point that he makes.

Legislation is complex sometimes because the underlying concepts are complex and sometimes because the concepts are expressed in a way which is not easy to grasp. In his Budget statement, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced that he hoped to make a start next year on a major project to simplify tax legislation for the benefit of businesses and taxpayers generally. Yesterday, my hon Friend the Financial Secretary laid before Parliament a report on tax simplification as required in the Finance Act, together with a background paper by the Inland Revenue.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), who has great expertise in this matter, made some very important points about this important attempt to simplify tax legislation, and I greatly welcomed his comments. There is an exciting possibility of reducing the compliance costs which the tax system imposes on every taxpayer, of taking forward the deregulation unit's work in simplifying the burdens on business and of supporting the Inland Revenue's continuing efforts to improve its service to the public and to reduce costs.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I am excited by the idea of involving private organisations such as the big six accountancy houses in the preparation of legislation. Why do the Government not involve criminals in legislation about police or Home Office matters? The point I wish to make is not that facetious one. The Minister could devote the rest of his very brief ministerial career—he can have

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

only 16 months in the job—to reading out defensive briefs written by hack civil servants and ignoring the main points at issue. Would he try to achieve a little glory in that career by telling us what the Government are going to do about the major recommendations of the Hansard Society commission?

Mr. Willetts: I am afraid that I have only three minutes left. I have been trying in my speech to go through the practical measures that we have taken in the past few years which are intended to implement many of the ideas to be found in the report. Sadly, I will not have time to list everything that we have done. I had hoped to talk about the implementation of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, as that is a very significant example of the sort of procedures that were envisaged in the report. We have new Select Committees to make sure that the proposals put before them have been the subject of adequate consultation, and also to make sure that appropriate account has been taken of that consultation.

When the final version of the deregulation order comes for parliamentary approval, the Committees report to both Houses on how the Minister concerned has taken account of the comments made on earlier drafts. If the Committees are not satisfied with the consultation that has taken place, they will say so in no uncertain terms. I pay tribute to the work of the Committees, and particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and to Lord Alexander of Weedon for the work that they have done since the new Committees came into being in the spring. That is a good practical example, which reflects some of the concerns expressed in the Hansard Society's report.

There is not enough time for me to get into the subject of law reform. In the previous Session—with the assistance of the Opposition parties—we passed law reform Bills on civil evidence, private international law and requirements of writing in Scotland, a series of measures which constitute a significant improvement in the reform of the law.

I hope that I have said enough to persuade the House of the Government's seriousness of purpose in this important sphere. We are committed to good government and, through the various means that I have described—the publication of draft Bills, close attention to drafting style, simplification wherever possible, and the sensible use of subordinate legislation—we are striving to be the Government of good legislation.

I hope that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland and the hon. Member for Dewsbury accept the fact that, in a low-key practical way, many of the ideas floated in the Hansard Society commission report are already being reflected in the practices and procedures of the House.

Family Life

11 am

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I have asked for a debate on this subject for some time because, since I entered the House last year, I have been struck by the extent to which working time in our country has become completely out of control. That lack of control over working time is having the most disastrous consequences on family life.

My concern stems from conversations that I have had with my constituents at my surgery in Rotherham. I think of a man who came in with his wife and two small children. He was a confident chap, not yet 30, and he clearly had a very happy family, who came to the surgery with him. He was working as a van driver for a Sheffield computer company, and his working hours were such that he was leaving home before 7 am and returning home a little after 7 pm, when he had to spend time working out his routes for the next day.

The man said that he was utterly exhausted. For that amount of work, he was earning £8,500 a year, which I remember because he had signed a contract for a yearly salary. There was no overtime or possibility of getting an increase. He wanted to know what he could do either to reduce his working time or to increase his pay. I suggested the normal methods, such as talking to the boss. He said, "He will fire me." I said, "Join a union." He said, "He will fire me." I said, "Go on strike"—because at times old Labour does resurface. He said, "If we go on strike, all the van drivers will be dismissed on the spot." I had to send him away from the surgery with absolutely no advice at all. I have since learnt that he has quit that job because he will be better off even on the meagre benefits that the state provides.

I can cite other examples, such as the engineering workers in my constituency who work six and seven-day weeks, 10 hours a day, who are not yet 30 but who have the physique of a 50-year-old. They are exhausted, trying to earn enough money to maintain a living income for their families, but they do not have any time to be with their families so that they can spend that money.

I think of my many friends from university who, after a quarter of a century of working in the professions, find that they are working longer hours than ever before. One of my oldest friends is the deputy head of a comprehensive school not far from the House of Commons. She gets up at 6 am, arrives at her school before 8 am, stays until 5.30, 6 pm or 7 pm, and then takes work home. She has a small child—her two older children are now teenagers. Her small son does not see enough of his mother.

I have an interest to declare because I have four children under the age of 10. I do not intend to discuss the problems of Members of Parliament, however, because I find many hon. Members' self-regard about their hours nauseating. They have extraordinary privileges, should they choose to exercise them, to control and allocate their working time.

The issue of working hours is a party political matter, although it is one that transcends the divisions between Members. The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) yesterday expressed his regrets that he would be unable to participate in the debate, because he takes a great interest in this problem. If we examine time in our society, however, we find that the Government have not only abdicated responsibility in this sphere but have, in a sense, taken away what control we previously had over our time. The Prime Minister will go down in history as the man who reduced Sunday to the status of just another ordinary day.

I do not know how many Members still read the Bible, but today I saw that Mr. Matthew Parris, in his column in *The Times*, enjoins us to use the Bible if we wish to insult hon. Members on the other side of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. No hon. Member should insult any other hon. Member in this House.

Mr. MacShane: If we wish to tell the truth about another hon. Member, we will find that the Bible is a rich source of quotations. We should recall the moving words of Ecclesiastes:

> "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven . . . A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance".

In that marvellous quotation from the Bible, the author finds time for everything. We now find that we have time for nothing except to slave for the re-exalted god of mammon that the Conservatives have set above us. The making of money is now far more important than the making of a family or a community in which all may work hard, but should not do so to the exclusion of all else.

The new trend represents the values of the 1960s in a sense, which have come home to roost. In that regard, I commend to the House the elegantly penned, if vitriolic, denunciation of the baby-boomer generation by my friend Mr. Christopher Hitchen in the current issue of that underrated journal of comment, *Vanity Fair*. That generation fills almost all the Government posts, and it was sublimely understood by the former Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher. It is a generation that spoke only of its rights and never of its responsibilities: the right to buy, the right to hire, the right to fire, the right to manage, the right to wealth, the right to share options and the right to consume. It is an endless litany of rights, rights, and rights again. The values and limits of self-control, balance, equilibrium and responsibility were utterly forgotten. As we have created a society in which rights hold a higher place than responsibility, I fear that the responsibility that we have to our children has been lost in the wash.

We know that the Government are not family-friendly. There has been a 20 per cent. increase in divorce since the Tories took over in 1979, and the number of single-parent families has increased by almost 50 per cent. This morning, we read in our newspapers that Mr. Archie Norman, the quintessential would-be Conservative Member of Parliament and the head of Asda, has said that women who take maternity leave this year will not receive a Christmas bonus. Mr. Norman combines the Christmas generosity of Scrooge with the love of babies that was expressed by Herod.

The debate should focus on families. It is about children, not about divorce, nor it is particularly about the legal institution of marriage. Some of the happiest couples and families I know have not tied the civil knot of marriage.

I pay tribute to the excellent contribution that has been made by the Parents at Work campaign, the National Council of Women, the women's institutes and the Demos Foundation. The Parents at Work campaign commissioned the Gulbenkian Foundation to carry out a survey of the employment conditions of working mothers, which was published last month. It found that almost a quarter of all working mums work for more than 50 hours a week. Five per cent., which is still a significant number, work for more than 60 hours a week. The survey also found that three quarters of our working mothers report coming home exhausted, and almost two thirds say that they do not see enough of their children. A fifth say that their relationship with their partners has been put at risk by long hours.

Britain has the longest working hours in Europe: one in three British men work a six or seven-day week, according to the labour force survey of 1990-91. The Institute of Management—again, not a trade union-friendly organisation—reported in March 1995, on the basis of a survey of its members, that individual work loads had increased greatly for nearly half its respondents in the past two years. One in five are working an extra 15 hours a week, virtually two working days.

Overtime is the new British disease. According to information supplied to me by the House of Commons Library and taken from the labour force survey, last year we worked nearly 69 million hours of overtime a week. Divided by the 37 hours of the normal working week—I think that I can do it without a calculator—that is equivalent to nearly 2 million jobs.

It is, of course, not possible to construct a simple equation relating excessive overtime to the mass unemployment that still disfigures our society, but until overtime is under control, and until employees' wages and salaries are not merely sufficient unto their needs but sufficient without necessitating reliance on massive overtime, we shall continue to live in a society in which there is far too much working time for many and no working time at all for all too many others—the unemployed.

I must declare an interest as a trade union-sponsored Member of Parliament and a strong supporter of trade unionism here and abroad. I must, however, also appeal to my friends in the trade unions to accept responsibility for an unpopular task—that of persuading, cajoling and ultimately instructing their members that overtime must be severely limited. There are examples of work forces that have shared overtime to safeguard jobs, but if we are to develop a working-time policy as part of a new labour market, unions and the workers themselves must be empowered to limit overtime.

Saturday's edition of *The Guardian* featured a letter from a member of my former profession, journalism. Sue Watkinson of Aberporth, Dyfed, writes:

> "As the hard-pressed deputy editor of a local newspaper and the mother of three children aged five, three and 20 months, a job share would seem the perfect solution."

Her problem was not seeing enough of her children. But who would pay the bills? As a professional journalist—a deputy editor—she earns £14,000. Half that amount will not bring home the bacon, or finance help with looking after the children.

That brings us back to the need for fair wages, and to Labour's advocacy of a minimum wage. In Asia, wage differentials are much narrower and more compressed than they are in this country. In my constituency—

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacShane: May I just finish what I am saying?

In my constituency a cashier at the National Westminster bank earns about £7,000 a year, while his or her chief executive officer in London earns 100 times that amount. In countries such as Taiwan, Singapore and Japan the narrower differentials mean that people have a living wage.

Mr. Taylor: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman so clumsily at the wrong moment.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Labour's espousal of a minimum wage. Would he care to tell us how much that wage might be?

Mr. MacShane: I can tell the House that Labour proposes a new model of partnership. The minimum wage will be arrived at after discussions between those directly concerned: employers, workers and their representatives—the trade unions—and Government. I believe that that will allow us to develop a wages and incomes profile that will ease the tensions that are so damaging to stable family life and community harmony.

One of the arguments against any control of working time is that it militates against economic efficiency, but we must draw a sharp distinction between hard work and long working hours, however. When I went to work in Switzerland 15 years ago, I found to my horror that I was expected to start work at 7.30 am. I had been used to more gentle office hours in England in the 1970s, and at first this was a shock to the system, but I subsequently found that finishing work at 4 pm gave me time for friendship and family life. No one there worked after 4 pm: the obsessive "yuppie" need to stay for hour after hour in banks, consultancies and legal firms was unknown in what is, after all, one of the most prosperous countries in western Europe. We need smart, efficient work; we need quality output rather than quantity input.

According to a recent survey by the Health and Safety Executive, 80 million days a year are lost through work-related stress. The International Labour Organisation says that stress at work costs up to 10 per cent. of Britain's gross national product. That amounts to roughly $100 billion—about a third of total Government expenditure. The loss of that money is a direct result of the amount of time that we take off. We work inefficiently, we work long hours and we have work-related illnesses, which, according to the ILO, have increased by 500 per cent since the 1950s.

As for our dynamic competitor partners, Japan's Government say that the number of annual working hours must be reduced. The Government of China, which many Conservative Members now pray in aid as the model economy, are legislating for a two-day weekend. In Germany, the dominant economy in Europe, working hours were reduced substantially in the 1980s. That was followed by an increase in engineering employment and a boom for the German economy, along with outflows of investment—some of which have saved industries in this country.

Britain is now internationally isolated. We have opted out of the European and world debate on working time. Let us take the example of Sweden—and here I cite not the Social Democratic party or the trade unions, but the leader of one of the conservative parties that were in alliance during the period of Swedish conservative rule in the early 1980s. He insisted on the passing of a new law allowing a man to take a month of paid leave when his child was born. He also insisted that only the father could take that leave.

As many hon. Members may know, Sweden already has generous laws relating to parental leave: parents can jointly take up to a year off. That arrangement has significantly increased the birth rate in Sweden. It appears that parental leave makes not only for happy families, but for bigger families.

In France—I leave aside the current travails of one of my favourite countries, after my own—the employers federation, the Confédération National du Patronat Francais, and the trade unions are discussing the possibility of a four-day week and a reduction in working time, with the full backing of the Government. Once the current troubles have calmed down, the idea will once more be a major item on the French economic agenda, promoted by employers and management.

In Germany, the president of the 3 million-strong German engineering workers union, Klaus Zwickel, has launched a Bündnis für Arbeit, which means an alliance for jobs, in which the unions agreed to hold back on wage increases in exchange for a reduction in working time. That has been taken up by German employers and Chancellor Kohl—another Conservative; I am stressing what Conservative Governments are doing throughout the world, especially in Europe—is discussing the issue with Mr. Zwickel and the employers, so his Conservative Government is taking this issue extremely seriously.

My interest in this subject was sparked by a remark made by the Minister for Industry and Energy, the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), who is currently in Committee doing doughty business for British Steel workers. I wish him well in those discussions. He said that he had visited a factory in Essex where people were working 60 or 70 hours a week. As an historian, my ears pricked up. In 1876, Benjamin Disraeli passed legislation limiting the working week to 56 hours. That Minister, 120 years later, was boasting, proclaiming, relishing and wallowing in the 60-hour week worked by people in that Essex factory. What time do they have for family life?

Conservative Members talk of returning to Victorian values. I would welcome a return to some Victorian values, notably the long-sustained campaign by Victorian social reformers to bring working time under control. From Lord Shaftesbury to Benjamin Disraeli, political leaders of that era accepted the responsibility to limit working hours. The Shops and Factories Acts of the 1930s controlled working time, and further legislation was passed in the 1950s. I cite Conservative Administrations who accepted their responsibility because it is necessary to stress that the control of working time is not a demand of the Opposition Benches, the left, the trade unions or the Labour movement. Today, big organisations such as the Women's Institute and the Institute of Management are taking the lead in demanding that working hours be reduced. They echo the great Victorian reformers in saying that the main victims of long working hours are children.

What are the alternatives and how do we deal with the matter? We have an excellent proposal from Europe. As a former Member of the European Parliament, the Minister knows full well what is happening in Europe. In 1993, Brussels proposed a directive on parental leave and leave for family reasons. It would allow, first, three months' parental leave for fathers and mothers, to be exercised by both full and part-time workers; secondly, family leave for up to six months; and, thirdly, the right to up to 10 working days' leave a year for pressing family reasons. Those 10 working days' leave are vital when a child suddenly falls ill or, at the other end of the age scale, when an aging parent needs urgent care.

All the countries of Europe, from impoverished Greece to the rich Netherlands, supported that proposal, but it fell to the veto of the English Minister. How brave, magnificent, determined, triumphant and very English that a right hon. Secretary of State for excessive working hours slammed his little fist on the table in Brussels and said "No" to a modest measure to help shore up the crumbling pillars of family life in Britain.

We can shape proposals not by inventing new laws but by drawing on our traditions. When the Minister replies, I invite him to consider whether that could be done on a bipartisan, all-party basis. We must look to our British sources. I agree that we must retain flexibility, as the demand for part-time work is huge, but the old 1950s model of a 40-hour week, worked mainly by men, has gone for ever. We must adapt our work force to the new challenges of globalisation but must not allow the challenges of globalisation to undermine and destroy family life and children's right to see their parents. We must go beyond debate because willing the end but refusing to discuss and legislate the means is the ultimate hypocrisy as we seek to remedy the present ills, of which uncontrolled working time is the most potent.

We should consider a family-and-work law, which would outlaw excessive hours worked involuntarily; provide adequate parental leave, including paternity leave—in my case, I would not mind if it were retrospective—give all employees, full and part time, individual rights to be consulted and to agree to hours beyond those laid down in a legally enforceable contract; and provide creche, kindergarten and nursery facilities to give under-fives a start, instead of the absurd and almost laughable nursery voucher scheme, which does not even begin to tackle the problem.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the measures that he suggests would benefit families and society as a whole? At the beginning of a conference in Sweden that I attended in 1988, a preliminary discussion of the agenda was held. People agreed happily to alter the agenda to allow a young man who was scheduled to speak late in the afternoon to leave early to pick up his children from kindergarten. That was accepted as completely normal and it showed that children were not just the responsibility of mothers.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend makes a fundamental point. Fathers must accept their share of the responsibility for creating a stable family life. In this country, fathers are pressured into working long hours, bringing work home and doing excessive paid or unpaid overtime, so taking their share of the responsibility becomes extremely difficult. The institution of social partnership measures would help to introduce agreed flexible working time and would prevent unions from permitting excessive overtime. In many other European countries, works councils within firms must give permission for overtime above a certain limited amount each week.

We must alter the tax regime, so that the financial burden of bringing up children is no longer penalised fiscally. Our tax regime is one of the most anti-family and anti-marriage in Europe and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Family and working time law or arrangements should require public offices to be open at times that suit parents rather than bureaucrats. I welcome the flexible approach to shopping hours, but we need to go further so that other services, especially important public services, are available when people need them.

Those measures will require legislation. Let us not have the wishy-washy hope that they can be brought about by market forces, discussion or give and take. Legislation has a big impact and was the great reformer of working time and working life in the 19th century. It will require partnership, so that once again Britain becomes one nation—a young nation, if I may invoke Benjamin Disraeli again, in which the youngest of all our future citizens are allowed to see their parents and in which work, which is vital for us all, resumes its proper place. It must be something that we do to make a living and no longer a tyranny of long hours over which we have no control, which damages family life.

11.29 am

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on securing this important debate, focusing parliamentary attention on a revolution that is taking place in households throughout the country.

Research published last week by the Equal Opportunities Commission found that the move towards flexible working has

> "improved the opportunities for some women to work."

The benefits of flexible working are becoming available to increasing numbers of people.

Opportunity 2000 reports that its 293 member companies now have, on average, eight "family-friendly" initiatives, and more than half offer flexible working hours. Other initiatives include job sharing, homeworking and paternity leave, subjects to which I shall return later.

The danger is that all the fine talk about flexible working can, as my hon. Friend made so clear, easily obscure the fact that attitudes in the workplace are not changing as quickly as they need to in order to enable parents to reconcile their roles as parents, carers and employees.

Juggling the demands of home and work is simply not an option for many people, who continue to be forced to make a straight choice between the two. An industrial tribunal recently heard how Sue Edwards, a woman tube driver, was told by her employer, London Transport, that she had no choice but to work the late shift. When she drew attention to the fact that she had a young son and would find it difficult, she was told that she could

> "drive a train or be a mum".

She won her case, but it took her three years to do so.

Not every working parent is presented with such a stark choice between work and home, but nevertheless, many parents are realising that they must make that choice. The lack of affordable, reliable and sufficiently flexible child care and the inevitability of low pay and long working

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

hours all make it difficult for parents who would otherwise wish to work—especially working mothers—to strike the right balance between home and work, to achieve their aim of being both good parents and conscientious and reliable employees. The fact that Britain lags behind the rest of Europe on all those things, as my hon. Friend made so clear, should be a source of the most serious concern, and indeed shame, to the Government.

We seek evidence that the Government are taking that seriously, and that they recognise that there is an important role for Government in starting to promote a proper partnership between the responsibilities of home and work and a proper partnership between employers and Government in order to achieve that important end.

The problem is that we hear too much about the Government's good intentions, especially overseas. At the Beijing conference, the Government signing up to the platform for action was a good example of the huge discrepancy between the rhetoric that we hear abroad and the actions that we witness at home. In practice, it leaves all Opposition Members sceptical that the Government have any real practical determination to deliver policies that would make a real difference to men and women's lives.

At the fourth world women's conference in Beijing, the Minister for Overseas Development, Baroness Chalker, said:

> "a more equal sharing, between women and men, of parental and household responsibilities, is fundamental for women's . . . access to education, jobs and politics".

All Opposition Members would agree with that.

Why, one might ask, have the Government in which Baroness Chalker is a Minister so consistently blocked the measures that would make that possible? Affordable child care and the availability of parental and paternity leave would give families a genuine opportunity to bring about a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities. That more equal sharing is impossible if those sources of support are not in place.

Consistently, the Government have denied British families that opportunity. They blocked the directive on parental leave from the moment that it was introduced, and eventually opted out of it as part of the Maastricht protocol. They have allowed a position to develop in which the United Kingdom has the lowest level of publicly funded child care in Europe. They have constantly undermined efforts to introduce proper paternity leave.

As long ago as 1979, when I was chair of the staff committee in the London borough of Camden, I introduced the first paternity leave scheme in the country. That was 16 years ago, and we have made precious little consistent progress since that time.

It is hard to understand why the Government are so complacent. If proof were needed that women, who bear the principal responsibility for managing the conflicting demands of home and work, continue to bear the responsibilities for juggling home and work, one need look no further than the Institute of Management's 1995 survey, which revealed that women account for 11 per cent. of all managers and only 3 per cent. of directors. For women working in low-paid jobs, frequently doing more than one part-time job to make ends meet, the problems of juggling the demands of home and work can be even more difficult.

The Government will no doubt be quick to proclaim the EOC's finding that flexible working has improved the opportunities for women as evidence of the success of the Government policy of deregulation of the labour force. Can we therefore presume that they will also take responsibility for the negative aspects of flexible working, which emerged from the EOC's survey?

Britain's unique long hours culture represents possibly the biggest threat to maintaining the right balance between work and family life. The EOC's report, "Flexible Employment in Britain", found that the long hours culture is having a destructive effect on the career development of women and on family life. It concluded:

> "Even in higher status jobs, the 'long hours culture' stops women from getting promoted and in lower status jobs, women have to work long hours to make ends meet. British men work the longest hours in Europe and have less time to spend with their families."

British families are quickly finding out that there is little that is "family-friendly" about the Government's definition of "flexible". Flexibility is synonymous with insecurity in the workplace, and has increasingly come to mean being prepared to work all hours. As women continue to bear the main responsibility for caring for children and for elderly relatives, they are less able to put in the long hours that are increasingly being expected of them, or, when they do so, it is at great cost to themselves and their children.

There is no one reason for the emergence of the long hours culture, but there can be no doubt that the Government's mismanagement of the economy has played a large part. Low pay and job insecurity have led to people working longer hours to build up their pay packet to a reasonable level, or they do so because they fear for their job and do not want to appear less dedicated than their colleagues. The EOC's research concluded:

> "the restructuring of organisations, by 'downsizing' or 'delayering', has meant that more work is being done by fewer staff."

British families now find it harder than previously to combine the responsibilities of work and home. Until recently, it was widely believed that employees would continue to enjoy increasing leisure time. That is holding true for the rest of Europe, but not for the United Kingdom. In the past 10 years, while the average working week has been decreasing in many other European countries, it has increased by about two hours in the United Kingdom. Last week's conference on the long hours culture, which was organised by the Women's National Commission, heard how employees in the United Kingdom work, on average, far longer each week than their European counterparts. Almost 28 per cent. of full-time employees in the United Kingdom work more than 46 hours a week—that is roughly double the figure in any other European Union country.

By contrast, slightly more than 7 per cent. of French employees and 6.7 per cent. of German employees work longer than 46 hours a week. Some 3.5 million people in the United Kingdom—15 per cent. of the work force—worked more than 48 hours a week in 1991. That was an increase of more than 12 per cent. over the figure for 1984.

The worst part is that the gap between the British and the European working week is widening. In 1993, British employees worked on average 1,952 hours a year—a rise of 48 hours since 1983. By contrast, German workers worked 1,739 hours a year—69 hours fewer than in 1983. The long hours culture is made worse by the fact that the United Kingdom is the only country in the European Union where employees do not have a statutory entitlement to paid annual leave. One out of 10 employees in this country has no holiday entitlement.

Working mothers are hit hardest by the emergence of the long hours culture. Research by Opportunity 2000 found that long working hours are a significant factor in preventing women from reaching the top levels of management. The long hours culture is not only preventing women from breaking into higher positions, but beginning to take a very heavy toll on the life of their children and on family life in general.

Two surveys carried out by the organisation Parents at Work, to which my hon. Friend referred, examined the effects of the long hours culture and found that it is putting many people under intense pressure and affecting both their health and their relationships. One of the surveys by Parents at Work concentrated on the plight of working mothers with children under the age of four. Two thirds of respondents said that they felt that they spent too little time with their children and experienced continuing problems with child care. They spent, on average, between two and four hours with their children each day. Parents at Work said:

> "A picture emerged of women doing a good job, taking little sick leave, working to give their families economic security and rushing home to care for children at the end of the day. Fathers who in general worked even longer hours than their partners were able to spend even less time with their children, putting extra pressure on mothers."

It is in everyone's interests that working parents are supported in their efforts to strike the right balance between work and family life. Companies may derive short-term benefits from employees working long hours, but there are long-term costs such as a reduction in productivity, an increase in mistakes, loss of skilled employees who drop out of the work force, sickness, absenteeism and the burgeoning cost of stress-related ill health. The more responsible employers have realised that, but the danger of the Government's laissez faire approach is that, if the long hours culture is allowed to go unchecked, it will continue to spiral upwards, placing an even greater strain on family life.

We want the Government to do more than simply wring their hands. Industry needs stability, and it is in the best interests of business and industry to forge a partnership that enables men and women up and down the country to discharge their responsibilities in the workplace as well as their obligations to their children and families at home.

11.43 am

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on securing the debate and on choosing to discuss these subjects this morning. They are important and topical subjects and I welcome the chance to debate them properly. However, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will be surprised when I say that the Government disagree with much of his analysis and with that of his hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell).

We are dealing with complex matters. Employers and employees in the United Kingdom face a multitude of different circumstances. Simplistic approaches may hold a superficial attraction for Labour Members, but in reality they would cause more harm than good to both businesses and jobs. That is why the Government have consistently opposed such nostrums.

There have been some generalised and rather laboured assertions that employees in the United Kingdom work longer hours than employees in other countries. In fact, the average number of hours worked weekly in the United Kingdom is 38.1. The average number of hours worked weekly throughout the 12 countries of the European Union—when the Union comprised 12 countries—is 38.6. The average hours worked weekly in France, Italy and Spain are greater than those worked in this country, and only Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands have a lower average figure.

That is why the Government have consistently opposed the simplistic approach. We are very close to the European average, but we have a much wider spread of hours worked. More employees in the United Kingdom work more hours and, in the nature of an average, there are more who work fewer. For every person who works more hours than the average, there is another who works fewer.

Those differences exist because that is what many people want. Employees want the opportunity to work part time or full time on standard shifts or on flexitime. They want to work the hours that best suit their circumstances. The Government or Brussels should not dictate to employers and to workers the length of the working week or on what days they may or may not work.

There are proper protections for employees against working hours that are genuinely excessive and that could be injurious to their health. Employers have a general duty under section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work. Factors such as hours of work, rest breaks and holidays must be considered when planning the safe organisation of work.

The proper way forward, as advocated by the Health and Safety Executive, is to carry out risk assessment, taking account of the actual factors experienced by workers rather than hypothetical concerns. It is not feasible only to set maximum levels for working time in order to prevent stress or fatigue. The organisation of working time—length of shift, rest breaks, intervals between shifts and shift rotation—must be considered in conjunction with the type of work performed, its physical and mental demands and the individuals concerned.

Mr. MacShane: I put to the Minister an historical, hypothetical question. In view of his recent comments, I assume that he would have voted against Benjamin Disraeli's control of the working week in 1876.

Mr. Taylor: That is certainly an historical and a hypothetical question. I take refuge in the general proposition that Benjamin Disraeli was a most enlightened leader of this nation who took the decisions that were right according to the culture of the time. That approach is incumbent upon us all: if circumstances change, solutions and responses must change as well.

Less hypothetically, reference is made from time to time to the findings of recent research conducted by Parents at Work, the recruitment agency Austin Knight and the Equal Opportunities Commission in an attempt to

[Mr. Taylor]

show that family life is suffering under the Government. The widespread view is that, in the past 30 years or so, family life has become more pressured. But that view must be set against a background of people's changing aspirations.

Many women feel, quite correctly, that it is important to have both a family life and a full working life outside the home, with the increased benefits that that may bring. The flexible labour market that the Government have brought about has benefited employees as well as companies. It means that more women than ever before have the opportunity to continue to work after they have chosen to have a family. Some 48.6 per cent. of women in the United Kingdom are in paid employment. That is not true of much of the rest of Europe, where more regulated labour markets mean that women who wish to work part time are often excluded from the job market.

The United Kingdom has the second highest participation rate for women in the European Union. Only Denmark outranks us. We compare favourably with Germany, where only 43 per cent. of women have paid work, and France, where only 41 per cent. of women have jobs. If we were to follow the European model and impose unnecessary regulations, many women who now work part time would be denied the opportunity to combine work and family.

The larger percentage of women at work in the United Kingdom arises precisely because our flexible labour market gives people the opportunity to work the hours that suit their circumstances. I recognise that individuals may have to make difficult choices to balance the responsibilities of bringing up children with paid employment, but unlike the Labour party, the Government believe that such matters are best decided by parents, not Brussels or Westminster. What suits one family will be unacceptable to another.

There can be no question of the Government's commitment to stable and harmonious family life. The Parents at Work survey points out that many people are happy to work full hours. They value the extra opportunities and wages that those increased hours bring. The hon. Member for Rotherham pointed out that recent surveys suggest that some people who work longer hours feel that it is detrimental to their relationships with their partners and children.

However, the survey by Parents at Work shows that 80 per cent. of the women surveyed enjoyed the financial security that work brings, 48 per cent. said that it enabled them to enjoy the time that they spent together as a family and 45 per cent. said that it made their children more independent, which they saw as a positive advantage. Their children also benefited from a higher standard of living. We must not blind ourselves to the positive results of women choosing to go out to work. For many women, jobs and careers, even including some long hours at work, have enhanced their lives and those of their families, not detracted from them.

The Parents at Work survey identified action that could help reduce the strain on family life. It included flexible working hours and help with child care. The recent Austin Knight survey showed how employers were beginning to address those issues in order to retain their expensively skilled work force. It found that three quarters of employers now have some form of "family-friendly" policy, a third provide some child care facilities, and more than 50 per cent. of staff are able to work flexible hours. In addition, more than half the employees surveyed received paternity and maternity leave above the statutory minimum.

Our flexible approach to the labour market brings positive results. The number of people unemployed in the United Kingdom has been on a consistent downward trend for the past two years. In percentage terms, only 8 per cent. of the potential work force is unemployed. That is well below the European Union average of 10.6 per cent. The total number unemployed is nearly 600,000 less than in October 1993. The numbers employed in manufacturing are increasing. There were 53,000 extra jobs in the year to June 1995. The numbers employed in services are increasing, with 260,000 extra jobs in the year to June 1995.

Unlike some Opposition Members, I welcome the fact that increasing numbers of people are in part-time employment. There are now some 2.2 million more part-time workers than in 1979, the vast majority of whom prefer the flexibility that such work gives them.

I come now to parental leave. Let me make it absolutely clear that the Government strongly welcome voluntary agreements that help people reconcile their working and family lives, but the key word is "voluntary". Leave is just one aspect of an employee's terms and conditions and cannot be taken in isolation. Terms and conditions are a matter for negotiation between individual employers and their employees. Each business must be free to develop arrangements that fit its particular circumstances and best suit the needs of its workers.

The Government do not believe in dictating to employers and workers how they should arrange their affairs; we believe that they can do that better themselves. In other words, we believe in a flexible labour market. Of course, a flexible labour market helps to improve the quality of life for individuals. It offers them greater access to jobs and greater choice in their working arrangements. For example, if the workers in a company attach importance to parental leave, they can negotiate it. If they prefer a shorter period of paid leave to three months without pay, they are free to bargain for it. That would be prohibited by European legislation. Most importantly, they would be free to argue for their priorities, not those imposed on them by the Government or Brussels.

Fathers are directly benefiting from the United Kingdom's flexible and voluntary framework. There is plenty of evidence that increasing numbers of employers are voluntarily offering their employees some level of paternity leave. The Confederation of British Industry surveyed 584 of its members in 1992 and found that 31 per cent. of them offered paternity leave on a discretionary basis and 12 per cent. offered it as a contractual entitlement. Those figures had increased from 26 per cent. and 6 per cent. respectively in 1987.

A survey of 356 United Kingdom companies conducted by Industrial Relations Services in 1994 found that more than two thirds offered paternity leave, all but two of them with pay. Some three quarters of respondents offered such leave as a contractual entitlement. As one would expect, the amount of leave varied widely—from one day right up to 46 weeks—but I doubt whether it was retrospective, as the hon. Member for Rotherham was hoping.

Mr. MacShane: Does the Minister accept that CBI and other surveys tend to cover the more advanced and stable British firms, but the problem arises in the great mass of firms that are not surveyed, in which parental leave is not part of contractual relationships? In particular, how does he address the problem of moving from good will or lack of it on the part of the employer to giving the employee the right to assert parental leave if he or she needs it?

Mr. Taylor: Maternity leave is provided for in law. I was intending to show in that passage of my speech that there is an increasing trend towards paternity leave schemes, but they are voluntary. The Government believe that they should be developed on a voluntary basis at present.

An article published this October by Industrial Relations Services states that the lack of legislation in these matters

> "has not diminished the incidence, scope and growth of contractual agreements providing such arrangements in this country. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that the incidence of paternity leave, in particular, is growing in the United Kingdom."

I welcome that, and I dare say that the hon. Gentleman does, too.

We certainly do not want that success to be put in jeopardy by possibly well-meaning, but potentially calamitous, interference from Brussels. The European agreement on parental leave is likely to become another piece of burdensome and unnecessary European legislation.

When that happens, many British businesses will breathe a sigh of relief that the United Kingdom has opted out of the social chapter and its damaging consequences for jobs and the economy, just as they did when we blocked the proposed directive on parental leave last year. That directive would have had truly horrendous implications for employers in the United Kingdom and across the Community. It would have forced employers to give employees at least three months' leave following the birth or adoption of a child. It would also have stipulated minimum leave entitlements for other family reasons.

Mr. MacShane: Hear, hear.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman may favour it, but the proposed directive could have meant an annual bill of £200 million for British firms—expenditure that many of them could ill afford. In his previous intervention, the hon. Gentleman asked me whether the surveys had reached smaller firms. Those smaller firms would bear the brunt of the £200 million that they could ill afford.

The new agreement is not much better, except in one important respect: it will not apply in the United Kingdom. It means that we are free to continue the existing voluntary approach that is delivering what workers want and what businesses can afford, rather than what people in Brussels or Opposition Members think they should have.

These are indeed important matters, and I am glad that we have had the chance to debate them. I thank the hon. Gentleman for providing the opportunity. The Government are sympathetic to all initiatives to help people reconcile their working and family lives, but I think that I have shown that simplistic legislation does not hold out a panacea and is certainly not a cost-free remedy. Rather, it would cause more ills than it would relieve, because it would increase the cost of employing people in an arbitrary way, taking no account whatever of businesses' ability to pay. Ultimately, it would harm the very people it was intended to help. The most generous statutory provisions on parental leave, paid holidays, rest breaks and so forth are useless to the man or woman unable to find a job. The Government do not forget that simple message.

Radio Gloucestershire

12 noon

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of BBC Radio Gloucestershire and the problems with the reception of its signal in my constituency. I welcome the Minister's presence, not least because he has always been so courteous in helping me with my constituents' other problems. He will be aware of our continuing correspondence on the subject, and of the questions that I have asked in the House ever since I have been a Member.

The time is now right to move forward, not least because a clear and simple solution has been identified. Since my election in 1992, there has been a blackout of Radio Gloucestershire in much of the Cotswolds. The situation in December 1995 is unchanged from that of December 1991, when the main medium wave AM transmitter was switched off. I ask the House and my hon. Friend the Minister for their forbearance, because this is a very technical subject. I will do my best to take it slowly.

The result of switching off the transmitter is clear. Figures from Radio Joint Audience Research Ltd. show that it is technically possible for 338,000 adults to receive broadcasts out of a total population in Gloucestershire of 471,000. That means that around 150,000 people—133,000 adults plus a quarter of under-16s—in Gloucestershire are currently unable to receive Radio Gloucestershire. That is a large section of the population, many of whom are my constituents.

The current reception problems are not confined to the geographical extremes of the county, but are confined to outlying rural areas beyond the principal towns and cities. The major gaps are estimated currently as follows: 20,000 people in the south-west of the county; 20,000 in the Forest of Dean; and 20,000 in the north Cotswolds. The rest are dispersed evenly throughout the county.

As the Minister knows, Radio Gloucestershire is a speech-based local news and information station, upholding the finest traditions of public broadcasting. Indeed, in 1994, it won the prized Sony award for local radio station of the year. Among its successes was the coverage of the dreadful Cromwell street story, when its journalists had their reports networked to the rest of the BBC. Before it lost its AM frequency, Radio Gloucestershire had built up an average weekly following in 1991 of a staggering 27 per cent. of the adult population, from a standing start in 1988.

My constituents hold their public service station in high esteem. At this time of year, many of my elderly and other constituents need winter weather and traffic information. Unlike London, power failures in parts of rural Gloucestershire are still far too common. When the power goes off, rural communities turn to their local radio station for information. The local radio station also provides much valuable sports and other news coverage.

When simultaneous broadcasting ended, the commercial stations were allowed to develop separate radio programming on medium wave and FM. To the west of my constituency, the independent Severn Sound is a good example of that. It retains licences for light music on both AM and FM. In contrast, the BBC was forced, as part of a national policy dictated by the Home Office, to relinquish its AM frequencies; thus began part of the problem. Before 1992, the responsibility was not that of my hon. Friend the Minister and the Department of National Heritage but that of the Home Office. I absolve my hon. Friend the Minister from all responsibility for the matter.

Radio Gloucestershire's AM frequency was passed to Boss 603 Radio, a light music commercial station based in Cheltenham. Although that station can be hard by some of my constituents, it does not serve the wider needs of the Cotswolds. Its programming and advertisers aim at a target audience in the immediate Cheltenham area only. It strikes me and many of my frustrated constituents that it might be better off with an FM stereo frequency. That is a view shared by many independent radio stations and their advertisers, simply because they can get a better quality of broadcasting in their immediate local areas.

My plea to the Minister is to review the decisions taken in the wake of the Broadcasting Act 1990. It made good sense then but it is less relevant today, because we are a long way from the broadcasting situation that prevailed in the 1980s. At that time, no one could deny that the BBC held the lion's share of the AM and FM frequencies. A decade later, the commercial sector, under the Radio Authority, has a commanding lead. The situation needs to be reviewed and reversed.

The commercial sector has an interest in change, because many commercial stations, as I have demonstrated, are stuck with AM licences but might, for reasons of quality, wish to upgrade to FM. I recently discovered that, when a commercial radio licence holder maintains both FM and AM stations, such as Severn Sound in Gloucestershire or Capital Radio in London, cross-media ownership rules prevent them from converting from AM to FM. They are therefore caught in a bind that prevents public service stations, such as Radio Gloucestershire, from gaining space on the AM frequency. That needs to be reconsidered.

When Radio Gloucestershire was established in 1988, it was satisfied with its AM transmission, because that, unlike FM, can deal with difficult topographical and geographical situations. It meant that the AM frequency could be received throughout the whole county satisfactorily, whereas the present FM frequencies, which are interrupted by hills, gave rise to the current situation.

A year after the station was up and running, the Home Office held a meeting with the BBC in 1989. I am told by Radio Gloucestershire that the bottom line was that the Home Office required it to surrender its unused FM local frequencies, which it had been holding for future expansion of FM coverage in difficult rural areas. Home Office officials told the BBC that Radio Gloucestershire would keep its AM frequency, which had served the county so well, in return for surrendering its potential FM frequencies, a deal which made a great deal of sense to all parties involved at the time.

However, in July 1991, after the Broadcasting Act came into force, Home Office officials apparently changed their minds and revoked the AM agreement, as it did not accord with the new Act, and Radio Gloucestershire had to surrender its AM frequency. Despite a hard-fought battle by the BBC for extra FM frequencies, the best deal that the Home Office could subsequently offer was one FM filler transmitter in Cirencester in 1991. The situation has remained unchanged for the four years since.

My constituents do not like it. Insult is added to injury by the fact that, in parts of the Cotswolds, we can hear the broadcasts of every other surrounding station: GWR, Three Counties, Radio Hereford and Worcester, Thames Valley Radio, Radio Coventry-West Midlands and even Radio Shropshire. However, my constituents cannot receive their own Radio Gloucestershire. The market towns of Moreton, Stow, Chipping Camden and Bourton are left high and dry from their own Radio Gloucestershire signal, because the FM signal is interrupted by the ridges and hills in my constituency.

For the past five years, the Department of National Heritage and its predecessor, the Home Office, have been resolute in their belief that this is a matter for the BBC to resolve using FM fillers, despite the fact that it has been granted only one licence to do so, but that solution's problems are enormous and inordinately expensive, and anyway, universal coverage would not be sensibly achieved.

I come to the solution, which my hon. Friend the Minister may wish to hear. On 30 November, the BBC chairman no less, Mr. Marmaduke Hussey, wrote to me and informed me that it would cost at least £500,000 to provide the five or so filler transmitters to give even a reasonable coverage to the whole of Gloucestershire. That would bring relief to the Forest of Dean and the main Cotswold towns, but not to those many constituents in highly rural regions. To attempt to give the whole county FM coverage would require at least a dozen transmitters and would be a scandalous waste of licence fee money: estimates place that exercise's cost at more than £1 million.

The BBC chairman has, however, presented me with an answer, with which I concur wholeheartedly. His recent letter says:

> "It has recently become evident that the pressure on medium wave frequencies for commercial radio is not as great as had been anticipated. Therefore, we have taken the decision to look into the possibility of using medium wave again. We have had informal discussions with the Department of National Heritage and they have indicated that this would be an acceptable solution."

My plea to my hon. Friend the Minister is that we should adopt that solution so that my constituents' suffering can be ended once and for all. Mr. Hussey's letter also states:

> "we intend to fund the additional transmitter out of next year's capital budget",

so the two things are in place: the technical solution has been identified and the funding is there. A single medium wave transmitter would be far better value than pursuing the FM option, and would provide something approaching universal coverage for the whole of Gloucestershire.

Before the BBC can proceed, however, the Department of National Heritage must allocate a frequency, and technical approval is required from the Department of Trade and Industry Radiocommunications Agency. I urge my hon. Friend to back the solution that I have outlined. I will send him a copy of the chairman's letter that sets out the BBC's plans. I hope that he can arrange an early meeting with officials to formalise those plans.

I am concerned because the precedent for this application is one made in 1994 for an FM filler at Coleford in the Forest of Dean. Apparently, it took many months for my hon. Friend's Department to respond, by which time the BBC had decided that it could not afford the FM option anyway. I do not want a repeat of that. Now we have identified the solution and the BBC is able to fund it, it would be a tragedy if, because the various Departments involved took such a long time to consider the matter, the BBC said that it could not afford to fund a new AM transmitter.

The commercial sector is much more interested in the new FM frequencies, and the Radio Authority has just obtained a space between 105 and 108 MHz, covering about one fifth of that expanded waveband. Since the time of the Broadcasting Act 1990, the FM space available for domestic broadcasts has doubled because the emergency services and utilities have transferred to other frequencies. Plenty of space is therefore available for all the commercial stations to broadcast on FM, and, in any case, they want to cover only a relatively small local region.

It is interesting that the Radio Authority intended to advertise a new commercial FM licence for the Cotswolds and had accelerated its plans precisely because of all my complaints about the BBC position—it told me that in a letter. A Radio Authority official has told me, however, that the Cotswolds licence will now be for the medium wave because of all the problems that I have outlined with the FM frequency. It was originally proposed to allocate more space to commercial stations on FM. It is now being proposed to allocate it on AM because of the problems, yet we cannot obtain AM space for BBC Radio Gloucestershire, an established and well-liked station.

With that evidence in mind, I strongly urge that we ensure that the BBC has a fair share of resources to continue in the local radio business, because it seems that the Radio Authority is awash with frequency options on both FM and AM.

I have shown that Radio Gloucestershire's problems derive from the Home Office's policy decisions at the time of the Broadcasting Act 1990. With a new chapter in broadcasting on the horizon, I hope that we can first sort out the previous legislation's unresolved problems. It is instructive to look back to the 1987 Green Paper on radio. This is the overall guiding theme that we should all remember in relation to broadcasting.

The Green Paper states:

> "there remains a place for local BBC stations operating under public service obligations . . . there are particular reception difficulties in some less populated areas, and there may therefore be a good case for envisaging the continuation of simulcasting"—

that is, simultaneous broadcasting on FM and AM. In the case of Radio Gloucestershire, it broadcasts simultaneously only in the towns of Gloucester, Stroud and Cheltenham. It is therefore time to restore the station's full coverage by allocating a replacement medium wave alongside its current allocation. I hope that my constituents will not have to wait another four years since the present problems began.

I urge my hon. Friend seriously to consider what I have had said today. The solution is there, the funding is there. All it needs is a little push from him and I am sure we will achieve everything for my constituents' benefit.

12.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I truly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on the vigour and persistence with which he has followed this important cause. We have had many meetings, debates and questions and much

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

correspondence, and I hope that his constituents are as grateful to him for his hard work on this matter as they should be.

I thank my hon. Friend for this opportunity to reaffirm that the Government recognise the value of the BBC's local radio services. As he knows, last year, we published a White Paper about the BBC's future. It said that it was especially important that the BBC should continue to provide news and current affairs programmes on its local radio services. It did not, however, commit the BBC to a specific number of local stations.

On 27 November this year, we published drafts of the BBC's new charter and agreement. Those documents give effect to the Government's policies in the White Paper and provide the necessary formal framework for the BBC's future role, including local radio services provision.

I know that, since he came to the House, my hon. Friend has been pursuing this matter for many months, indeed years, and I have congratulated him sincerely on that. I sympathise with those of his constituents who are unable to receive the BBC's local radio service. Some of them will have had the benefit of receiving Radio Gloucestershire's programmes when they were broadcast on medium wave—AM—between 1988 and 1992. Others in Gloucestershire may not yet have been able to hear the service due to their living beyond the range of the station's transmitters.

My hon. Friend knows that considerable practical difficulties exist in providing good broadcast reception in the Cotswolds. That is not a unique position: many regions have problems relating to their reception of broadcasting services. I know that he is aware of the fundamental characteristics of broadcasting transmission, but, perhaps for the benefit of others, it may be valuable if, for the record, I set out some of essential features to put this matter in context.

Radio reception on the FM waveband, as for television reception on the ultra high frequency, relies primarily on a clear line of sight between the transmitter and the receiving aerial. Reception is impaired and can be blocked by obstacles interrupting the signal path. In built-up regions, such obstacles are usually man-made, such as tall buildings or large reflective structures. In rural regions, it is more common for the obstacles to be naturally occurring features such as hills and trees. Despite those complications, broadcasters have achieved more than 99 per cent. coverage for their television and radio services in the United Kingdom, from several thousand transmitters.

It should be remembered that each service requires a different frequency, and that each frequency has to be separate from those in use at each neighbouring transmitter to avoid interference. Unfortunately, it is generally the most beautiful areas of the country with forests and hills for which transmitters are needed, and I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that Gloucestershire fits that description.

Broadcasters reach 99.4 per cent. of the population with television signals. That is a considerable engineering achievement, but it means that perhaps some 300,000 people are without a television service. The situation is similar for radio. The BBC currently estimates that its coverage of its national FM networks is 99 per cent. That means that there would still be many transmitters to build at considerable expense if full coverage were ever to be achieved.

There is no obligation on the BBC to provide everyone with satisfactory access to all its services. The Annan committee recognised in 1977 that such an obligation would be wholly impracticable, in view of the small and scattered nature of many communities and because of the difficulty of matching transmitter coverage to the local geography.

I return to the specific problems in Gloucestershire that were raised by my hon. Friend. It may be helpful briefly to set out some of the background to the difficulty, and to explain how we have arrived at the current position.

BBC Radio Gloucestershire started broadcasting in October 1988, when most radio stations were providing a simulcast service on both the FM and AM wavebands. It had recently been established that this was a wasteful use of the frequency spectrum, and that simulcasting should be reduced to a minimum. Nevertheless, permission was given to the BBC to introduce its new Radio Gloucestershire service on both wavebands for a limited period. That was an exceptional and temporary measure, to help the new service to establish itself.

At the end of the agreed period, the BBC was to close its AM service, and Radio Gloucestershire was to broadcast on FM only. The BBC subsequently suggested that there would be little to gain by turning off the AM service before the frequency was needed for an alternative purpose. We agreed to that proposition, and extended the temporary transmission period until such time as the Radio Authority might need the FM frequency for developing independent radio.

On 31 January 1992, following a request from the Radio Authority, the AM transmitter was turned off and the frequency was reassigned to the authority for an independent radio service. The frequency is now used by the independent local radio service based in Cheltenham called Boss 603 Radio.

I should add, while mentioning independent local radio, that the Radio Authority has announced plans to advertise a licence for a service catering for listeners in the north-east of the county. That should feature among the licences that it aims to advertise from the middle of 1996 onwards. We welcome this extension of programme choice for listeners in parts of Gloucestershire.

However, we also recognise that some developments of this nature have adverse effects on listeners in other areas. The consequence of the BBC losing an AM frequency is that those listeners lose a service altogether, because FM and AM coverage of an area is rarely identical. Several areas, including Gloucestershire, have experienced a similar outcome.

A number of communities which had relied on signals from the AM transmitter could not receive the FM signals. The BBC generally hoped that, where possible, it might be able to build new FM transmitters to restore the service to such areas. However, its ability to do that depends on a number of factors, including the availability of frequencies and suitable transmitter sites. The BBC also has to take account of a variety of other pressing demands on its resources when determining its engineering priorities.

In Gloucestershire, the BBC has identified nine areas for which new transmitters are needed. It estimates that the total cost of providing FM facilities for each of those communities would exceed £1 million. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury drew that information from the letter that he received from the chairman of the BBC. It is by no means clear at this stage that suitable sites and frequencies will be available, and, as transmitter installation is not a simple task, the operation would take some time to complete, even if the resources were available.

I do not want to sound too dispiriting to my hon. Friend. As he knows, the BBC has not given up on Gloucestershire. It has been looking for alternative ways to resolve the problem, and one possibility might be to provide an AM service for the area. Understandably, my hon. Friend may feel—although, charitably, he did not put it in such serrated language—that this could take us back to first base.

I appreciate that the affected communities might believe that such a solution, if it proved workable, would show that they have been inconvenienced unnecessarily. However, it must be remembered that the Radio Authority had few spare frequencies at its disposal when it opened for business in 1991. Simulcasting the same programme service over an area on two wavebands remains a wasteful activity, which we discourage, and it was appropriate to give the new service, which had, of necessity, to operate on the poor AM waveband, the best frequency that was available.

From the beginning of this year, the Radio Authority has had access to new FM frequencies in the 105 to 108 Mhz sub-band. Accordingly, its need for AM frequencies has diminished, and it is appropriate for the BBC again to take its potential use into consideration. It is too early to know whether the BBC will find that a viable way to sort out the problem for my hon. Friend's constituents, but I assure him that the BBC is working on it, and that the Department of National Heritage will look at any proposal as sympathetically as possible for my hon. Friend.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: As the Minister and I have said, the FM solution would cost about £1 million, but would still not give adequate overall coverage, whereas the AM solution, providing one transmitter, would cost £10,000 to £20,000, and would provide reasonable overall coverage for Gloucestershire. I hope that my hon. Friend will opt for the second of his two solutions, and push hard for the BBC to be allowed an AM frequency.

Mr. Sproat: That certainly adds an element of realism to the sympathy that I have already promised my hon. Friend, and we shall take that important fact fully into account.

I know how greatly listeners appreciate the BBC's local radio services and I hope that listeners throughout my hon. Friend's constituency will similarly be able to take advantage of BBC Radio Gloucestershire's service.

12.26 pm

Sitting suspended.

Haemophiliacs

1 pm

On resuming—

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I shall complete my speech as quickly as I can since the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), I am glad to see, is in his place. He has fought on this issue for a considerable period, and I am anxious that he be given the chance to speak in the debate.

I welcome the opportunity of bringing once again to the attention of the House the plight of 3,000 individuals who, while being treated in the national health service for haemophilia, were given contaminated blood products and as a result contracted hepatitis C. The Minister will be aware that those individuals were all treated before 1986. In that year, a system was introduced which prevented contaminated blood from being passed on, but for those 3,000 people, the system came too late—they had contracted hepatitis C.

Those few words in medical terms trip off the tongue so lightly and so unemotionally that it is necessary to describe the way in which that treatment has adversely affected the future of those 3,000 people. Of them, 2,500—approximately 80 per cent.—will develop chronic liver disease. I should like to spell out their fate. They will be confronted by a variety of problems, including jaundice, vomiting and abdominal pain caused by the swelling of the liver and the spleen. When that continues for a long time, it leads to scarring. Scarring means cirrhosis of the liver. Between 250 and 500 of those 2,500 people will develop cirrhosis of the liver. Chronic hepatitis and cirrhosis can lead to a hepatoma, a cancer of the liver, from which many will die. Between 1988 and 1994, more than 550 people suffering from haemophilia died from liver failure, and in 1994 alone, 14 people died in those circumstances. The rate of deaths is accelerating.

That is the future confronting that tiny group of people who, already struggling to live a normal life with the burden of the debilitating effects of haemophilia, were given treatment on the NHS which resulted in them contracting hepatitis C. I have at least one example of somebody in my constituency who suffered that fate—a youngster called Neil aged 13 years old. He grew up with haemophilia. His family nursed him through his early years; they protected him and encouraged him to lead as normal a life as possible. There were scares, as the youngster was full of life and devilment and had little respect for his haemophilia. At 12 years of age, the parents were told that their young lad had been given infected blood and had hepatitis C. I am sure that the House understands the parents' devastation.

Last week, the Haemophilia Society published a report that examined the experience and needs of those with hepatitis C. It outlined the physical problems and described the effects on individuals and their families. We should listen to the words of one man aged 31, who said:

> "My general health has rapidly deteriorated over the past four years. I suffer from chronic fatigue and am unable to finish a full day's work. Joint aches, pains, decreased appetite and weight loss, itching, a need for nine hours' sleep a night. I feel in the last four years my physical stamina has aged about 15 years. I have grown old before my time."

Another sufferer, aged 55, said:

> "I have had 22 operations over the last two and a half years. I feel more tired as the months go on and I fear my liver will eventually fail. In the long term, the prognosis is bad."

[Mr. George Mudie]

Although physical fears are a major problem, the effect that the disease has on the family is also a serious and continuing concern. With an infectious disease, which could become debilitating and life-threatening, the financial problems that might confront families are always uppermost in their minds. Individuals aware of the growing weakness caused by the disease worry justifiably about the financial effects that their illness will have on their family. Fears about being able to continue in employment blight and constrain any long-term financial commitments, and because of the knowledge of the illness, there is no escape route through private insurance.

From reading the report, the Minister will acknowledge case after case of individuals who have faced problems at work or even problems finding work because of the illness. Salaries and careers are impossible dreams when a person has this terrible disease.

I have tried to convey the real physical and financial problems. On top of those are emotional and relationship problems caused by the disease: the worry of passing the infection on to a loved one, the dilemma of whether to have a child, and the strains on a marriage when illness means that income, and therefore standard of living, is reduced. All those factors add up to a blighted, uncertain future for each of the 3,000 people. Some may escape the full rigours of the disease, but as it may lie dormant in the body for more than 20 years, no one can tell or be entirely sure that they have escaped.

What can be done? Those four words represent the point at which—unfortunately—the Government and those concerned have in the past parted company. It is agreed that all I have spoken about until I uttered the four words "what can be done" is very sad and deserving of sympathy. Yet, when the matter was debated briefly in the other place, what followed was prevarication and an unwillingness to make any real contribution to ease the plight of those infected.

To be fair and to balance the picture, the Government were sympathetic and supportive of haemophiliacs who received contaminated blood and became infected with HIV. It is beyond argument that that disease is more severe than hepatitis C, but the similarities between them are too great to be ignored.

The circumstances under which individuals became infected with a second disease are exactly the same in each case. The test to prevent HIV being passed on stopped the hepatitis C virus being passed on. Both illnesses can be—and are—debilitating. All those who suffer face the worry of passing the disease to a loved one or to an unborn child. All face difficulties in education and employment. All face the impossibility of long-term financial commitments. All face the impossibility of gaining life insurance, unless it is offered at a totally prohibitive cost.

Let us take the case, often repeated in debates on this subject, of the three brothers who all became infected before 1986. Two of the brothers got HIV. They died. They received financial aid while they were alive and, on their death, their families received financial help. The third brother, also a haemophiliac, was infected at the same time, but did not contract HIV. He contracted hepatitis C and died. Yet during the painful debilitating stages of his illness, he received no financial help and his family received no help on his death. All three contracted the first and second disease in the same way, all three died, yet the brother who had hepatitis C received no help. Does that sound fair? Does it sound sympathetic or even defensible?

I hope that the House and the Minister will agree that there is an overwhelming case for giving financial help to those individuals and their families. It could be given on the same basis as for haemophiliacs with HIV, and could even be administered through the Macfarlane trust, which it is agreed has carried out the task of distributing and administering the aid for those with HIV in an exemplary fashion.

It is hoped that there will be a hardship fund for those who are already ill, partly because they suffer major reductions in income as a result of their illness, and partly to meet the increased costs of prescription charges, transport and food. Such a fund could also provide help for the dependants of those who have died, and an across-the-board payment to all those who have been infected, who suffer from uncertainty—from not knowing whether hepatitis C will have a serious or even a fatal impact on their lives and on those of their families.

The Haemophilia Society report asked for other measures to be considered, several of which cover resources for treatment and care. They include an up-to-date information system that is easily understood and in an accessible format; treatment with interferon alpha where that is deemed appropriate; access to PCR—polymerase chain reaction—tests to confirm the existence or otherwise of the virus in the body; access to a liver specialist; regular reviews and follow-up. The society also asked for a public education programme designed to break down the isolation and discrimination experienced by many.

Several hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Hendon, South and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), have taken an interest. Early-day motion 3 was signed by more than 250 hon. Members from both sides of the House. They all supported the case, which can be simply expressed as follows: 3,000 people, most of whom have families, have been infected with a destructive and potentially fatal disease. Because they suffer from haemophilia, they had no choice over the type of treatment offered by the national health service. Now, because they were given infected blood during that treatment, their lives and those of their families have been blighted.

No one blames the national health service or the Government, but we quietly plead for a recognition of the painful heartbreaking position in which those individuals and their families find themselves, and for an offer of help and hope. If the Government will not do that, no one else can. I know that every penny in the NHS is important and much fought over, but in terms of overall Government expenditure, the sum involved is small. None the less, it would be a significant sum for the affected families. It would show compassion and bring help, and it is desperately needed.

1.12 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on his success in securing the debate, and on his speech, with which, perhaps unusually in this place, I agreed 100 per cent. I also thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in inviting me to take part in the debate, and I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), who cannot be here because he has other parliamentary duties. My hon. Friend has authorised me to say that he would have liked to be here, and I am sure that he too would have agreed with everything that the hon. Member for Leeds, East said.

I also pay tribute to the work of the Haemophilia Society, whose chairman, the Rev. Alan Tanner, is a constituent of mine. The society has done magnificent work for its members.

Like the hon. Member for Leeds, East, I draw the parallel between the haemophiliacs who suffer from human immunodeficiency virus and those who suffer from hepatitis C. The cause of their illness is precisely the same. Both groups received infected blood products through the national health service. Both were given what was hoped to be life-enhancing treatment, which instead caused a life-threatening illness.

For both groups the consequences, too, will be the same. About 600 to 700 people will suffer a painful and premature death. Of course I accept that not all those infected with hepatitis C will suffer in that way. Indeed, 20 to 25 per cent. of them will be completely cured as a result of treatment with alpha interferon. But others, who neither die an early death nor enjoy a complete recovery, will suffer a life of pain and worry for many years to come.

I believe that when we consider those three categories of people we already have the key to a solution. The first principle is that no one should be denied treatment and the possibility of a full cure through interferon alpha. The other day, some of us met representatives of Schering, the company that produces that drug, and they expressed concern that in some parts of the country people who could benefit from treatment with interferon alpha were being denied it. I hope that the Minister will be able to give a lead on that matter, especially as, when my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who is now the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, was a Health Minister, he spoke to us on that matter.

Haemophiliacs who develop cirrhosis of the liver should be treated absolutely on a par with those who develop HIV. For both groups the prognosis is the same. All those people face the prospect of an early death, they are all suffering physically, and they and their relatives are suffering mentally and emotionally.

Indeed, if the onset of cirrhosis of the liver were to be the trigger for the main payment, the Minister could tell the Treasury that the scheme would not cost too much money this year. The cost would be spread over four or five years, and would have relatively little effect on total Government expenditure while doing an immense amount of good for the individuals concerned. Those who do not suffer from cirrhosis of the liver could be given a more modest payment.

Last week I invited the Minister to read the Haemophilia Society's report, and in it he will have seen cited the case mentioned by the hon. Member for Leeds, East—the family with three brothers, all of whom died, two from HIV and one from hepatitis C. Those who died from HIV had been compensated, but the third had not. How can we say to the mother of those three sons that two were worthy of receiving Government money but the third was not? That does not stand up on the ground of logic, nor on the ground of compassion and human kindness.

When we debated the subject before, the then Minister talked in global sums and mentioned a figure of £6 billion, representing the cost of a total no-fault compensation scheme. That is not what we are asking for. We ask simply that a relatively discrete small group of people should receive some assistance as a mark of the financial hardship and of the physical and emotional pain that they are suffering.

Of course someone in the Treasury, or even someone in the Department of Health will say that that would create a precedent. However, the argument about precedent is the argument of administrative convenience; it is not the argument of compassion or of Christmas—you and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have just come from the Christmas carol service. The precedent was created when the Macfarlane trust was set up and the Government rightly decided to make ex gratia payments to haemophiliacs infected with HIV, and then to non-haemophiliacs infected with that virus. The Prime Minister took a major part in both those decisions, so I hope that the report of our debate will be sent to him so that he can act upon it.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on his success in the ballot and on securing the debate. He put his points in his typically warm-hearted and down-to-earth way. I am delighted to see that he is well supported today, not only by Opposition Members but by Conservative Members, too.

I know that many hon. Members are concerned about the situation of haemophiliacs who have also had the misfortune to contract hepatitis C, which adds to the difficulties that they already have to face. The problem has been raised several times in the House. Last week, I answered a question on the subject from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), to which the hon. Member for Leeds, East added a supplementary question. My hon. Friend also initiated an Adjournment debate at the end of the previous Session. I am also aware of early-day motion 3, which has a large number of signatures.

Let me say that I have great sympathy—and will always have great sympathy—for patients who have become infected with hepatitis C through blood transfusions or blood products. The Haemophilia Society originally launched its campaign for help for people in this situation in the spring. The hon. Member for Leeds, East will be aware that the Haemophilia Society has recently issued an interim report—I stress that it is an interim report—on its hepatitis C impact study.

I have just come to the Department of Health, and there is a great deal to read. I would like to read the Haemophilia Society's report thoroughly, but I have not yet had the opportunity to do so. I shall make that a very high priority, but I want to read the report and not merely a brief. I am aware that the report graphically describes the problems experienced by some sufferers who find that they now have to contend with the effects of hepatitis C

[Mr. John Horam]

infection on top of the effects of haemophilia. The hon. Member for Leeds, East graphically and eloquently explained those severe problems in his speech.

The great benefits to patients of medical procedures rarely come without some risk, and I would like to put the matter into that context. It is important to remember that it is not always possible at the time treatment is given to fully appreciate the risk or to avoid suspected or known risks. In the case of each individual patient, a balance must be struck between the benefit to be gained versus any possible risk. The patients we are now discussing received the best treatment available in the light of medical knowledge at the time. I do not think that either the hon. Gentleman or my hon. Friend will dispute that.

The factor 8 concentrate—the cause of the infection—has brought great benefits to patients with haemophilia. Previously, only about 5 per cent. of patients with severe haemophilia reached the age of 40, whereas by 1980—as a result of factor 8 concentrate and drugs—the life expectancy was very close to that of normal males. There was also less need for the periods of hospitalisation, and boys had a better chance of achieving a reasonable education. Additionally, the convenience of patients being able to keep concentrate in a domestic fridge and treat themselves at the first sign of a bleed meant a considerable reduction in long-term disability. All those benefits have come about as a result of the blood products which, simultaneously, have been the cause of the infection.

Most haemophilia patients infected with hepatitis C were so infected before the blood products were treated to destroy viruses in 1985, and well before tests for hepatitis C became available. Before then, the only way to safeguard blood was to limit those from whom blood was taken by a system of self-deferral. This excluded, amongst others, those known to be suffering from hepatitis, or any other liver disease, and drug misusers.

The basic facts are quite straightforward and are not in dispute. The figure of just over 3,000 for those infected, which was quoted in the recent Haemophilia Society report and again today by the hon. Gentleman, is substantially in line with the Department's own estimates. A figure of a total of 50 deaths from hepatitis C in patients with haemophilia has been suggested, and has been cited in the early-day motion to which I have referred.

While every death is a tragedy for the individual concerned and their family and friends, it is important to keep a sense of proportion. I understand from the United Kingdom Haemophilia Directors that, of 126 haemophilia patients known to have died in 1993, 12 showed the cause of death as liver disease, of which hepatitis C may have been the cause. That is less than 10 per cent. That figure of 12 for 1993 contributes to the figure of 50 which we are talking about as the number who have died so far in this way. Eight of those 12 were also HIV-positive.

I do not minimise the impact of such tragic losses on individual families, but it is vital that we do not lose sight of the fact that, fortunately, many of those infected will be able to continue to lead a reasonable life. We owe it to those individuals infected to ensure that the public perception of this illness is not distorted. If people are given the impression that there is little to choose between hepatitis C and HIV, we risk the very stigmatism which was such a sad aspect of the early days of HIV awareness.

It has been argued that the fact that ex gratia payments were made to those who contracted HIV through blood or blood products means that payments should also be made in the present case. As both the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend will be aware, the Government have not accepted that proposal so far. We believe that different prognoses have been made for those with hepatitis C and those with HIV.

Many people infected with hepatitis C may live for a long period without any symptoms appearing, and my hon. Friend has conceded that. Fifty per cent. of sufferers may progress to chronic hepatitis with varying degrees of good or ill health. Perhaps 20 per cent. of infected patients will develop cirrhosis—a progressive destruction of the liver—that may take 20 to 30 years to be fully apparent. The majority of those years will be trouble-free in terms of ill health and, as I have mentioned, only a small proportion will die of liver disease.

The Haemophilia Society's report of its hepatitis C impact study makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the effect of hepatitis C in this situation.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if a relatively small proportion of sufferers will develop cirrhosis of the liver and die prematurely, the cost of helping them will be correspondingly small?

Mr. Horam: Yes. That is a valuable point, which my hon. Friend makes for the first time. The Haemophilia Society—understandably, as it has not completed its study—has not made full and costed proposals. We have never received such a suggestion to study, and I would be interested to hear details of the relatively modest and restricted proposal which my hon. Friend has made during the debate. We understand that the final report of Haemophilia Society will be published in 1996.

Infection with the virus will not necessarily lead to hepatitis, but if it should, it can be treated with the drug alpha interferon. Alpha interferon is not a universal panacea for hepatitis patients. It can have unpleasant side effects, and it is still not clear whether a permanent cure is possible. However, it has been shown to have real benefits for a proportion of sufferers. We have said all along that those people who could benefit from it should be able to receive alpha interferon.

My hon. Friend alleged that patients whose consultants wished to prescribe alpha interferon had been refused treatment due to a lack of resources. My predecessor said during the Adjournment debate on 11 July that he would investigate the issue of medication supplies. Officials are continuing to make inquiries and have done so since that date. We are very serious about this. If my hon. Friend or any other hon. Member has any examples of cases in which alpha interferon has not been made available because of the cost, I will be delighted to hear from them. I shall certainly ask my officials to follow that up, as it would be very serious if that were happening. So far, there is little evidence of significant difficulties, and we have not been able to track down any particular examples. Hon. Members must let the Government know if any such examples come to their attention.

My Department is supporting an initiative by the Haemophilia Society to undertake a study of the best way to support its members who are infected with hepatitis C, and has made available substantial funds in 1995-1996 with a commitment to further funding in 1996-1997 and

1997-1998 for this purpose. My Department is also looking at what appropriate research may be undertaken to increase knowledge of hepatitis C, its natural history and its optimal treatment.

One example of that is that the standing group on health technology has identified the evaluation of the use of alpha interferon in the treatment of hepatitis C as a top priority in the NHS. Such developments are important to increase the evidence base upon which decisions can be made on the best treatment for each individual patient.

It is the Government's view that the most effective use of resources is to seek to improve the understanding, management and treatment of the condition. This is the best way to minimise the impact of the disease—which the hon. Gentleman described so graphically—on individual patients and their families. The Haemophilia Society's recent report gives examples of that.

All that I have heard in today's debate suggests that I should read the Haemophilia Society's report extremely closely, and I promise the House that I shall look at the matter afresh in the light of what is said in the report. We have also heard from my hon. Friend a sensible suggestion for a more modest and restricted compensation scheme than has been hitherto mentioned. For those reasons, I shall leave the matter at this stage, although I give my full sympathy to those who have the disease.

Army Technical Services Agency

1.30 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of the Government's intended decision, announced yesterday, to move the Army Technical Services Agency from Malvern to a collocated site at Chertsey. I am relieved that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, rather than the management of ATSA, has the final word on the matter. That was not immediately apparent from a letter that I received dated 5 December from the parliamentary branch of the Ministry of Defence, which said:

> "The Defence Secretary has asked me to thank you for your letter of 29 November about the collocation of ATSA. The matters raised are, however, the responsibility of the Chief Executive, Army Technical Support Agency and I have therefore transferred the correspondence to that Department and asked them to reply to you direct."

I should be grateful to have the Minister's assurance that the decision is ultimately for him and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take and not one for the management of an agency.

I am not clear about the precise status of the decision to move the agency. In his letter to me which I received today, my hon. Friend the Minister says two things about the decision. First, he says:

> "I have decided that, subject to the outcome of a period of consultation, the ATSA should collocate at Chertsey."

In a subsequent paragraph, he says:

> "I can assure you that I will take full account of all representations before making a final decision."

I hope that the position is that expressed in the second quotation and not that implied in the first, and that my hon. Friend is in a position to change his mind on the matter if he is persuaded to do so.

The Minister's decision seems to spring from advice which is a reversal of advice that his predecessor received just over two years ago. I have here a document which, inevitably, as it is from the Ministry of Defence, is identified by numbers. It is the MAN S(ORG) study No. 761 dated May 1993. It is clear as to the advice that the Minister of the day had received. Paragraph 5.30c on page 73 says:

> "Malvern is the cheapest option,"—

that is, comparing Chertsey and Hullavington—

> "with a range of buildings which would seem suited to the type of organization we are proposing. It is Army owned and could be adopted with the least difficulty of the three sites to the requirements of the TSA, although Married Quarters and a Mess will be required. Of the three sites, it offers the best prospect of retaining quality non-mobile staff and it has a nucleus of electronics trained personnel (who may be particularly difficult to replace elsewhere). Also it would offer some possibilities for long distance career development. Finally, although it is some distance from Andover, it is within easy reach of Bristol and Donnington, (the recommended site for the PPD)"—

which has now transferred to Bristol—

> "and has good road transport links.
>
> Given the savings that would result, the apparently favourable condition and structure of the accommodation, reasonable employment prospects and geographical location, we recommend that the TSA should be located at Malvern".

The point is that the advice is all based on criteria which are clearly laid out, and rather more clearly so than the advice report, to which I shall refer in a moment. The

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

criteria are laid out in terms of costs, suitability of site, availability, any political considerations, environmental impact, recruitment potential and accessibility to senior management, customers and others.

Under the cost heading, the report clearly says that the investment appraisals

> "show that locating the TSA at Malvern would result in the greatest savings (some £18M over the LTC period)".

In relation to Malvern, the report says:

> "The effect of the increase in staffing levels would have less impact than at Chertsey as the site is large, considerable refurbishment has taken place already"—

that is an important point—

> "and more existing buildings are available for use."

There are important issues on the question of recruitment. The report says:

> "Chertsey is not a promising recruitment area given that it is in the London travel to work area, housing is expensive, unemployment is low and there is competition from the many private companies in the area who generally pay more than MOD."

The obvious question is, what has changed in the past two years completely to reverse the present advice on the decision from the advice that the Minister of the day received just a few years ago? That question is particularly relevant when one considers the nature of the new advice which has been given to the Minister.

I have a document with the reference QMG/205, dated 15 November 1995, which is headed "Loose Minute"—I am not sure what that means.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): It is an MOD speciality.

Mr. Spicer: I have not had time to check, but I think that QMG/205 is the same document as the one which the Minister issued last night as the basis for the advice that he gave. Some strange things are mentioned in the advice, to which I believe the Minister should respond.

In relation to cost, for example, which is clearly an important issue, the general tone and content of the paper—I am not trying to cast aspersions—is much less substantive and analytical and much more bland and assertive than the paper to which I have previously referred. This paper simply states that the cost of refurbishing Malvern, which it accepts is an option, would be £317 million or £319 million if everything were to be rebuilt. The paper goes on to say that the cost of totally rebuilding a site at Chertsey would be £312 million, which is some £5 million less than refurbishing at Malvern.

At this stage, one can only work on a gut feeling. The argument that the cost of refurbishing Malvern, which is in an area where costs are generally much lower than in the south-east, is £5 million more than the cost of completely rebuilding Chertsey needs further justification.

There are further matters in the report, and I shall write to the Minister about them, because there is not enough time on this occasion to get through them all. I have 16 fairly substantive questions that I want to put to him about the report. I will put two to him now. The first is on the rather crucial issue of where ATSA's client base will be should it move, or even if it does not move. The report which is the basis for the Minister's decision says that the agency has

> "its Owner and main customers at Andover".

It goes on to imply that, because Andover is much closer to Chertsey, having those customers nearby would be another reason for collocating at Chertsey.

The work done at Andover is in fact related to the quartermaster general's operations. But half of ATSA's work—this was anticipated in the earlier report—is now undertaken for the MOD procurement executive at Bristol, which is considerably closer to Malvern than is Chertsey. That, too, should be given rather more consideration than it is given in the report.

According to the report, there is scope for hard roads for tank movements at Chertsey. The report does not mention it, but Malvern too has a hard road that is used for tanks: that too could be analysed. This report—which is slim in comparison with the earlier one—contains discrepancies, and refers to matters that need more careful examination.

Although I agree that the final decision should be made in the best interests of national defence—in other words, in the most cost-effective way—the fact remains that the original advice was accurate. Malvern has the experience, the buildings and the relative cost structures that are likely to make it more cost-effective for purposes of collocation than Chertsey, which has been sucked into the cost structures of London and the south-east.

I ask the Minister not to rely exclusively on the second report and on the advice of the internal accountants who prepared it, and who might be thought to be fitting the figures to suit the decisions required of them by senior management in ATSA and elsewhere. I ask him to secure the independent advice of an independent accountant or auditor and have the figures checked—especially those relating to the investment appraisal—before making his decision. At present, the figures do not seem to add up.

Representatives of the civilian staff at Malvern have assured me that they will accept the findings of an independent auditor. If the move to Chertsey took place, it would mean considerable disruption to members of the defence staff, some of whom are long-serving and valued for their expertise and experience. In the interests of good man management, the Government owe it to those staff members at least to ensure that the decision is made on the basis of accurate, transparent figures.

I intend to put a further 16 questions to the Minister in writing, as time does not permit me to ask them now. Meanwhile, let me simply ask him to recognise—as I am sure he does—his responsibility to ensure that the period of consultation is genuine. Although his mind appears to be firmly made up—no doubt that is how the position will be presented to the public—I ask him to be open to persuasion, and to re-analyse the arguments that have been put to him. In particular, I ask him to consider arranging an independent examination of the figures with which he has been presented.

1.42 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Mr. Spicer) on securing an Adjournment debate at such a timely stage, while we are making up our minds on this important matter. I am sorry if the phrasing of the letter that was sent to him gave him the impression that we had already made up our minds; the point of writing to him was to tell him of the conclusion that we had reached following our many studies of this thorny problem in an attempt to resolve it.

It was important for us to give some idea of the way in which the collective mind of the Ministry of Defence was moving, so that we could consult my hon. Friend and his constituents and they would be able to have their say. I give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that the decision is one for Ministers to take: no one but Ministers should be held responsible for it, as he well knows.

My hon. Friend will now have received a copy of the document outlining our proposals, which, as he knows, are subject to consultation from now until 12 February. I note that he will be submitting a further 16 questions to me, and I shall be happy to provide him with a detailed written response. If he subsequently wishes to discuss the matter with me and, perhaps, bring a delegation of his constituents, I shall be pleased to receive him. I am under no illusion about the importance of this matter to my hon. Friend and his constituents.

Let me make it clear not only to my hon. Friend but to all his constituents who are understandably anxious about what is in the consultation paper that we take our obligations to consult extremely seriously. We have noted so many of those obligations in the defence costs studies that we fully appreciate the sensitivities that may arise, and the need for consultation to be real rather than merely cosmetic. As I have said, I shall be happy to receive representations, which will be given careful and detailed consideration before we reach a conclusion.

My hon. Friend has made a good start this morning. He has been pretty hot on the trail, given that the consultation document was issued only yesterday. He has made a number of relevant and important points about the Malvern site. We are well aware of the local impact that our proposals could have, and we shall consider those points very carefully.

As my hon. Friend knows, ATSA is a mixed military and civil service-manned defence agency which provides the Army with essential technical and engineering advice. The current organisation was formed from the amalgamation of the Army's six technical branches and authorities, and the majority of its staff are currently dispersed on seven main sites—Chertsey, Malvern, Middle Wallop, Chilwell, two sites at Woolwich and a small headquarters at Andover.

ATSA was formed in October this year as a result of a study conducted in 1993, which recognised that it would make good business sense to bring the various activities carried out at those disparate sites under one roof. The work done since then has borne out that view, and that is why we now propose collocation. We believe that it will result in a leaner and more efficient organisation, better suited to serving the front line. I was grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that the decision must be in the best interests of our management of defence; I know that, having been a Minister himself, he will accept that that is genuinely the case.

The chief executive is confident that collocation will enable him to make the best possible use of modern logistic support and management techniques, and to promote the efficient delivery of technical support. An equally important consideration is the value for money that should and will be achieved if we go ahead with rationalisation and standardisation. Overall, we believe that the case for collocation is both compelling and necessary to the achievement of optimum effectiveness and value for money.

In August 1993, the trade unions were informed of the outcome of the original study—which my hon. Friend mentioned—including the recommendation that the agency should be collocated on one main site. They were advised that no firm decisions would be made until investment appraisals had been completed and the fullest consultation undertaken. Since then, the staff have been kept fully informed through management briefings and quarterly newsletters. I emphasise, however, that I understand the anxiety that is felt by my hon. Friend's constituents during the decision-making process: I have every sympathy with them.

The chief executive has conducted a range of studies over the past 18 months, both to re-examine the original study findings—which my hon. Friend rightly mentioned—and to establish the best solution for ATSA in terms of value for money and business sense. In common with other Departments, the Ministry of Defence is extremely sensitive to the need to consider the effect that its proposals for the relocation of units may have on local economies. I know that people are anxious about that proposal, as I have seen their anxiety expressed in the Malvern press.

As a result, we have considered some 17 options, 11 of which have been subjected to an extremely full and detailed appraisal. Those options range from doing the minimum, through twin-site options, to a variety of single-site options. All 17 options have been discussed in the document that now forms the basis for consultation but the most logical, and those that I shall deal with in detail now, minimise disruption both for staff currently employed by the agency and for the business that it conducts.

The "do-the-minimum" option, which would keep things more or less as they are and therefore cause least disruption, is the most manpower-intensive of all the options. It is also unattractive, because it fails to realise the anticipated benefits of establishing the ATSA, even with improved communications and a rationalised management structure. My hon. Friend will understand that that option is therefore a non-starter.

Another factor against maintaining the status quo is that the ATSA units at Woolwich occupy buildings that are nearing the end of their economic life and must soon be vacated. The only possible alternative accommodation available to the ATSA in south London would be a new build on the Aquila site at Bromley, currently occupied by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. Largely for that reason, the "do-the-minimum" option is one of the most expensive of those considered.

For many, including my hon. Friend, an obvious choice might be to concentrate ATSA on both Chertsey and the north site at Malvern, the current locations for much of ATSA's activity on land systems. On close examination, however, that proved to be the most expensive option. Financial considerations apart, the two-site option also fails to offer the business advantages of an agency collocated on a single site. Although I recognise that continuation at both Chertsey and Malvern offers least disruption for staff, it would unfortunately perpetuate

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

many of the inefficiencies of the current arrangements and offer no financial advantage. For this reason, we rejected the option.

The other option, which obviously finds favour with my hon. Friend, is to locate the entire operation at Malvern. As the consultative document explains, collocation at Malvern would involve either the refurbishment and use of the existing buildings or the construction of a new building. Both those options are more expensive than collocating at Chertsey. Malvern has one advantage as a single-site option: it would be better placed than Chertsey, in travelling terms at least, for communications with the centre of the new MOD procurement executive at Abbey Wood near Bristol. Balanced against that, however, is the fact that Malvern is far less convenient for meetings with ATSA's owner and main customers at the headquarters of the quartermaster general at Andover.

A collocated ATSA establishment would also introduce many additional military staff into Malvern, which would necessitate a major new build of married quarters and single living accommodation. The cost of that work, along with the need to refurbish or build new office accommodation, means that Malvern is a more expensive option than Chertsey.

Compared with the Malvern option, collocating at Chertsey would involve less building work. Some new office accommodation will be required, but the married quarters and messes for military staff can be met from existing resources. All that adds to the cost-effectiveness of the Chertsey option. In terms of net present value over 25 years, the Chertsey solution is also £5 million cheaper than the cheapest Malvern option.

From a business point of view, Chertsey is also the preferred option, as the agency's owner and major customers, the equipment support management staffs, are at Andover.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Minister is simply reading out, almost word for word, the advice contained in the document that we have all seen. As I requested at the beginning of this debate, will he reconsider that advice in the light of what I have said?

Mr. Soames: I shall indeed, but it is important that I put our view on the record. The point of the consultation process is to take account of all the views that my hon. Friend expressed today, which his constituents will wish to express in the coming weeks and the more detailed questions that he will submit to me.

Of all sites considered for the ATSA, Chertsey is the closest to Andover in travelling time, which can represent a significant saving in staff travel costs for meetings at either location. Also, as it is geared to large armoured fighting vehicle support, Chertsey has the most extensive support facilities of all the current ATSA sites. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's comments about the road at Malvern.

The facilities at Chertsey are shared with the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, and it would be extremely expensive to re-create them elsewhere. The appraisal of other sites has included the assumption that a detachment at Chertsey would have to be maintained to use those facilities. Chertsey also has ready access to test areas for large vehicles on MOD-owned property, a feature absent from other site options.

My hon. Friend quite rightly wants me to understand and take account of the effect that our proposals will have on the local economies of areas from which ATSA will withdraw and the disruption that it could cause to the families involved. He knows that I fully understand that. Nevertheless, it is a sad fact that reorganising in this way to allow the introduction of new working practices will often result in some job losses. On this occasion, if our proposals go though, we expect them to yield some 300 posts, both civilian and military, by the time and if collocation is fully achieved.

We expect our proposals to affect around 230 posts, both service and civilian, at Malvern. The majority of those losses are likely to fall on non-mobile staff and, although it is anticipated that many will be met by natural wastage, it would be wrong of me to rule out the prospect of some redundancies. If we go ahead, we shall attempt to minimise the number of redundancies as much as possible and shall examine the scope for civilianising some military posts, which may help us in this area.

As the consultative document explains, if we proceed with the proposals, up to 50 staff may ultimately have to be made redundant at Malvern. I stress, however, that, wherever possible, it is intended to transfer civilian staff, provided that job vacancies exist in the reorganised agency. We shall also seek to find staff posts elsewhere within the Department or the civil service generally. As well as reducing possible recruitment difficulties at the new site, transferring staff should reduce the number of redundancies and retain as many existing experienced staff as possible.

My hon. Friend will understand that I do not underestimate the upheaval that can be involved for staff who may need to move house. But if we proceed with our proposals, we shall offer our relocation package to mobile staff who transfer. That includes significant financial assistance to cover many of the costs associated with moving. I note my hon. Friend's comments about the costs associated with moving into an area like Chertsey.

We shall do all we can to ensure that any reductions are handled sensitively and compassionately, recognising the significant contribution that the staff have made to the extremely efficient functioning of the agency and its predecessors over many years.

I do not wish to underplay in any way the job losses that may flow from our proposals. Malvern will remain a major centre of employment for my Department, with the DERA continuing to employ more than 1,700 civilians there. In addition, more than 4,500 service and civilian staff will continue to be employed at establishments in the surrounding area. Where possible, opportunities would be sought to offer staff other posts in the MOD or elsewhere in the civil service.

All staff, both service and civilian, employed by the various branches that make up the ATSA—including those at Malvern—have provided first-class support to the armed forces. One does not get the chance often enough to praise those people who undertake important work, which, although well away from the spotlight, is vital in ensuring the fighting effectiveness of the front line. Troops now deploying to Bosnia will have equipment that the ATSA has dealt with. The staff at Malvern are no exception to that, and I am well aware of the need to ensure that all the arguments that my hon. Friend put forward, and the 16 questions that he will submit to me—he may choose to bring a delegation to see me—are carefully weighed before I come to a final decision on the ATSA's future site.

The facts described in the consultative document strongly support ATSA's collocation on a single site. As Minister of State for the Armed Forces, I must ensure that the Ministry of Defence adopts the most effective solution in operational, business and cost terms. Nevertheless, I assure my hon. Friend that the consultation period will be just that—a period for thorough, sensible and real consultation. That is the least we owe those people who have served their country so well.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend and congratulate him again on raising this important matter at such a timely moment. He may be assured that we shall deal with it in a thorough and comprehensive way.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to report to the House the death of Sir David Lincoln Lightbown, Member for South-East Staffordshire. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will join me in mourning the loss of a colleague and in extending our sympathy to the hon. Member's family and friends.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (PROPERTY AND ENDOWMENTS) AMENDMENT ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Mathematics

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the standard of achievement of young people aged 16 to 25 years in mathematics. [3868]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): Mathematical skills are clearly a key to employability and international competitiveness. Achievements at A-level continue to show year-on-year improvement and are at their highest level ever.

Mr. Williams: When the number of specialist mathematics teachers in schools is down by 25 per cent. compared to 1984, when the number of graduate applications for teacher training courses in maths is down by 22 per cent. and in physics by 41 per cent., and when nearly all our universities now have four-year degree courses in maths, with the first year being effectively a remedial year to bring people up to standard, why does not the Department for Education and Employment realise that there are serious problems in the standards of mathematics of young people, and that that has serious knock-on effects in physics, in engineering and in other science courses?

Mr. Paice: The Government of course recognise the vital importance of mathematics. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday responded to the London Mathematical Society's worries about that matter in a way that demonstrated that, yes, progress continues to be made. The number of young people with A-level passes, as I said, increases every year as a proportion of the age group, but aspects remain that we need to examine further.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's direct question, among other things that are happening, the Teacher Training Agency has the power and the ability to use special measures to encourage teacher training in those areas where there are shortages of teachers, which it can use—I hope that it will—directly to help to remedy the shortage of mathematics teachers that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in order to improve young people's standard of mathematics, it is crucial that primary schools concentrate on the basics of education and get them right? Would that not be helped if all primary schools returned to formal methods of teaching, instead of using some of the trendy methods that have proved so disastrous?

Mr. Paice: The slimmed-down version of the national curriculum, which has recently come on stream, focuses much more on basic mathematics among the core skills. In the letter of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the London Mathematical Society, she has said that the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is to introduce a calculator-free test for 11-year-olds in 1996 and to consider the possibility of introducing a mental arithmetic test for 11-year-olds the following year. As my hon. Friend said, that clearly emphasises the vital role of the primary sector in ensuring that all young people receive a good grounding in mathematical skills.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Do not the Minister's comments conflict with the views of the London Mathematical Society? It believes that mathematical standards have fallen in recent years and it has noticed a marked deterioration in those standards among young people who seek to study physical sciences at university. What do the Government plan to do about that, or are they so complacent that they believe that no action is necessary?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Lady obviously did not listen to my earlier answer.

Mrs. Campbell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Paice: The hon. Lady shakes her head—she should listen rather than gesticulate. I have referred to the letter that my right hon. Friend sent to the London Mathematical Society, which responds at length to all of its concerns. That letter is on the public record and it was included with a press release that was issued at the time. We have clearly responded to the society's concerns.

We do not accept that there is evidence of a full, widespread decline in mathematical standards. We all want standards to rise, and that has been happening. However, as I have stressed several times in the last few minutes, we are keen to take other measures to improve even further the standards of mathematics teaching in our schools at all levels.

Mr. Brazier: I am a graduate mathematician with two children who attend an excellent state primary school. Does my hon. Friend agree that mathematics is a very good example of a subject where early, well-organised testing is extremely important? Does he also agree that, if we are to achieve the highest possible standards in mathematics, the Conservative party's commitment to testing children thoroughly and early, in an objective manner, is extremely important?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. In the past few years, we have witnessed the apparent voltes face of the Labour party over testing. It opposed the concept of testing, which is how we shall find out whether young people are progressing and learning the mathematical skills to which my hon. Friend referred. We are now told that the Labour party supports testing—although Labour Members opposed the measures root and branch when we introduced them through legislation in the House. That is the style of the Opposition: they oppose measures only to support them when they realise that they are working. That is the reality with which we must live.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

2. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the total administrative cost of the nursery voucher scheme. [3869]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): The cost of administering the nursery voucher scheme from April 1997 will be determined by a competitive tender.

Ms Hodge: Will the Minister confirm that, in the four pilot authorities, the Government intend to give the management consultancy Capita the job of registering playgroups and nurseries? Capita, by its own admission, has no educational professional expertise. In similar circumstances, would the Minister dream of using Capita to recruit generals or admirals to the defence forces of Britain? Is not such a policy a complete betrayal of our children's future? Is it not a move driven by right-wing dogma and a scandalous waste of an opportunity to provide quality nursery education?

Mr. Squire: Virtually everything that the hon. Lady said is wrong. Where she looked at her crystal ball, it was cracked—presumably she brought it with her from Islington.

As to the inspection regime, she will have to wait a little longer and then she will receive the full facts. It is pointless to speculate about the matter at the moment. The hon. Lady is charged by the Labour party with responsibility for under-fives issues, and we are waiting agog for a statement from her or from her party as to precisely how it plans to introduce its commitment to universal nursery education. When and if that commitment appears, I shall take the hon. Lady's criticisms seriously. In the meantime, we are clear that the scheme will be driven overwhelmingly by parental choice.

Mr. Viggers: Is my hon. Friend aware that I represent a constituency which already has excellent educational provision for four-year-olds? While I strongly support the nursery voucher scheme, which will provide extra resources and spread nursery education, will my hon. Friend confirm that he will give priority to ensuring that the existing educational establishment for four-year-olds—where one exists—will not be destabilised or prejudiced?

Mr. Squire: I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the concept of the nursery voucher scheme and willingly give him that assurance. I remind him that we are talking about an expansion of provision for four-year-olds, and common sense dictates that good existing provision that is more likely to expand. I see no reason why it should contract.

Mr. Steinberg: Will the Minister explain, as I genuinely do not understand, how nursery vouchers can provide extra places in the state sector if there are no places to begin with? Will he explain what he said to the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers)? In areas with good nursery provision, will not the vouchers be top-sliced from the grant and therefore decrease rather than increase the number of places available?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman, perhaps understandably, is thinking of everything being determined by providers. With regard to his second point, I remind him again that, if an authority is currently providing X number of places for four-year-olds, provided that it continues to provide that number in the first year of the universal scheme, it will lose no money. If it provides one extra place, it will gain. As to his first question, we are looking for a range of providers—certainly including LEAs and existing nursery and infant schools—to expand their provision. I should tell the hon. Gentleman—purely as a factual statement—that I have received several letters from schools in LEAs that were not part of phase 1, bemoaning the fact that they cannot expand their nursery provision next year.

Grant-maintained Schools

3. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils are currently being educated in grant-maintained schools. [3870]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): More than 680,000 pupils are currently being educated in grant-maintained schools in England.

Mr. Legg: I welcome the fact that 680,000 pupils are now educated in grant-maintained schools. Does my right hon. Friend agree that grant-maintained status is the best route for education, as it leads to higher academic standards and lower truancy than in neighbouring schools directly controlled by local education authorities?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes. I agree with my hon. Friend that the results in grant-maintained schools in terms of academic results, truancy, behaviour and so on compare very well with comparable schools in the maintained sector.

Mr. Spearing: Is it not a fact that the Government are claiming that education can be as well based in grant-maintained schools as in those that are locally administered? Does that not mean that the accusation could be made that the Government's long-term policy is the elimination of local education authorities as we know them today? Will she confirm that that suspicion is well based in respect of the legislation that she has put in place?

Mrs. Shephard: There are very real benefits for pupils in grant-maintained schools, as I have just said. Those benefits are clearly perceived by 1.3 million parents whose children attend grant-maintained schools. According to a survey in *The Times Educational Supplement* last year, it is the view of heads and governors of grant-maintained schools that the independence of those schools from LEAs and the flexibility to handle their entire budgets contribute directly to the success of the schools. Therefore, it would be irresponsible not to examine whether those benefits might be extended to all pupils.

Deregulation

4. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to reduce the number of regulations in force supporting (a) education and (b) employment matters; and what savings she estimates will be made in each. [3871]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): We shall continue with the policies which have already made the United Kingdom one of the least regulated countries in Europe.

Mr. Steen: While the Deputy Prime Minister waxes lyrical about the importance of deregulation and the Prime Minister tells the leaders of Europe that they should follow our example, is my right hon. Friend aware that her Department has not referred any regulations or rules to the Select Committee on Deregulation? The only education rule that has been referred for deregulation is one about the length of the school day. As I am a great fan of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, before the Prime Minister finds out, would she make some plans—if not for 1995, for 1996—to have a bumper deregulation year?

Mr. Forth: Can I share a trade secret with my hon. Friend? One of the great difficulties faced by those of us who are extremely anxious to deregulate is that, every time we invite those who rightly complain about bureaucracy and regulation to give us specific examples so that we can tackle them as vigorously as possible, we get a disappointing response. When I had responsibilities for schools, I used to invite head teachers in particular, but chairmen of governors as well, to give me specific cases on which we could work. I regret to say that I am still waiting. If my hon. Friend can help to encourage small businesses, schools and others to give us specific examples, we shall do our best to deal with them.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Minister confirm that, rather than strengthening the already inadequate child labour laws in Britain, he is proposing to deregulate them even further so that the 1.5 million to 2 million children working illegally in Britain will get even less protection than at present? Is it Government policy to exploit children?

Mr. Forth: Quite apart from the fact that hon. Lady is completely wrong in her assertion, we are anxious to give young people every proper, legitimate opportunity to enjoy the experience of an appropriate degree of work so that they can broaden and build on their educational experience. I would be rather disappointed if the hon. Lady were suggesting that young people should have no experience of work in properly controlled circumstances and with the proper degree of protection. That is our aim, and I hope that she shares it.

Mr. John Marshall: Would my hon. Friend like to compare the thirst of Conservative Members to get rid of regulation with the enthusiasm of other people in Europe and of the Opposition for introducing job-destroying regulations?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right to pose that distinction. Let us not underestimate the real difficulties that apply. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) said, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, no less, is spearheading the Government's effort in this direction, and he has, of course, our full support. It would help enormously if all Members of Parliament and their constituents were to give us as many concrete examples as they can of where regulation and bureaucracy is giving them difficulty so that we can look specifically at them and direct the attention of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and the Deregulation Committee to them.

Grant-maintained Schools

5. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received concerning her proposals to fast-track grant-maintained status for voluntary aided schools. [3872]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received almost 2,000 responses to the Department's consultation paper on self-government for voluntary aided schools.

Mr. Ainsworth: Is it not a fact that self-governing schools have not only the ability but the obligation to consider opting out each year, and that what is now being disguised as a fast track by the Government is a deliberate attempt to deny parents the opportunity to choose? That is right-wing dogma dressed up as a fast track.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman could not possibly be more wrong. Grant-maintained status remains voluntary, and we are not at present proposing to change that, but we are committed to extending the benefits of self-government to more schools. We are looking at ways of bringing that about.

Mr. Pawsey: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to confirm that the Government have no intention of dragooning Church schools into a fast-track approach to grant-maintained status, and further confirm that there has simply been issued a consultation document that poses a number of alternatives? Finally, does she agree that it would be a good idea for the Churches to consult widely among parents so that their representations truly reflect what is best for the children at those schools?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right. We have received more than 1,900 responses to the consultation process and we are considering all the replies carefully. We shall make an announcement on that after the analysis has been completed.

Mr. Kilfoyle: In a written reply on 4 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Under-Secretary of State for Schools listed 23 separate issues that had gone out to consultation, only three of which had met the Department for Education and Employment's efficiency guidelines of a minimum of 10-week consultation. On that matter, the Government allowed four weeks, extended under pressure to five. In so doing, they have managed to unite the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the National Governors Council. Is that lack of consultation down to the Secretary of State's arrogance, or to obsequiousness to the Prime Minister's educational pipe dreams?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman is barking up the wrong tree. This is a consultation process and we have received many responses. Responses to the paper were requested by 24 November. To show that my right hon. Friend is a listening Secretary of State, she listened to the request to extend the consultation period, and did so by one week to 1 December. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should listen to the reply—he asked the question. A substantially longer consultation period, would have effectively removed the option of legislation in the 1995-96 parliamentary Session, which would have been wrong. Our consultation processes are truly just that.

Teaching Quality

6. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to improve further the quality of teaching in schools. [3873]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We are improving teacher quality across the entire profession, from a new qualification for aspiring head teachers to securing, through the Teacher Training Agency and the Office of Standards in Education, high-quality initial teacher training.

Mr. Lidington: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a good and dedicated classroom teacher can probably have a more important, more beneficial, influence on a child's life chances than virtually any other single factor, whatever the child's social background or the region in which his or her school is located? Will she join me in praising the dedication of thousands of good teachers in maintained schools, but encourage the teaching profession to take seriously the call from Her Majesty's chief inspector for them to reflect carefully and critically on teaching methods and other professional skills, so that those skills develop in the interests of the children whom they seek to serve?

Mrs. Shephard: The importance of good teachers and good teaching is undeniable. That is why Conservative Members have made such a priority of training, of in-service training, and of grants for education support and training money to help raise teaching standards. There are thousands and thousands of dedicated teachers. Working with the Teacher Training Agency and with Ofsted, they are examining the importance of teaching the basic skills. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to my announcement after the Budget about the 12 literacy and numeracy centres that we are setting up across the country. Their attention will be directed towards helping primary teachers teach reading and numbers according to the best methods identified by Ofsted.

Mr. Chris Davies: Will the Secretary of State accept that widespread public concern exists about her plans to revise the school premises regulations, and that schools with rising pupil numbers may be forced to cram even more children into overcrowded classrooms? How will that improve the quality of children's education?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman entirely misunderstands the purpose of this deregulatory measure, which we were urged, I think in an earlier question, to adopt. There is no link between the work that is going on about minimum teaching areas and class size. I remind the hon. Gentleman that there is no simple link between numbers of teachers or the amount of funding and higher achievement in the classroom. I am afraid that those who do not believe that should look at the striking illustration of Hackney Downs school, which had one teacher for every eight pupils.

Mr. David Nicholson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to concentrate on the overdue task of improving teaching standards and methods. I particularly emphasise the teaching of reading in primary schools, where modern methods have done an enormous amount of damage. Does she agree that good pupil-teacher ratios do not necessarily mean high standards, as was found recently in Hackney Downs school? When she is listening to criticisms by Opposition parties, will she take account of the increase in classroom assistants, which I do not think are reflected in pupil-teacher ratios throughout the country?

Mrs. Shephard: Of course I will, and so will the teaching profession, head teachers and governors of schools. The important role of classroom assistants cannot be over-emphasised, and nor can the importance of proper training for all our teachers.

Mr. O'Hara: While it is welcome to have the Secretary of State and members of her party acknowledging that only good teachers can deliver quality education to pupils, may I ask what she intends to do about the crisis that is emerging in education of an exodus of teachers, largely due to their health being broken by the excessive pace of reforms being introduced by the Government, the lack of recruitment of teachers in general and of specialist teachers in such important subjects as English, maths and design technology? What are her policies for improving the supply of teachers?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. A great deal has been said about redundancy among teachers, but very little has been said about the overall number of teachers which increased by 2,500 between January last year and January this year. There is no shortage of teachers at present and vacancies are at an all-time low. Indicative targets were issued for five years to assist the Teacher Training Agency and training institutions to plan ahead, especially for shortage subjects. They recently announced their priority subject recruitment scheme and they have begun promotional activities to attract students to the profession.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend accept that, notwithstanding all the tributes that have rightly been paid to my constituent and friend Philip Lawrence, formerly headmaster of St. George's school, I could not let Education and Employment questions pass without paying tribute to his enormous professional courage and personal bravery in going to the defence of a member of his school? May I also say, as he would have said, that he did no more than any other member of the teaching profession would have done? It is a great profession. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree, and I am absolutely sure that the whole House would want to pay tribute to Mr. Philip Lawrence's selflessness and courage. The greatest possible monument that he could have is the school and the pupils that he has left behind. I am sure that my hon. Friend was right when he said that Mr. Lawrence would have been the first to say that the vast majority of teachers would have done just what he did without a second thought.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

7. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the effect of the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme on children with a disability. [3874]

Mr. Robin Squire: We attach great importance to provision for children with special educational needs.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Health are considering the responses to the consultation on provision for such children in the nursery education voucher scheme.

Mr. Heppell: Does the Minister agree with the organisations for and of disabled people, such as the Council for Disabled Children and the Royal National Institute for the Blind, that the proposed voucher scheme is incompatible with the idea of the promotion of increased choice for children?

Mr. Squire: In a word, no. Indeed, it would be hard to do so. I explained to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) that they will need to wait just a short time for the final detail. It is self-evidently true that universal provision for four-year-olds must logically increase the number of children with special needs coming into the education sphere. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree—the outside organisations that he mentioned would certainly agree—that earlier diagnosis of special needs is in the interests of the pupil, and is also much cheaper for the country.

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that increased choice and diversity in nursery provision, which the Government's proposals for vouchers will enhance, will be good for all children, including those with disabilities?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why Conservative Members welcome wholeheartedly the introduction of the voucher scheme.

Additional Resources

8. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are her Department's priorities for the use of the additional resources for education announced on 28 November. [3875]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have provided an extra £878 million for schools next year. I would expect that substantial sum to result in an improved quality of education in our schools.

Mr. Bayley: Last year, one of my children, who is at a local authority primary school, was in a class of 37. Is the Secretary of State aware that the National Association of Governors and Managers and the public sector accountancy association, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy—CIPFA—have revealed that more than one in three children in primary school are now taught in a class of more than 30?

Has the Secretary of State seen the estimate from the National Foundation for Educational Research that reducing class sizes to 30 or below for all five, six and seven-year-olds, as the Labour party proposes, would cost only £60 million a year? Does she believe that it would be better for more parents of more children in more schools to spend that £60 million on reducing class sizes for primary school children, rather spending a further £101 million on expanding the assisted places scheme?

Madam Speaker: We must have brisk questions. Answers have been very brisk today, and I must move down the Order Paper.

Mrs. Shephard: It is for local education authorities to identify their priorities and how they wish to spend the substantial increase—4.5 per cent. in all—that they will have next year, compared with this year. That is a substantial increase, and it will certainly enable authorities to place a priority on primary classes, if that is their decision.

I remind the hon. Gentleman, however, that his party's opposition to the assisted places scheme is the best possible example of its class-envious attitudes. We believe in choice and diversity for everyone: the Labour party believes in choice, but only for Front Benchers. Our calculation shows that the extra number of teachers that would result from the Labour party's putative use of the £60 million would be one teacher per 18 schools.

Mr. Atkins: Will my right hon. Friend join me, and all the Conservative Members who represent constituencies within Lancashire county council, in pressing its education committee to pass on the full 5.5 per cent. increase that she has been able to achieve in the Budget negotiations? Does she agree with my suggestion that Lancashire county council's education committee has absolutely no excuse for failing to provide the necessary resources for our children in the county's schools, given the Government's increase in the education budget of more than twice the rate of inflation?

Mrs. Shephard: Lancashire county council will benefit from an above-average increase in its education SSA next year. I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend and other Conservative Members who represent Lancashire constituencies will not allow the Lancashire LEA to get away with doing other than passing the increase on to children in its schools.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Secretary of State visit Withinfield junior and infant school in my constituency, where she will see for herself the appalling conditions in which 55 children share two urinals and six of the nine classes are taught in outside classrooms? When she sees that, will she help the local authority, which cannot possibly afford the money for a new school? That is the school's top priority, and it has the land for the new school. Will she give it some real resources so that those children are treated to a decent school before the old one falls down?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Lady asks about capital allocations, which will be announced shortly. The increase for next year is substantial, and her authority will be able to use it to good effect to deal with the problems that she has described.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that all parents would agree with the priorities that she has laid out today, and on previous occasions, to the effect that the money allocated, and particularly the extra money now available, must go to schools and should not be retained by the local education authority? Will she therefore condemn the plans contained in papers from Liberal-controlled Harrow council? Instead of giving the money to schools, it wants to increase the staffing of its central bureaucracy. Is that not a disgrace? Should it not be condemned? Not only that, but, with the cheek of the devil, the council wants to blame the Government for its decision.

Mrs. Shephard: I fear that that is typical of many councils under such control. I trust that my hon. Friend and his colleagues will make absolutely certain, as they have today, that such a ludicrous practice will be roundly condemned by parents in his constituency.

Mr. Blunkett: First, may I associate everyone on the Opposition Benches with the Secretary of State's comments on the tragic death of Philip Lawrence, and, if I may say so, the concerned and measured way in which she has responded to that tragedy?

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that the standard spending assessment is the assessment of the Government's understanding of what they believe local authorities should spend? It is not grant provided to an authority in order to provide services. Far from a 4.5 per cent. increase—or, in the county of the right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), a 5.5 per cent. increase—there has been a cut of £298 million in the revenue support grant. Next year, the amount of money available will be cut by at least £41 per pupil. It is only because Labour authorities spend way above the SSA estimate that an even bigger cut has not been announced in the amount of money and resources available to schools throughout the country.

Mrs. Shephard: That was a brave attempt by the hon. Gentleman. He and his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition did not star mathematically last week when they confused 30 per cent. of schools with 30 per cent. of lessons. What the hon. Gentleman is trying to do, and this is why it was a brave attempt, is to compare settlement with spending. He should compare Government settlement with Government settlement. What local authorities spend above their SSAs is up to them, but whatever they choose to spend, the Government resources available to them overall will increase by 4.5 per cent. There is no getting away from that, however much Opposition Members do not like it.

Assisted Places Scheme

9. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received about the assisted places scheme. [3876]

Mrs. Gillan: We have received many representations welcoming the expansion of the assisted places scheme, details of which were announced on 29 November by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Royal Ballet and Music school is offering 47 assisted places and is bidding for further assisted places? Is she further aware that that institution is currently putting on an excellent performance of "Peter and the Wolf"? Would not Prokofiev be appalled to think that the future Christmas performances of his great orchestral narrative would be jeopardised if the wolves in the Labour party were to abolish assisted places throughout the country?

Mrs. Gillan: Trust my hon. Friend to come up with such a seasonal question, but he is absolutely right. Music and ballet schools are covered by the assisted places scheme and would be eligible to bid for more places if they so wished. Pupils at those schools who perform at Christmas provide us with great pleasure and enjoyment. Let us hope that, like Scrooge, the Labour party has a conversion this Christmas.

Mr. Hanson: What does the hon. Lady think the expansion of the assisted places scheme tells us about the current state of the Conservative party? The Government have chosen to spend additional resources on a select number of children, rather on the majority of children in the United Kingdom who would benefit from those resources.

Mrs. Gillan: We value choice and we believe in value for money. I am not rehearsing the same arguments that I put from the Dispatch Box during our last Education and Employment questions about value for money and the Opposition's politics of envy.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to an article in the *Daily Mail* earlier this month. A Mr. Patel, who is alleged to be a Labour voter, wrote to the Leader of the Opposition urging him to think again. He said:

> "This scheme is popular with ordinary working people."

Mr. French: In considering the expansion of the assisted places scheme, will my hon. Friend pay particular attention to the position of cathedral choir schools, such as King's school, Gloucester, many of which have been outside the scheme for many years and would greatly benefit from being within it?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend for that suggestion. The scheme is proving very popular. By the end of last week, we had already received bids from more than 30 schools for almost 1,000 new places over the next two years. With a month to go, we expect to receive even more bids for this very successful scheme.

Overseas Students (Fees)

10. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on fees for overseas students. [3877]

Mr. Forth: We welcome the presence of the increasing number of overseas students in our universities and colleges. This shows that people abroad recognise that a British education is an excellent investment.

Mr. Lloyd: Does the Minister recognise the undoubted benefits, both commercial and cultural, that this country gains from those many people who, having been educated here, have risen to senior positions in their own societies? The Government's decision some years ago to increase fees was an act of vandalism. As we have a listening Secretary of State, is it possible that she might seriously consider whether that was a wise move for this country?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that for several years, since the early 1980s, the number of overseas students in all categories has increased year on year, every year, and continues to do so. That suggests that the premise underlying his question is wrong.

The implication of what the hon. Gentleman has said is that we should find money from somewhere to subsidise more overseas students coming to this country. I would find it rather difficult to justify that in current circumstances. If, at some stage, he or his colleagues would say where they would find the money to do what he suggests, I should be very interested.

Mr. Luff: Does my hon. Friend understand that, following the withdrawal of so many local education authorities—including the Hereford and Worcester LEA, which covers his and my constituencies—from making discretionary grants, so many institutions that teach dance and drama depend on the income from overseas students? I urge him again to consider the possibility of revising the scheme to ensure that our constituents in Hereford and Worcester, as well as those in the remainder of the country, can benefit from a proper training.

Mr. Forth: It is entirely a matter for LEAs to make a judgment about the value of the discretionary awards and their nature. If the tuition in the subjects to which my hon. Friend referred is excellent, no doubt it will attract overseas students in exactly the way as it will attract students from the home market.

Mr. Madden: What action will the Minister take to prevent overseas students from being adversely affected by the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which denies child benefit to those granted limited leave to remain in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Forth: None.

Expenditure (Schools)

11. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to ensure that additional spending on education reaches schools and pupils; and if she will make a statement. [3878]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have provided an extra £878 million for schools next year, and that is where I expect the funds to go. Authorities that choose to do otherwise will be called to account by parents and governors, and rightly so.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although parents in Lancashire are extremely pleased to know that that additional money is being provided, they are becoming increasingly frustrated by the fact that the local education authority, under Labour control, continues to waste money, as it did last year, when it made cuts in schools at the same time as providing advisers to advise teenage girls on lesbianism? Is that not the record of Labour in office, and is it not a disgrace?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend makes his own point. Lancashire is set to benefit from a 5.5 per cent. increase in its education SSA. It is therefore well placed to ensure that those extra resources go to the classrooms. I am quite certain that the pressure exerted on the LEA by my hon. Friend and his colleagues will ensure that that happens.

Mr. Pickthall: Will the Secretary of State tell the people of Lancashire precisely how much of that supposed rise will go to new spend in schools after taking into account inflation, the teachers' pay rise, the extra numbers coming on stream in schools and the extra spend that is required on special educational needs? How much will be left?

Mrs. Shephard: The extra money is there, as it always is, to fund the teachers' pay award, the increase in pupil numbers and so on, and of course to take account of LEAs' own priorities. Naturally, I would expect them to continue to look for savings and to ensure that the extra money is used to maximum advantage.

Mr. Sykes: May I put a Yorkshire point of view to my right hon. Friend? Instead of putting up with the crescendo of whingeing from Opposition Members, to which we have been subjected this afternoon, may I tell her that the people of North Yorkshire are absolutely delighted with the additional resources in this year's education SSA? Does she think that it would be a good idea, if it wanted to spend more money on education, for North Yorkshire county council to sell its £14 million worth of farm land?

Mrs. Shephard: A Yorkshire point of view is always refreshing, as we have just heard. I can do no more than say to my hon. Friend that I am delighted that he and his colleagues, and, indeed, North Yorkshire, are pleased with the extra resources allocated to education. What the local authority decides to do with its farm land, and its other assets, is a matter for it.

Mr. Bryan Davies: As the nation is becoming aware that this so-called extra expenditure on schools is largely illusory, shall we consider some of the realities of the Budget? Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to explain to the country the benefits of slashing higher education capital expenditure by a third and further education colleges' capital expenditure by two thirds over the next couple of years?

Mrs. Shephard: Higher education and further education recurrent spending has been protected. Indeed, there is provision for an extra 12 per cent. increase in student numbers in further education and provision for the continuing steady growth in higher education numbers. There is still provision for capital programmes for higher and further education, but we expect them to take advantage, as indeed they already are—in the case of higher education to the tune of £1.6 billion—of the private finance initiative.

Sir Patrick Cormack: As my right hon. Friend will know from her recent visit, there is considerable satisfaction in Staffordshire about the recent announcement. Will she send a note to Members of Parliament of all counties pointing out what prudent management of this extra money could result in?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall certainly take on board my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Unemployment

12. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of the Budget on unemployment. [3879]

Mr. Forth: The Budget of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor built on the policies that have helped to achieve a fall in unemployment of more than 700,000 in the past three years.

Dr. Jones: I welcome the fall in unemployment announced today, but the Minister will realise that it is falling at a rate of only 0.5 per cent. a month and that the Red Book assumes that it will remain at more than 2 million until the turn of the century. Will he explain how big cuts in the home energy efficiency scheme, housing, transport and other construction projects can possibly help in the fight against unemployment? Surely he will realise that the private finance initiative, which is supposed to take over, is viewed with dismay by the business community. It sees the PFI as an abrogation by the Government of their responsibility for infrastructure projects, which are needed in their own right and to create employment.

Mr. Forth: I have been struggling to remember whether the hon. Lady was one of the Opposition Members who voted against the tax cuts in the Budget—I think that she was. It strikes me as rather astonishing that she should do that and then express such concern about the level of unemployment. Even she must know what reduces unemployment, and we have been successful in doing that—more successful than our continental partners, whose policies some Opposition Members wish to emulate. Our unemployment rate is lower than those of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, and there is considerable evidence that the policies that we have pursued over the past three or four years are attracting inward investment and creating the climate in which unemployment will continue to fall.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is it not true that, as a proportion of the population of working age, this country has more people in work and fewer people out of work than any other major country in Europe? On the day when a further reduction in unemployment has been followed by a further reduction in interest rates, is it not imperative, and in the best interests of the unemployed, that the Government continue on the course that they have so successfully set themselves?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out those pertinent facts—and they are even more pertinent as our record on, for example, women's employment is also one of the best in the European Union. I believe that what we are creating stands comparison excellently with the record of any other country in the European Union and of many beyond. That leads me to agree with my hon. Friend that we should stick firmly to the policies that we have pursued. If we do that, we can expect to see continued steady economic growth through 1996 and beyond.

Mr. Meacher: After a Budget conspicuous for the total absence of any job-creation strategy, despite the fact that unemployment still stands at more than 2.25 million, will the Minister recognise that today's supposed fall in unemployment is a mirage, because Government figures also released today show that, far from rising, the number of people in employment has fallen by 22,000 over the past quarter? Does that not clearly show that people are disappearing from the unemployment count not because they are getting jobs but because they are dropping out of the labour market altogether? Is it not now clear that the so-called economic recovery is spluttering out and that, with a 0.25 per cent. cut in interest rates, there is no prospect either of staving off the risk of recession or of preventing a rise in unemployment this winter?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman, who must be the walking personification of old Labour, really should get a new script, because what he says simply will not do. Not only is it grotesquely inaccurate, but it completely ignores the fact that in the Budget we cut taxes for small companies, lowered tax bills for the self-employed, capped business rates, lowered the qualifying age for capital gains tax retirement relief and increased the VAT threshold—to name only a few of the measures immediately related to small businesses. The Government recognise that small firms will be the creators of jobs for the foreseeable future, and we shall help them. The Labour party, with its blind obsession with, for example, a statutory minimum wage, would crucify job creation rather than help it.

Mr. Dover: Does the Minister accept that not only one Budget but a series of good, responsible Budgets has reduced the unemployment rate in Chorley, in the middle of Lancashire, from 10 or 11 per cent. to 4.5 per cent.?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right, and I am glad that he has pointed out that each constituency up and down the country has seen the creation of real jobs. Our constituents are getting jobs, and they recognise what is going on. They also recognise the value of economic stability and inward investment, even if the Opposition do not.

Education Statistics (Accuracy)

13. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new proposals she has to improve the accuracy of education statistics. [3880]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has a continuous programme to ensure the accuracy of statistics.

Mr. Flynn: Can the statistics be improved to show the huge increase in the number of children in care being excluded from grant-maintained schools? In one district where all but one of the schools are grant-maintained, only the one local authority school is now admitting children in care. The police have pointed out that the huge increase in exclusions—a result of the schools' league tables—

is causing great problems to society, and is adding greatly to the distress of young people who have suffered unfairly from all the misfortunes that life has thrown at them.

Mr. Squire: My Department has no evidence to suggest that grant-maintained schools, any more than LEA schools, are excluding pupils disproportionately. If the hon. Gentleman has such evidence, I invite him to send it to the Department. All the comments from the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members suggest that the Opposition's claims that they support grant-maintained schools are based on fragile ground.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Does my hon. Friend agree that, rather than calling for new and improved statistics, the Opposition should perhaps spend more time studying the statistics that are available? Do not the statistics show that the Opposition's determination to abolish the assisted places scheme is irrelevant to the quality of education of our young people? Do not they show that thousands of less well-off families benefit from the scheme? Should not the Opposition learn a lesson from the statistics?

Mr. Squire: Like my hon. Friend, I remain optimistic that the lesson may be learned by the Opposition, but there are no encouraging signs. He is right that the assisted places scheme has assisted children from households who would otherwise have no chance to take advantage of that good education.

Youth Unemployment

14. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new measures she plans to take to get unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds into work. [3881]

Mr. Paice: We propose to continue policies and programmes that have seen unemployment among this age group fall by 225,000, or 28 per cent., since the recovery began.

Mr. Jones: Are not 650,000 people in this age group unemployed, of whom 150,000 have been out of work for more than a year? Today, 350 people have lost their jobs in MANWEB as a direct consequence of privatisation and the Scottish Power takeover. Does he accept that the Government's policies are laggardly and hesitant, and that only a general election will help the unemployed?

Mr. Paice: No.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend think that it is interesting that youth unemployment in France is 25 per cent. and in Spain is 40 per cent., whereas in this country it stands at about 15 per cent.? Is it not also interesting that in France, which has a similar population to this country, there are 2 million fewer people in work. Is it not a fact that, while France and Spain have adopted the social chapter and the minimum wage, we have not?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend properly reminds the House that unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds in Britain is, on comparable statistics, 7 per cent. lower than the European average. He also reminds the House of the difference between this Government's policies and those of many Governments in Europe. In particular, they have adopted the social chapter and the minimum wage—policies that the Opposition espouse. The Opposition pretend to care about young people's unemployment, but they espouse policies that would destroy jobs, as they have destroyed jobs in many other countries throughout Europe.

Mr. Byers: Will the Minister confirm that more than a quarter of all unemployed claimants are aged between 18 and 25? Does he accept that, in the past 12 months, unemployment in this age group has increased by more than 100,000? Given those facts, does the Minister accept that urgent action is needed? Why do not the Government impose a windfall tax on the newly privatised utilities to finance a programme of training and job creation, as proposed by the Labour party? Are the Government simply prepared to stand to one side and watch a whole generation of young people become the innocent victims of the Government's failed economic and social policies?

Mr. Paice: Let us deal first with the facts. It is a fact that unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds—the group about whom the hon. Gentleman is concerned—has fallen by 225,000 in three years. The number of them who have been unemployed for six months or more has fallen by 106,000, a 30 per cent. decrease. The number of those unemployed for a year or more has fallen by 54,000, a decrease of 27.5 per cent. That improvement is dramatic, and hardly what one would expect from a Government who do not care.

I wonder how many times one can spend a windfall tax. Every time we challenge the Opposition to tell us how they would fund one of their programmes, they say through a windfall tax. It will be the most swingeing tax that any Government have ever imposed, should the Labour party ever have the chance, because the programmes that it will have to fund are legion.

I have to ask the hon. Gentleman—

Madam Speaker: Order. It is the Government's business to answer questions, not to ask them. We now have a statement.

HMSO (Privatisation)

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): With permission, I wish to make a statement about the Government's plans for the future of Her Majesty's Stationery Office and how the plans might affect Parliament.

For most of the past 200 years, HMSO provided free supplies to Departments and to Parliament, charging its costs to funds allocated in the Vote. In 1980, HMSO began recovering its costs. Within two years, Departments were freed from their obligations to purchase from HMSO, which then had to compete with private sector suppliers. HMSO and its staff met the new challenge, and the business became increasingly commercial, competitive and productive. In 1988, HMSO became an executive agency. I pay tribute to the management and staff of HMSO for their commercial success in recent years.

The public sector market in which HMSO competes is shrinking. Between 1990 and 1994, HMSO's turnover fell by more than 10 per cent. Job losses are likely unless HMSO is able to seek new sales opportunities.

Against that background, the Government plan to privatise HMSO by means of a competitive tender offer. The business will benefit from access to wider markets. Its staff will benefit from the increased security of a thriving business. Customers such as Parliament will benefit from an accountable, commercially enforceable relationship with a supplier well positioned to reduce costs.

We intend to retain in the public sector only a small residual body, which will continue to bear the name Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Its responsibilities will include Crown copyright. The residual body could also administer parliamentary copyright if Parliament so wished. Retaining responsibility for copyright in the public sector will allow us to sustain and improve the accessible and affordable publication of Government information.

The remainder of the business, which is the bulk, will be offered for sale under the name "The Stationery Office". We shall seek a buyer who will maintain the independence and integrity of the present HMSO. Under no circumstances will we offer the printing and publishing businesses separately. I placed earlier today in the Library of the House the information pack that we are using to elicit market interest.

Our objectives will be to maximise value for money for the taxpayer; to ensure that staff are treated fairly and that their rights are respected; to ensure that the needs of Parliament and other customers, such as Government Departments, are satisfied; and to complete the privatisation as soon as is practicable.

Madam Speaker, you have rightly stressed the importance that you attach to the maintenance of a first-class service to Parliament. Your letter of 28 November to the Leader of the House was published in the *Official Report* of 11 December. I have sought to reassure you, Madam Speaker and, with your agreement, I shall place a copy of my letter of 12 December in the Library of the House. The key point is that the buyer must be fully acceptable to Parliament. With that in mind, I intend to publish the shortlist of bidders in due course, and I shall involve parliamentary officials in the selection of the successful candidate.

Parliament's requirements will be enshrined in a binding and enforceable contract, based on the new supply and service agreements between HMSO and Parliament that take effect from 1 January 1996. The contract could include the provision that any future changes in the structure or operation of the Stationery Office should take account of Parliament's requirements. Potential purchasers will have to honour recently negotiated improvements such as reductions in the price of publications, and, I hope, negotiate further reductions.

Parliament benefits from the dedication of trained and experienced staff in HMSO. The type of sale that we envisage would mean the buyer taking on HMSO's staff with their existing terms and conditions.

The Government are sure that the interests of HMSO, its customers, its staff, the taxpayer and Parliament will be best served by privatisation along the lines that I have set out, but uncertainty—particularly among staff—necessarily accompanies a change of this sort. The Government aim to complete the sale by summer next year—subject always to meeting the requirements of Parliament as a prerequisite.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will seek an early opportunity for a debate on those issues.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I thank the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for his statement. I also thank the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for ensuring, Madam Speaker, that your letter to the Leader of the House, dated 28 November, was recorded in the 11 December edition of *Hansard*.

Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that he will meet each of the House's requirements as laid down in your letter—which, as I said, is recorded in the 11 December edition of *Hansard*? In particular, will he delay the sell-off to enable the House authorities to complete all the preparatory work? He said in November, in a public interview, that the arrangements would be put in place only after Parliament had given its approval; will he therefore ensure that a full debate takes place, involving votes in both Houses of Parliament, before he goes any further?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that HMSO has operated profitably in the public sector for some time, and has met all the targets set by Government? Will he also confirm that it has served Parliament for more than 200 years, while maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality and meeting the most exacting requirements?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that 95 per cent. of staff have rejected the idea of privatisation? They are proud of HMSO's achievements in the public sector, and want it to remain in that sector. Why has the right hon. Gentleman not investigated ways in which HMSO can operate in the public sector with greater commercial freedom? Is he not aware that such an option was included in the Government's Green Paper on the future of the Post Office, and was recommended by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry in its report of January 1995? Will he now refer his proposals to the new Public Service

[Mr. Derek Foster]

Select Committee, so that it too can examine that option? That would give new hope to the staff of HMSO, and reassure the House authorities.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the plummeting staff morale, and the pall of insecurity that has descended on Norwich and HMSO since his announcement in September? He claims that there will be "no automatic redundancies". What does that mean, and what guarantees will he give?

Is it not a fact that this privatisation is driven not by the interests of HMSO, but by Tory dogma and the right hon. Gentleman's wish to privatise as many public services as possible before his Government are driven out by the electorate? He claims that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply, but is not TUPE an extremely difficult and uncertain area that cannot be defined in advance? Is he certain that transferring public contracts as part of a privatisation is legal under European law?

I believed the Chancellor to be a decent man fallen among thieves, but he is doing the Deputy Prime Minister's dirty work in his last-ditch attempt to become the Leader of the Opposition. The Deputy Prime Minister says, "Lurch to the right," and the Chancellor says, "How far?"

Will the Chancellor now bury these proposals and return to the House with a new proposal for HMSO to operate more commercially in the public sector?

Mr. Freeman: The right hon. Gentleman asked me six questions, and I shall try to answer them briefly but properly.

First, I intend to meet all the requirements set out in Madam Speaker's letter. The vast majority of points will be dealt with by the contract that I envisage both Houses of Parliament will take out with the Stationery Office under its new ownership. There will be proper protection, but it is not a matter for me. It is for both Houses of Parliament to satisfy themselves that the requirements set out in Madam Speaker's letter are met. I remain confident that they will do so.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman asked whether I would delay the sell-off until all the conditions set out in Madam Speaker's letter, particularly the completion of a draft contract, are met. The answer is yes. I made it plain in my statement that it is a prerequisite that the interests and requirements of Parliament are met. We cannot and should not proceed until those requirements are legitimately met. Parliament is by far HMSO's largest customer, although HMSO also prints and publishes for the Crown and many Government Departments.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman requested a full debate, with or without votes. I shall appear before the Public Service Select Committee. I am in the hands of the business managers, but am delighted to appear before any Committee and at any debate. This important matter should be taken seriously. I shall therefore answer fully and, I hope, satisfactorily in whatever forum is chosen.

Fourthly, I do not believe there to be a problem in respect of European law. That is the advice that I have received. We can go into that matter in greater detail when an opportunity presents itself.

The right hon. Gentleman's fifth and sixth points go to the heart of the matter: why are we proposing the privatisation of HMSO, given the inevitable adverse effect on the morale of those who work for the organisation? We are a conservative country and whenever change is proposed, people fear the worst. I firmly believe that, if I do nothing with HMSO, its market will contract further. *[Interruption.]* Whatever the Administration—Labour, Liberal Democrat or Conservative—its market will contract. It has been contracting for a decade now. The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) will know of the significant job losses that have occurred in the past five to 10 years. HMSO has handled them well, but as the market contracts, jobs are lost.

The prime purpose of the privatisation, therefore, is to enable HMSO, when no longer owned by the taxpayer, to compete for private sector work. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) asks why a state-owned company cannot compete for private sector work. It is not this Administration's philosophy to allow a taxpayer-owned state corporation to compete unfairly. *[Interruption.]* The principle has been proven to be right, because when those companies enter the private sector—many successful privatisations have occurred—their business tends to grow as they have access to new markets.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Then change the rules.

Mr. Freeman: It has nothing to do with the rules. It has to do with the realities of business life.

I want Her Majesty's Stationery Office to have bigger markets and to employ more people than would otherwise be the case.

The final question that the right hon. Gentleman asked me was about jobs. I firmly believe that, if I do nothing, there will be redundancies—some compulsory—at Norwich and elsewhere throughout the country. Under the proposals, if the market grows, as I believe it will, more jobs will be available—more than would otherwise have been the case.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the tributes that he paid to the staff at HMSO, so many of whom, as he said, work in Norwich and in the surrounding area? I am also grateful for the assurances that he gave about jobs and prospects for the future.

Will my right hon. Friend continue to consult members of staff, and everyone involved in HMSO, at every stage in future? Will he also consult especially Members of the House, many of whom, representing constituencies away from Norwich, are worried about that matter? Will he consult officials of the House, because, after all, Parliament is a key customer of HMSO?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can give the assurance that I shall consult representatives of the staff. It is not possible for me to consult every member of staff, but I have been to Norwich twice, and I envisage going again, to meet the union representatives of the employees.

In my statement, I gave an additional assurance, based on the advice of our consultants, that the core of the business—the printing and publishing business—will not be broken up. I also said that we intend to offer HMSO as a whole—not only the printing and publishing business, but the other ancillary businesses. That suggestion was made to me by representatives of the work force, and I accepted it.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Does the Minister realise that the proposed privatisation of that successful and profitable public enterprise is pure dogma? It is merely an item of ideology. What guarantees—and I mean guarantees—will he seek that HMSO will not be broken up? If it is broken up, large parts of it will become unviable. It undertakes not only printing and publishing; there is a very large reprographic and office supplies business, which the Minister did not even mention.

What security obligations will be placed on a private buyer? The organisation is a major security printing and publishing business, with a strong influence on national and parliamentary security. Will the Minister seek any employment guarantees from the proposed bidder? Those are essential. Nine hundred people work in HMSO in my constituency. It is probably one of the largest single employers left.

Is the Minister absolutely sure that TUPE—and I brought pressure to bear on him about that the other day—will apply in that sector of rapid technological change? Undoubtedly, there are ways around TUPE under those conditions.

Does the Minister agree that it is a totally unnecessary privatisation, which is destroying a business that was set up 200 years ago to avoid corruption in the supply of services to the Government?

Mr. Freeman: I respect the hon. Gentleman's position. After all, he represents, I dare say, the majority of the work force in Norwich. However, he needs to reflect on the central argument that I made about jobs and the marketplace in which HMSO operates. It is a serious business point, and it is the reason why we are proceeding. Perhaps, when we have a fuller debate, the hon. Gentleman might care to come to grips with that point, because it is in the best interests of his constituents.

The hon. Gentleman asked me three questions. I cannot give any guarantees, with HMSO in the public sector or in the private sector, about the shape of business in 10, 20 or 30 years' time. However, I have made it crystal clear that we shall offer the business as a whole and, in any case, not break up the printing and publishing business. The best guarantees that that will not happen lie in the drafting of the contracts, not only from the House but from the other place and from Government Departments—and I dare say, through the Office of Public Service.

We, as the customers—that is to say, the Crown and Parliament—can require the business to have a certain nature and structure. If that is not maintained, the contract may well be vitiated. It depends on the terms of the contract. Parliament is entitled to formulate its own views about the location of the press and the staff and the way in which the business is structured and organised. Therefore, Parliament will be able to control the nature of the business that supplies the products.

As to TUPE, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing my attention to what he considers to be a residual problem. I shall ensure that I am properly briefed in good time for the debate, when we shall examine the matter in detail. *[Laughter.]* I am trying to give a serious response to the hon. Gentleman's point. *[Interruption.]* With respect, I have repeated very clearly the advice that the Department has received. I am treating the hon. Gentleman's point seriously. He has cast doubt upon the advice available to the Government, and I shall certainly reflect further upon the matter.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend recall that he has used the words "public service" several times this afternoon? Does he accept that there is no more important public service than delivering accurately and properly the proceedings of this place and all the activities connected with it?

Therefore, does my right hon. Friend accept that there are Conservative Members who are not necessarily excited by his proposal and who do not necessarily believe that it is in the best public interest? Will he consider the option of Parliament taking control of the affair and being responsible entirely for its own publications? It could be voted a suitable sum of money so to do. If he will not take that suggestion on board—I hope that he does—will he at least give a complete and firm undertaking this afternoon to set up a proper Select Committee to supervise whoever produces the works?

Mr. Freeman: I was attracted initially to the idea of separating the business. I visited the south London printing works and came to the clear conclusion that one could not separate the parliamentary from the Crown business. I am afraid that the two are inseparable in a commercial sense: the business is run as an integrated whole. Therefore, I do not believe that it is possible to have a dedicated parliamentary press, with Parliament receiving the appropriate funds directly and then negotiating for the direct control and management of the business. That would be a neat solution, but it is not a practicable one. I am happy to examine the matter again, but I do not believe that that is possible.

As to the establishment of a proper Select Committee, I have appeared before the Finance and Services Select Committee, which I understand has some responsibility for the matter. I am happy to appear before any Select Committee that the House of Commons, in its wisdom, decides is a better forum.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the suggestion of an early debate on the subject in the House, but do the Government intend to make available in time for that debate a draft of the contract for which the private sector will be invited to tender? Does not the Minister believe that the timetable that he has outlined is rather ambitious if the complex issues in the supply and service agreements are to be turned into a contract or series of contracts? If that cannot be achieved in the time scale that he suggests, will he give an absolute assurance that there is no need for it to be completed by any arbitrarily set date?

Mr. Freeman: I am not setting deadlines, and you will confirm, Madam Speaker, that I gave you an assurance in that regard. Deadlines cannot apply in this case, as there is a prerequisite that Parliament be satisfied.

As to the hon. Gentleman's two specific points, I have placed in the Library the information pack comprising documents and information about HMSO, which are publicly available and which potential purchasers will wish to study. That is separate from the service

[Mr. Freeman]

agreement, which I understand was signed yesterday with HMSO by the House authorities and authorities of the other place. It governs services that should run from 1 January. That will form the basis of a contract with a new owner of the business in due course. I have offered my Department's assistance to the House authorities in drafting that contract, but at the end of the day it is for the House to agree the details of the contract that will protect its position.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a structure that was vital 200 years ago is not appropriate in today's modern world of enormously competitive multi-media and complex publishing? He is absolutely right in his statement that the new model that he has presented to the House today could be the saviour of people with high skills and great integrity, and could protect their reputation. Finally, I thank him for fulfilling my commitment to the trade unions that they would be consulted at all appropriate stages.

Mr. Freeman: As I recall, my hon. Friend was a distinguished public service Minister responsible for HMSO. I am grateful for his support, not only in repeating the assurances that he gave, but in emphasising the ones that I have given.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): After the close of business on Monday evening, I visited the parliamentary press to see the production of *Hansard* and the Vote at first hand. After more than 20 years in the House, it was remiss of me not to have done so before. I left with the impression that, for all practical purposes, the function on the other side of the river is effectively a department of the House. It is dedicated to the vagaries, the pressures, the timetables and the ebb and flow of business in the House, in which no other commercial printer can ever be experienced.

Can the Minister name another commercial operation that is experienced in dealing with the ebb and flow of work produced by the House and the other place? Woe betide any Minister who gets rid of that service and then has to explain to the House why the Votes and Proceedings, Committee *Hansard* and the Order Paper are not available. It is not possible to fit in jobbing contracts on a commercial basis between bits of parliamentary work.

As the Leader of the House has left the Chamber—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is here."] He is here, so I suggest that, because of its unique parliamentary aspect, it should be a House of Commons matter whether the privatisation goes ahead. We want a clear, unambiguous statement that there will be a free vote on whether the parliamentary press should be privatised. Members on both sides of the House should see for themselves how the work is produced and consider the benefits and disbenefits.

It is a House of Commons matter, not an ordinary privatisation where we follow the political divide. Although there is ideological division, today's statement concerns how the House functions on behalf and to the benefit of our constituents and not for us privately. We cannot do our job—representing our constituents—if there is the slightest shadow of doubt about the supply of our necessary papers.

Mr. Freeman: I find myself in agreement with the hon. Gentleman. However, he visited the parliamentary press in the evening. Had he done so during the day, he would have found a different business. In the late afternoon, the evening and all night the parliamentary press is geared to producing *Hansard*, Bills and documents for Committees. Had he gone there during the day, he would have found it producing documents for the Crown—for Government Departments. The business, sadly, cannot be separated. The presses need to be loaded with the *London Gazette*, which is a Crown publication, not a parliamentary publication, at different times of the day to get maximum use from expensive machinery.

I caution the hon. Gentleman against jumping to the conclusion that the press can be dedicated entirely to parliamentary business. It cannot, and that would not be in the interests of the management and the staff, because jobs would have to be lost. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments, but the way to protect the quality of service required from that plant—the quality of work supplied, the timeliness and the cost—is through a contract.

I am sure that the House will require that press to be retained. It is a valuable asset, with substantial recent investment in plant and machinery, and the House will require standards of service that the printing and publishing business in the private sector will aspire to meet. Can anyone imagine any owner of that business, whether it is myself as a Minister of the Crown, or a private sector printer or publisher, seeking to embarrass itself by providing rotten service to the House?

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Yes.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is not living in the real world.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I welcome the news about the privatisation of HMSO. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is undoubtedly the best way to protect jobs, because HMSO will be able to seek greater commercial freedom? Will he suggest that the staff of HMSO contact the Crown Agents staff, who last summer gained their freedom from the Government and have now moved into a much more secure future?

Mr. Freeman: That is an interesting idea. Other work that I would like HMSO to undertake, in addition to private sector work, is some of the European Commission's and European Parliament's work. We have an extremely efficient parliamentary press—it is called a parliamentary press, but it does other work—and I would like to see its machines properly loaded and more people employed in south London, not fewer.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Could it not be said that the Minister has condemned his case from his own mouth? What reason is there to privatise something that works efficiently and well in the interests of the House? Why cannot a public sector contractor enter the private sector market to secure further work if it wants? It can do so on favourable and equal terms.

Mr. Garrett: It does.

Mr. Bermingham: As my hon. Friend says, it does. There is no necessity for privatisation. Is it not just dogma overcoming intelligence?

Mr. Freeman: The philosophy pursued by the Government consistently over the past 16 years has been, where there is a state corporation or enterprise and we want its business to grow by taking on private sector business, for the business to be moved into private sector ownership, 51 per cent. or 100 per cent. I am never going to be able to convince Opposition Members about that approach.

We do not believe that the taxpayer, as the shareholder of the business, should subsidise or underwrite a business that unfairly competes with the rest of the private sector. There are many other advantages for example, removing Treasury control on investment and on running costs. I do not believe that that is appropriate for this business. I also firmly believe that, in the private sector, the management will be able to augment the skills, particularly of marketing and finance, which one does not normally associate with public sector bodies.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are plenty of printers in the private sector that provide absolute accuracy and security to their clients in important matters such as printing reports and accounts and keeping the inside information secret until it is due to be published? Would they not resent, rightly, HMSO moving into their markets if it was underwritten by the taxpayer rather than operating on a commercial basis? Could he reassure employees that they might have the opportunity to have shares in the business, or in the business that purchases HMSO? Although the Labour party regrets every privatisation, the employees never do.

Mr. Freeman: I particularly agree with my hon. Friend's last comment. It is appropriate for the management and staff of any business—public sector moving into the private sector or already there—to have an equity stake in that business or at least a share in the profitability of the business. I hope very much that it will prove possible for that to apply to HMSO. We shall see how the market responds.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Does not the right hon. Gentleman appreciate the Opposition's concern? He referred to TUPE, but when he was asked a detailed question, he could not answer. The whole point about TUPE is that it lasts, at most, for three months and can be abandoned thereafter. The experience of takeovers in the printing industry in particular has been that pension funds have been filched as soon as many of those companies have been taken over. We want a guarantee that the pension fund will be ring-fenced, above and beyond TUPE, so that there is no possibility, in the event of an unwanted privatisation, of the workers' money in the pension fund being filched by the new owners in the interests of shareholders elsewhere.

Mr. Freeman: That is an important point. TUPE, of course, does not cover pensions and is a separate but emotive issue, as anyone who has had responsibility for public sector departments will know. I give an undertaking to the House that, specifically as regards pensions, but also as regards TUPE, whose provisions will apply—that is the advice that I have been given—I will address separately and specifically protection of the pension rights of those who work in the business. I have already given that assurance to the trade union representatives in Norwich.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Parliament will continue to have exactly the same rights over its copyright and over the contracts into which it enters, especially in relation to electronic publication, which, obviously, will become important, bearing it in mind that the House may wish to publish documents over the Internet? Will he think carefully about nomenclature, bearing it in mind that considerable confusion may arise if there is a "Stationery Office" in the private sector while, at the same time, Her Majesty's Stationery Office is retained with residual responsibilities in the public sector?

Mr. Freeman: I was merely alluding to the transaction's structure. I do not envisage that the residual body in my Department and the Cabinet Office would be referred to as HMSO. I imagine that the individual and his staff would be referred to as the Queen's Printer and would retain the Crown copyright.

It is not for me to comment on what the House may decide to do in terms of Internet access and publishing more documentation. Speaking on behalf of the Crown, I should like much greater access—this sits well with our views on open government—to Government documents. Of course, Ministers will control Crown copyright; that will not be a matter for the private sector printing and publishing business owner at least, or for the existing HMSO business. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the past 35 minutes, the Minister has repeatedly used the phrase "acceptable to Parliament". If that means anything, it means acceptable to more than a majority of five in Parliament. Therefore, why does he not rely on a free vote? Will he deal with the question that was put by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) on security, which he, inadvertently no doubt, did not answer? What happens now if Budget statements are leaked? As I understand it, the printing side has never been guilty of any leaks because, of course, there are sanctions. In the new set-up, what sanctions will there be on security? Will he answer my hon. Friend, whose constituency this relates to, who asked a proper question on security?

Mr. Freeman: Yes. On security, the hon. Gentleman is right. I cannot recall, certainly in the past 16 years, any specific problems with security in terms of printing Budget documents. The printing presses are sealed overnight and suitable security arrangements apply; I understand that, having printed the documents, staff remain on the premises. Those arrangements will continue. In the past, if there was a problem, I would be called to account and I would sack the management. In future, on the Budget, which is a Crown matter, the Treasury and myself acting on its behalf would take action under the terms of the contract with the printing and publishing business responsible for publishing Budget documents. We would either suspend the contract or seek redress, so in practical terms there is no difference.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, which will lead to increased job opportunities in HMSO, and should lead to increased investment where it is no longer subject to the dead hand of the Treasury. May I remind him that the people who talk about dogma are the very people who opposed the privatisation of BT, British Airways, British Steel, British Gas and all the other great public utilities? Will he not be seduced by those who call for a free vote,

[Mr. John Marshall]

because, when there was a free vote on the Nolan committee report, the Labour party's Chief Whip made it clear that he did not recognise what a free vote meant?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his general support for the notion of privatisation.

Just to correct my answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I am advised that the vast majority of Budget documents are already printed by private sector contractors, and not by HMSO.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister realise that he cuts a sorry figure today, trying to defend the indefensible? When he was asked a question about why he was doing this, he said that he was doing it because it was the Tory party's philosophy. The Government have had £80 billion selling off the nation's silver and now they have got down to this paltry little set-up—HMSO. Will it be the Mace next and the Dispatch Boxes? Will he give a guarantee that, if this thing goes through, the publishing firm that gets hold of HMSO will not include Haymarket Publishing Group, his gaffer's—the Deputy Prime Minister's—firm, and Murdoch? Are they excluded?

Mr. Freeman: The normal rules governing the propriety of Ministers and decision making will, I can assure the hon. Gentleman, apply.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): As Chairman of the Select Committee on Administration, I am deeply concerned. Our *Hansard* facilities are second to none, and the Minister must know that in Canada the printing facilities were privatised and it was an absolute disaster. I hope that hon. Members will keep our excellent services and that they will vote against this proposal.

Mr. Freeman: My understanding is different from that of the hon. Gentleman. He raised that matter with me before. In Canada there has been no such privatisation, although there are proposals. I shall certainly watch progress on those proposals with great interest, as I am sure will the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): What consolation does the Minister's statement contain for the work force at HMSO, when privatisation of gas and electricity undoubtedly led to redundancies? Is not that why he cannot give a guarantee?

Mr. Freeman: No Minister should be believed if he or she were to give a guarantee about jobs in either the public or the private sector. I repeat what I said earlier: that, if the market is allowed to grow and if HMSO is allowed to operate on a bigger canvas, more jobs will be created than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not interesting that even Lady Thatcher refused to take this step, and she did not need any lectures about privatisation? Does the Minister not realise that one of the reasons—there are others, I know—why the Government are so deeply unpopular and discredited in the country, as shown by every by-election and council election, is that people recognise that the Government base their policies not on common sense but on dogma, indifferent to public opinion? Does not this decision in the dying days of this Administration show how right people are in coming to that conclusion about this Tory Government?

Mr. Freeman: No one on the Opposition Benches—perhaps this is not the occasion—has yet dealt with the point of substance, which is that, to safeguard jobs and expand job opportunities, HMSO should be allowed to operate in both public and private sector markets. It can do that only under private sector ownership, and so far I have not heard a coherent argument against that.

Mr. Miller: Is there not a fundamental contradiction between the Minister's response about protection of the rights of the House and his answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett)? For example, if the printing works were sold on, let us say to an overseas company, the House would clearly have reservations about continuing that service. How will we deal with those issues? More fundamentally, how will we deal with the issues that the Minister dodged, when two days ago I raised the vexed question of developments of intellectual property rights in a rapidly changing world? Is it not important for those matters to be addressed by the House before this daft privatisation goes through?

Mr. Freeman: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is referring to intellectual property rights that are possessed by HMSO as a printing and publishing house. *[Interruption.]* If he is referring to that, I can tell him that HMSO, like any other printer and publisher, is entitled to protect its position. In the context of copyright, if that is the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, I have explained that the House controls its own copyright and that the Government control the copyright of Departments. We can certainly go into the matter in greater detail if the hon. Gentleman has the time on a more suitable occasion to develop his points, so that I can more fully understand them.

I have two points to make about control over the ownership of the business. First, I have indicated that the House, through its officials, will be involved in the selection of the purchaser of the entire business. Secondly, it is open to the House to put into the contract that any change in the identity of that owner or the structure of ownership could be a precondition for cancellation of the contract.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Why does not the Minister recognise that, by common consent, Her Majesty's Stationery Office has served the nation and Parliament well over very many years? Would it not be better to accept the old principle "if it works, don't fix it", and to let HMSO develop as a publicly owned concern? Instead, the Government seem to have adopted the rather bizarre approach, "If it moves, privatise it".

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman says, "If it works, don't fix it". It does not work—jobs are being lost and the market is contracting. I should not be discharging my job properly unless I addressed those fundamental issues. That is why there has been a protracted review of the future of HMSO for the past two to three years. That is also why I am taking action now to end the uncertainty and to chart a sensible way forward.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): For the third time of asking—so far unanswered—is this not a matter for a free vote?

Mr. Freeman: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Minister tell the House whether the consultants that he used to prepare the proposal were allowed to consider the option of HMSO remaining within the public sector, but with a wider commercial remit? If so, what was the consultants' response to that option? Did they have the freedom to say that privatisation of HMSO was not the most desirable option to bring before the House?

Mr. Freeman: It is not the policy of the Government to permit the unfettered entry of a state body into the private sector market. That never has been and never will be the policy of the Government. There are certain limited derogations by the Treasury permitting the marginal capacity of HMSO to be used to bid for private sector work, but one should not—in my judgment, ever—allow the taxpayer to subsidise public sector companies competing with the private sector.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Points of order come after statements, and I have another statement. However, I will allow the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) to speak again, as he has requested.

Mr. Derek Foster: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would not wish the Chancellor of the Duchy to mislead the House. He accused the Opposition of not addressing the central issue. Many Opposition Members have said that we want HMSO to be able to sell in wider markets, and we want it to be able to borrow for investment in the private sector. Why cannot that be done within the public sector? Will the Minister put that point to the new Public Service Select Committee, so that it can investigate whether it is a feasible option? That would please everyone at HMSO and avoid the embarrassment of the House authorities.

Mr. Freeman: We can return to those issues. I would humbly suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that he might check with the shadow Chancellor. We had exchanges on that point during the process of railway privatisation. We cannot permit a publicly owned body with more than 51 per cent. of its equity controlled by the state to borrow and that borrowing not be included in the public sector borrowing requirement. The shadow Chancellor, who has been challenged on that issue in the past, has made it clear that he does not propose any change to those rules. If the shadow Chancellor is also suggesting that state bodies should be allowed to compete freely with the private sector in the provision of services, that would represent a change in policy. Perhaps we should return to that point at greater length at the appropriate time.

Public Expenditure (Wales)

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on public expenditure in Wales. Copies of my statement, provisional standard spending assessments, provisional capping principles and base budgets for unitary authorities are available in the Vote Office. I will outline today how I propose to allocate money to spending programmes in Wales and what I expect that money to buy. Full details will be published in the departmental report early next year.

I have already announced that the Welsh Office will have the biggest budget ever next year—£6,865 million, including the proceeds from the planned privatisation of the Housing for Wales loan book. That is an increase of 2.2 per cent. on what is expected to be spent this year, compared with 1.2 per cent. for all Departments taken together. The long-established formula arrangements ensure that the need for higher spending in Wales than in England continues to be recognised. It is indisputably a good settlement for Wales.

The money available is a large amount. But I intend to make that money go even further than usual by maximising the use of private finance and making further efficiencies in the cost of government in Wales. I am examining 25 potential projects under the private finance initiative, which together have a total value of £1 billion. In the next three years, I expect the PFI to bring in £360 million of additional capital investment. Private finance has a lot to offer the health service and the roads programme.

We will announce very soon the first major PFI project in Wales to come to fruition. That will be in addition to the large amount of private investment which Welsh Office programmes already lever in. This year, I expect more than £600 million to be generated. I want to see that sum increased in future years.

Next year, the Welsh Office will reduce its running costs as part of the drive for reducing the cost of government across the public sector. Running costs will be reduced by 8 per cent. in cash terms over the next three years. My Department will invest in new information systems to help it to build on its impressive record of securing savings, while still providing a high-quality service to the public. I also expect non-departmental public bodies in Wales to make savings in their running costs. The less money that is spent on delivering services, the more there is to spend on the services themselves.

Since I became Secretary of State for Wales, I have listened to the views of a wide range of people and organisations about what they think should be the priorities for spending. I have concluded that our priority areas should be investment in health to care for the sick and elderly; spending on education and training to ensure that everyone, but especially young people, is best equipped for the future; and protecting the environment and ensuring that conservation and economic development go hand in hand. Above all, I want to ensure that the steady and sure progress made by the Welsh economy is consolidated and encouraged. There will also be a substantial increase in the budgets of the Welsh police forces.

[Mr. William Hague]

Giving priority to those areas will mean some reductions in others, but difficult choices are unavoidable, if we are to make proper provision for our priority areas.

My decisions are set against the background of an economy which is growing healthily. In the past two years, manufacturing output has gone up nearly 7 per cent., while employment in manufacturing has grown by 13 per cent. over the same period. Productivity continues to rise, and time lost through industrial disputes has plummeted—14 working days per 1,000 employees last year, compared with 1,590 working days per 1,000 employees in 1979. Indeed, the past four years have seen the best performance since 1891.

I recognise that unemployment remains too high in some places, but it has fallen by nearly a quarter during the past three years, and today's figures show that it is continuing to fall. Long-term unemployment is falling even faster. Numbers of new vacancies notified to jobcentres are at record levels, and average wage levels are rising faster in Wales than in Great Britain as a whole.

The Government's stewardship of the nation's finances has laid the groundwork for that success. We have created the conditions in which enterprise and innovation can flourish by keeping taxes, regulation and Government spending down to a level lower than our major European competitors, which is helping to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe.

As well as getting the basic conditions for growth right, the Government have an additional role in fostering economic development. Offers already made this year, taken together with business in the pipeline, will produce grant offers of £65 million in regional selective assistance, levering in £967 million of capital expenditure by the private sector. The number of applications received so far this year is 30 per cent. up on the same period last year. So, next year, I am making available £55 million, £12.5 million more than planned provision for this year—as well as more money to promote innovation and technology in small firms.

I will also increase the central Government assistance to the Welsh Development Agency by 58 per cent. next year to £40 million, an increase of £12 million on the previous plan. That will enable it to maintain its total spending at about this year's level, while it presses ahead with its property disposal programme.

I will maintain the level of grant in aid to the Development Board for Rural Wales at £8 million. That will enable it to sustain an economic development programme of some £18 million.

I am also maintaining the grant in aid to Cardiff Bay development corporation at £51.5 million. That is an increase of £1.2 million on the previous plan, and will enable the corporation to continue to press ahead with the barrage, take forward plans for the development of Bute avenue, and establish a site for a multi-media park at Ely fields. In recognition of the particular importance of tourism to the economy of Wales, the amount of support for the Wales Tourist Board next year will continue at its present record level of almost £15 million. Local authorities also have a role to play. I will be announcing shortly allocations of more than £56 million under the strategic development scheme.

Those are huge sums of money going into economic regeneration. They will lever in even greater amounts of private money to continue the success story that Wales has become.

Training and education are also vital to future economic growth. We must continue to invest in the work force if we are to keep pace with global competition, and if Wales is to continue its outstanding record of success in attracting inward investment. Of the total training budget for next year of £142 million, £53 million will be directed towards training young people. That is an increase of £6.6 million, or 14 per cent., over this year.

This year, about £6 million will be spent on modern apprenticeships, allowing a total of 3,400 starts. Next year, I am providing £16 million, so that, by the end of next year, more than 8,500 young people will have been able to start this programme. That will result in a real and lasting injection of new highly skilled and qualified workers into manufacturing industry in Wales.

Both the Further Education and Higher Education Funding Councils will receive increases next year over planned provision for this year. That will provide for the equivalent of more than 121,000 full-time students—a record level. Almost one in three young people now go on to higher education, compared with one in eight in 1979. In line with that priority, I have also been able to find a further £2 million in the current year to enable the Further Education Funding Council to buy more information technology and capital equipment.

Capital spending on schools will also be increased. Despite the need for reductions elsewhere, I will provide almost £44 million to local authorities for education capital—the same amount as this year. In addition, I am providing £8 million for the popular schools initiative, so that the schools that parents choose have the capital to expand. Within the overall totals, £1.5 million of capital expenditure for education will be spent over the next three years to improve access to schools for disabled children.

I come now to the health service. Spending per head on the health service in Wales is 13 per cent., or almost £100 per person, above the level for England to take account of greater need. For next year, I will make available £2.274 billion, an increase over previous plans, and an increase over this year of almost £84 million. That is a cash increase of 3.8 per cent. and a real terms rise of 1.1 per cent.

There will be more doctors, more specialist staff, fewer administrators and more patients treated. The private finance initiative will supplement that amount even further. I am determined that there should be the best standards of health care in Wales for those who need it. On top of that, I am providing a special package of £4.5 million over the next three years for people with mental illness.

For the central Government roads programme next year, I propose to spend £154 million, which is a reduction of about £33 million on provision for the current year. Provision next year will enable starts to be made on the A40 Fishguard western bypass, the A4060 Mountain Hare to Dowlais scheme, the A55 Waen to Pont Dafydd, the A40 Carmarthen eastern bypass, and the A470 Lledr valley stage 2. In addition, the A55 improvements across Anglesey are important, and I plan to start the first stage of those improvements next year. Preparation work will continue on the A465 dualling between Abergavenny and Hirwaun, which is also of high priority.

I want to seize the opportunities to take forward a number of major road schemes in partnership with the private sector under the private finance initiative. I am looking into the possibilities of the scope for projects to be privately designed, built, financed and operated.

I propose to make £100 million available next year for capital expenditure on local authority roads in Wales. Much of that will be on the 17 transport grant schemes for which I am already meeting construction costs, but work can start next year on the Ceredigion link road in Dyfed and on the eastern bay link, which forms the final section of the Cardiff peripheral distributor road. The Cardiff scheme could be suitable for a private finance approach and my officials will be discussing the feasibility of this with the local authorities. Preparation work can continue on a further six schemes, including improved access to Cardiff international airport, the Port Talbot peripheral distributor road, and the Porth and Lower Rhondda Fach relief road.

I now come to the overall local authority settlement. Provision to local authorities for capital programmes next year will total £508 million, excluding transitional costs of local government reorganisation. In addition, there are many opportunities for local authorities to supplement that through the private finance initiative, and I hope that they will take full advantage of them. Provision for local government reorganisation will be almost £42 million next year, on top of the £41 million provided so far. I am issuing a written announcement today about the distribution of support for compensation costs this year.

The overall local government revenue settlement for Wales provides for a substantial increase. The increase in total standard spending of 3.1 per cent. to £2,867 million recognises the needs of local authorities for increased spending on schools, which I expect to receive a large part of the increase.

On community care, I have confirmed the levels of funding announced last year already, and I now propose a further increase of £21 million for 1998-99 to £190 million. Within TSS, £331 million will be available for police authorities—an increase of 5 per cent. following last year's 11 per cent. increase, which underlines our commitment to combat crime with high-quality, high-visibility policing.

I propose to increase Government support for local authority spending by 2.1 per cent. to £2,517 million. That is around 88 per cent. of TSS, and represents £860 for every man, woman and child in Wales. Within that total of support, I propose to make available £459 million in redistributable non-domestic rates, £237 million in specific grants including police grants, £1,792 million in revenue support grant, and £29 million to damp down council tax increases arising from changes in allocations due to the move to unitary authorities.

Local government must play its part in restraining public expenditure, and capping is an important tool in ensuring that it does. Next year, I propose that an authority's budget should be considered excessive if it exceeds either its standard spending assessment by 12.5 per cent. or its base budget for this year by 3 per cent. An authority cannot be capped at or below its SSA. My capping proposals are provisional. I will make my final decisions in the light of local authorities' budget decisions and all other relevant considerations.

Full details of my capping proposals, local authority provisional SSAs and base budgets are being sent to unitary authorities today. The SSAs have been calculated using the distribution formula developed with the local authority associations and ratified by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. I will announce my final decisions on TSS, central Government support and SSAs in January.

I have noticed some speculation about the impact of this settlement on council taxes in Wales. The actual levels of council tax will be set by local authorities. In some years, it will be necessary for local authorities to raise a greater proportion of their revenue locally. None the less, I expect there to be a large differential between council tax levels in Wales and England for the foreseeable future.

For the second year running, we will maintain the rate of grant for housing association schemes at 58 per cent. I will provide more than £85 million for Housing in Wales. Together with private finance, that represents a capital provision of more than £150 million. It will enable it to provide 3,000 new homes as planned and help 700 families to move into low-cost home ownership, even though it is a reduction in my provision of 8 per cent. That is consistent with planned provision in England.

For local authority capital provision for housing, I will make more than £257 million available next year, of which £180 million will be devoted to housing renovation grants and will allow for a further 17,000 grants. We will maintain this year's spending, which will continue to make an enormous difference to the quality of Welsh housing stock. It is in recognition of this that housing expenditure per head in Wales will continue next year to be at least 50 per cent. higher than in England.

I am also allocating £2 million over the next two years to conduct a comprehensive housing condition survey across Wales. That will help to ensure that the huge amounts we spend on housing are focused on the areas of greatest need.

I shall now deal with provision for the arts and libraries. Revenue provision for the National Museum of Wales and the Arts Council of Wales will be maintained at the current year's levels. With further efficiency savings, I expect those bodies to have more to spend on their objectives than they have this year.

There will be a small increase in revenue provision for the National Library for Wales, so that the third library building can be brought into operation. That will enhance the storage capacity of the library, and strengthen its position as a pre-eminent repository of literature and culture. A modest increase for the Welsh Language Board will enable it to take forward the implementation of the Welsh Language Act 1993, and to develop its longer-term strategy for the language.

I am making provision of about £6.5 million for the Cadw agency. That will enable it to maintain its programme of grants for historic buildings at this year's level, and enable it to meet higher targets for listing.

I am maintaining funding for the Sports Council for Wales, which will enable it to take forward the initiative that I announced in September for the encouragement of sport for young people.

The Countryside Council for Wales plays a key role in providing conservation and environmental protection of the Welsh countryside. I want to see that role enhanced.

[Mr. William Hague]

I am boosting the council's budget by 24 per cent. over this year's original plans to a budget of £22 million, and I am increasing provision for Tir Cymen to bring around half the farmland in the pilot districts into the scheme. That dramatic increase demonstrates my stated commitment to promoting conservation and to preserving our natural heritage.

The Welsh Office budget next year will be the highest ever, and the private finance initiative will bring in more capital investment on top of that. Considerable sums of private money will be levered in by a whole range of programmes. In reaching my spending decisions, I have given boosts to health and to education, to training, to economic regeneration, and to preserving the environment. I believe that the decisions that I have announced today will benefit every person in Wales, and represent a solid investment for the future. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I am surprised that the Secretary of State is so modest about his achievements in moving towards his ideological objectives. After all, we know that he wants to roll back the frontiers of the state and cut public expenditure. From his letter of 7 November to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), we also know that he wants high and ever-increasing levels of council tax. So why on earth does he not admit this afternoon that he has cut £100 million in real terms from the Welsh budget, and that council tax increases in Wales next year will, according to local authorities' latest estimates, average 15 to 20 per cent.?

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will not own up to that because he realises that his statement is the Government's latest admission that, after 16 continuous years of office, they have produced an economy too weak to maintain our basic public services, and too small to provide the opportunity for work for all those who want it.

The cuts in the budget will fall most heavily on the capital programmes, especially the building of houses, roads and hospitals, and also on local authorities' regeneration programmes. Will the Secretary of State tell us his estimate of the number of jobs that will be lost to the Welsh economy as a result of those cuts? Will he confirm that the capital spending forecast for next year is 25 per cent. lower than spending this year?

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise the great concern that his budget will raise among those involved with economic development? Is it true that, of the 600 jobs that he is axing at the Welsh Office, about 23 per cent. will be the jobs of people central to the task of attracting inward investment? The department that deals with industry will be hit disproportionately hard, and the proposals that he announced concerning the Welsh Development Agency are little short of pathetic. The proposed increase of £12 million contrasts with the £23 million shortfall for the current year, and the agency is still having to rely on a programme of forced asset stripping, which is leading it to an uncertain and unsustainable future.

Is the Secretary of State surprised that he has still not been able to sort out the shambles of his Department's handling of European grants, and that, as a result, inward investment in Wales has collapsed from 13 per cent. to 8 per cent. of total United Kingdom investment in the current year?

Does the Secretary of State accept that his statement on the private finance initiative is based more on hope than expectation? The Government have yet to meet any of their targets for the programme or announce one successful significant scheme in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) described the PFI as the "probably fictitious investment scheme". Is that not the most appropriate description?

I welcome the fact that there will be a modest increase in resources for the police, but will the Secretary of State express regret at the fact that 16 years of Conservative policies have produced a society that is so divided and has such record levels of crime that these additional resources are now essential? Does he also accept that the new figures mean that there will be an increase in the police precept on council tax payers of 22 per cent? Is that not another hidden Tory tax on Wales?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, excluding the ring-fenced new community care resources, the local authority SSA's total, standing at £2,438 million, is a reduction of 1.3 per cent.? Is not the figure £33 million less in cash terms than the current year's budget? Does he realise that inevitably there will be cuts in services, and that his claims of increased spending on education are neither honest nor credible? Expenditure on the popular schools initiative and the nursery vouchers scheme has attracted no public support in Wales whatsoever.

Does the Secretary of State realise how reviled his party has become because of the way in which it is now playing party politics with the education of other people's children? Governors are resigning from schools throughout Wales because they realise that the present problems with class sizes, standards and pupil-teacher ratios will all be made worse by the failure of the Government to meet next year's teachers pay award. Everybody understands the problem—parents, governors, teachers, educationists and pupils. Why cannot the Secretary of State understand it?

The cut in funding to Tai Cymru is particularly unwelcome, given the growing housing problem in Wales. There are 70,000 homes unfit for habitation in Wales, and homelessness has increased by 50 per cent. in the past 10 years of Tory government. Can the Secretary of State explain his strategy to deal with this growing housing crisis, given that the 14 per cent. cut of the £97 million forecast budget of Tai Cymru will mean a reduction in the number of homes built for social housing in Wales next year of 750?

On the question of the £65 million of receipts from the sale of the assets of Tai Cymru, will the Secretary of State confirm that that money will not be available for expenditure in Wales—least of all in the housing programme—but that it will be recaptured by the Treasury?

Finally, will the Secretary of State agree to an early debate on the proposals in the Welsh Grand Committee? Does he realise that, when the people of Wales understand that his "pay more, get less" policies give poorer services and less investment in the future, he will never be able to command popular support?

Mr. Hague: On a day when job vacancies have reached a record level, unemployment has fallen again and interest rates have been reduced, only the hon. Gentleman could describe the economy as weak. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman described the economy as "weak", and that is the background against which he did so.

The hon. Gentleman has criticised those areas in which I said that Government spending would be reduced, as he is entitled to do. Does that mean that he is not in favour of the increases which I have announced? Unless we are prepared to make some reductions, it is not possible to make increases elsewhere.

Or does the hon. Gentleman think that £6,865 million is not the right figure for expenditure in Wales? He has not told the House whether he thinks expenditure should be higher or lower, or what the Labour party would have as the total of Government expenditure in Wales. To call for higher spending for programme after programme comes a bit rich from a party that wants to waste millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on setting up an assembly in Wales. I find the hon. Gentleman's general approach extremely unconvincing.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the £65 million that will be raised by the sale of the Housing for Wales loan book. That money will be spent in Wales, which is why it is additional to the Treasury provision of £6,800 million. The two sums added together give the total budget. So the hon. Gentleman is mistaken.

The hon. Gentleman asked about council tax. He claimed that I had said that there should be ever-increasing levels of council tax. I have said that, in some years, it will be necessary for local government to find locally a larger proportion of its revenue. It is not necessary in every year. In that, I have agreed with the stated views of the Assembly of Welsh Counties.

When the council tax was introduced, the minutes of the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance showed that the assembly considered

> "that the introduction of the council tax provided the Government with an opportunity to enable local government to raise a greater proportion of its revenue from local taxation. At present local Government was able to raise less than 10 per cent. of its revenue locally, insufficient to ensure local accountability".

What I have said is entirely in line with that.

The hon. Gentleman said that people concerned with economic regeneration would be worried by this statement. I have increased the provision for regional selective assistance, increased the grant to the Welsh Development Agency, and redirected training resources in a way that aids economic regeneration. That is extremely good news for people who want to see continued economic progress and development in Wales.

In relation to the private finance initiative, as I have said, I shall announce the first project to be contracted extremely soon. On the question of local government revenue overall, I am increasing the Government's provision for local government revenue by £51 million in total. In relation to the housing budget overall, I am confident that the budget that I have provided will enable Housing for Wales to meet its stated plans, and that I have maintained a housing budget for Wales that is proportionately far ahead of the budget in England.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to criticise the reductions in the areas where I have set them out, it is incumbent upon him to say where he would find the money to avoid them, and to tell us how he would square that with the 10p tax rate advocated by his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). He will find that that is a difficult task.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and, in particular, its strong thrust towards economic development, not only in the industrial and business sphere but in the rural areas and through the Countryside Council for Wales, which will receive an extraordinary increase in its budget of 24 per cent. next year.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the increase in regional selective assistance and the increase in the WDA's funding for training and education, coupled with today's cut in interest rates and the fall in unemployment, mean that the prospects for growth in the Welsh economy next year can be viewed with far greater confidence?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend is right; the economic outlook is very good. The increased provision for regional selective assistance that I have set out today reflects the new momentum that is behind the inward investment effort. That is evidenced by the 30 per cent. increase in applications for regional selective assistance to which I referred. Set against the background of a lower taxed and more lightly regulated economy than is the case throughout most of the rest of Europe and the steady growth of the United Kingdom's economy as a whole, the outlook is very promising.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The Secretary of State has told us that Government funding for local authorities in Wales next year will amount to 88 per cent., that the increase in Government funding is about 2.1 per cent. and that the increase in local authority revenue spending altogether is to be 3.1 per cent., leaving out of account relief spending and capital spending for the moment.

Does the Secretary of State accept that those three figures alone—merely for local authority revenue spending—imply an average increase of well over 10 per cent. in council tax, which will mean that the people of Wales, rather than the Government, will have to pay for the increases in spending on education and other services of which he is so proud? Does he accept that that will mean that the people of Wales will lose further confidence in the new unitary authorities which are to be set up on April fool's day next, which will turn out to be an expensive and unpopular April fool joke?

Mr. Hague: The position is as I have stated it to be. The actual council tax levels for next year will be set by local authorities. The figures that I have given today imply that authorities should raise a slightly larger proportion of their total revenue locally, but that is a marginal change, which will still leave a great differential between council tax levels in Wales and those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I thank my right hon. Friend for including in his statement on road spending provision for preparatory work on the new road link with Cardiff international airport. That will be very good for the economy of the Vale of Glamorgan. I also thank my right hon. Friend for following the 11 per cent. increase in last year's police budget with a further 5 per cent. this year. The Vale has already been given 14 extra police officers this year; they are much needed, and very welcome.

[Mr. Walter Sweeney]

Finally, I thank my right hon. Friend for the extra provision for education and health. Would not the Opposition's demands for even more spending carry more weight if, instead of advocating the spending of millions of pounds on a building for politicians, they wanted to spend money on children and patients?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right, and I am grateful for what he has said. He rightly draws attention to the preparatory work on improved access to Cardiff international airport, which I know is important to his constituency and to the local economy; he also identified the importance of improved provision for education and health.

The health spending that I have announced today should enable 27,000 more out-patients and 46,000 more in-patients and day cases to be treated next year. It should also enable 100 more medical staff to be employed in the health service as a whole. As my hon. Friend said, that is a much better way in which to spend the taxpayers' money than setting up a new talking shop in Cardiff.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Why is it so splendid and vital to cut direct taxation nationally, but then decide to increase direct, compulsory council tax, as the Secretary of State has done?

Mr. Hague: There is no connection between any national tax changes and the size of the Welsh block, which is determined by a formula: it is 6.02 per cent. of changes in the amount for comparable English programmes. If I were to provide a different amount in local government revenue support next year, I would have to find it from other components of the Welsh block—or vice versa. Those who call for more revenue support for local government must be prepared to say where it would come from in the rest of the Welsh block, or to say—as Opposition Members so far refuse to say—that the total amount to be provided is not the right amount.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as one who is unaccustomed to attending the House for statements about Wales, I feel that the higher spending that he has announced—I believe that he mentioned extra spending of as much as £100 per head on health, which is £100 more than is spent in the rest of the country, particularly Birmingham—will strike my constituents as inexplicable?

Nevertheless, does my right hon. Friend agree that that spending demonstrates the advantages to Wales of membership of the Union, and the disadvantages that would ensue should Labour's policies for Wales be implemented?

Mr. Hague: I assure my hon. Friend that the differences are explicable. There are greater problems in public health in Wales than in many other parts of the United Kingdom. For instance, the proportion of people with limiting long-term illnesses is significantly higher in Wales, which justifies continued higher expenditure.

My hon. Friend is, however, right in saying that the higher expenditure shows the benefits of Wales being part of the United Kingdom. We should do nothing to endanger the part that it plays in the United Kingdom, and in this United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Will not the fledgling unitary authority of Flintshire begin its life in a seriously underfunded state? Is it not inevitable that council tax will go through the roof in Flintshire? Should not the excellent Flintshire councillors have a better deal, so that they can aim to provide more teachers and houses, and better community care? The settlement is unsatisfactory, and there should be a rethink for Flintshire, at least.

Mr. Hague: As I have explained, it is important to choose between different priorities. The below-average provisional SSA increase for Flintshire is due mainly to decreases in its share of secondary pupil numbers and updating of the financial database, which determines the relative weight of each service within the calculations. Naturally, I shall take account of the views of local authority associations on all the figures that I have announced, and make my final announcement in January.

I shall look at the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but I reiterate that we are choosing between many competing priorities. I believe that I identified the right priorities in my statement.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): May I welcome the generous increase in resources to train young people, which will enhance their future job prospects? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a cruel trick if those young people ever became victims of the social chapter and a minimum wage, which would devastate their job opportunities and their chances for life?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. By the end of the next financial year, 8,500 young people will have started modern apprenticeship courses in Wales, which is an encouraging sign for future job prospects and skills in the Welsh economy. We would do no favour to young people in Wales or elsewhere in the United Kingdom if we adopted job-destroying measures, such as a minimum wage or the social chapter, which would deny rather than improve prospects for a whole generation.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is the Secretary of State content with the fact that discretionary educational grants in Wales have virtually dried up, with the result that many professions are now no longer available to working-class children?

Mr. Hague: I have explained to the House my overall priorities within education. I have increased the total provision for capital spending on local authority schools as well as the provision for further and higher education funding councils, so the hon. Gentleman can see that I am increasing resources for several educational areas. It is impossible to spend as much as we would like on every aspect of education at the same time.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Secretary of State realise that, despite his smiling face and silver tongue, he cannot hide the central con in his statement? He pretends that great priority is being given to education, but the increases do not reach primary and secondary education in the state sector, which is the most critical area for most people.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that, once community care is taken out, Government support will increase by only 1.8 per cent.? The Government's figure for inflation is 2.5 per cent., and teachers' salaries are likely to rise by 3 per cent., so, even if educational spending is to stand still, council tax needs to rise by 15 to 20 per cent. The fallacy of this statement is that the people of Wales will pay just to stay where they are in respect of education.

Mr. Hague: The overall increased capital provision for schools will feed through across the state sector. We must be clear about that. As for the total revenue settlement, the increase in total standard spending gives authorities room to make substantial increases in educational provision. Naturally, I look to local authorities to continue to improve their efficiency, just as central Government are improving theirs.

If the unitary authorities carry through all the changes to their payrolls for which I am offering to fund the mandatory costs for the next couple of years, local authorities' running costs should be about £30 million less in total. More money is therefore available to local government than appears on first examining some of those figures.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Is it not deceitful of the Secretary of State to paint such a rosy picture of the Welsh economy, when independent, impartial observers are saying clearly that Wales has been reduced to one of the most impoverished areas in western Europe? Why will he not be straightforward with the House this afternoon, and confirm that council tax in Wales is likely to increase by more than 11 per cent.—double the expected increase for England?

Mr. Hague: We have dealt with the council tax argument. Council tax levels, as I have explained, are to be set by local authorities, but I have said very clearly in the past several weeks that I would expect a larger proportion of revenue to be funded locally by local authorities in the coming year.

On the overall economic picture, I believe that the hon. Gentleman does an injustice to Wales. There are problem areas. There are pockets of high unemployment—I referred to that in my statement, and I acknowledge it—but the overall rate of unemployment in Wales, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, is now lower than that in the other major European economies. That is a very different picture from the picture that we saw in previous decades. That picture has improved further with today's statistics, and it will improve still further in the coming year.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Is the Secretary of State aware that the statement will confirm the worst fears of many of my constituents, and of constituents throughout Wales, especially if they are parents or school governors or if they are one of the more than 100 people in my constituency who newly joined the dole queue this month—as the figures published today confirm?

The Secretary of State is not, in real terms, increasing the expenditure of the Welsh Development Agency to make up the £23 million cut, which meant that many very important projects had to be ended—or not begun—in my constituency and elsewhere in Wales. His announcement of an additional £12 million will not make up any of that £23 million, because the statement says that the WDA's spending for next year will remain approximately the same as for this year. That means that the £23 million cut will be made this year and next year.

A significant number of projects will not be able to go ahead, and many of those people who joined the dole queue last month in my constituency will remain on it directly as a result of the Secretary of State's failure to overcome that £23 million shortfall.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman must consider the provision for the Welsh Development Agency, which is a £12 million increase on what was planned in the Government's grant alongside the other measures that I announced—the increase in the budget for regional selective assistance and the attention that I have given to the training budget, especially for young people, which is good news for people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, where the unemployment record has not been as good in the past 12 months as it has been in Wales as a whole.

If the hon. Gentleman wants me to increase further the WDA's budget, he must be able to say where, in the other programmes, that money should be found. I have not heard Opposition Members make any suggestions about that today.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): May I welcome just one part of the statement—the announcement about the Carmarthen eastern bypass? We have waited for about 20 years, and we suffer appalling problems of congestion throughout the year, especially in summer. The bypass is badly needed. I also welcome the improvement of the links to Ceredigion, because those links are frustrating the economic development of that region.

There are some small problems with the Carmarthen eastern bypass. We have had major public inquiries, but we do not want another full-blown public inquiry. We want those little problems to be ironed out and the project to go ahead as soon as possible.

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I am trying to ensure that the road projects that have the highest priority, and the road projects that I have described in the statement, are those that are of strategic priority to the whole of Wales. I believe that there is a strong case for the projects that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and I have, as he says, included them in my statement. I will consider the issue he mentioned of the specific problems with those roads projects, and I should be happy to discuss them with him further.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): Will the Secretary of State explain the position in Clwyd? He has received representations from local authorities in Clwyd, and they have explained to him in great detail that there is nursery provision in Clwyd for 100 per cent. of four-year-olds, provided outside the SSA. That is funded by a Labour local authority. If he introduces nursery vouchers, the people of Clwyd know that that will disrupt nursery education in Clwyd; it will take it away from the parents in Clwyd. I want to know what he will do about it.

Mr. Hague: There is no reason for local authorities to have anything to fear about nursery provision if they are providing a service that people want to use. The money that will be recouped from local authorities to help to finance the nursery vouchers will not exceed the cost of the voucher. There will be more money in total; it will be a net injection of cash into the system, and it will give parents choice. I do not understand why we should not

[Mr. Hague]

give parents choice in those matters. I had supposed that the Labour party had become persuaded of the need for choice in recent times. Certainly its members often appear to want to exercise it, but evidently that is not the case today.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Is this not a shamelessly cynical exercise by the Secretary of State in bouncing local authorities into imposing swingeing council tax increases? As those local authorities in Wales are almost all Labour-controlled, that will be very convenient for the Conservative party in the run-up to the next general election.

I specifically appeal to the Secretary of State to intervene to require his officials to reconsider the disaggregation of West Glamorgan county's budget. The way in which it is being done is penalising Neath and Port Talbot compared with Swansea, to such an extent that, in Heol-y-Ffin in Trebanos in my constituency, whereas all the people in that street at present pay the same council tax, from April 1996, people living on the Neath and Port Talbot side of that street will pay £100 more than people living on the other side.

It has nothing to do with the way in which the two new authorities distribute their spending and budgetary plans. The reason that that discrimination is occurring is to do with the Secretary of State's own Welsh Office incompetence and obstinacy.

Mr. Hague: I do not think that it is to do with anyone's obstinacy. My officials have worked on the disaggregation very hard, together with people in the local authorities. A great deal of work has gone on through the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, so that the disaggregated figures and the notional amounts are agreed figures, and everyone's best understanding of what the figures should look like.

Of course I will be happy to consider the matter that the hon. Gentleman draws to my attention, but I hope that he appreciates that the disaggregated figures and the notional amounts are already the product of a great deal of detailed work, taking account of the many anomalies that might arise. I will certainly consider that matter.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Was the Secretary of State able to take account of representations made to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) by Flintshire specifically about the staff from Clwyd county council who have now adopted Flintshire as their new authority, and about the position of Theatre Clwyd, both of which are aspects of the settlement that cause concern?

Can the Secretary of State confirm to the House that, wherever in the statement he has used the phrase

"maintained at current levels of expenditure",

as he has with the tourism budget and with the libraries and museums budget, he means a cut, because inflation has increased?

Mr. Hague: I have already mentioned Flintshire in my answer to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones).

Yes, maintaining budgets flat means that the cash amount remains the same, but all those organisations have opportunities to reduce running costs so that more is available to be spent on services. In the case of the National Library for Wales, as the hon. Gentleman will recall, I announced a cash increase, so there is an increase in the resources available to introduce a much larger service, to bring the third library building into use.

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): Will the Secretary of State comment on the reorganisation of local government in Wales? The cost of that reorganisation has been put at £150 million, and the Society of County Treasurers has said that only districts with populations of 350,000 will achieve a payback. Bearing in mind the heavy on-going cost of local government reorganisation, will the Secretary of State assure us that the £42 million for local government reorganisation next year to which he referred in his statement will be sufficient, and will not lead to cuts in services? Is the £42 million new money?

Mr. Hague: Yes, the £42 million is new money, in the sense that it is additional to the other amounts that I have announced in support of local government next year. The provision that I have made for the years up to and including 1998-99 will mean that the Welsh Office's support for transitional costs will total about £104 million over a five-year period.

The amount that I have announced in the statement will cover all the mandatory costs that my predecessor indicated would be covered. It will also cover a proportion of the discretionary costs of local government reorganisation. It would be wrong to meet all those costs, because that would lead to an increase in bids and an increase in the costs over time. We do not want to see that occur.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I cannot believe that the Secretary of State is so unintelligent that he does not realise that this is a "Fantasy Island" budget, replete with Orwellian newspeak. When the Secretary of State talks about an increase in the Welsh Office budget, he actually means a cut.

The Secretary of State has announced cash increases for local government, but if we take into account inflation and local authorities' spending this year, we find that their funds will be cut. The Secretary of State has only to look at the statistics on local government education produced by his own Department. They show that the pupil-teacher ratio has increased in the past few years. More and more children are being taught in classes with more than 31 pupils, and last year the local authorities reduced their administrative costs by more than £8 million. Yet the Secretary of State is providing those authorities with less money to run the education system.

Will the Secretary of State confirm the figure that he gave to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) of a minimum 11 per cent. increase in the council tax budget in Wales? If authorities are to meet existing levels of service with reduced funding from the Welsh Office, they will have to increase their council tax by more than 11 per cent.

Mr. Hague: Let us be clear that the Government's support for local government revenue funding will be £51 million higher next year. That will amount to a lower proportion of total standard spending by a small sum, which is why we need to increase the revenue raised locally in the coming year. I have already referred to that fact.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to direct more resources to that area, he must say where he would find them. He must be able to tell us where he would get them. If he is not happy with the total budget of £6,865 million—as he implied in his question—he must confirm whether he has squared his views with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, and whether he believes that extra money should be raised through higher taxation, higher borrowing or reductions in spending elsewhere. Unless Labour Members are willing to confront that basic problem inherent in all their remarks, their criticisms of today's statement will have no credibility.

I find it extraordinary that Labour Members have not uttered a single word of welcome for a statement which announces this level of provision for health, education, training and the Countryside Council for Wales. They are professional gloom-mongers—but they have not even been successful in that regard this afternoon.

Points of Order

5.14 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, of which I have given you notice. You will be aware that, some weeks ago, Baroness Blatch, a Home Office Minister, announced in the other place that social security resolutions would be laid before the House on Monday next. They will come under our negative resolution procedure, so they will be eligible for debate only if a prayer is laid.

Given that the orders will be implemented on the day before the House returns from the Christmas recess on 8 January, it will mean that hon Members will not have the opportunity to debate the orders, which will lead to more than 10,000 refugees and asylum seekers being left destitute and on the streets.

I am sure that, as the defender of the House's liberties and our rights of free speech, you will recognise that, even if that is technically within the rules, it is against the spirit of the rules that we usually operate in this place. Therefore, I hope that you will examine our procedures and consider the question to ensure that, if someone raises a prayer with you on Monday, provision may be made for a debate to occur even on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I believe that the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) wishes to make a similar point of order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to be brief, as it is a very important matter.

Mr. Madden: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. While I endorse everything that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) has said, I must add that the Standing Committee on the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is directly concerned with these matters, will not have an opportunity to debate them for several weeks. The Social Security Select Committee is considering the issue at this very moment, and it has still to report.

While we do not criticise you in any way, Madam Speaker—we realise that you have no responsibility for the way in which the Government choose to conduct their business—the procedure amounts to an abuse of Parliament, and demonstrates a contempt for Parliament. It is not an arcane matter: thousands of people will shortly be left with absolutely no income. Therefore, would you at least deprecate the procedure?

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. During the recent debate on the legislation, I intervened on the Home Secretary precisely to point out that many people who are perfectly legitimate refugees will be deprived of all their income on 8 January. They cannot work, and their families will have nothing to live on, yet Parliament is approving that outrageous and thoroughly unjust measure.

It is a disgrace that the matter cannot be debated properly before it comes into effect on 8 January. When I intervened on the Home Secretary, he promised to provide me with an answer. He has not done so, and I think that he should be made to explain his position to the House.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) for allowing me time to consider his point of order. He wrote me a long letter late yesterday afternoon. I have taken into consideration not only his point of order but also the other two points of order on the subject—which is a most unusual course for me—as I appreciate the seriousness of the situation, and the fact that hon. Members feel very strongly about it, and it is right that they should place their views on the record.

However, I must inform the House that the Chair has no power to do what the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and other hon. Members have requested. They want me to interfere with the Government's use of order-making powers which have been given to them by Parliament in statute. No Speaker has the right or the authority to intervene in that way, but I hope that the strong views that have been expressed today have been noted by those on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Alton: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your reply. I ask you also to look very sympathetically at an application for a Standing Order No. 20 resolution so that the matter might be debated urgently next week.

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to ask leave to move a Standing Order No. 20 application now?

Mr. Alton *indicated assent.*

Madam Speaker: It is somewhat hypothetical. I think that the hon. Gentleman must submit the proposal to me at the appropriate time and of course I shall examine it, as I always do.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is usually unsatisfactory to try to grasshopper back to a previous statement, but I believe that there is a point of order for you, as you are responsible for the Clerks Department and its operation in the House.

The impression was given—I put it no higher than that—not so much in the statement as in answers from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that the Clerks Department was participating in matters—I shall not go into their merits, but they are nevertheless highly controversial—in relation to the privatisation of the Stationery Office. If the Clerks Department agreed to participate in the way in which the Minister certainly indicated to the House—Labour Front-Bench Members also received that impression—have they agreed to participate in the operations with contractors or potential contractors for the Stationery Office?

Madam Speaker: I take the hon. Gentleman's point very seriously. We all have to interpret in our own way what Ministers say, particularly in answer to questions, but that was not the impression that I obtained. Although participation by parliamentary officials in Government decisions is, of course, quite improper, consultations between Government representatives and House authorities will be required at many stages of the proposed process of the privatisation of HMSO. However, there is an important difference between the two that must be maintained at all times, and I shall see that it is.

BILLS PRESENTED

British Time (Extra Daylight)

Mr. John Butterfill, supported by Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. Greville Janner, Sir Terence Higgins, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Sir Peter Lloyd, Mr. John Maxton, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. David Rendel, Mrs. Anne Campbell and Dr. Tony Wright, presented a Bill to advance by one hour the time for general purposes throughout the year: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 January and to be printed. [Bill 15.]

Wild Mammals (Protection)

Mr. Don Dixon, on behalf of Mr. Alan Meale, supported by Mr. John McFall, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Elliot Morley, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Eric Clarke, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. David Winnick and Mr. Tony Banks, presented a Bill to make provision for the protection of wild mammals from certain cruel acts; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 January and to be printed. [Bill 16.]

Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement)

Mr. John Marshall, supported by Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Hartley Booth, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Sir Michael Neubert, Mr. Julian Brazier, Rev. Martin Smyth, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Donald Anderson, Mr. Michael Alison and Mr. Norman Hogg, presented a Bill to make provision about conspiracy, or incitement, to commit certain sexual acts outside the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 February and to be printed. [Bill 17.]

Employment (Upper Age Limits in Advertisements)

Mr. David Winnick, supported by Mr. Alex Carlile, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Hugh Dykes, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. George Foulkes, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Greville Janner, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Andrew Rowe and Mr. Allan Stewart, presented a Bill to prohibit the use of upper age limits in the advertising of employment vacancies: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 18.]

Noise

Mr. Harry Greenway, supported by Mr. Robert Atkins, Sir Michael Neubert, Rev. Martin Smyth, Sir Marcus Fox, Mrs. Llin Golding, Mr. Richard Tracey, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. John Marshall, Mr. David Evenett and Mr. Robin Corbett, presented a Bill to make provision about noise emitted from dwellings at night; about the forfeiture and confiscation of equipment used to make noise unlawfully; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 16 February and to be printed. [Bill 19.]

Public Interest Disclosure

Mr. Don Touhig, supported by Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mrs. Edwina Currie, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith, Mr. Derek Fatchett, Sir David Knox, Mr. Giles Radice, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Richard

Shepherd and Dr. Tony Wright, presented a Bill to protect individuals who make certain disclosures of information in the public interest; to allow such individuals to bring action in respect of victimisation; to protect the identity of sources of information in certain cases; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March, St. David's day and to be printed. [Bill 20.]

TREASURE

Sir Anthony Grant, supported by Mr. Peter Brooke, Sir Peter Hordern, Mr. A. J. Beith, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mr. Tam Dalyell, Mr. Andrew Faulds, Mr. Toby Jessel, Mr. Robert Key and Mr. Richard Spring, presented a Bill to abolish treasure trove and to make fresh provision in relation to treasure: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 March and to be printed. [Bill 21.]

TRADING SCHEMES

Sir Nicholas Scott, supported by Mr. Robert Hicks, Sir David Knox and Sir David Madel, presented a Bill to make provision in respect of certain trading schemes; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 February and to be printed. [Bill 22.]

GENDER IDENTITY (REGISTRATION AND CIVIL STATUS)

Mr. Archy Kirkwood, on behalf of Mr. Alex Carlile, supported by Mrs. Edwina Currie, Dr. Lynne Jones, Mr. Jerry Hayes and Ms Glenda Jackson, presented a Bill to make provision in relation to sex reassignment treatment and the registration and civil status of those who have undergone such treatment: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 February and to be printed. [Bill 23.]

OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

Lady Olga Maitland, supported by Mr. Bob Dunn, Mr. Charles Wardle, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Julian Brazier, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. Andrew Hunter, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Sir Patrick Cormack and Sir Michael Neubert, presented a Bill to make provision about arrest without warrant, and punishment, in connection with offences under section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 January and to be printed. [Bill 24.]

RAILWAY HERITAGE

Mr. Mark Robinson, supported by Mr. Ray Whitney, Sir Kenneth Carlisle, Mr. David Amess, Mr. Anthony Steen, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Nigel Forman, Mr. Tim Smith, Mr. John Whittingdale, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. David Nicholson and Mr. Robert Jackson, presented a Bill to make further provision for and in connection with the preservation of railway records and artefacts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 16 February and to be printed. [Bill 25.]

WILDLIFE

Mr. James Couchman, supported by Sir John Hannam, Sir John Hunt, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Elliot Morley, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mr. Cynog Dafis and Mr. Harry Greenway, presented a Bill to make further provision for the protection of areas of special scientific interest; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 26.]

LEASEHOLD (REFORM)

Mrs. Jacqui Lait, supported by Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. Nigel Forman, Dr. Ian Twinn and Mr. Roger Gale, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to leasehold and to introduce a system of commonhold property tenure: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 March and to be printed. [Bill 27.]

INTEREST ON DEBTS

Mr. Nick Ainger, on behalf of Mr. Jon Owen Jones, supported by Sir Wyn Roberts, Mr. Peter Hain, Mr. David Alton, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Ian Pearson, Mr. Nick Ainger, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Ms Jean Corston and Ms Diane Abbott, presented a Bill to amend the law by making provision for certain debts to carry interest; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March, and to be printed. [Bill 28.]

NON-DOMESTIC RATING (INFORMATION)

Mr. Allan Stewart, supported by Sir Hector Monro, Mr. Phil Gallie and Mr. Bill Walker, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with the disclosure by persons who are valuation officers or assessors to other such persons of information connected with non-domestic rating: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 29.]

LAW REFORM (YEAR AND A DAY RULE)

Mr. Alan Milburn, on behalf of Mr. Doug Hoyle, supported by Mr. Alan Milburn, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. David Trimble, Mr. Alun Michael, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Don Dixon, Dame Jill Knight, Ms Janet Anderson, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. John Hutton and Ms Jean Corston, presented a Bill to abolish the "year and a day rule" and, in consequence of its abolition, to impose a restriction on the institution in certain circumstances of proceedings for a fatal offence: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 30.]

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Alan Simpson, supported by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Sir John Hannam, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Llew Smith, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Gary Waller, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. Robert Hicks and Mr. Harry Greenway, presented a Bill to make further provision for energy conservation; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 31.]

DOGS (FOULING OF LAND)

Mr. Andrew Hunter, supported by Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Dame Jill Knight, Lady Olga Maitland, Mr. David Nicholson, Mr. Julian Brazier, Mr. Geoffrey

Clifton-Brown, Mr. Henry Bellingham and Sir David Madel, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the fouling of land by dogs: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 January and to be printed. [Bill 32.]

WATER (CONSERVATION AND CONSUMER CHOICE)

Mr. Richard Burden, supported by Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. David Nicholson, Ms Joan Ruddock, Mr. David Jamieson, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Ms Jean Corston and Mr. Nick Ainger, presented a Bill to provide for the conservation of water resources by the establishment of mandatory water leakage targets for water undertakers; by requiring water undertakers to encourage the installation of water efficient fittings in homes; and by providing for the review of abstraction licences which affect sites of nature conservation value; and to give domestic consumers greater choice as to methods of charging for the supply of water: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 January and to be printed. [Bill 33.]

PRISONERS' EARNINGS

Mr. Hartley Booth, supported by Sir John Cope, Sir Peter Lloyd, Mr. Michael Alison, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. John Marshall, Mr. David Tredinnick, Mr. Nigel Waterson, Dr. Ian Twinn, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Paul Flynn and Mr. Douglas French, presented a Bill to authorise deductions from or levies on prisoners' earnings; to provide for the application of such deductions or levies; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 34.]

Orders of the Day

Armed Forces Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.25 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is extremely important. There is an Armed Forces Bill every five years and, like its predecessors, this Bill will continue the existence of the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957 for a further five years. Those Acts provide the statutory framework for discipline in the armed forces. Unless we renew them by an Act of Parliament before the end of December next year, they will expire.

Clause 1 achieves that purpose. It provides for the service discipline Acts to continue in force for a further year and to be renewed annually after that by an Order in Council, but not beyond the end of the year 2001. A number of other clauses address matters of detail, and I do not propose to detain the House with them today.

I shall propose that the Bill is committed to a Select Committee, which will enable the clauses to be examined in great detail.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): As I do not expect to receive an invitation to sit on the Select Committee, I need to question the Minister now, before he sits down.

Why is the Bill so inadequate in its protection of Scottish soldiers and their families residing in Scotland? In terms of the courts martial appeals system, the Bill defines Scots law as inferior to English law.

Why has the Minister chosen to ignore recent improvements in child protection law in Scottish legislation? I refer to the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which give greater protection to children caught up in abuse cases than the Bill does. Why is that so?

Mr. Soames: At least we shall be assured of the hon. Gentleman not making a speech. That was a most long-winded intervention that was typical of a former military policeman.

Courts martial in Scotland do not apply the law of Scotland. They apply the same service law wherever the trial takes place. It is a portable system which the armed forces carry with them wherever they serve, whether it is in Bosnia, Belize, Brecon or the borders. While elements of service law are based on English law and certain English legal procedures have been specifically adopted, service law is a system of law in its own right. It would be entirely impractical for courts martial in Scotland to operate under different law from courts martial everywhere else. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will now allow me to develop my speech a little more so that we can come on to those parts of the reforms that I intend to announce today and which I hope will please Scottish, England and Welsh soldiers and Ulstermen as much as they please the House.

I intend to propose that the House commits the Bill to a Select Committee, which will enable the clauses to be examined in great detail. Now that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has declared his hand, it is almost inevitable that he will find himself on that Committee, where he will be very welcome with his knowledge as a former military policeman.

I imagine that, as in the past, the Committee may also wish to look at one or two issues that are not included in the Bill. Indeed, we have already undertaken to give the Committee the report of our assessment of the armed forces' policy on homosexuality.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Before the Minister leaves that subject, will he accept that homosexuals are just as likely as anyone else to be highly competent and professional members of the armed services and that their sexuality should have no bearing on their eligibility to serve their country in that way? Will he legislate to that effect?

Mr. Soames: I do not intend to go into that matter now. As I have said, we intend to deal with it in Committee. I think that the reasons for the services' position are well understood. The Committee will have the opportunity, if it so chooses, to debate those matters at greater length and with the benefit of the review which we shall be presenting to them.

I intend to concentrate today on the more important clauses in the Bill. First, I wish to deal with local service engagements. Clause 2 will enable the armed forces to offer a new type of engagement for local service. Men and women recruited for local service would not have the same obligation to serve anywhere in the world as those recruited for general service.

There are no plans to introduce local service engagements on a general basis in the foreseeable future. However, it is sensible to give the services the flexibility to recruit for local service if they identify areas of activity where it would be appropriate so to do.

One specific area that has been identified is guarding. We have recently begun to consult on proposals to employ service personnel on local service engagements as armed guards at certain establishments.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): I am not bidding, I hasten to say, for a place on the Committee but merely wish to ask my hon. Friend whether clause 2 could be applied to medical personnel. My immediate concern, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley), arises from local anxiety about the closure of Cambridge military hospital, the extremely alarmist rumours that have been put about and the availability of surgical staff in the army. I hope that my hon. Friend can assure me that there is no possibility that the hospital will be closed and bulldozed in February.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley) has been in touch with my Department and has sent me a copy of the most extraordinary, outrageous and inflammatory letter in a local newspaper in Aldershot on the numbers of surgeons and others available for deployment—which figures are completely and hopelessly inaccurate.

I am happy to confirm to my right hon. Friend—and I should be grateful if he would pass this on to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot—that it would be quite inappropriate to recruit medical support by way of local service engagements. We are quite clear, that for any foreseeable operation, we would be able to find regular personnel from the defence medical services. Any local peacetime shortfalls would be met in the short term by employing civilian practitioners. I would like to take the opportunity to ask my right hon. Friend to pass our best wishes to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot and ask him to rest his mind on the issue.

The suggestion that Cambridge military hospital will be bulldozed is also nonsense. The permanent buildings will be retained for defence-related purposes and the national health service will also maintain a temporary presence at the site.

I shall now deal with the question of consistency with civilian courts. Where it is sensible and practical, procedures in the services mirror those of the civilian courts and the police. Clauses 5 to 11 are clear examples of that. They incorporate a number of changes which have been made in civilian law over the past few years, remove anomalies in service rules and procedures, particularly compared with civilian ones, and contain improvements.

I shall come back to clauses 12 to 16 later.

Clause 17 tidies up the rules enabling service men and women to make complaints through the internal redress procedures. It will allow a time limit to be introduced for the making of such complaints. This is not intended in any way to be restrictive. However, it does not seem sensible to allow complaints to be made an excessively long time after an event.

The suggested three-month time limit will also tie in with clauses 18 to 24, which aim to introduce consistency into the arrangements for service men and women to take various complaints to industrial tribunals. At present, different sets of rules apply to different types of complaints. The Bill aims to introduce greater uniformity. The basic principle will be that in all cases eligible to be submitted to industrial tribunals, internal procedures must be used first In most circumstances in civilian life, there is a three-month time limit for applications to industrial tribunals. For service men and women, because of the requirement to use internal procedures first, the industrial tribunal time limit will be extended by three months. The three-month limit for internal complaints will provide time for efforts to settle complaints internally before the industrial tribunal deadline expires.

Clause 26 is designed to allow the Secretary of State for Defence, as the trustee of Greenwich hospital, to grant a lease in respect of the Royal Naval college, Greenwich. The House will be familiar with the background to this matter. It is, I believe, right that the Committee will have the chance to consider an issue which is of great public interest and of considerable importance.

I shall now deal with drug testing. I know that everyone in the House will understand that there can be no place whatever for drug misuse in the armed forces. For a year now, the Army has had a compulsory drugs testing programme. Those who refuse to take a test, or who test positively, are normally required to leave the Army, as is anyone found to be misusing drugs in the other services. Clause 27 makes it an offence to refuse to take part. This will provide flexibility in dealing with those whom it would be preferable to retain, such as the young, first-time offender.

[Mr. Soames]

Time does not allow me to say much about clauses 25 and 28. In different ways, they amend the law to help the services do their business more effectively. Clause 25 will enable us to resume important recruiting activities which involve members of the public handling service firearms under supervision.

Clause 28 amends the Visiting Forces Act 1952, an extremely important piece of legislation, to enable Parliament to offer concessions on jurisdiction to visiting forces from a wider range of countries than at present. As such concessions are usually available on a reciprocal basis, the underlying purpose of this change is to facilitate arrangements for our forces to exercise in the countries concerned.

I now want to deal with what I believe is going to be the most important part of this Armed Forces Bill. A five-yearly Bill means that there is a regular review of the court martial system. It enables us to think afresh about whether we are doing things in the best way.

The House needs to be quite clear about the need for a separate system for administering justice in the armed forces. In many ways, life in the services differs fundamentally from civilian life. Discipline in the armed forces is not an optional extra; it is a key ingredient of fighting effectiveness. Lives can and do depend on it.

The system of discipline has to be capable of functioning in peace and war, and wherever in the world members of the services find themselves. That is the point that I was trying to make to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). It has to be firm. Just as importantly, it must be fair and be seen to be fair. Anyone who has served in the armed forces will remember that the first canon of military law is that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done.

The proposals for change resulting from our review are quite complex and I thought that the House would find it helpful to have the details before today's debate. I therefore answered a written question last Thursday, setting out the details. The salient points are these.

A key figure in the court martial system is the convening officer. He is the senior officer who agrees to the setting up of a court martial. He decides what the charges will be and when and where the court martial will be held. He is responsible for appointing the prosecuting officer and the members of the court martial and, where necessary, arranging the appointment of the judge advocate.

Additionally, the convening officer is responsible for aspects of the conduct of the prosecution, such as deciding whether or not to accept a plea by the accused to a lesser charge. He is also normally the confirming officer, responsible for approving or amending the verdict and sentence of the court martial.

The convening officer is part of the chain of command. He has performed all those functions because of the need for the chain of command to be involved in the administration of discipline. We have examined, however, whether he needs to continue to perform all those functions and have decided that he does not.

The role of convening officer will cease to exist in its present form. His duties will be divided. New higher authorities will ensure that the chain of command continues to be involved in preliminary decisions on how discipline cases should be handled. We recognise, however, that there is a need to remove the impression, however mistaken, that the chain of command can have an undue influence over court martial proceedings. Therefore, many of the convening officer's functions will be transferred to new bodies independent of the chain of command. The new prosecuting authorities will be staffed by legal officers. They will decide whether to prosecute and what charges should be brought. They will then conduct the prosecution.

The administrative arrangements for courts martial will be in the hands of cells independent of both higher authorities and the prosecuting authorities. Those cells will be responsible for selecting court martial members, who will be officers who are not in the same command as the accused.

Where they require legislative authority, the changes that I have just outlined will be the subject of amendments to the Bill. Clause 12, however, already ends the convening officer's role in confirming the findings of courts martial.

That is part of the reform of post-trial procedures dealt with in clauses 12 to 16. That reform involves simplifying the arrangements for conducting internal reviews of court martial findings and sentences. More important, though, is the opening up of access to the court martial appeal court, to enable it to hear appeals against sentence as well as against conviction.

It may not be generally realised that a civilian court of appeal, sitting as the courts martial appeal court, deals with appeals from courts martial. The change to allow appeals against sentence to be heard will mean that all courts martial decisions will be liable to challenge at the court of appeal.

I should like to return to measures that do not yet feature in the Bill.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): My hon. Friend will know that defence is a matter over which the European Union has no competence. Will he confirm that the organisation and discipline of the United Kingdom's armed forces are entirely a matter for this country and this Parliament, and that no interference will be accepted from European courts on the pretext of health and safety, sex discrimination, employment or any other form of legislation?

Mr. Soames: It would not be right for me, a humble toad beneath the Government's harrow, to give such a blanket assurance. One of the many anxieties that we all labour under is the interference by the European courts in some of our judicial cases. It is devoutly hoped that this country's courts martial and judicial systems should suffer minimum interference from the European courts.

At most courts martial, there is a judge advocate. As a lawyer, he fulfils many of a judge's functions in a Crown court. He advises on the law, sums up and, in the event of a guilty finding, offers guidance on the sentencing options.

We have decided to enhance the judge advocate's role. Judge advocates will be present at all future courts martial. Unlike now, their advice on points of law will be binding on the court and they will have a vote on sentence. Also, the reasons for a sentence will be given in open court.

Not all disciplinary matters are dealt with by court martial. Fortunately, the majority are disposed of summarily, normally by the commanding officer. That is an effective way of dealing with more minor disciplinary issues quickly.

Again, we have reviewed those arrangements. We intend to extend the facility that enables defendants in certain circumstances to elect for trial by court martial. In future, defendants in all Army and Royal Air Force summary proceedings will be able to opt for a court martial.

All the changes that I have described will apply to the Army and to the RAF. They will also generally apply to the Royal Navy. However, as hon. Members will, I am sure, understand if they think about it, there are differences in the Royal Navy's discipline system, and that will affect the way in which the changes are extended to it.

I have accepted the Navy's judgment that it would not be feasible to change its present arrangements for summary trials. They already offer scope for defendants in some cases to elect for trial by court martial. The operational environment at sea, however, means that widespread use of an extended right to opt for court martial could prevent relatively minor disciplinary matters from being dealt with quickly.

The Select Committee dealing with the Bill will consider those proposals closely. They represent a cohesive and coherent package of reforms and improvements to take the court martial system into the next century. Generally, I hope and believe that the Bill, as it is drafted and with the amendments that will be added to it, represents an important, sensible and satisfactory framework for future military discipline, and I commend it to the House.

5.44 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I thank the Minister for outlining the Bill's purpose and for doing so in such short order. I shall take a little longer, but I hope that I shall not detain the House too long, because I know that everyone has much business to do.

As the Minister said, this afternoon and over the next few months we will undertake the five-yearly review of the armed forces' discipline Acts. We will not vote against the Government tonight because, in general, anyone would accept that discipline is central, and perhaps more so to the armed forces than to any other institution. As we are concerned with discipline, it is natural that, by the very nature of our investigations, we will concentrate not only on the need for discipline but on its form and its breaches in the past few years.

As we will be concerned with breaches of discipline, I should make it clear at the outset that our concentration on those aspects of service life in no way reflects on the vast majority of men and women who make up our armed forces. It is worth recalling that at a time when our men and women are being dispatched to take part in the largest peacetime operation, and certainly the largest military operation in Europe since the second world war.

Thankfully, deficiencies in discipline or breaches of it are a minority sport in the British armed forces. That is not because it is imposed on our soldiers, sailors and airmen, but because of the appreciation that the best form of discipline is self-discipline. It stems partly not only from rules and regulations, but, as the Minister will know, from loyalty, because loyalty to one's friends, as the Minister will also know, is among the highest of virtues, although it is not always rewarded. We regard loyalty in the British armed forces, at every level from colonels-in-chief down to squaddies, as a virtue that should not be underestimated. I therefore take the early opportunity to thank the members of the British armed forces—men and women—for their discipline, courage and loyalty throughout the five years.

Discipline, good order and morale are inseparable. I make that point because the discipline that is an essential part of military life is often misunderstood by people, including some hon. Members, who are not familiar with military ethos and practice. It is not merely a matter of abstract rules and regulations inherited by tradition and imposed without rationale; it is an essential, crucial component of our armed forces' effectiveness.

That discipline serves the country well and is the fulcrum around which the efficiency of our service revolves. All other things being equal, an undisciplined or ill-disciplined force is doomed to defeat on the battlefield. It serves our military units well, as it is an integral part of esprit de corps and morale, delineating acceptable behaviour from unacceptable behaviour; and it serves our service men and women well, because disciplined practice in peacetime will minimise their personal risk in times of war. In short, from the individual to the nation, discipline saves lives.

The Minister referred to the interlapping between civilian and military law. The rule of thumb of hon. Members on, I think, both sides of the House is that, wherever possible, appropriate and practical service law should approximate to the law in civilian society. Of course, unlike some of our potential enemies, we live in a democratic society and therefore we approach military law with a conceptual framework that separates us from those who do not share our vision of civil liberties or social mores.

There is one aspect of the overlapping of military and civilian law that the Opposition do not support, and we are glad to see that the Bill does not refer to it. There have been recent reports—no more than that—that the Home Secretary intends to foist young offenders on the military. We make it plain that the armed forces neither need nor want to become the repository of the problem offenders of the penal system. Quite apart from their current obvious overstretch, it is not the job of the armed forces to be penal officers or probation officers for the Home Secretary, and we urge the Minister to resist whatever entreaties he is receiving from that quarter.

Mr. Stephen: None of us thinks that it is desirable to mix criminals with serving soldiers, sailors and airmen, but does not the hon. Gentleman accept that young offenders might benefit from some of the outstanding leadership skills that are possessed by staff at the basic training establishments—although not, as the hon. Gentleman says, in a military environment?

Dr. Reid: I have suggested that we should separate criminals from those who are at risk. Leadership qualities in the armed forces, and especially among cadets, are much under-used socially. Young people who are at risk because of social circumstances are already dealt with by challenge weekends and development in the cadets, and I should like to see that greatly extended.

[Dr. Reid]

However, that is quite different from using a period in the armed forces as some form of penal servitude or from using the forces as custodians of offenders. In some cases, presumably the dross of the penal system could be hived off by a Home Secretary who is so beleaguered on other fronts that he is shifting the problem towards the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, whose shoulders are broad enough to bear it. I hope that the Minister will resist those entreaties.

We welcome many of the proposed changes to courts martial, which are the major issue in the Bill. The ultimate vehicle for the imposition of disciplinary procedures in the forces is the court martial, and I suspect that consideration of its form and procedures will command by far the Committee's greatest attention. Although I welcome the proposals, we have certain reservations, which we shall detail in Committee. I shall outline some of them. The first one is general and the others are specific.

Our general reservation is that the treatment of serious court martial offences, not necessarily those that have been committed in the United Kingdom but which perhaps involve a civilian, raises a general concern. It is highlighted by the tragic case of Christina Menzies, which has already been raised in the House by the local constituency Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). The case highlights the inadequacies of the present system in serving justice on more serious offences such as homicide through the court martial system.

Christina Menzies, a young girl, was the daughter of a sergeant in the British Army, and she was brutally murdered in Germany. The accused was a serving soldier in the British Army and, although the tragic young victim was a civilian, it was decided to try the accused by court martial by the British military authorities rather than by the German civil courts and investigative bodies that had begun the procedure. Therefore, it was decided that the investigation and prosecution of the case would be undertaken by British military authorities.

I make it clear that I am not in a position to make a judgment about the innocence or guilt of the accused soldier, who was acquitted by the court martial. Many people, including Christina's parents, the local Member of Parliament and the German authorities feel strongly that justice was not served by that acquittal. There are grave doubts about whether the prosecuting officer had the necessary experience for such a role, especially as the defendant was able to hire a barrister who specialised in offences such as homicide. That barrister was hired at taxpayers' expense through the legal aid system.

There were equally serious doubts about the ability to handle complicated forensic evidence. In cases where a civilian victim is involved and where the offence occurs in a modern, civilised and democratic society, why is it necessary for a military court rather than a local court to be used? Is justice served by pitting armed forces officers, who perhaps are inexperienced in matters as serious as homicide, against the best that money can buy in an experienced criminal defence counsel? The Committee will need to examine seriously that general question and it will need to try to ensure that a case such as that involving the death of Christina Menzies never happens again. If we can achieve that, perhaps the tragic experience of that brutal murder can be put, at least in the long run, to some good purpose.

I have two or three specific points on other court martial issues. We have long made plain our view that reform of the system is overdue, particularly in terms of composition and appeals procedures. The Minister has gone some way towards doing that and we welcome that, but we have argued that it is wrong to exclude experienced warrant officers from sitting on a court martial.

A sergeant may have been hardened by battle or by military service on the streets of Northern Ireland, and may have a streetwise or barrackwise knowledge of men and women in the armed forces. He may have wisdom and knowledge that are not always immediately and spontaneously apparent in officers who have had a somewhat more sheltered background on their way to commissions, but he is excluded by our traditions and rules from sitting on a court martial.

If we wish, where practical and possible, to approximate to civilian law, we must bear in mind the primary civilian premise that a man or woman should be judged by his or her peers. In this case, not only is it practical and possible to take on experienced non-commissioned officers, but it is beneficial to justice being done and being seen to be done. We shall certainly raise that matter in Committee.

The Minister outlined the part that is played in the chain of command in the intended reforms of the courts martial system. The reforms provide only a mechanism that must be activated to ensure that members of the panel do not come from the same corps as the defendant in contentious cases. By repealing provisions that provide for an officer to confirm and revise a court martial's finding under, I think, clause 12, the Government have offered a compromise rather than a serious examination of the matter of advancing towards the principle of peer group judgment. We should recall that some 20 cases are pending in the European Court, to which the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) referred. I doubt whether the proposals as they stand offer sufficient transparency to verify that senior officers are sufficiently independent to ensure fair treatment.

The Government will tell us, as they did five years ago, that they have surveyed opinions on courts martial, and that their last survey revealed no overwhelming demand for change. The supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence and a service opinion survey about discipline in 1988 are based on 29 unfavourable comments from a total of 2,361 comments, which in turn are from a total of more than 142,000 trained strength for that year. That is hardly a scientific basis on which to approach the issue.

Before the Minister says that, if there was an unsettled feeling among members of the armed forces, they would all write in, I remind him—not that he needs it—that the first rule of armed forces life is never to volunteer, and certainly never to complain about anything in writing giving one's name. We need to find out on a more scientific basis whether there is satisfaction in the armed forces quite apart from finding whether it exists in outside bodies such as the European Courts. May we be assured that, in future, the Army attitudes survey will include specific questions on discipline, and that details will be given about the response rate to the survey since the most recent review?

The requirements proposed by the Government would amend the Courts-Martial (Appeals) Act 1968 to allow the courts martial appeal court to hear appeals against sentences and convictions under clause 14(2). They also extend the powers of the Secretary of State to refer sentences opposed by courts martial to the courts martial appeal court. Clause 15 provides for the registrar to extend time limits for the notice of appeal, or for application of leave to appeal. Those have been covered adequately by the Minister.

Dr. Godman: I do not believe that the court martial appeals court has ever sat in Edinburgh, but does my hon. Friend agree that it would make good sense for a Scottish judge to sit on the courts martial appeal court when it is hearing an appeal against a decision taken at a Scottish court martial?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend has thrown me a question as helpful as the one that the Minister was thrown on European courts by the Member for Shoreham. The frank answer is that I do not know. I can see the appeal of that, but nevertheless a judge in Scotland will by definition, as my hon. Friend knows, be practised and expert in Scottish law. Therefore, he will operate under a system that is different from English law, not only in detail, but in its first premise.

I am not a lawyer, and I am in a minority in the House in not being one, but I understand from the recesses of my memory that Scottish law is based on Roman law, which has a first-principle and philosophical basis—the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) will keep me advised on that—whereas English law is determined by case law. I think that generalisation is probably true. I can see the attractions of what my hon. Friend said, but I cannot give an answer in detail without giving it further consideration. I assure him that I will give the question further consideration before I next speak from the Dispatch Box, if he is in the Chamber. I thank him for pointing us in a constructive direction.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) will definitely be on the Committee now.

Dr. Reid: Yes, my hon. Friend has made a good case for being on the Committee.

There is a further, perhaps more important, point on courts martial. Extending access to an appeals court comprising senior civilian judges would improve the present position under which appeals are made to the same panel who set the sentence. While we generally welcome the change, it raises some other problems. As usual, the minute we move in one direction, we raise unexpected problems from another quarter.

Many aspects of service life are unlikely to be taken into account in the approach of civil courts, and in any case the services may still take consequential administrative action. We require some clarification on that point, especially when we recall that the system of appeals has already been found to be in breach of the European convention on human rights on the basis that anyone held must be allowed to appeal against the unlawfulness of his or her detention. The Minister will be aware of reports in the press on one case as late as Monday this week.

I wish to mention the separate and general, but recurrent, issue—which might merit consideration—of past miscarriages of justice in the courts martial system, especially those that have affected large numbers of people. This is not an easy issue, but it has been raised in the House, most consistently by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who has championed the cause of many executed during the first world war, among many other veterans' causes. I understand that he will address that subject, should he catch your eye, Sir Geoffrey.

The subject was highlighted again this year by the case of those were accused and convicted of mutiny at Salerno. I understand why people ask what purpose opening the subject serves. They argue that it may undermine discipline, and, after all, the people are dead. The reason for opening the subject was brought home to me because the family of John James MacFarlane, one of the so-called Salerno mutineers, are constituents of mine. I understand the anguish felt by that family. He had fought for his country, and had won gallantry medals. It is now accepted by everyone that, through a mistake at best—let us hope that it was not intentional—by his commanding officers, he and others were deprived of their medals, dishonoured, demeaned and dismissed. That is still deeply felt by that family in Hollyton in my constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has already made our misgivings known about the sentences that were passed in that case. At the very least, we should not accept the bland dismissal of the right to rectify miscarriages of justice merely because of the passage of time. That seems to be the position that has been accepted by the Prime Minister and the Government. Why it should be considered as an appropriate—indeed, honourable—course of action to rectify miscarriages, even posthumously, in civil society but not in military society is frankly beyond me. I would go further—the ability and will to recognise miscarriages of justice, even posthumously, reinforces the legitimacy of the justice system in the military.

In some areas, problems in the services reflect problems in society in general—for example, the problem of drugs. We supported the Government in the introduction of random drug testing in the armed forces because of the peculiar and unique nature of the armed forces, with people handling guns, explosives and armaments. However, we are perturbed that, despite the efforts of the Government, there are continuing reports of apparently large-scale misuse of drugs within the armed forces.

I am even more perturbed by reports, which I hope the Minister will be able to deny, that the Government intend to adopt a softer line on recruitment policy for those with previous drug convictions. I accept that there can be no absolute prohibition on those who have one conviction for the use of soft drugs, and I have no intention—because it serves none of us well—to sensationalise the subject with cheap sloganising. But, whatever pressures are created by the shortfall of personnel, we should send no signals that drug misuse is an acceptable background for enlistment in the armed forces, especially when we are trying to stamp out the practice among established personnel. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us that assurance tonight.

[Dr. Reid]

There is a policy of no tolerance of drugs within the armed forces, and I think that it should continue. By 15 November this year, 6,968 Army personnel had been tested for drugs; 133 had failed; and 200 to 300 tests are outstanding. However, in 1994, 490 soldiers were reported for offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, despite the no-tolerance policy towards offenders. As I have mentioned, those people are in charge of potentially lethal weapons, so let us press forward with the no-tolerance policy.

Race recruitment is another issue that comes up at every quinquennial review. The 1990 report commissioned from Peat Marwick McLintock still holds true today. Racial stereotyping and language are the most important factors in low application rates from black applicants. Only 233 applicants from the black, Asian and other ethnic minorities chose to apply to join the Army in 1992-93—the last year for which I have figures—of whom a mere 50 were accepted. That represents about 1 per cent. of the Army's strength—a negligible increase since the last review.

I do not question the Government's commitment, but we must accept that we are not making great headway. As the armed forces struggle to compete against civilian institutions for skilled personnel in the labour market, the MOD must improve its recruitment efforts and improve conditions in the workplace. That is not just morally and socially sensible, or a reinforcement of the link between civil and military society, but necessary given the skills needed by the armed forces.

Is the MOD examining recruitment patterns in the south-east and the west midlands, the regions with the highest proportion of ethnic minorities? Given the almost twofold increase in the Army's advertising budget, are resources being directed at strengthening ties with industry and further education institutions to identify recruits from ethnic backgrounds? We will raise such questions in Committee, and I hope we will reach a conclusion on them. We would like the current armed forces monitoring process to continue.

The Minister would not expect me to rush through even a short speech without mentioning sexual equality—a matter in which I know he takes a great interest. It is a subject to which the Committee considering successive Armed Forces Bills has returned consistently in recent years. We accept that efforts have been made in the past few years and accept that problems arise because of the strength of tradition and at times, to be frank, because of prejudice inside the armed forces. To be even more frank, it is difficult for Ministers—there is nothing personal in this—to trail-blaze when their attitude to service women has not always been marked by an enlightened disposition. Their blundered handling of the issue of pregnant service personnel has proved that prejudice can be costly financially—now to the tune of more than £50 million—as well as socially.

Lest anyone says that he was not warned, I know that several of my hon. Friends brought up the issue of pregnant service women during the 1981 quinquennial review, so the Government had a 14-year warning about it.

Women are still inadequately promoted and protected against discrimination in the armed forces, especially in terms of advancement to higher posts. We welcome the advent of women fighter pilots, but we want further progress to be made quickly. We will pursue that matter in Committee.

On combat forces, the Opposition take the general view that a woman should be judged by the same criteria as a man—gender-neutral criteria. They should be judged according to their standard of personal fitness for and operational effectiveness in the role in question. We accept that there are those who feel that my second criterion—the operational effectiveness of Army, Navy or Air Force units—has the potential to allow discrimination. We must start, however, by accepting that the raison d'être of our Army, Navy and Air Force is as fighting units. Any other starting position would undermine the raison d'être of our armed forces. That is why we include operational effectiveness as one of the criteria against which service personnel must be judged.

Homosexuality in the armed forces has been discussed in the past few years. The Secretary of State has established a review on that issue, and we will comment when it is published.

Clause 26 empowers the Secretary of State

> "to grant a lease or otherwise permit occupation of the Royal Naval College Greenwich and other land in the vicinity of the College"

by repealing section 7 of the Greenwich Hospital Act 1869. We are not opposed in principle to the change of use of that building, provided that it is in keeping with its traditions, history and architecture. Section 7, however, already offers ample scope to permit occupation of the building, subject to certain limitations and the ultimate availability of it, if necessary, for the purposes for which it was originally intended.

We therefore do not believe that sweeping away section 7 of the 1869 Act is sensible. We are not prepared to give a carte blanche to any Secretary of State to get rid of that building, willy-nilly, as he or she sees fit. We will consider compromise proposals, but we will oppose the complete repeal of section 7.

The Minister referred to clauses 2 and 25(2). I am slightly unclear—or should I say slightly suspicious?—about the motives behind those clauses. Existing legislation already covers all classes of personnel, other than those in the armed forces, who might require to carry arms in support of military operations. Under the Firearms Act 1968, persons such as gunsmiths and armourers can be in possession of a weapon without holding a certificate. Police officers carrying out their duties are already exempt from the 1968 Act. Who are the persons referred to in clauses 2 and 25, and under what circumstances might they be required to carry arms? Two possible categories of person suggest themselves.

First, an amendment to the 1968 Act would allow the arming of the Ministry of Defence's guard service, which was mentioned by the Minister. That body of civilian guards was established on the recommendations of the Defence Select Committee after the tragic Deal bombing. The arming of the MGS has been mooted on previous occasions, but each time it has been rejected as politically undesirable. What has changed the situation now, other than a desire to save money?

The second possible category is even more horrific to hon. Members. The powers contained in the clauses, together with the provisions in the Reserve Forces Bill, would allow the arming of civilian commercial contract guards working for the MOD as reservists. In theory, if the Armed Forces Bill is passed, Group 4 or Securicor personnel could be armed if they were, according to the terms of clauses 2 and 25, supervised by service personnel. I have no personal prejudice towards any commercial institution, but the prospect of armed Group 4 personnel guarding our nuclear installations would not send a shiver of confidence up the backbone of the British population.

Mr. Soames: In order to prevent the hon. Gentleman from feeling that he must continue down such a fatuous route, may I give him an unequivocal and total undertaking that such a thing will never happen?

Dr. Reid: We are already making progress, and I take that commitment as it is given. No doubt that assurance will enable me to shorten my contributions, even in Committee, although I suspect that will mean that I will have to lose quite a few good lines that I might have used.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Some time ago I visited the South Yorkshire police to look at the arrangements that it makes when policemen have to carry weapons on duty. The arrangements made me feel confident that a properly run civilian police force, where officers are armed, can draw up plans that serve the public interest and convey confidence and a sense of protection to the public. If we were to arm non-service personnel in the armed forces, does my hon. Friend agree that the arrangements operated by a good police force would have to be operated by the people whom the Minister has in mind?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Everyone in the House recognises that the implications of fiscal rectitude and the downward pressure on budgets mean that efficiency savings have had to be found. We will not make cheap points about that. Objective, mutually agreed criteria were used to assess the effectiveness of Ministry of Defence police. Although those criteria were a means of achieving certain savings in line with the reduced size of the military estate, they were commensurate with the maintenance of security. We would not wish any of these clauses to be used merely as a means of saving money.

I thank hon. Members for their indulgence in listening to my speech. Many issues will be raised in Committee. At the outset, I mentioned discipline and morale in the armed forces, so it is fitting to conclude—and before we divide on any of the issues—with the hope that we can all unite, I am sure we can, in once more expressing our gratitude and respect for the courage, dedication, discipline and loyalty of the men and women who serve in the armed forces and whom we have the privilege of speaking of this evening.

6.20 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): It is just under five years since we last debated an Armed Forces Bill. It is already clear from the speeches we have heard, especially that of my hon. Friend the Minister, that much has changed. When we last debated the matter, it was during the closing stages of the cold war. It is worth reflecting that then there were 313,000 armed service men; there are now 238,000. By 1998, when the reforms are finished, there will be 210,000. That is a reduction of 30 per cent. in the armed strength of the Army, 30 per cent. in the armed strength of the Navy and 42 per cent. in the uniformed armed strength of the Royal Air Force. In 1990, we spent £21.7 billion on defence; this year we will spend 2.3 per cent. less in cash terms and 25 per cent. less in real terms.

I make these points simply to show how different the armed forces are now than when we last considered these matters. There are smaller numbers, they are required to carry out a greater variety of tasks, they are better equipped and, clearly, if they are to complete the tasks that they are assigned to do, they must be even more professional than they were five years ago.

Both this evening and during the special procedure that follows, we need to consider carefully the ways in which the Bill will apply to the smaller numbers in the greater variety of tasks that they do—and in particular the fact that there are now and will continue to be much larger numbers of civilians working alongside uniformed personnel in the years ahead, doing the same or similar tasks to those that uniformed personnel have been doing up to now. We must ensure that the legal framework that applies to the uniformed part of the force is right so that there are no inconsistencies with what the civilians working alongside them are doing.

I shall not follow much of what the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said. However, he made much of the case of Christina Menzies. I acknowledge that there is a problem in that area, especially in Germany where court martial procedures still apply to the dependants of service men. The hon. Gentleman will remember that, when we both sat on the Committee considering the last Armed Forces Bill, we and one other hon. Member suggested changes. It is my recollection that that proposal was not endorsed by the whole Committee, including Labour Members. I am pleased that there has now been a change of view, and that we can return to the matter in Committee.

I want to raise one other matter. It relates to the other Bill being proposed by the Ministry of Defence—the Reserve Forces Bill. I hope that, as the two Bills are going through the two Houses concurrently, we can keep track of them both. Certain matters relate to both, and it would be most unfortunate if we amended this Bill only to find that that had been overtaken by events when the other Bill goes through the House. There was a similar problem last time around with a number of other Bills, not relating to service men, that were going through Parliament. It is important that, when we consider the Bill in Committee, we take account of Government and other legislation going through the House at the same time and amend the Bill by the end of its passage if the need arises.

Following the great changes in the armed forces over the past five years and the changes still to come, the Bill provides the opportunity to ensure that we have the right legal framework within which our armed forces can operate in the years ahead, when they will be asked to carry out even more varied tasks with even more varied formations. I am sure that the Bill will achieve that, and I commend it to the House.

6.26 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): This is not just another Bill. It raises important and contentious issues, but its special procedure makes it very different from other legislation. When the Government tried the

[Mr. Bruce George]

experiment with Special Standing Committees in the early 1980s, they received a series of bloody noses—and that was the end of experimentation.

The special procedure, which surfaces only every five years—the reason is obvious—means that the Committee, of which I very much hope to be a member, investigates and then it legislates. That is something that the Defence Select Committees should be doing. Why should they be restricted merely to investigating, while those who legislate are an entirely different group of people? I was sad that, when the Defence Select Committee was at least given the option of taking over responsibility for the Bill, it turned it down. That was a missed opportunity.

The procedures laid down for the Committee mean that Back Benchers have rather more influence over the legislation than they have in the normal Standing Committees, where the Opposition and Back Benchers are, in most cases, rendered superfluous to the legislative process, which is a carve-up between the civil servants and Ministers. Sometimes I wonder whether Ministers have much influence over what happens. I hope that we will take advantage of the opportunity to do more than simply acquiesce in what is presented to us in the Bill or in the notes on clauses.

Another reason why the procedure for this Bill is different—this was alluded to by the Minister—is that the lineage goes back to the 17th century. In essence, it is the legislature's manifestation—which in some ways is an illusion—of its theoretical supremacy over the military. It is another reason why this is an important Bill.

I support the Bill in general, but there are two areas that cause scepticism bordering on cynicism—clauses 2 and 26. The former enables the armed forces to recruit personnel on local service engagements and the latter amends the very important Greenwich Hospital Act 1869. I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said, and, if I do serve on the Committee, I shall vote against any amendment to that Act. Despite being 120 years old, it is still relevant.

On the face of it, neither of the two clauses appear to excite much opposition, yet they do. As someone who has professionally observed the MOD for more than 20 years, perhaps I will be forgiven the view that occasionally it is devious and wrong. Some people prefer to start from the assumption, at the other end of the spectrum, that it is honest and occasionally right. I fear that that is far too simplistic an analysis.

On the face of it, who could object to the MOD awarding itself the legal power to recruit personnel for local service under clause 2? I admit that the Minister in his brief speech could not be expected to give us all the information, but so far, the information revealed on why one needs this military home service engagement has been rather patchy.

In downsizing the armed forces, the Government have been largely unsuccessful. The downsizing is Treasury-driven—that is pretty obvious to anyone. It now appears that, at a time of high employment, people in the armed forces are being given a special inducement to remain in the services for longer. We read too about rather unusual methods of recruitment, which, in the circumstances, appear to be quite bizarre.

How many personnel will be required to serve at home only? Why does the MOD have to be given flexibility? I would have thought that having a number of military personnel who will not serve abroad would create inflexibility. I can understand a guy who has served abroad in some awful places wishing to settle down at the end of his career, put his feet up, go into a little guarding job, go home and be happy with his lot. If we had an Army of 2 million people, perhaps we would be able to afford the luxury of allowing some to operate on stay-at-home contracts.

But when the Army is down to such absurdly low levels in a dangerous and, some might add, deteriorating international environment, is it wise to block off a number of personnel who will serve their country only within the travel-to-work area laid down?

I do not wish to be hostile to people who are serving or will or might in future serve their country, but we cannot surely say, as we did in the old militia system of the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, that one's obligation to serve King or Queen and country will be determined on a narrow geographical basis. We cannot say either that perhaps they can serve elsewhere for 30 days in the year. What kind of engagements are cut and dried in a calendar month? I would like to explore that issue in more detail because it deserves to be explored. Will those personnel be part of the existing establishment or supplementary to it? That is an important question.

I suspect that one of the reasons why little clause 2 is included in the Bill is to provide the opportunity for the MOD to continue the process that it has been proceeding with for some 15 years: considerably downsizing the Ministry of Defence police. It says that they are far too expensive. Of course the police are very expensive, but we tend to think that it is necessary, in the interests of society, to have well-paid, well-motivated, very well-trained personnel who can deal with crime protection, crime prevention and a whole range of activities.

Given that the MOD possesses an enormous amount of land—it is the largest landowner in the country—and that it has an enormous amount of data, information, equipment and so on that need to be protected, somehow to argue that the police force is too expensive appears yet again to be compromising what should not be compromised: people's safety and the security of information that ought to be kept under MOD control.

The MOD police are expensive, but we pay for quality. The MOD appears to obsessed with privatising security. I can recall one senior member of the private security industry coming before the Defence Select Committee and saying that he would not bid for an MOD contract because he could not provide the required quality of service on the money that the MOD were paying private contractors.

I can understand why the MOD wants to change the mix of military police; contract security, the MOD guard service and the Ministry of Defence police, but I do not think that the MOD police should be reduced from fewer than 5,000 members today by—perhaps—2,000. I wonder what the critical mass for the MOD police would be—I suspect 2,500 members, although it might go below that. I hope that the Ministry of Defence will explain in great detail that its objectives are not pecuniary—or vengeful since the MDP have escaped the Ministry's attacks on several previous occasions.

We want detailed explanations of why it is proposed to replace one group of personnel—perhaps 2,000 in number—by 2,000 or 1,000 or 500, or goodness knows how many. To make one group of people—potentially—redundant to provide jobs for another group of people does not seem to be the best practice to expect from an employer.

The Ministry of Defence has not persistently shown that it is capable of making the right decisions on security. I can recall how in the early 1980s it almost got rid of the MOD police from the Royal Ordnance factories. The Defence Committee stopped that. I can recall the inquiry made by the Defence Committee into security at military installations after the disastrous Deal bombings. It was not obvious to the Committee at that time that the MOD had got the balance right.

In light of those and other mistakes, I am not entirely convinced that the procedure under way is for any other reason than to save money. If the MOD thinks that it can get away with justifying the calculation simply on the basis of the investment appraisal examples in the documents published recently, I am afraid that it is wrong.

The MOD police are important and flexible. They are civilians, and it is important that civilians should be in a dominant position in the establishments that they patrol and guard. Civilianisation and constabulary powers cannot be bolted on to the powers of a soldier. The MOD police are versatile. They conduct guarding, armed guarding, policing functions, crime prevention, and fraud investigation, which the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have recently shown will keep them in a great deal of work in the years ahead. It is believed that £23 million has been fraudulently removed from the procurement process alone. They can liaise with the Home Department forces in a way which soldiers cannot. I accept that their numbers will have to be reduced further because the MOD estate is diminishing, but the proposals are erroneous. I want them examined closely.

Of course, one of the ways suggested by the MOD to keep its police numbers down is based on the number of gates. It has said that there are too many gates. That appears to be the MOD's version of the wrong type of snow or the wrong type of leaves on the track. To say that there are too many gates at MOD establishments surely ignores the fact that they been appraised many times previously. What would happen if the number of gates were cut from, say, three to one? If the Minister drove his car out at 5.30 pm and saw several hundred people undergoing searches, perhaps he would reach the conclusion that defence establishments have more than one gate for very sound reasons.

I should like to make two further brief points. First, while the special Committee will be examining security, another Committee will be examining it—the Defence Committee. The Minister and those associated with him will have to explain things to two Committees. Not only will the Committee on the Armed Forces Bill be keen to know what is proposed.

Finally, surely Greenwich is part of our heritage and our history—even more so than county hall, because it must be infinitely more important to our history than a building only 60 years old. We know that the Government fouled up the sale of county hall, too. Do estate agents have pictures of Greenwich to show people? Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) can tell me whether there are pictures, so that people can see how our history is being sold. The whole idea is tacky and obscene—an act of administrative and political vandalism.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will go into far more detail on the subject, but as an individual member of the Defence Select Committee I find it degrading that something as important as Greenwich is potentially up for grabs. Perhaps it will not become the headquarters of McDonald's, or of a South Korean or American multinational company, and perhaps we should be reassured by that.

But why should we alter legislation to allow the Secretary of State for Defence, who is the custodian of that part of our national history that is within his responsibility, to line himself up for what is potentially not only the sale of the century, but the sale of several centuries? To say that it is not really a sale is disingenuous.

That is not a party political issue; I do not believe that any issue that has been raised in the debate is a party political issue. I only hope that the Government can be prevailed upon to say that that wonderful set of buildings, some of international significance, must remain within the public sector. Of course the public sector is a dirty word for some people, but it is now so flexible that surely Greenwich could fit somewhere within it without falling foul of the ideological obsessions of some hon. Members.

Please let us throw out the relevant clause and remove the temptation to allow Greenwich to be disposed of to the private sector. The Government must think carefully about how the buildings could be retained, if not in the MOD then in some other sphere. I hope that, despite the cuts in the armed forces, that may be possible.

I hope I may be forgiven if I make just one party political point, because I cannot resist it. When Labour party conferences voted each year to reduce our defence expenditure to the average of that of our allies, I do not think that even they envisaged that by now the Conservative party would be well on the way to achieving that objective.

While we are examining our downsized set of commitments—although perhaps I should not say that, because it is the number of people who are supposed to fulfil the commitments, rather than the commitments themselves, that has been downsized—let us not go mad in the process. Let us realise that we are living in a difficult world. What happens in the Russian elections next month, or in the presidential elections a year from now, may have significant consequences for international security.

Let us not forget the importance of observing intelligently what may lie in front of us. When the Minister and some of his colleagues are in the House of Lords, they may think, sooner rather than later, "Perhaps we were rather too hasty in making some of those decisions." I hope that one of the decisions that will be reversed during our proceedings on the Bill will be the decision on Greenwich. Certainly Ministers should be aware that the House will, as I hope, exercise its powers of scrutiny as it is not always able to do, and that we shall see our input in what is enacted. The legislation must reflect not only the Government's input but ours, and I hope that I can look forward to serving on the Standing Committee.

6.43 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I always enjoy the contributions by the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who is right to say that the Defence Select Committee has gained much information that would be relevant to the Standing Committee on the Bill. I share the view that it would have been an interesting idea for the Select Committee to be responsible for the scrutiny of the Bill in Committee. As things are, I, like the hon. Gentleman, hope that I may be able to make a small contribution and use the information that we gathered in the Select Committee.

Those who have the privilege of serving on the Defence Select Committee know that, as we visit our armed forces, we see their courage, fitness and technical skill at all levels. Our job with the Bill is to ensure that we provide the framework within which those armed forces can operate at best efficiency.

This year's Bill is indeed substantial, and there will be significant detailed work to be done on it. In updating the Service Discipline Acts, the Standing Committee will have a duty to scrutinise the whole remit of the armed forces and to consider the overall framework within which they operate.

Several factors will inform the Committee's thinking. It will have to bear in mind the current recruitment situation. The Select Committee on Defence has taken evidence on that, and there is a recruiting problem at present, not so much in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, but certainly in the infantry branch of the Army, where there is a shortage of about 2,000 on the year's intended recruitment pattern. We must ask ourselves why.

We should also ask ourselves why, if the armed forces are really equal opportunities employers, the figures show that, on 1 September 1995, only 12.8 per cent. of those in the Navy, 3.5 per cent. of those in the Army, and 8.7 per cent. of those in the Royal Air Force, were women. Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether the whole structure of the armed forces and the discipline required within them are relevant to the problem.

Studies are now being carried out of the role of women within the armed forces, and it may emerge that appointments are made entirely on personal suitability. Perhaps, if women are fit physically, they will be able to do certain jobs, even perhaps in areas of the infantry. When the Committee considers the Bill, it will certainly examine attitudes within the armed forces, to see whether there may be disincentives to the recruitment and retention of women.

Also informing the views of the Committee will be the ethnic monitoring that has shown that, in July, only 1.4 per cent. of people in the armed forces were of black or Asian origin. If there is a recruiting problem, and if there are well-paid jobs available in the armed forces, is it right that we should have those extraordinary figures, which seem to reveal problems in recruitment and retention?

I am sure that the Committee will also bear in mind the Bett report, "Managing People in Tomorrow's Armed Forces", which deals specifically with military terms of service. We should ask ourselves about the exceptional position of those in the armed forces, which makes them subject not only to civil law but to military law and discipline. Is that requirement still necessary?

After all, there was a need for exceptional forms of law and discipline when ships were at sea, and armies away from the United Kingdom, for long periods. Then it was necessary for discipline to be both quick and effective. But perhaps that manner of carrying out service discipline is not quite so necessary or appropriate for the 21st century—that is the period towards which we are looking now. At one time, discipline needed to be speedy and decisive, but there may now be ways of getting around those original difficulties.

Are there procedures within the armed forces that were once necessary but are now redundant, or which need to be invoked only in exceptional circumstances? I share the Minister's view that procedures should be seen to be fair, but in my constituency experience, disciplinary procedures, both for service men and for civilians serving with the armed forces, often seem extremely protracted.

The Committee will need to take all those strands of thinking into account, and it should be able to call witnesses and take evidence. I believe that there has been a slight change in the procedure since I chaired such a Committee in 1985-86. At that time, we worked with a Select Committee procedure and then effectively took the Bill as a Standing Committee. I believe that now the Bill will come back before the House, where the Committee will be able to brief hon. Members.

I hope that that will be done on an all-party basis. In my experience, such Select Committees and Standing Committees work closely together on an all-party basis, and there is little cause for dissension.

I shall now flag a couple of small points that should be raised in Committee. I share the view that clause 2, which

"enables the armed forces to recruit personnel on local service engagements",

will cause apprehension within the Ministry of Defence police. That body has already suffered the Blelloch report and the Rucker report, and we can reasonably expect the Government to explain their position and intentions concerning the MOD police very soon.

In clause 9—similarly, this is a minor point for the Committee—I am surprised that there is no mention of DNA swabs when reference is made to taking fingerprints. I should have thought it appropriate to include that in the Bill.

Those are all very much points for the Committee and, like the hon. Member for Walsall, South, I hope that I shall be able to contribute to the Committee when the time comes.

6.49 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Because of the detailed nature of the Committee proceedings that are to follow Second Reading, I, like others, feel no particular need to delay the House for long at this stage. However, there are one or two matters that I should like to take this opportunity to raise.

The Bill seeks to bring service discipline into line with the civilian justice system, and that seems to me to be entirely desirable. One must accept that service discipline imposes more burdensome obligations on members of the armed forces than if they were simply members of the public. But I believe that it is right to start from the principle that only the additional burdens that are absolutely necessary should be retained.

One particular element of service discipline marks it out from the civilian criminal system—the retention of the death penalty for certain military offences. For my part, I believe that the arguments against the death penalty are overwhelming and, on every occasion on which I have had the opportunity to do so, I have voted in accordance with that belief in the House. If those arguments are relevant and effective in relation to the civilian system of justice, I believe that they are equally effective in relation to military justice.

It is notable that the death penalty for military offences has not been invoked since 1945. In the 50 years since then, we have fought wars in Korea and in the Gulf and there have been engagements throughout the world in which British forces have been involved. If that most salutary of penalties has not been invoked for 50 years, I have to say that there are compelling reasons for saying that it should go. I am disappointed that the Bill contains no provisions to that effect.

I thought that the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) made a good point about clause 2, which emboldened me to think that perhaps, instead of the TA, the Territorial Army, we should have the TTWA—the travel-to-work army. The hon. Gentleman did make some serious points, which I hope the Committee will consider carefully.

Service discipline—as the Minister rightly pointed out in opening the debate—has at its heart the system of courts martial. I have conducted a court martial as a civilian lawyer, and it is from that standpoint that I have given some consideration to the proposals for reform that the Bill contains. I have to say that, at first glance, they seem to me to be entirely sensible.

Any system of justice, whether civilian or military, should be seen to be fair, transparent, effective and speedy. If the proposals meet the criteria that I have just outlined, they certainly deserve support from both sides of the House. The same criteria must apply to any prosecution in courts martial, and here I share the misgivings that have been expressed by others in relation to the murder of Miss Christina Menzies. That matter has been raised in the House by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), and very effectively on behalf of his constituents by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), who is not with us this evening. I think that that is a point which the Minister and those serving on the Committee may wish to consider in due course.

If it is the case that the accused person in a murder trial being conducted within the military system of justice is enabled in the interests of fairness and justice to have access to a civilian lawyer who is experienced and well qualified in conducting the defence in murder trials, why is there no provision so far as the prosecution is concerned for enlisting the assistance of a civilian lawyer of equal experience and aptitude to prosecute the case?

Some time ago, I myself prosecuted in murder cases in the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland. If I can be allowed a moment or two of anecdotal reflection, I must say that the first time I had to do that, I found it to be an extremely difficult and very arduous business. I do not think that I ever conducted the prosecution in any murder trial—perhaps I acted in about 40 or 50 such trials during my professional experience—without being aware of the very considerable burdens that it imposed.

If I may be excused a colloquialism, to land such a case on a serving officer who happens to be lawyer, or even on someone from the Judge Advocate's department, may be unfair. I hope very much that those with responsibility for these matters will consider whether it is practical in cases of such importance to use lawyers of sufficient experience from the Bar of Scotland, England or Northern Ireland, to ensure that the prosecution is carried out to the highest possible standards. Fairness should apply not only to the accused. It is a concept that must apply in the public interest as well.

During an exchange between the hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Motherwell, North, reference was made to the need to have a Scottish judge on what were described as Scots courts martial. Of course, a court martial is Scottish only by virtue of the location where it may be held, because a court martial is a United Kingdom process authorised by a United Kingdom statute.

By virtue of section 2 of the Courts-Martial (Appeals) Act 1968—with which I am sure you are more than familiar, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the judges of a courts martial appeal court may, among others, consist of

> "such of the Lords Commissioners of Justiciary as the Lord Justice General may from time to time nominate for the purpose".

The Lords Commissioners of Justiciary—as I am sure you are well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker—are the judges of the High Court in Scotland. The Lord Justice General is the principal judge of that court.

The provision already exists for Scots judges, or those qualified in Scots law, to be members of a courts martial appeal court. But when those judges sit in that capacity, they sit not as Scots judges in particular, but as UK judges enforcing a UK statute and its provisions. While the provision does exist for the involvement of Scots judges in these procedures, it is important to remember that they are seeking to apply not Scots law, but the statutory framework laid down in the 1968 Act.

Dr. Godman: Naturally I defer to the hon. and learned Gentleman in his knowledge of these matters, but is it not the case that Scottish service men being tried by a court martial suffer certain procedural disadvantages vis-à-vis the procedures that are engaged upon in civilian criminal cases?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is right to this extent. If an individual is prosecuted for murder in the High Court in Scotland, that individual's trial will be conducted according to the law of Scotland and to the procedures and laws of evidence applicable in a Scottish court. An individual who, on the other hand, is prosecuted by a court martial will be subject to the system of law laid down in the statute that governs courts martial. To that extent, it could be argued that a person facing trial by court martial may enjoy less protection than he would have had if he had been prosecuted in the ordinary civilian court.

The Minister referred to clause 18 in his opening observations. I know that he, like me, will have received a letter from the chairwoman of the Equal Opportunities Commission. The letter that I received informed me that a copy had been dispatched to the Minister, and I am sure that he will give it his usual careful and courteous consideration. But in that letter—which was written in extremely reasonable and moderate terms—certain

[Mr. Campbell]

anxieties were expressed about the precise language of clause 18. I hope that, when the Committee comes to consider the matter, careful consideration will be given to the requirement that that clause contains.

There are a number of other issues for the Committee which, to some extent, have been referred to by other hon. Members. I wish to refer to ethnic minorities, who are still inadequately represented in the armed forces. It is wrong to blame the Government or the Ministry of Defence for that. The problem is much greater and we should not simply endeavour to apportion blame across the House. It must, however, be a matter of concern for all of us with an interest in those issues that only 1.4 per cent. of the armed forces are black or Asian. We should be seeking to create circumstances in which people from all parts of society feel confident to apply for membership in any of the three armed services.

I do not wish to say much in detail in relation to the issue of homosexuality. My views on that have been put on the record in the past. I believe that it is a fundamental matter of civil rights that no person should be discriminated against by reason of sexual orientation. The service law relating to criminal matters has been brought into line with civilian law, and I hope that the House will have an opportunity at a later stage in these proceedings to express a view on the issue of administrative discharge.

There has recently been an effort to invoke the jurisdiction of the courts in England in relation to administrative discharge. In the course of that effort, although the judges held that the current policy was not unreasonable, in the sense in which lawyers use that word, at least one of the judges robustly pointed to the fact that public opinion had changed substantially.

If one is looking for parallels, one can look at the attitude that the armed services of Australia and New Zealand have taken to homosexuality. Anyone who has been in the company of the extremely fine soldiers from New Zealand who have been attached to the British infantry battalion stationed at Vitez in the former Yugoslavia will know that they are as robust and effective a unit as any that the British Army is able to produce.

In July this year, I tabled some questions about sexual harassment in the armed services. I hope that that is an issue which the Committee will feel disposed to take up. As a result of the questions and the subsequent correspondence, I discovered that the Ministry of Defence maintained no central record of claims of sexual harassment in the armed services. The Royal Navy does not hold central information about such claims; the Army maintains records only of complaints that have been referred up the chain of command since 1993; and the Royal Air Force is able to provide only the details of the cases that have been investigated by RAF police since 1989. If we are anxious to ensure that the armed services are truly equal opportunities employers, as I think the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) is, and if we envisage a far greater number of women serving in all three armed services, clearly we must have vigorous and effective policies on sexual harassment.

In relation to Greenwich, if one examines clause 26(2) or clause 26(5), one sees that the powers that have been conferred on the Secretary of State are extremely wide. He has an almost unfettered discretion. It is right to remember that the Secretary of State is the trustee of the Royal hospital. In my judgment and, I am sure, in the judgment of many hon. Members of all parties, he has much more than an obligation to get the maximum financial return from those buildings. I do not think that it is wrong, or that it demonstrates an unwillingness to accept that things have changed, to say that public buildings of that historical and traditional importance should have a public use that will entitle the public to have regular and reasonable access to them. Any such use must surely be consistent with the history and dignity not only of the Royal Navy but of the buildings themselves.

As matters now stand, it would be possible for the Secretary of State to grant a lease to the American company that recently bought the royal train so that the company could establish its headquarters at Greenwich. Many people would find that inimical to the traditions and dignity of those buildings. The Secretary of State is asking for substantial powers in the Bill. He should appreciate that the way in which he exercises those powers will be seen by many people as an important indication of his judgment and his understanding of how deep and important are the traditions of the three services for which he now has responsibility.

Discipline has much to do with history and dignity. The Bill is clearly necessary in order to preserve the highest standards in all the armed services. It undoubtedly has the support of the whole House, but some detailed parts of it will require, and will receive, considerable scrutiny. I shall be very surprised if the Bill comes back to the House in the same form as it leaves the House after this debate.

7.5 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The quinquennial appearance of the Armed Forces Bill is one of the most sensible traditions of the House. I wish to add just three points to those which have already been made by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. Our worst legislation is always that which is rushed through in response to some public outcry, or some crisis or tragedy. Dog bites man so we end up with a Dangerous Dogs Bill. Football fans run amok so we end up with a Football Spectators Bill. There is a tragic stabbing and people clamour to add more and more to a simple measure to give modest powers to give to the police so that they can do something about the problem. We must beware of doing the same thing in this Bill, particularly on the issue of sexual orientation.

The worst possible service to the cause of those who wish to see change—I am for the status quo unless I am convinced heavily the other way—is done by the action that we saw this afternoon from the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who came into the Chamber late, halfway through my hon. Friend the Minister's speech, popped up, asked a question and then disappeared for the duration. The background to the matter and the understanding that is necessary if we are to take on board the depth of feeling in the armed services about the issue can be learnt from a study of the military ethos paper of January 1994.

Those of us who have not had the privilege of serving in the armed forces—now a majority of Members, I suspect, whereas perhaps 40 years ago it was the other way round—have not understood how service people feel. I shall quote just three sentences from the document which sum up how people feel. Paragraph 7 says:

> "The Army cannot remain wholly immune from the changes in the society it serves, and from which it recruits, but neither must it allow itself to follow trends which tend to undermine the traditional values essential to its unique responsibilities and operational role. The Army recognises that its adherence to its standards must be defended on pragmatic rather than emotional and traditional grounds. It also recognises that where reform is appropriate, this must be addressed as a matter of timely policy rather than a damage limitation exercise in the face of events."

That must be right. It is undoubtedly one of the matters that the Committee will have to consider.

For the military clothing manufacturers, 1996 and 1997 will be good years. It is popularly believed in our constituencies that we have the police to look after us. In my constituency at present 10 police forces are operating. They are the Home Department police—the Wiltshire constabulary—the British Transport police, the Atomic Energy Authority police, the Ministry of Defence police, the Royal Air Force police, the Royal Air Force Provost security service, the Royal Military police, the Ministry of Defence guard service, the Royal Marine police and the Royal Navy regulating branch. The Bill will add two more, the Military Provost guard service and the RAF police guards. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House will find 12 police forces operating in their constituencies—not to mention the private security companies that will be part of the MOD's security arrangements under the terms proposed in the defence police and guarding structures study.

I am not opposed to that; I understand the logic of it. However, as the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) pointed out, the MOD's police have been subject to everlasting reviews for the last decade and more, and they desperately need some stability. They expected the worst in terms of manpower cuts, and they were right to be a little worried. No doubt the Standing Committee—on which I hope I shall be fortunate enough to serve—will examine that aspect carefully.

Some years ago, in 1987, we gave a Second Reading to the Ministry of Defence Police Bill. I took a lively part in that debate, as did the hon. Member for Walsall, South. Many of the issues that were debated then have been aired again today, especially in connection with clause 2. We were surprised to discover when we debated the Ministry of Defence Police Bill in 1987 that neither House had engaged in a debate on the police since 1860, when the Bill that became the Metropolitan Police Act 1860 was debated. I therefore welcome this Bill, and the clause in it that will give us an opportunity to examine the issue again.

My main aim in listing the police forces that currently operate in my constituency was to stress the importance of underlining the primacy of Home Office forces. That point was often raised during debate on the Ministry of Defence Police Bill, in Committee and on the Floor of the House, and firm assurances were given by my hon. Friend the Minister's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton). There is now no doubt that Home Office chief constables have primacy throughout the United Kingdom, including within the wire of defence establishments. My right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell said in Committee:

> "I wish that to go on the record as there should be no misunderstanding about that."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 12 February 1987; c. 59.]

That Bill gave rise to an important concept that I think we must consider again: the interface between the MOD police, the Home Office police and all the other police forces in operation. When a crisis necessitates calling a police force into action, the worst possible outcome is ignorance of the rules under which each force is operating—not knowing whether they are armed, and not knowing their rules of engagement.

That is not fancy; it happens. It applies to, for instance, occasions when demonstrators try to get inside the chemical and biological defence establishment in my constituency, and to other activities including terrorism. Everyone understands now that the Home Office police have primacy, but it is not clear what the pecking order is thereafter, or what happens inside the wire when the Home Office police arrive.

Inter-force working arrangements were a feature of the Ministry of Defence Police Bill. On 16 October 1987, the Home Office issued circular 65/1987, which laid down guidelines relating to the respective responsibilities of the MOD police and "1964 Act" police forces, otherwise known as Home Office police forces. Will my hon. Friend the Minister ensure that that circular is updated, so that there can be no doubt about the interoperability of the police forces? That matters enormously, because at the interface of those police forces in our communities—in my constituency, for example—there is sometimes doubt about who investigates what.

The Menzies case, which has been mentioned, is an example; The guidelines that were issued following the 1987 Act were clearly not followed in that case. Paragraph 5 clearly states:

> "Responsibility for the investigation of any incident in which terrorism is suspected, of serious offences against the person, of sexual offences (except minor offences or acts which are offences under Service law only), of domestic burglaries and of sudden deaths will rest with the appropriate local chief constable."

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The hon. Gentleman has referred to MOD police in his constituency, and to other non-Home Office forces. Is there not a case for regularising the position, so that a constable in those forces is not inhibited—as he or she is at present—in responding to an emergency that is outside the perimeter of their immediate jurisdiction before the arrival of a Home Office police officer? There are currently difficulties relating to insurance and liability, and the only powers of arrest available to such constables are the common law powers that are available to the hon. Gentleman and to me. The point needs to be clarified in the interests of police officers, quite apart from the interests of everyone else.

Mr. Key: That is an important point, but it was clarified pretty substantially by the 1987 Act, which gave constabulary powers to the MOD police. Nevertheless, I agree that some aspects need clarification. For instance, I feel strongly about the question of the jurisdiction of the British Transport police. It is ridiculous that they must stand and watch someone who rushes off a train having murdered someone disappear into the wide blue yonder because they have no jurisdiction outside railway property. That, however, is not relevant to the Bill, and is not a matter for my hon. Friend the Minister.

I had the honour to be a Minister in the Department of National Heritage, and to observe the difficulties that arose in relation to the Greenwich Hospital Act 1869. The

[Mr. Key]

ownership of Greenwich was in some doubt. A collection of buildings had been passed, if not from pillar to post, at least from one Department to another, under very peculiar arrangements. It was difficult to track down the ownership, and establish who was allowed to do what. I welcome this attempt to address the issue, and to make it crystal clear who can do what. I do not think that we should dismiss it as some ideological attempt to privatise the Greenwich royal naval college; I think that it is a much more sensible idea than that.

When I served in the Department of National Heritage, we were anxious to find the right use for the college. It was always clear that the Royal Navy would not have the use of all of it for all time. What was needed above all was a holistic approach. It was crucial for us somehow to recreate the wonderful vision of Greenwich that existed when it was built, including the observatory and the splendid park—for which I had the honour to be responsible when I was a Minister—and to tackle some of the enormous traffic problems in and around the college.

I feel passionately about that, because I spent many years singing in the Thomas Tallis choir in, among other places, the Greenwich college chapel, and I am very familiar with the buildings. I was relieved to read in the MOD's house journal in December 1995 that the defence land agent had said:

> "Supermarkets and suchlike would not get past the starting gate".

Of course not. I am sure that that is not the Government's current intention. What matters is the need to find a solution that will ensure the future of that magnificent set of buildings well beyond the millennium, possibly making them a world heritage site but also ensuring that they are used. I do not want Greenwich to become a museum; I want the buildings to be used and alive, so that young people in particular will appreciate them more and more as we move into the next century.

Sir David Hardy and Lord Lewin, his predecessor as chairman of the national maritime museum and the royal naval college jointly, proposed a preservation trust to run the royal naval college site, funded independently of Government through a trust. I gather that that proposal has the strong backing of the heritage lottery fund, which may contribute to the large set-up and conversion costs, and other arts and heritage organisations. We should give serious consideration to that proposal. Let us not simply say that the buildings are too important for us to do anything with them, and that we should maintain the status quo. Let us find an imaginative way to proceed. A trust may be the answer, so we must give it a fair wind. I am sure that we can examine that matter in Committee.

In discussing this extremely detailed Bill there will be a lot of hot air and, I hope, constructive debate. It is a good Bill and I support it.

7.19 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I wish to raise three issues that relate to this Bill. The first is race and the armed forces.

Some ugly cases of racism have arisen. I asked a parliamentary question on that subject and received a full answer from the Minister, and inquiries are still going on. The Ministry of Defence is coming into the modern world very slowly in recognising that racism in the armed forces exists and needs to be stopped. In the past, it has taken a silly attitude to racism and bullying in the armed forces. I was present when a former Defence Minister expressed the view that someone who complained about bullying or racism was a bit weak and therefore should not be in the armed forces in the first place, as his or her personality was flawed. That is the Army's peculiar way of blaming the victim and it is a recipe for racism and bullying continuing.

I welcome the fact that clause 20 allows service personnel access to an industrial tribunal on race grounds. But what exactly do the Government intend to achieve by that clause? The Minister said that internal inquiries would be held first. Whatever the findings of such an inquiry, could cases be referred to the Commission for Racial Equality, for example? It is time that the MOD fully complied with the Race Relations Act 1976 instead of its own peculiar version of it, which has to be constantly changed when Bills such as this are introduced.

The relevant figures show that recruitment to the armed forces is discriminatory. Promotion procedures also seem to be unsatisfactory. We still have nowhere near the equivalent of Colin Powell in the British armed forces, which says something about the promotion procedures.

Following serious allegations in respect of the Household Cavalry, an inquiry took place under section 49(3) of the Race Relations Act. Although the inquiry's result went to the Ministry of Defence earlier this year, we have still not heard what the Minister intends to do about it. We should have an explanation.

My second point relates to the MOD police. I support the comments that have already been made, especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). We need a reliable MOD police service but it may be cut by a third under the Government's proposals, jeopardising its reliability. The Government want to replace MOD guards, particularly on armed duties, with military armed guards—often low-ranking service personnel—because they would be cheaper. They would also be much less well trained and would not have the essential policing experience required for many duties carried out by the MOD police, especially when they are armed.

Emphasis is placed on the MOD police's constabulary role, in which they have special legal powers. Ordinary soldiers will not have those special powers. The Government must explain the implications of the proposed changes, which could be serious. The option of replacing MOD police in their constabulary role with regular service personnel was dismissed by the recent Blelloch inquiry, yet the Government are proceeding down that road. That is wrong and unjustified.

My third point concerns the ban on homosexuality in the armed forces. Four individuals, all with exemplary service records, are challenging the legality of that ban in the court. Lieutenant-Commander Duncan Lustig-Prean of the Royal Navy, who enlisted in 1983, was discharged for his sexual orientation in January 1994. At the end of 1993, his commanding officer described him as

> "A most able, conscientious and industrious officer. His engaging and warm personality allows him to communicate effectively at all levels. This is the cornerstone of his success; he is dynamic and extrovert, yet his magnanimous and conciliatory nature fosters genuine trust and support. Resourceful, versatile and perceptive, he is a most effective manager and organiser. He is a balanced

> enlightened and knowledgeable man who enjoys my complete trust in all matters. Lustig-Prean has great all round potential. He is an outstanding prospect for early promotion to Commander."

He was chucked out because of his sexual orientation.

Jeanette Smith, a service aircraftwoman and nurse in the Royal Air Force, enlisted in April 1989 and was discharged in August 1994. Her discharge report said:

> "SAC Smith has an above average understanding of trade knowledge and the performance of her conversion course has been assessed as satisfactory. There is no evidence to suggest she is or has been involved in homosexual relationships with any member of HM forces, or that criminal offences have been committed during the course of the relationship. SAC Smith has confessed that she is homosexual, although there is no evidence to suggest misconduct, corruption, blatant or promiscuous activities or unnatural behaviour on service establishments."

Yet she was chucked out of the armed forces.

John Beckett, a weapons engineer and mechanic in the Royal Navy, enlisted in February 1989 and was discharged in September 1993. In September 1993, the naval personnel secretary said:

> "Throughout his service Beckett's reporting officers have commented upon his efficiency, intelligence, dedication and ambition and there is every indication that had it not been for his sexuality his Royal Naval career would have blossomed."

Sir Michael Layard, Second Sea Lord, said:

> "We accept that he was a loyal and patriotic man and that he has not committed a civilian or naval disciplinary offence."

Yet he was thrown out of the armed forces.

Graeme Grady, a sergeant in the Royal Air Force, enlisted in August 1980 and was discharged in December 1994. His squadron leader wrote:

> "Sergeant Grady . . . has been a loyal serviceman and a conscientious and hardworking tradesman who could be relied on to achieve the highest standards. He has displayed sound personal qualities and integrity throughout his service and has enjoyed the respect of superiors, peers and subordinates alike. He was promoted in 1990. Sergeant Grady is recommended to any future employer."

All four individuals clearly had sound records, yet the armed forces got rid of them because of their sexual orientation.

Homosexuality in the armed forces was decriminalised in 1994, yet a blanket ban was retained. That was unreasonable. Heterosexual misconduct, even resulting in serious criminal convictions in the civil courts, such as rape, is treated as a discretionary disciplinary matter. Criminal-style investigations still take place, often following anonymous allegations. Those subject to them have their private property searched in a degrading manner and are subject to prurient sexual interrogation.

Many countries have lifted the ban. In the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Turkey are the only countries that have an absolute ban on homosexuals in the armed forces. Several NATO countries have no ban—Canada, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and France. Germany has no ban for conscripts. Italy operates a ban on conduct but not orientation. Other countries that do not operate a ban include Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria.

The United States of America has some sort of "don't ask, don't tell" compromise, which is unsatisfactory in my opinion, but even that is being challenged in the courts there, and some of those challenges have been successful.

The costs of the ban are extensive. Every investigation takes up a lot of officers' time, at considerable cost. There is the loss of the cost of training of those service personnel. It has been estimated that as many as 500 homosexuals may have been forced to leave the forces, or have left voluntarily, in the past four years. The cost of their training may amount to about £40 million of taxpayer's money—wasted as a result of that stupid ban.

The judges in the Court of Appeal who heard the four's case all called for an urgent review of the policy, especially in view of the experience of other countries that have lifted the ban. They commented on the complete lack of evidence that the ban was necessary.

In response to that court statement, the Ministry of Defence set up its own internal review to consider the ban, but the responses that came at the time that that internal review was set up were extremely unsatisfactory. The First Sea Lord publicly called for a campaign to retain the ban, and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces dismissed the argument of the Master of the Rolls as "politically correct claptrap".

I know that service personnel have been consulted, but there has been no guarantee in that consultation of anonymity. There are also marked signs that those who oppose the ban will be subject to face-to-face interviews and may find themselves in difficulties resulting from that. I therefore believe that the review process that the MOD set up in response to the judge's comments has already been seriously compromised, and has come dangerously close to conducting an exercise to encourage hostility to all existing serving homosexuals.

If the four ex-service people win their case, the MOD may be forced to pay compensation to more than 500 people. The organisation Stonewall estimated that that might cost more than £12 million. We have had the example of the women in the armed forces who were dismissed despite warnings to the MOD that it was acting outside the law, but the MOD would not listen and that resulted in large compensation payments, totalling £50 million. A similar position is arising in this case, but the Government appear intent on incurring that bill for the taxpayer. If they were in local government, they would be surcharged by the district auditor for that attitude.

There is a distinction between privacy for individuals when they are off duty and sexual misconduct when they are on duty. Of course there should be strong sexual conduct rules in the armed forces which deal with all sexual behaviour, but that must be in relation to all, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. It should not discriminate. That ban should go.

I make one final comment, because I cannot resist it, although it is probably ungracious. For years, the left has asked, "Where are the enemy? Who are the enemy?" We had a huge defence budget, but we were never told who the enemy were. In the past month, we have had the royal "Panorama" programme and the events that followed, so I suppose that we can at last say that the enemy is in charge of our armed forces.

Mr. Soames: Very amusing, Harry.

7.34 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): It is my pleasure to contribute briefly to the debate, and as so much has been said my contribution will be briefer than I had anticipated.

[Mr. Andrew Hargreaves]

First and foremost, I disagree with Opposition Members' interpretation of clause 2. It seems to me, as a result of my brief experience with the Royal Navy, visiting various shore establishments during my time as a participant in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, that the clause would help the Royal Navy enormously in some of its difficulties with service personnel acting in and maintaining shore establishments. I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to say whether that is a sensible interpretation of the need for the clause.

I shall canter briefly on through a couple of aspects of concern, which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister might be able to clarify or which might form the basis for further discussion in Committee.

There is much sensible provision in the Bill on procedures for various aspects of courts martial. In many clauses—clauses 18, 19, 20 and so on—there is an important element that refers to internal redress procedures.

I very much support that aspect of the clauses. However, as the ombudsman does not have a locus in the armed forces—I am a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—I hope that it will be a matter of discussion in Committee or that my hon. Friend the Minister might consider that there should be a method to monitor complaints that might arise as a result of the redress procedures, to ensure that the procedures do not come into disrepute, and that the monitoring should be conducted impartially by an independent person or a former officer.

I strongly support clause 27, which relates to drug testing. My hon. Friend the Minister knows that I have played some role in trying to rid sport of drugs. The only way of achieving that is random testing, and I strongly support the concept of compulsory testing. I hope that the Committee will consider that. Testing need not be introduced overnight; it may be phased in gradually. Voluntary testing as a first step is a sensible way to proceed in those services where it is appropriate.

I shall mention homosexuality in the armed services only to say that my comments are already a matter of record. I disagree profoundly with the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). My sympathies or my opinions on the subject mirror those of my hon. Friend the Minister.

I shall briefly mention the Race Relations Act 1976 and ethnic minorities to say, as someone who has employed and employs people from ethnic minorities, that the issue should be considered with sympathy in Committee. However, we should bear in mind, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, that it is a matter not of apportioning blame but of encouraging people from all parts of the community to play their part in the armed services.

I was delighted at the enthusiasm of the first black trooper to mount guard outside Buckingham palace, who said that his heart was bursting with pride at being able to take part in that event. He is a splendid example to other people, who I hope will follow.

I shall end on a note of concern, which was ably expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), on the subject of clause 26 and the Greenwich building and all that lies in it. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury for his remarks on that subject, which were well measured and sensible. I would reassure him and other people by saying that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is well aware of the opinions of hon. Members on both sides of the House about that. He is on record as saying:

> "These beautiful buildings are a national asset, part of our heritage to be cherished. We are looking for a new occupier, of the highest possible quality, who will add lustre to the building."

I am sure that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who also cherishes national heritage matters, will ensure that that occurs. His suggestions should be considered seriously by the Committee. I commend the Bill to the House.

7.39 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I intend to focus on just one clause of the Bill—clause 26—concerning future uses of the site currently occupied by the Royal Naval college. The clause has already attracted the interest of a number of hon. Members.

The site is steeped in history. From the 15th to the 17th centuries it was a royal hunting lodge and palace and the birthplace of King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I. In the late 17th century it became a hospital, founded by King William and Queen Mary, for elderly and disabled seafarers. The naval connection remained intensely strong, and it was in the painted hall at Greenwich that Nelson's body lay in state after Trafalgar—as anyone who has visited the admirable Nelson exhibition at the national maritime museum will know.

In the mid-19th century, as the need for a specialist hospital for elderly seafarers decreased, the site was transferred to the royal naval college, which has remained the principal occupant to this day. I was slightly puzzled by the comments of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) who said that the complex had been passed from one Government Department to another. I understand that it has been occupied by the naval college for the last 126 years—not a bad record of occupation by one Department.

Not only is it a location with a long and a proud history, but it comprises an incomparable series of buildings designed by several of the country's greatest architects. Inigo Jones, John Webb, Christopher Wren, John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor left their mark on Greenwich, and they created a complex that not only is unique in Britain but also counts as one of the great masterpieces of European baroque architecture. It is currently being considered for world heritage status.

The site is held in trust for the Greenwich hospital—the charity established 300 years ago by King William and Queen Mary. As the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) pointed out, the Secretary of State for Defence is the sole trustee and the uses to which the Greenwich complex can be put are prescribed by Act of Parliament.

The Greenwich Hospital Act 1869 paved the way for the establishment of the royal naval college at Greenwich, and I think that I should remind hon Members what section 7 of the Act says. It provides for the site to be used

> "for the purposes of the naval service or any department of Her Majesty's Government".

The amendments now proposed to the Act stem from the Government's decision earlier this year to locate the new joint service command and staff college at Camberley and to close the existing Royal Naval college and the joint services defence college at Greenwich.

I do not intend to dwell tonight on the background to that decision. I have already spoken about the matter on previous occasions in the House, most recently in the debate on the defence estimates on 17 October. Suffice to say, I believe that the decision was a bad one, taken on dubious grounds and following consultation that would have made Mr. Alain Juppé proud. While the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was always courteous to me throughout the consultation process, I have no doubt that he made a terrible mistake in failing to recognise the outstanding advantages of Greenwich as the proper location for the country's new tri-service college. I believe that posterity will judge him and the Government harshly for that decision.

Although I understand that the process of establishing the tri-service college at Camberley is proving neither as easy nor as economical as the Minister led us to believe initially, that is a matter to be pursued on other occasions—and I shall do just that. The Minister will have his work cut out to convince hon. Members that the transfer to Camberley will proceed on time and within budget—or that it should proceed at all.

In the meantime, the British public have had their first real taste of the consequences of the Government's decision. In September this year, the royal naval college appeared in an estate agent's brochure as a desirable property for sale on a 150-year, full-repairing lease. Predictably, the brochure contained the typical estate agent's blurb extolling the site's potential.

It is difficult to imagine any other country that possessed such a magnificent complex of buildings treating them in that way. The present Secretary of State for Health, when Secretary of State for National Heritage, famously described Greenwich as the British Versailles. One has only to think about the implications of that comment to realise the absurdity of what is now happening. One cannot imagine the French putting Versailles on the market, the Spanish trying to hawk the Escorial around estate agents or the Greeks trying to flog the Acropolis. It is so absurd a concept as to make the Government's actions quite ridiculous: a British Secretary of State for Defence, who is only too pleased to wrap the Union Jack around him when it serves his purpose, is trying to flog the country's heritage through an estate agent.

It also makes a mockery of the statement made by the noble Lord Cranborne on behalf of the Government in a document entitled "Defending Our Heritage", which was published by the Ministry of Defence just a year ago. It is about historic military buildings on the defence estate, and I shall quote the opening words of Lord Cranborne's introduction:

> "The Ministry of Defence is the single largest owner of historic buildings of any Government Department . . . Some, such as Horse Guards in Whitehall, the Royal Naval College at Greenwich and the Royal Hospital at Chelsea, are more than part of the history of the Armed Services alone: they are part of the nation's history and the Department has a particular duty to act as 'their preserver and guardian".

Is that how the Government fulfil that role—by offering them for sale in a brochure by Knight, Frank and Rutley? It is hardly surprising that the Government's actions prompted a national outcry—a reaction that has clearly surprised and alarmed Ministers, who cannot have anticipated the strength of public feeling about the issue.

Even the Secretary of State for Defence, who is not usually the most emollient of characters, back-pedalled very rapidly and gave an assurance that the royal naval college would not be sold to any bidder whatever the consequences. He assured us that Tesco need not apply. I am reassured by the fact that the Secretary of State had some qualms about the prospect of the family firm of the former leader of Westminster council getting its hands on the royal naval college.

The Secretary of State has also assured us that Greenwich will not be sold to the highest bidder, that only appropriate uses will be entertained and that careful consideration will be given to the options before any decision is reached. The Minister repeated those assurances in a recent letter to me on the subject, and he has said much the same thing tonight. That is fine, but should we trust the Government? Their track record does not exactly command confidence. After all, they sold county hall not to an appropriate user, such as the London School of Economics, but to a Japanese consortium that has had great difficulty devising any use for the former seat of London government other than as an aquarium.

Quite apart from their track record, there are two other compelling reasons to doubt the Government's bona fides. The first is the way in which they have handled the response to Knight, Frank and Rutley's marketing exercise. Bids had to be submitted by 15 November, and I understand from an answer to a parliamentary question that I tabled that 11 expressions of interest had been lodged at that date—eight for the whole site and three for part of it. However, we remain in the dark about the identity of the bidders. Ministers have simply refused to reveal the identity of the organisations or individuals who have lodged expressions of interest or how they intend to use the site.

When challenged, Ministers have tried to defend their stance on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. That is nonsense. We are not asking to know the precise terms of the offers, but who is in the running to take over some of the country's finest buildings and to what uses they may be put. I do not accept the assertion made by the Minister in a letter to me of 5 December, in which he said:

> "It would be quite wrong for the Government to reveal the identity of interested organisations, if they do not themselves do so, before we have had the opportunity to analyse their expressions of interest."

I put it to the Minister quite simply: what do they have to hide? If they are reputable serious organisations that would make appropriate tenants for the premises, they can hardly wish to hide their bids under a cloak of secrecy.

The national maritime museum and the university of Greenwich have properly felt it appropriate to reveal their interest in the site. If organisations do not feel confident that their case for taking over the Greenwich site will withstand public scrutiny, they should not be entrusted with control of that magnificent complex of buildings.

In his letter to me, the Minister also claims that the Government need time to clarify the proposals and to consult heritage and other bodies before a decision is reached. I doubt what meaningful consultation can take place with heritage bodies and other interests if the identity of the bidders and the uses to which they propose to put the building cannot be revealed. That would be a

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

strange consultation. In any case, why did the Government not consult before making the proposal? Why was there not an initial consultation to establish what uses for the site might be appropriate before estate agents were engaged to hawk the buildings around?

The second compelling reason for doubting the Government's bona fides is the wording of clause 26. Section 7 of the 1869 Act allows the use of the Greenwich site for the purposes of any Government Department. That would seem to make possible appropriate heritage or educational activities, such as those proposed by the national maritime museum or the university of Greenwich, but it would not permit a private use. There must, therefore, be real grounds for concern that, in seeking to change that legislation, the Secretary of State is paving the way for the privatisation of the Greenwich complex. If Ministers are not prepared to reveal the identity of the bidders, they cannot hope to assuage our anxiety that it is a prelude to privatisation.

The very broad remit given by clause 26 to the Secretary of State to grant a lease to any person appearing to him to be suitable for a period of up to 150 years on such terms and conditions as he thinks fit gives enormous latitude and would make it difficult even for a bizarre and inappropriate decision to be challenged. The Secretary of State may say that Tesco need not apply, but I see nothing in clause 26 that would prevent him from granting a lease to Tesco, if he chose to do so.

The only limitation on the Secretary of State's power is the requirement that any proceeds from the site should be applied to the benefit of the Greenwich hospital charity. I am not a lawyer, but others who are better qualified may have a view on that. It could be argued that the legislation imposes an implicit obligation on the Secretary of State to seek the best possible return for any lease that is granted. That obligation could make it difficult for the Secretary of State to approve an appropriate use generating a low income as against an inappropriate use generating a substantially higher income as that would be in the interests of the Greenwich hospital, of which he is the sole trustee. That issue should certainly be considered closely in Committee.

It is not acceptable, not least after the sobering disposal of county hall, to allow such wide-ranging powers to the Secretary of State to dispose of the Greenwich site to whomsoever he chooses. It is arguable that the clause should be dropped entirely and the 1869 provisions retained. That would allow appropriate uses for the purposes of any Government Department, such as the Department of National Heritage, and might prove sufficient to enable the national maritime museum, which occupies the adjoining premises, to take over the painted hall and the chapel and to organise through the proposed trust the letting of the other premises.

Even if it is felt that a new clause is now required to reflect the changes over the 125 years since the existing legislation was passed, it cannot be right to allow the Secretary of State such unfettered discretion to dispose of the Greenwich site. At the very least, clause 26 should be amended to provide proper safeguards so that only uses that are clearly compatible with the remarkable historical and architectural qualities of Greenwich could be approved.

For example, it might be possible to establish a separate organisation or trust, comprising people with relevant expertise and standing, to vet all proposals and give a public verdict on them before the Secretary of State is empowered to grant a lease. At least that would begin to reassure the public that the hugely important decision about the future use of one of Britain's finest sites will not be taken behind closed doors by Ministers who have demonstrated by their previous actions that they cannot be trusted with the custody of the nation's heritage.

I was pleased that, in opening, the Minister acknowledged that the Committee would need to look closely at the clause. I know from the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) that the Committee will look at the clause very closely indeed. I hope that the possibilities that I have described will be considered carefully in Committee, and that appropriate amendments will be made to clause 26.

7.55 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I want to outline an amendment that I hope to canvass in Committee or on Report. It relates to the 300 British and empire soldiers who were executed in the first world war, who were found guilty of such charges as cowardice, desertion, sleeping at post, disobedience, throwing away arms and hitting a superior officer.

It has long been my view, and that of an increasing number of people, that those British soldiers were denied the rules of natural justice. A high proportion of them were suffering from mental illness caused by their experiences in the trenches, and it is now time that they were granted pardons. That would be the purpose of my amendment, and I understand from informal consultations with the Clerks Department that it falls within the scope of the Bill.

Although a long time has elapsed, the matter is of our century, and, mercifully, a few thousand veterans of the great war are still alive. Nothing would give them greater satisfaction than to know, albeit late in the evening of their lives, that their comrades in arms had been pardoned and exonerated by the nation. There is overwhelming support for those pardons among veterans and those who were close to veterans of the great war.

My postbag is full of letters from every part of the United Kingdom and around the world. Almost without exception, they support those pardons, as does the representative organisation of ex-service people. The Royal British Legion has passed resolutions requesting that the matter should be reviewed.

Although a long time has elapsed, the British establishment—I hesitate to use that word—suppressed the documents relating to those courts martial for 75 years. When they were released and examined and people argued that there had been a miscarriage of justice, the establishment said that it was "too late". That is not satisfactory, because dependants of those executed soldiers have examined the papers relating to their loved ones' field courts martial and execution and demanded a remedy. They have received a great deal of support.

I recently had a long conversation with Lord Houghton of Sowerby, who was a distinguished Member of the House for many years and who fought at Passchendaele.

He argues with immense conviction that there is a profound need for the wrong to be remedied, at least in terms of the public record.

I hope that, when hon. Members consider the matter in Committee or on the Floor of the House, there will be an opportunity to vote on it, and that there will be a free vote, because the proposal for pardons commands widespread support across the political spectrum, as it does in the country.

The Prime Minister has courteously written to me several times about the issue. While he expressed sympathy and acknowledged that there was injustice in the first world war because of the nature of trench warfare and so on, he said that there should be no pardons, because it is a matter of history. Of course it is a matter of history, but cannot be glibly dismissed as if it were the Napoleonic wars or the glorious revolution; it is of our century.

Comrades in arms and dependants of those soldiers are still alive. People who suffered shell shock and trauma in the second world war have written to me and other hon. Members saying, "I know what it's like. I suffered shell shock. I am pleased it didn't happen to me in the earlier conflict." There is an overwhelming demand to recognise the matter as not merely one of history but one which is still within our scope and time, and which it is our duty to remedy by granting pardons.

If we are to spend million of pounds each year teaching history to schoolchildren and college students, we need to write it with clarity and precision. That includes declaring and writing about some of the uncomfortable aspects of our history. I venture to suggest that this is an uncomfortable aspect, because, in retrospect, we did an injustice to those British soldiers. We must now acknowledge that, and should put the record straight.

There is immense interest among schoolchildren in the subject. I make no apology for saying that. Many schools have based lessons around the executions. They do so to demonstrate the trauma of warfare in the first world war and the fact that, while we are proud of our system of justice, it is fallible. I hope that the House will be minded to consider the point.

In my previous ten-minute rule Bill, I suggested that there should be some system whereby those field courts martial could be reviewed. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) referred to another episode, with which I am less familiar but about which there is powerful evidence suggesting that it should be reviewed—the so-called Salerno mutiny in world war two. It would be sensible and sensitive of the House at least to put into the Bill the facility for such matters to be reviewed.

I said that the field courts martial were unjust. People might ask how that could be so, and how all 300 soldiers could possibly be innocent of wrongdoing and all simultaneously suffering from trauma and shell shock. In fact, I do not argue that, but a very large number of those men were in those categories. That is demonstrated, and documented in detail, by the papers that were suppressed for 75 years. Even the most cursory examination of those papers by appropriately qualified legal and medical people would conclude that it was wrong for those men to be executed.

The common factor for all 300 men is the fact that they were denied the rules of natural justice. Those rules were not invented just recently; they have been a theme of our justice system for centuries. The standards that applied in the earlier part of this century are no different from those of today.

The men were not given the opportunity to prepare an adequate defence. Many of them were not represented at all; if they were represented, it was by somebody who was demonstrably not qualified to do so. After their field courts martial were completed, they were often not told what their sentence was until between 12 to 24 hours before it was carried out. Not only is that demonstrably unfair and unjust, but for all the 300-plus soldiers, there was no right of appeal against the sentence of death.

Therefore, I say with confidence that all 300 cases justify pardons. In many cases, the arguments are not only buttressed but redoubled by the fact that the documents show that many men were sick, traumatised and suffering from appalling conditions that no man could endure.

I meant at the beginning of my speech to apologise to the Minister for missing his opening remarks. I do not think that he currently has a tremendously high opinion of me, but no discourtesy was intended. I am prompted to refer to the hon. Gentleman because his late grandfather's doctor, Lord Moran, wrote extensively in his diaries and memoirs about shell shock in the first world war. In moving terms, he demonstrated, as a contemporary witness of the executions, the fact that the men were sick and traumatised.

I invite hon. Members, between now and when I hope to be able to table an amendment, to examine the documents of Lord Moran, the powerful book "For the Sake of Example" by His Honour Judge Anthony Babington, and the well-documented book "Shot at Dawn" by Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes. They show that wrongs were done.

While it is a matter of some regret that previous generations were responsible for those wrongs, it could be a matter of national pride for our generation that, towards the end of the century, we put the record straight, drew a line under this unhappy episode and included the names of those soldiers among those that we honour and respect every year at the remembrance services.

It is interesting that the regimental association of the Durham Light Infantry has already included the names of that regiment's executed service men in its book of remembrance. It considers that no shame attaches to those people. The memorial to the Black Watch in Dundee includes the names of the executed soldiers.

In the wonderful graves administered by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Flanders and on the Somme, those men in death lie alongside their comrades in arms. They are not discriminated against. That suggests that, in the years immediately after the first world war, albeit silently, there was recognition among those who made decisions that those men should not be discriminated against. There was a mood for such recognition of their service to be extended to them in death.

I hope that we can get the royal pardons either by statute or by the Prime Minister reflecting again on the matter during the course of this Bill, and subsequently recommending to Her Majesty that the royal prerogative be exercised. Statutory change would not then be necessary. Even if the pardons are not granted in the immediate future, which I would very much regret, one thing has changed since I and other people commenced this campaign some three years ago.

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

My postbag shows beyond all doubt that, in a sense, those men have been pardoned by the highest court in the land—British public opinion. If one discusses the matter with people in our streets and in clubs among ex-service men and women who went through the first and second world wars, and with serving service men and women today, one finds that, overwhelmingly, they proclaim that those men were brave British soldiers who should be granted pardons. I hope for and look forward to the support not only of Opposition Members but of the many Conservative Members who have over the months told me of their support for such pardons to be granted.

8.9 pm

Dr. Reid: With the leave of the House, I shall be brief, because I have only two things to say. First, in response to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), I and many hon. Members believe that it is never too late to right a wrong. When people tell me, whether it be a private or the Prime Minister, that these things are merely a matter of history, I commend to them Hegel's maxim:

"The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only at the coming of the dusk."

History is not a source of forgetting; it is ultimately the source of wisdom. Let that wisdom through history counsel us, as we deliberate on the issues raised by my hon. Friend.

The second general matter refers to the other speeches that have been made. Although there have been divisions on detail, I think that, on most of the issues—there are one or two possible exceptions—hon. Members agree in principle that advances have been made in the Government's position, whether we dispute the degree of those advances. The Minister will know that my view has not been fashionable in recent decades. We should be building towards a framework consensus on national security matters.

That view is imposed on us by circumstances as well as by its popularity in our armed forces around the country. I ask the Minister, therefore, wherever possible, to approach amendments in a consensual fashion, because he will find that our Front-Bench team is not destructive, but, I hope, constructive, and, on the odd occasion, perhaps constructive with effect.

Having said that, I look forward to discussing these matters further in Committee. I hope that we can do so in a fashion that is a credit to the service men and women whose lives will be affected by our deliberations.

8.10 pm

Mr. Soames: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have had a valuable, constructive and useful debate. I am sure that, in its work, the Select Committee dealing with the Bill will wish to take forward the views that have been set out by right hon. and hon. Members, and take account of the many experiences that they have brought to our debate.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) in an, as usual, good speech, made the most important point in relation to a Bill about service discipline: discipline, good order and morale are inseparable. I agree with him about the cadet forces' excellence, and about the wonderful nature of challenge weekends—what a tremendous force of good they are. I hope that we will be able to do more in that sector to help young people.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for our reforms on court martial procedures. I note his point about drugs, and I agree that it would be wrong to soften our line on drugs; indeed, there is no question of softening that line. Drug misuse in the armed forces is unacceptable. As he knows, offenders are normally discharged. We do not accept habitual drug users into the armed forces.

One-off experimenters are not automatically excluded. The cases are considered on their individual merits, but we make it clear to all recruits that drug misuse will simply not be tolerated, and can and will attract disciplinary action, including dismissal or administrative discharge from the service.

The hon. Gentleman talked about racial discrimination in recruiting. I do not accept that there is such discrimination. It is true that we must do better on recruiting in the ethnic communities; and we are committed to trying to increase that. That point was made by a number of hon. Friends and Opposition Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who made his point in a powerful manner, as did the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who has been a powerful enemy of racism in this country and whose words therefore carry weight.

As to someone who said that I was an unenlightened Minister in the matter of women in the armed forces, that was an outrageous suggestion. There is no more enlightened Minister in the Government when it comes to women, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker. As hon. Members know, or would know if they knew something about the armed forces, women are excluded from literally a tiny handful of roles in the armed services. They make a hugely vital contribution to the armed forces, without which those forces would not be able to operate anymore. We need to go on recruiting the high calibre of young women that we are getting into the services.

I acknowledge what someone said about physical selection of women, gender-free testing and all that. There is much more work to be done on that. By and large in the armed forces, there is tremendous commitment. Anyone who has seen these young women in all three services, who make such a formidable contribution, will know that the only thing we have to worry about is how to go on recruiting such excellent women and to develop their careers. I accept that the need will always exist to ensure that, providing they are good enough, they are promoted on the same terms as.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North mentioned the Home Office's use of the services. I think that he was exaggerating to make a point. As he knows—I have said it before here—we are considering setting aside part of the military corrective training centre as a young offenders institute. That work, which is being conducted in a most careful and detailed way, is being considered by Ministers. We hope to come to a decision shortly.

We do not intend to anticipate that decision tonight, but I want to repeat that anything we decide involving the use of part of the MCTC will in no way ever diminish the first-rate and highly professional military training undertaken there. If it were to do so, we would stop it at once. It will not affect the military ethos of the course.

I turn to the question of pardon for soldiers executed in world war one, which was raised by the hon. Members for Motherwell, North and for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), and I understand why the latter could not be here for the early part of the debate. For the edification of the hon. Member for Thurrock, I have read probably every book on that matter, and certainly almost all the great books about physical courage and otherwise on the battlefield. After the most detailed and careful consideration by the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Defence, it has been decided that it would be inappropriate to grant a pardon.

The people executed—some 346 men—represented 11 per cent. of the people who were condemned to death. As hon. Members know, the other sentences were commuted. A review found that there were no procedural errors or legal improprieties in the courts martial or in the subsequent reviews by the chain of command. On those grounds, there is no basis for a pardon.

As a general principle, it is inappropriate to reconsider historical events in the light of modern attitudes. Most soldiers stayed and fought in the trenches under appalling conditions, and they needed to be able to rely on their comrades. I acknowledge, however, the determination of the hon. Member for Thurrock in his campaign, and he is to be applauded for sticking to his guns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) made some valuable points that we noted, especially the important point about the treatment of civilians alongside military personnel. I have no doubt that the Select Committee, when it discusses these matters, will wish to deliberate on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) referred to the Christina Menzies case. That unfortunate case was thoroughly investigated by the special investigations branch of the Royal Military Police and the German civil police. The prime suspect was tried and acquitted of Christina's murder. No doubts exist about the competence either of the Royal Military Police or of the Army legal services in dealing with such serious cases. The prosecution was properly brought, and conducted by an experienced senior legal officer of Army legal services.

The service man in question was tried for and acquitted of Christina's murder trial. His trial by general court martial was properly conducted, and a "not guilty" verdict was passed.

Dr. Reid: I should make it clear that neither I nor anyone else, as far as I know, seeks to re-run the trial. Will the Minister at least give us an undertaking that, during the Committee investigations, he will have an open mind to considering the lessons that may be drawn from that case, with a view, if necessary, to drafting, if possible, an amendment that would be acceptable not only to the MOD but to others in the House, to avoid problems that have arisen? I do not seek to attack personal competence or decide guilt or innocence. However, there are lessons to be learned, and I hope that, in Committee, the Minister will keep an open mind on these matters.

Mr. Soames: In his distinguished career in the House, the hon. Gentleman will never come across a Minister whose mind is more open to change than mine.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Even the Minister cannot stop himself laughing at that.

Mr. Soames: I laughed before the hon. Gentleman.

If it is possible to do what the hon. Member for Motherwell, North requires, we shall do it, but I suspect that it is probably not possible.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) who, sadly, is not able to be in his place, expressed interest in clause 2 relating to the MHSE, and the related question of military home service engagement and the Ministry of Defence police. He does not agree with the clause. The hon. Gentleman has always taken a close interest in the Ministry of Defence police, and he particularly links that to the MHSE. We recently issued a consultation document which was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and for Wyre and others. We shall have to see how that consultation goes.

Clause 2 is purely an enabling clause, which will provide the services with what I hope will be a useful adjunct. As an hon. Member implied, it is certainly not intended to use local service as some kind of panacea to overcome wider recruitment difficulties. It is a totally different type of engagement, and that would not be possible. By far the vast majority of service men and women will continue to be required to serve wherever we need them, at home or overseas, in peace or in war. They could not possibly be on local service engagements, but in future there may be merit in such an arrangement.

I shall now turn to security and the Ministry of Defence police. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, who knows a great deal about these matters, will realise that, whatever his criticisms of the Ministry of Defence, of which many are probably entirely justified, the one issue on which we are not prepared to take a short cut is on the security of our installations and our people. There is no question of our ever doing that.

The Ministry's first priority on security is to ensure the safety of our personnel and establishments and the effectiveness of our operations. Over the years, the Ministry of Defence police and others who are responsible for guarding our installations have done a first-class job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport was right when he spoke about recruitment difficulties. We are making vigorous efforts to resolve them. He also spoke about the Bett review, which, of course, will not be a matter for the Committee, although the wonder of this procedure is that we will be able to raise almost anything, and I have no doubt that a way will be found to give Bett a good canter round the course. My hon. Friend raised a number of other important issues which we shall need to deal with.

As usual, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East made an excellent speech. He is a lawyer, and therefore, of course, knows everything. We have to be particularly careful when dealing with matters of this type, because he knows what he is talking about.

The hon. and learned Gentleman raised the question of the death penalty. There are no proposals in the Bill to alter the powers of courts martial to pass death sentences. It is intended to retain the death penalty as a non-mandatory sentence for five offences that have been committed with an intent to assist an enemy directly or indirectly. As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, it is the policy that such offences should never be carried in peacetime. The court martial reforms in the Bill mean that there would be a new right of appeal to the courts martial appeal court against a death sentence if one were ever passed after the Bill becomes law.

[Mr. Soames]

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East spoke about clause 18, relating to sex discrimination; that matter was also raised by the hon. Member for Leyton. Of course we shall give the matters they raised the most careful consideration, and I have no doubt that the Committee will wish to discuss this matter, which, for reasons of public comment and circumstances of time, is on people's minds.

There were several coloured soldiers in my regiment and I never saw any of the stuff that has been mentioned, but I am aware of public concern about it. It is easy to criticise, and that can be extremely serious for the armed forces. Ethnic minorities make a splendid contribution to our national life, and we need to get more members from those communities into the armed forces. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) made an extremely good comment about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury is a member of the Select Committee on Defence, and has substantial forces interests in his constituency because of its location on the edge of Salisbury plain. It is in almost the heart of the British service areas. He made a well-informed and sensible speech. I was interested in his remarks about policing, which, as one would expect, made a good deal of common sense. We look forward to seeing the arguments developed in Committee. His list of police forces in his constituency should at least ensure a low crime rate in Salisbury. If not, what on earth are those forces doing?

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury spoke with feeling and considerable knowledge and authority, deriving from his former and happy incarnation as a Minister at the Department of National Heritage, about Greenwich. I totally agree with him on that matter. We can agree or disagree about the way in which the matter has been handled, and I am sure, with that wonderful hindsight that we are all so lucky to have, we could have handled it better. The purpose of what we now seek to do was admirably encapsulated by my hon. Friend.

As usual, the hon. Member for Leyton made a pithy and pointed speech, which was all the more impressive when we recall that, for his entire time in the House, he has had a genuine commitment to rooting out racism. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as long as I am Minister for the Armed Forces, since before my time and into the future, the principle that the services are fully integrated and non-discriminatory will be at the front of our minds. If at any time there is a need to take action to ensure that that remains the case, the hon. Gentleman may be assured that we shall take it.

We should be happy for the hon. Gentleman to come to the Ministry of Defence to talk to us, so that we could tell him about our huge range of programmes to try to ensure that we get these matters right. He could help us by encouraging members of the ethnic communities to join the armed forces. They will find a warm welcome, and their contribution will be greatly valued, not because they are from ethnic minorities but because we need many high-quality young men and women to join the armed forces, and there are many such young people in the ethnic minorities.

The hon. Member for Leyton spoke about homosexuality, on which subject his has always been an honourable voice. As I have said, we shall present our review of our policy to the Committee as we promised, and I have no doubt that the Committee will wish to debate it at some length. The House knows the views of the Ministry of Defence, the joint chiefs, the chief of defence staff and others on these matters. All those views have been made plain, and they are not in any sense homophobic or judgmental. They have to do with military discipline and good order, and the immensely strong and genuinely held feelings of hundreds of thousands of people in the armed forces.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hall Green on his membership of the armed forces scheme. His interpretation of clause 2 is quite correct. He supported clause 27 on drug testing, and we are grateful to him for that, because he has particular knowledge in this matter and are glad to have his endorsement. We note his views on homosexuality and race.

The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) made a powerful speech, as one would expect. I agree that Greenwich is not only one of the great masterpieces of baroque architecture, but probably one of the greatest masterpieces of any architecture, in this country. It is perfectly true that the question of the new arrangements for Greenwich has aroused feelings going far beyond those who have served there on the naval staff college course and the generations of serving officers and men of the Royal Navy. Greenwich has been at the centre of their lives and that of the Royal Navy.

It is an institution that has, however, changed use on a number of occasions. If those marvellous buildings are to live, they must be used properly. As the hon. Member for Greenwich knows, we are proposing to grant a lease, not to sell the freehold, to those whose proposals meet our criteria and are of the greatest merit. The buildings will remain for all time Crown property, held in trust by the Secretary of State for Defence for the exclusive benefit of the Greenwich hospital.

The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed on a number of occasions why Greenwich cannot be the joint services staff college. I am sorry if he does not agree with me, but we are happy to give him any further information that he requires. Greenwich simply could not possibly accommodate that college.

We are seeking for Greenwich the most appropriate, dignified and fitting use of those wonderful buildings for the millennium and beyond. Any suggestion about a joint services staff college is not a serious contribution, and simply not even a starter. I have already said that we must seek the most appropriate, fitting and dignified use of those wonderful buildings.

It has been reassuring that, in our debate, the House has demonstrated the need for and its understanding of the reasons behind the service discipline Acts, and the system of discipline they enshrine. I do not believe that anyone here would disagree with the admiration that is generally felt for the members of the British armed forces. Wherever they go, they show immense qualities of courage, resolve, tenacity, common sense and, above all, good humour. Discipline plays a large part in instilling those qualities. We can all properly take huge pride in the armed forces.

As some 13,000 of our forces are to be deployed to Bosnia in the next few days, it is right that we should remember that it is a complete fallacy to think of service discipline as some sort of gratuitous imposition on our young men and service women. It is better to regard it rather as a framework which is absolutely vital to their safety and well-being, especially when we ask them to undertake many extremely challenging, very difficult and sometimes dangerous duties. Such duties are the hallmark of service life, for which they are admirably trained and prepared.

That is why no responsible Government of any colour will play fast and loose with the system of discipline. It is our duty to ensure that that system is effective and fair and that justice is not only done, but is seen to be done. The Bill is about achieving that end.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Select Committee.—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COMPANIES

That the draft Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

That the Company and Business Names (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 3022), a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6612/94 and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on 30th November, relating to environmental impact assessments; recognises the Government's continuing commitment that full consideration be given to environmental matters in decision-making processes; welcomes the Government's intention to press for the removal of a number of unnecessarily prescriptive provisions in the draft proposals; and supports the Government's intention to seek clarification of certain provisions.

SINGLE CURRENCY

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. COM(95)333 on the practical arrangements for the introduction of the single currency and the European Monetary Institute Report, dated November 1995, on the changeover to the single currency; and agrees with the Government that Protocol 11 annexed to the EC Treaty, which means that the United Kingdom is not committed to move to Stage 3 of Economic and Monetary Union, and can decide whether to join on the basis of the United Kingdom's national interest given the circumstances at the time, is to be welcomed.—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

Question agreed to.

STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith, Mr. John Evans, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Mr. Nigel Jones, Dame Jill Knight, Sir David Mitchell, Mr. Tony Newton and Mrs. Ann Taylor be members of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges.—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

Burnley and Pendle Bus Company

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

8.33 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue which is of great concern to my constituents and also to those of my friend, the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who is present.

In one sense the debate has been placed in context and is nicely framed by the report of the Select Committee on Transport, entitled "The Consequences of Bus Deregulation", which was published today. The Committee makes a number of recommendations that I wholeheartedly endorse. It has recommended that the Government should undertake

> "an urgent review . . . for the disposal of the remaining municipal undertakings."

That is germane to the subject of the debate. The Committee considers

> "the present means of regulating competition in the bus industry through the OFT"—

the Office of Fair Trading—

> "is unsatisfactory and needs to be changed."

I agree. It goes on to recommend that a

> "specialist regulator be created for the bus industry"—

an Ofbus. I also agree with that.

The Committee also recommends that the Government

> "should make a statement of policy objectives for buses."

When I reflected on that, I found it astonishing that we have not had such a statement from the Government. Perhaps the Minister will refer to that when he replies.

I am expecting quite a lot from the Minister following the article which appeared at the weekend in *The Observer* under the headline

> "Norris reins in bus companies."

The newspaper reported that the Minister plans to rein in the "cowboy operators" this week. It also reported that new penalties will be introduced for sub-standard services. Apparently, predatory companies will feel the lash from the Government after a decade of free-for-all. I hope that the Minister will enlighten us as to his response to the Select Committee report.

We know from that report and the transport statistics which the Department of Transport published earlier this year that since deregulation the average age of buses has risen dramatically. *The Observer* reported:

> "More than a third of Britain's buses are now more than 12 years old."

I believe that more like 48 per cent. of buses with more than 33 seats are more than 12 years old. The number of new buses that have been ordered by our bus companies since 1990 has plummeted by 66 per cent. Those are desperate statistics. We now barely have a bus industry to talk about. In 1979, we manufactured 25,531 buses; in 1994, we manufactured a paltry 9,566.

That is the context in which I would like to discuss what is happening in Pendle. In October this year, the local council, which is Liberal-controlled, announced that it intended to sell the municipal bus company, Burnley and Pendle Transport. The company is jointly owned by Pendle and Labour-controlled Burnley. It runs some 90 buses and 16 coaches, and employs about 270 people, including 200 drivers.

If Pendle council cannot persuade Burnley to agree to the sale, the council's stated policy is to sell its 50 per cent. stake and to press ahead on its own. That decision to sell came like a bolt from the blue. There was no mention of the planned sale at the local elections in May this year, which returned a majority Liberal council in Pendle. I have asked myself why it was not an issue.

A leading Liberal councillor, who happens to be an employee of Stagecoach, Mr. Ian Gilhespie, told the *Pendle Citizen* on 30 November:

> "The buses were not an issue at the election because it was only after the election that Burnley Council approached Pendle to see what Pendle thought about the idea."

That is a preposterous claim, and a complete invention. The idea that Burnley was prompting Pendle to sell its stake in the bus company is ludicrous. I want to put the record straight.

The Price Waterhouse report, which set out the options for Burnley and Pendle Transport, went to both councils on 6 July. It made it perfectly clear what the consultants thought of the respective positions of both councils. The report said:

> "Burnley Borough Council would prefer to maintain the status quo (ie retain the existing ownership) and Pendle Borough Council would prefer to seek an option which allows it to realise the value inherent in its shareholding."

That was the position then and it is the position now. Pendle council wants to sell, but Burnley council, to its credit, is not even prepared to contemplate any sale.

There has been an enormous tidal wave of opposition to the sale, which has dominated the local press since the beginning of October. Some 13,000 local people—a phenomenal number—have signed a petition against the sale, and that has been handed to Pendle's chief executive. That opposition shows the extent of the disquiet felt in the area.

The Liberals constantly trumpet about local democracy and they make a great virtue of it, but I challenge them to put the issue to a local referendum. That would not be impossible. Tower Hamlets, which was a Liberal-controlled council for many years, consulted the people on their preferred level of council tax. If it was good enough to consult on that, why is not it good enough to consult in Pendle on the level of bus services? Why will they not test the views of local people?

The idea of selling our bus company came not just from the Liberal group, but from a small number of people within it. Most of the Liberal councillors were kept in the dark. Why do they want to sell? They just want to get their hands on a valuable capital receipt. Councillor Tony Greaves, who casts a long shadow over this matter, told the press that there was no secret about that. On 9 November, he told the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* that Pendle would go ahead and sell its 50 per cent. share in the company "with or without Burnley."

The Liberals want to sell the bus company, but not because it runs at a loss. On the contrary, it turns in a healthy profit, and last year it paid a dividend of £71,000 to each council. Nevertheless, there is tremendous pressure to sell the bus company before 31 March. If that is achieved, the council can get a 75 per cent. capital receipt. If the sale slips beyond 31 March and into the new financial year, the ratio will be just 50:50, with the council able to spend only half on whatever takes its fancy, with the other half being used to repay council debt. There is a race to sell, which could affect the sale price. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

The Liberal leader of Pendle council, Councillor Alan Davies, claimed loftier motives for the sale. He told the "Town Crier", an excellent publication that circulates in the West Craven area of my constituency:

> "We will not join the ignorant political abuse that is going on. Up until now, all we have had is the biggest set of false suppositions, emotive distortions and downright lies that I have ever seen from anyone. We will at least tell the truth."

He said that they would tell the truth. He then said:

> "We have decided to consider the sale of Pendle's shares because we believe it could be the best for bus services and passengers, best for the company and its jobs and the best for the council tax payers and residents of Pendle."

It is certainly not the best for bus services and passengers, as the Select Committee confirmed in its report. It is also not the view of the Liberals in Eastbourne, which has the distinction of having the first municipal bus company in the country. It is still Liberal-controlled, and the Liberals want to hang on to their local authority bus company.

The company's managing director, David Howard, told me in October:

> "There is no doubt that generally speaking the ownership of a bus company by a local authority can be seen by the population as being a service provided by local management with appropriate knowledge and identity with the area, who may be more sympathetic to consider service provision than the management of one of the larger bus operating groups remote from the district concerned."

That is certainly true.

Councillor Davies told people that the sale would be best for the company and for jobs. That is certainly not the view of the former general manager of the Burnley and Pendle bus company, Mr. Roy Marshall. He was general manager for 12 years from 1974 until his retirement in 1986. With his vast experience, he reached the conclusion that the sale would be detrimental to the employees and to local taxpayers. He said that a takeover by Stagecoach—which is one of four companies bidding for the company—or one of the other private operators could mean cuts in staffing levels and wages, closure of depots and workshops and the cutting of routes and services that do not bring in enough income. That is the reality, as testified by today's Select Committee report.

It was Jim Bowie, the well-respected district secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, who told the *Barnoldswick and Earby Times* early last month:

> "Burnley and Pendle has been one of the most successful municipal bus companies in the county. It has the best people, the best fleet and among the best workers."

That is a tribute with which I wish to be associated.

Councillor Davies also said that the sale would be best for the council tax payer. That is absolute nonsense. As I have already explained, the company makes a profit year after year.

The leader of the council said that the Liberals would not trade in abuse, yet his colleague Councillor Tony Greaves is a byword for abuse. He is ungracious, brittle and sour, and he constantly trades insults with people. In fact, he recently called Councillor Colin Waite a thug. The *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* chided him, saying:

> "Hurly burly and hot tempered outbursts are the stuff of politics but personal abuse deserves no place in any debate. And unless he cares to understand this and apologise Councillor Greaves need not go out to a public meeting in search of thugs to condemn but could stay at home and look in the mirror."

Hear, hear to that.

Since then, there have been threats of legal action by Liberal councillors against the Pendle Labour party. I will not weary the House by going into the detail, as I have already covered it in a recent early-day motion.

To try to retrieve the position, the local Liberal party has been sending out a blizzard of leaflets—some 20,000—setting out the reason for the sale. In the leaflet "The facts about the buses", it poses the question:

> "If it is sold will services get slashed?"

It gives the answer:

> "No. Liberals have always been in the forefront of pressing for good local bus services. The fact is the council will not sell without strong guarantees about services."

I tell the Minister that the Liberals will not get those guarantees.

I tabled a clutch of parliamentary questions before the end of the last Session. The Minister wrote to me last month saying:

> "There were very few cases"—

he was referring to previous privatisations—

> "where the employment terms of the workforce were formally protected—although some purchasers promised that there would be no redundancies for a given (usually quite short) period. In a few instances minimum service levels were stipulated as part of the sale, again for a limited (usually three years) period."

There are no guarantees, and the Liberals are kidding people if they think that they can get any covering services and jobs.

Finally, there is the question of what happens when one council wants to sell but the other does not. Again, I raised that matter with the Minister. I do not know whether Burnley and Pendle is unique, but it might well be. The Minister told me that such matters would be considered case by case.

On 1 November, the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* indirectly quoted Councillor Tony Greaves as saying that the Secretary of State had already given his informal approval for the sale. I find that absolutely astonishing, and I want the Minister to comment on it.

The Minister has told me previously, in reply to a parliamentary question, that the Government's policy is to legislate to force councils to get rid of their bus companies. However, the Government are running out of time. There is nothing down for this Session to facilitate that. The whole system of deregulation, as the Transport Select Committee report says, needs to be put under the microscope because it is certainly not working.

The industry needs to be re-regulated to protect services, diversity and consumer choice. We need to encourage the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to take vigorous action to prevent anti-competitive behaviour, and the Select Committee agrees. We need to strengthen the powers of the Office of Fair Trading. We need to help municipal bus companies such as Burnley

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

and Pendle to compete effectively, free of the artificial financial restrictions created by Government rules on council-influenced companies.

The incoming Labour Government desperately need to re-regulate the entire bus industry to give local authorities powers to plan and contract sensibly for bus services in their area.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before the hon. Member speaks, may I ascertain that the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and the Minister agree to him speaking? That is the tradition in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Yes I do, Deputy Madam Speaker. Forgive me.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris) *indicated assent.*

8.50 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) I am glad that the early start of this debate has given me the chance to make a few brief comments because the debate is very important. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on securing the debate, which he has initiated because the council in his constituency has caused a problem.

The transport undertaking in Burnley and Pendle was brought together some 60-odd years ago as—originally—the Burnley, Colne and Nelson joint transport undertaking. It ran in that context until the local government reorganisation of 1974, when it took the new name Burnley and Pendle. Before I became a Member of the House, I was a councillor in the borough of Burnley, where I served on the joint transport committee for a number of years, and therefore have some knowledge of it.

My hon. Friend referred to the Transport Select Committee report, "The Consequences of Bus Deregulation" that has been published today. It is somewhat fortuitous that that report has come out today. I certainly endorse my hon. Friend's comments and echo his full support for the points that he highlighted.

My hon. Friend referred to the guarantees that are said to be being given by some of those who are bidding to buy the Pendle shares in the Burnley and Pendle joint transport undertaking. I emphasise "the Pendle shares" because there is no doubt that the Burnley shares are not for sale. Indeed, we hope that we can persuade Pendle to think again and not sell those shares.

Pendle Liberals, and those who are inclined to support the sale in that borough, need to think twice on two particular points. First, the petition has clearly shown that the public are strongly opposed to the proposed sale. Secondly, as my hon. Friend said, the Liberals and their supporters should know that guarantees given now are not worth the paper that they are written on.

Certainly in Burnley we all know that when the Burnley building society was taken over by the National and Provincial building society—in the early 1980s it was called a merger—certain undertakings were given. Those undertakings were guaranteed in a letter sent out by the then chairman of the Burnley building society. All the undertakings given, including those that said that one third of head office jobs would remain in Burnley and that Burnley's name would appear in every office of the National and Provincial building society, were not honoured for very long at all.

Now there are no head office jobs in Burnley, and only a computer that may well go when the society is taken over by Abbey National plc. We do not even have a regional office. We know that, if any shares are sold with regard to the transport undertaking, the same thing will happen—and we will lose services.

One thing that people in Pendle have to understand is that while the profit of the Burnley and Pendle company is shared 50:50 between the two boroughs, most of it is in fact made within my borough of Burnley. That is because of the nature and geography of the constituency of Pendle. It is more rural, and has a scattered population, and services do not very easily make a profit. My hon. Friend and myself believe that the provision of services are far more important than making profit, but we recognise the context of the Transport Act 1985. I remember that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were joint Chairman of the Committee on that Bill, along with Madam Speaker when she was a Committee Chairman.

My hon. Friend referred to the former general manager, Mr. Roy Marshall, and his strong view that the sale would be bad for transport and the provision of a public service for the people of Burnley and Pendle. When the joint transport undertaking became a company as a result of 1985 Act, the general manager was Mr. Luddeman, who is currently the manager of London General. Now the manager is Mr. Jelpke. Both those men faced the challenges of the 1985 Act and made Burnley and Pendle transport a very successful and viable undertaking.

I want to refer to the question of who is submitting bids for the company, since we do not really know. We understand that it might be Stagecoach, which took over the former Ribble undertaking. When the 1985 Act went through, Ribble, which was part of the National Bus Company, was split into three. The main part of Ribble, based at Preston, was the subject of a management buy-out and was subsequently acquired by Stagecoach. Indeed, Stagecoach garages some of its buses at the Burnley and Pendle transport depot in Queensgate in my constituency. Ribble used to have a depot in Centenary way, but it closed it a few years ago.

We understand that other potential bidders are Blackpool Bus, First Bus Yorkshire Rider, Greater Manchester Buses (North) and Preston Bus, which is submitting a bid in conjunction with Burnley and Pendle management and employees.

We know for a fact that the Preston Bus bid was considered by a specially appointed Pendle council sub-committee yesterday, but we do not know exactly what happened. We know that Mr. Souter, the multi-millionaire owner of Stagecoach, has already been to the Queensgate depot and met the work force. He has made no secret of the fact that there will be job losses, especially among the managerial, clerical, administrative and mechanical staff. The drivers' position is a little less precarious—in the short term at least. But once the services start to go, so will those jobs. We know that there will be job cuts and service cuts.

On 4 December, a letter was sent to the chief executive of Pendle borough council by the chief executive of Burnley borough council, who was trying to ensure that there was no misunderstanding on the part of the Pendle controlling group. The final paragraph of that letter says:

> "I think it is important that you draw the contents of this letter to the notice of all Members of your Council but particularly to the attention of those who will be involved in the decision to dispose of the shares. It is also important that you draw it to the attention of prospective purchasers as I am not certain that all of them will be aware of Burnley council's position in relation to the sale, the Articles and the replacement of Directors."

Burnley feels that Pendle council should know, as should potential purchasers, exactly where Burnley stands. That is why the letter was sent.

Among other things, Burnley has been told that if it does not sell, its 50 per cent. of the shares will not be worth as much as the other 50 per cent., when those are bought. As far as I am concerned, if there are two halves, one owned by the private sector and one by the public sector, instead of the two halves being in the public sector, as at present, the two halves are still equal to one, so if one half share is devalued, the other must be devalued too.

Burnley borough council wrote to Pendle:

> "I understand that your Council are still considering the disposal of your shares in the Transport Company, that bids have now been submitted and that a decision will be reached following further consideration by a Special Sub-Committee and your Policy Committee.
>
> Burnley Borough Council remain completely opposed to any form of sale of the company or the whole or part of its shares and I have been asked to write to you formally to inform you of this position and to ask you to draw the content of this letter to your Members, particularly the Liberal and Conservative Members who are supporting the share sale.
>
> We have carried out our own survey of the effect of local authorities disposing of their transport companies and the pattern is all too familiar—job losses amongst both managerial and operational staff; less favourable working conditions; longer working hours; reduced pension arrangements; increased fares; poorer services; loss of less viable and rural services; lengthened 'bus frequencies; and loss of public involvement. This pattern has, I understand, simply been confirmed in a recent discussion which the Chairman of Stagecoach had with company employees when he implied that apart from some of the drivers the job prospects for the remaining workforce, if his company were the successful bidder, were poor."

Those are the things that both the public and the employees need to know.

Finally, I shall quote the paragraph that tells potential purchasers exactly where they stand:

> "I have to tell you that my Council are prepared to take what action is considered necessary to prevent the sale and I am currently discussing various options with my Members. However, I think it would only be fair to draw to your Members' attention the possibility that Burnley council will not feel obliged to co-operate with any purchaser of the Pendle shares in amending the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the company. Similarly, my Members may not feel obliged to approve any nominations which a purchaser may put forward to replace the Pendle Directors with their own nominees."

Let the buyer beware. Pendle Liberal council should think again, decide that the sale is not in the best interests of jobs or of transport in its area, and it should not go ahead with that sale. Anyone tempted to buy shares should recognise that Burnley will not co-operate, because we believe that a sale would not be in the interests of Burnley or of Pendle in connection with either employment or transport. The proposal is an absolute outrage.

9.1 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): It has been a pleasure to hear the debate so far. One hesitates to intrude on private grief, but it is a pleasure to witness the spectacle of the hon. Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike), both Labour men, using the debate to attack their Liberal opponents on local authorities. If I may say so, it has been a commendable performance by both of them, and it is a shame that there is no Liberal Member here to respond. I certainly do not intend to respond on the Liberals' behalf.

First I shall say a word about the Select Committee report. As the hon. Member for Pendle rightly said, it was fortuitous that, with brilliant timing, he chose today for his debate. He must even have anticipated the Select Committee's decision when to publish its report. Then I shall talk about the bus company itself.

I appreciate that it must be difficult for Labour Members to stomach the fact that, in its report, the Select Committee said that it did not wish to turn the clock back to before regulation, or to introduce franchising outside London. It rejected both those propositions, for the simple reason that ideology is one thing, but facts shout louder.

As the House knows, and as is now taken for granted even among such organisations as the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, which, when I last encountered it, was hardly a bastion of Conservatism, the reality is that, over the past 10 years, subsidy has been reduced by 50 per cent. and operating costs by one third, while route mileage has increased by about 27 per cent. There is a general recognition throughout the country that deregulation has been good for services and good for customers.

What the Select Committee and I have recognised—it has been generous enough to acknowledge that I set up the bus working group a year ago precisely to deal with this point—is that we can make the service better still. Everybody recognises that, as the bus is fundamental to any public transport strategy, we must see how we can make it a more attractive mode of transport.

Clearly, we do not want to turn the clock back—as the hon. Members for Pendle and for Burnley wish—to those dreadful days before the 1985 Act which introduced deregulation. I imagine that both hon. Members have impeccable new Labour credentials, but I shall have to examine their records in slightly more detail. I fear that there may be those on the Opposition Front Bench who will not take kindly to this outbreak of the dreaded "S" word, a word which is now to be excised from anything that emerges from Walworth road and about which we are not supposed to speak in the House for fear of offending public sensibilities.

Let me say a word about the Burnley and Pendle bus company. First, I must make it clear that Pendle borough council has not yet asked the Secretary of State for his consent to the proposal to sell its half of the company. I hope that the hon. Member for Pendle will appreciate that, in the circumstances, I cannot respond to some of his comments, because we have not yet received an application.

The hon. Gentleman described the company, and I will not therefore repeat the description. I should point out that, while the company makes a reasonable profit, it is a

[Mr. Steve Norris]

very static operating profit. The hon. Member for Burnley speculated as to whether it was a unique company. BPT is the last remaining municipal company which is a joint company. It is owned equally by Burnley borough council and Pendle borough council. The articles of association of BPT do not contain any pre-emption rights in favour of either partner and Pendle is entitled to sell its half share in the company independently of its partner.

For all the municipal companies—whether in joint or single ownership—the 1985 Act allows disposal of shares by the local authority owners. This can be done only with the consent of the Secretary of State, who has three basic principles in mind—that the objective should be to promote fair and sustained competition in the bus industry; that a fair market price should be obtained, subject to any small discount that one might allow for a work force buy-out team; and that the new pension arrangements are precisely set out and carefully considered.

Our aim throughout is to ensure that such sales result in the best value for money for the local authority, bearing in mind the state of bus competition locally. Our preference is for a normal open competitive sale. But where it is argued by a local authority that a public announcement of the intention to sell may bring about destabilising competition that could depress the value of the company, we will be prepared to consider agreeing to a private competitive sale. In such cases, local authority vendors have to clear the shortlist of bidders with the Department to ensure that the essential features of a competitive sale are retained.

The Government firmly believe that it is best for these companies to be run by and passed to the private sector. The evidence for that is that there are now only about 20 public sector companies left. The subsidiaries of the National Bus Company, the Scottish Bus Group and London Buses have all been successfully sold off and are now in the private sector. More than 90 per cent. of all bus operations are in the private sector. Frankly, we think that, if the remaining companies are sold, they will be more efficient operations, spurred on by private ownership and the need to generate profits. They will be more responsive to the needs of passengers and will be able to demonstrate that they are not receiving favourable treatment from their owners.

The companies will also have access to long-term private sector finance. It is now rapidly becoming evident that, far from any investment shortfall, investment in the bus industry is now extremely healthy. The hon. Member for Burnley had some rather disparaging things to say about Stagecoach. He neglected the fact that the company has just ordered 1,000 new buses. Other larger operators are also now ordering hundreds of new buses. The process of deregulation has introduced tremendous diversity into the bus market. Minibuses, midibuses and other essential design features are now commonplace. These have been pioneered in the new deregulated environment.

That has occurred because the companies have been freed from the interference of the owning local authority, and freed from the restriction that they cannot carry out activities beyond their pre-1986 operation. In other words, private companies can diversify into other areas.

There is a further incentive to local authorities to sell the bus companies. If assets are sold before 31 March 1996, local authorities will be able to devote 75 per cent. of the proceeds to local projects, such as improvements in public transport. The spending of the proceeds can, of course, take place after that date. For sales that take place after 31 March 1996, however, 50 per cent. of the proceeds will again have to be used for the reduction of debt in the traditional way.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Is not the existence of the 31 March deadline likely to depress the price which private sector companies will offer, because they know that the percentage that can be applied will go down from 75 per cent. to 50 per cent?

Mr. Norris: As the number of bus companies remaining in the public sector dwindles ever more, the circumstances in which the owners of those companies approach the market are likely to be less attractive for a variety of reasons. That is a further incentive for local authorities to accept the clear commercial reality, the clear operating advantages and the clear advantage to customers which are implicit in selling those operations while there is a market.

I imagine that purchasers are, indeed, aware of the capital rules surrounding sales, but if the local authority is sufficiently vigorous in prosecuting its ambitions to sell, it will be able to obtain a fair price with or without the additional proportion of proceeds which they can spend on public transport. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the difference after 31 March will simply be that the balance of the proceeds will have to be used for debt reduction and will not be available for current spending.

The local authority vendor has imposed conditions on the sale in almost all the cases in which a municipal bus company has been sold. I shall not list the companies in detail, but suffice it to say that the conditions were of varying complexity and duration depending on the importance given to them by the vendor. Standard concessions have often dealt with the assets of the company, such as property, so that any subsequent excess profits in the event of an on-going sale could be shared, usually on a 10-year reducing taper, with the vendor.

As for employment terms, some purchasers gave promises that there would be no new redundancies for a given, often quite short, period. In a few instances, minimum service levels were stipulated as part of the sale—again for a limited period, generally of about three years. I should emphasise that that sort of covenant is essentially a matter for the local authority and the purchaser.

The Secretary of State's concern when deciding whether to consent to the terms of a sale is confined to ensuring that the purchaser does not take on such onerous conditions that it will fetter the purchaser's ability to react in a commercial way should market conditions in the area change. The Secretary of State also examines the purchaser's arrangements to cover the pension rights of employees of municipal bus companies when considering whether to give consent to a sale.

I have outlined the general principles. I should now like to return to the particular case in Lancashire. Pendle wishes to sell; Burnley does not wish to sell. Burnley, as the hon. Member for Burnley said, is furthermore firmly opposed to the proposed sale of Pendle's half of the company. As we understand the present position, Pendle has invited expressions of interest and is currently having indicative bids professionally analysed. I should say nothing further on that issue, for reasons of straightforward commercial confidentiality.

We have received requests in the past for part-sales of municipal companies, varying from as little as 10 per cent. upwards. We normally see no advantage in part-sales, first, because it is difficult to determine the true value of part of a company. The second reason is that, where the buyer also runs bus services in the area, the buyer is effectively getting in return for payment of only part of the company's value a guarantee that there will be no competition. There may also be a loss when the rest of the company is sold. Those points in a way reiterate what the hon. Member for Burnley said.

Despite those reservations about part-sales, however, I have every sympathy for a local authority which is willing and keen to withdraw from involvement in its bus company. I recognise that Burnley and Pendle is a unique company and that it is in a unique situation.

Under section 75 of the Transport Act 1985, the Secretary of State will consider each sale on its merits and take account of the different circumstances which prevail in each case. The Secretary of State is bound to look at every proposal that is put to him. I can confirm to the House that he will do so in this case. We shall take account of the fact that Burnley is opposed to the sale, and we have told them that we shall take account specifically of that view in considering any proposals that may be made by Pendle.

A number of options are available to Pendle borough council, but it is the council that has not yet decided what to do, and, as I have said, it has not yet asked us for consent. If and when it does, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a decision on the merits of the case. I hope that the hon. Member for Pendle will understand that I cannot comment further until he makes that decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.—[*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 11 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hill Farming

1. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to encourage young people to enter hill farming. [4127]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I have no plans to introduce measures specifically to encourage young people into hill farming. However, the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995, which came into force on 1 September this year, will encourage landowners to let more land. This has been reinforced by 100 per cent. relief from inheritance tax for land in new tenancies granted on or after 1 September. As the market in let land is freed up, more opportunities will be created for new entrants generally.

Mr. Griffiths: I must tell the Minister that few young farmers will be cheered by his reply. The background to the Government's dealings with farmers in our hill country areas is that the livestock compensatory allowance has been cut or frozen over the last four years, grants in the less-favoured areas have been cut from 50 per cent. to 30 per cent., and farmers have less income than ever before. Instead of possibly making more land available, is not it time for the Government to do something to improve farmers' incomes, which have decreased in my own constituency and in other parts—

Madam Speaker: Order. We have questions to get through today. We do not want statements.

Mr. Hogg: As to the first point about let land, what really troubles young farmers is the knowledge that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) introduced legislation in 1976 which did enormous damage to the ability of landowners to let land. They will have been shocked by the Labour party's decision to vote against the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995, which has done an enormous amount to free up land.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the best way for young people to enter farming, whether it is hill farming or otherwise, is for them to have the opportunity to have their own tenancies? Does not the Minister find it extraordinary that the Labour party should therefore seek to oppose that very move?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The 1995 legislation was agreed between all parts of the industry, and the Government would not have introduced it unless it had been so agreed. The Labour party defied informed opinion by voting against the legislation, and that was a disgrace.

Mr. William Ross: Given that the land tenure situation in Northern Ireland is very different from that in Great Britain, does the Minister understand that the real concern of farmers in the hill areas of Northern Ireland has to do with the percentage of their net income that is at present derived from subsidies? What comfort can he give to those people over the long term?

Mr. Hogg: I shall not refer directly to the question of farmers in Northern Ireland because I do not have the necessary expertise; that is more a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I can say that, in 1995-96, the real value of farm incomes in the LFAs is expected to rise by 4 per cent. On the value of direct subsidies coming into LFAs in the United Kingdom, there has been a steady increase from 1993—and, it is anticipated, until 1996—in the real value of direct subsidies to livestock farmers. Incidentally, hill livestock compensatory allowances form only a relatively small part of the overall direct subsidies to livestock farmers.

Regional Speciality Foods

3. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to promote British regional speciality foods. [4129]

The Minister for Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): As the Minister in the Department responsible for small businesses, I am especially concerned to assist this dynamic and growing sector of the food industry.

We continue to support Food from Britain, which is broadening its active support for marketing groups and for individual businesses.

Mrs. Lait: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful answer. Is she aware that France's wonderful regional products are supported by forms of producer co-operatives? In my constituency, we have wonderful lamb from the Romney marshes, superb fish from the sea, and great cheeses and fruit. Can my hon. Friend assure me that we will have more publicity and help for regional speciality food groups?

Mrs. Browning: Indeed, the regional food groups have been very successful in bringing together many smaller groups and individual businesses. We already have the well-established Taste of the West, Taste of Anglia and North West Fine Foods. My hon. Friend will be especially interested to know that, in January, two more groups will be launched—Middle England Fine Foods and Taste of the South East.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Is not it true, however, that British food is not being supported enough? We have a huge deficit of £6 billion in temperate foods that we could grow in this country. If we put some money into Food from Britain, instead of cutting back, and supported our farmers as the French do, we would have a real advantage in selling our food abroad.

Mrs. Browning: I meet Food from Britain regularly and I frequently go abroad to support that organisation and British companies that are exporting quality, speciality British foods with great success. It is interesting that that particular sector of the food industry—speciality foods and small food companies—employs 20 per cent. of the work force employed in the food industry.

Sir Jim Spicer: My hon. Friend has rightly mentioned Taste of the West. Does she agree that the success and the value added to all those products rests upon people such as George and Amanda Streatfeild—whom she knows—of Denhay Farms, who play such a remarkably virile role in Taste of the West?

Mrs. Browning: Indeed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who are they?"] I shall tell hon. Members who they are. They are farmers, a husband and wife team in Dorset, whom I have met. They have exhibited at many national and international exhibitions. Among their many excellent products, they produce air-dried ham, which the Italians think they are best at, but the Streatfeilds have beaten them to it in many awards.

Milk

4. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to maintain the present levels of milk production. [4130]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): Yes. The Government's policy is to resist any cuts in the UK's milk quota allocation.

Mr. Cunningham: Is the Minister aware that a number of milkmen, especially in the west midlands, are being put out of business, and that there will be a shortage of milkmen very soon, because the supermarkets are taking over the business? What does the Minister propose to do about that?

Mr. Baldry: That is just competition in the marketplace, and nothing to do with EC milk quotas. At 26p for a four-pint poly-bottle of milk in our supermarkets, milk in the UK is cheaper than anywhere else in the European Community.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Can my hon. Friend set out the Government's view on the future of milk quotas?

Mr. Baldry: Our ultimate objective is to get rid of milk quotas, because we are prevented from making the most of the UK's natural advantages for milk production by the EC quota system. So we wish to get rid of milk quotas.

Mrs. Golding: Is the Minister aware that a recent survey by the Co-operative Wholesale Society showed that 11 to 16-year-old children are consuming far too little milk and other dairy produce? Instead of working to deprive our children of milk, does not the Minister think that it would help the milk industry and the health of our nation if he stopped treating the dietary needs of our schoolchildren with such contempt?

Mr. Baldry: That really is over-hyping it. The take-up of the scheme varied greatly between local education authorities so the benefits were already spread unequally. Those benefits have never been targeted on the basis of need. We do not believe that the changes will have any effect on the health or nutrition of British teenagers.

5. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funding the United Kingdom will receive from the EU in 1995-96 towards the cost of milk in secondary schools and school catering. [4131]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We estimate that EU expenditure on the discretionary elements of the school milk scheme will amount to approximately £6.1 million in the United Kingdom in 1995-96. Doing away with the discretionary element will result in public expenditure savings of about £4 million.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that this subsidy, unlike much of the £3 billion subsidy to the dairy industry from the common agricultural policy, is an important and essential one? Will he take more notice of what nutritional experts say and make sure that this cut does not take place?

Mr. Hogg: The scheme is neither important nor essential. We continue to subsidise milk for primary schools at a cost of about £12 million a year. As the Minister of State has just made plain, the take-up is extremely uneven: not all local authorities take up the scheme, and even in participating LEAs not all schools do so. There is no targeting of need, and the scheme is an inefficient use of resources.

Mr. Marland: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is worth reiterating that any change in policy will have no effect on primary schools, that milk will still be available to them, and that it is not the Government's objective to force-feed teenagers with milk?

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Marland: It is surely up to parents to decide whether they want their children to drink milk, and they have some responsibility in that respect.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend further agree that any reduction in milk consumption at schools will make more milk available for manufacturing, for adding value and for creating wealth?

Mr. Hogg: I apologise to my hon. Friend for getting to my feet too soon. I should like to focus on two of his important points. He is right to draw attention to the fact that we subsidise the consumption of milk in primary schools. His second point is basic: it really is up to parents to encourage their children to drink milk, if that is what they deem right for them. Theirs is the responsibility; we must go on emphasising that kind of basic fact.

Dr. Strang: But surely the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware that only two years ago a Minister of State in the Department was telling the House what a great scheme this was, and that we should encourage teenagers to drink milk in our schools—particularly young girls, to help reduce the risk of osteoporosis in later life. The Minister knows that the policy is wrong, and that we should be encouraging teenagers to drink more milk. Will he reconsider?

Mr. Hogg: That is nonsense, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. What is more, it shows why the Labour party cannot be taken seriously when it talks about reducing expenditure and tax. The plain fact is that this is saving us £4 million which I can then spend on areas of greater priority in the agriculture budget. People should focus on schemes to determine whether they are good or bad. This one is not a good use of resources; that is why we have done away with it.

Fishing Industry

6. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to involve United Kingdom fishermen in discussions on future developments in the industry. [4132]

Mr. Baldry: I regard dialogue and consultation with UK fishermen as imperative. I already hold regular consultations, meetings and pre-Council of Ministers briefing meetings with many of their representatives.

Mr. Harris: I appreciate and applaud all that my hon. Friend has done in this respect. Still, can he convince me and the House that Her Majesty's Government appreciate the depth of anger of our fishermen, especially in the south-west, about the fact that as from 1 January 40 Spanish vessels will be allowed into western waters? Moreover, our fishermen almost certainly face significant cuts in their quotas; and to rub salt in the wound, taxpayers will have to pay large sums in compensation to Spanish interests for the removal of those wretched flag-of-convenience vessels from our register. Can my hon. Friend tell me and my fishermen what future the fishing industry has?

Mr. Baldry: First, it is important that the House recognises that the Factortame judgment has absolutely nothing to do with the fisheries policy. It is a judgment, in the Advocate General's opinion, on the freedom of business association for individuals in the European Union. It has nothing to do with fisheries policy. Indeed, if we were to leave the common fisheries policy, the Factortame judgment would still stand. I of course appreciate the UK fishing industry's concerns that it must have a long-term sustainable future, and every part of every policy that I take forward is bent on that end. Certainly at the Fisheries Council meeting next week I am determined to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen, consistent with the scientific advice and the need to sustain stocks for the benefit of future generations of fishermen.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that the Government are always bragging about their opt-outs in the Common Market? Why do they not opt out of the common fisheries policy?

Mr. Baldry: This House decided by a considerable majority in the early 1970s to join the European Community. In joining it, we signed up to the common fisheries policy. When the Labour party sought to re-negotiate our terms of entry, not a word was mentioned about fishing policy.

Mr. Jenkin: I thank my hon. Friend for taking time to meet representatives of Kent and Essex fishermen earlier in the year. Can he give us any further news on the non-sector quota? It is restricting the supply of fish to such traditional fisheries, to the point that—I am afraid—today they are sawing up their boats on the beach.

Mr. Baldry: I am trying to see whether there are ways in which we can allocate more quota to the non-sector fishing industry. I appreciate my hon. Friend's points. The industry has very real concerns and I am trying to see whether there are ways in which we can meet them.

Veal Crates

7. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to work for an EU ban on the use of veal crates. [4133]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have already achieved a review of directive 91/629 on the welfare of calves, bringing it forward from 1997. As a result, the Commission has obtained the advice of its Scientific Veterinary Committee and is on the point of putting proposals forward to the Council of Ministers. We shall press the Council for an end to the veal crate throughout the European Community and for changes to the unacceptable EU dietary requirements.

Mr. Shepherd: I thank my hon. Friend for that comprehensive answer. Is not the way forward for it not to be necessary for calves to be trans-shipped to Holland or wherever, and that the issue should be tackled by having a robust United Kingdom calf-rearing industry, which will meet the market's requirements? Is work not being done in that respect at the Rosemaund experimental husbandry unit near Hereford? Will my hon. Friend tell the House what progress is being made?

Mrs. Browning: The launch of the Rosemaund experimental unit has attracted much interest. We have worked with the Meat and Livestock Commission to target interest in the catering industry especially, where much of the Dutch-reared veal is used; veal reared in those unacceptable crates. I assure my hon. Friend that the unit has proved very successful in introducing to people who are interested in raising welfare-friendly veal in the UK ways in which to go about it in the most welfare-friendly manner.

Mr. Shore: Have the Ministry and the Commission in Brussels never heard of the word subsidiarity? If they have heard of the doctrine of subsidiarity, why do not they apply it to the veal trade? Why does the Ministry not come forward with legislative proposals in this House to ban the export of veal under the present conditions and then wait to be challenged, if need be, in the European Court?

Mrs. Browning: We took the decision in the House in 1990 unilaterally to ban the veal crate. I must say to the right hon. Gentleman that if we are seriously interested in the welfare of animals generally in the European Union, it should be as much a matter of concern to know that just over the channel those deplorable practices continue. We in this country have led the way with the banning of veal crates, and we hope that as a result of our actions—this year I have visited other Agriculture Ministers personally about the issue—other countries will understand that we did it not from an emotional viewpoint but from one of very clear science that shows that it is not in the animals' best interest. We want to see that policy applied throughout Europe—not in little England with the drawbridge drawn up.

Mr. Gale: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on the personal efforts that she has made to try to bring an end to a vile practice? We had hoped to see a ban imposed on the use of veal crates throughout the European Union by the end of the year. When does my hon. Friend think that a ban may be possible? I ask her and her departmental colleagues to seek to ensure that farm animal welfare has a proper place at the intergovernmental conference next year.

Mrs. Browning: I can assure my hon. Friend that at the meeting of the Council of Ministers next week my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister will be seeking to hear the results of the Scientific Veterinary Committee. We are hopeful that our policy will be taken forward in Europe. The presidency has expressed its interest and concern that progress should be made, as have, interestingly, the Italians, who will take over the presidency in January. There is continuity in Europe to take forward the policy.

It has been the Government's policy to seek European-wide policies on animal welfare. But that is not the Labour party's approach. I shall share with the House a letter from a shadow Opposition spokesman. It was written only last month to Franz Weber. It reads:

> "Thank you for your letter about the transportation of live animals across Europe. I strongly support your call for an end to the current legal provisions which allow the export and transport of live animals for slaughter."

Opposition Members should understand that the greater prize is to be concerned about the welfare of animals throughout the Community.

Right to Roam

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce a right to roam; and if he will make a statement. [4135]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): As emphasised in the recent White Paper on rural England, we believe that a general right to roam is not acceptable.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is already an excellent network of footpaths? Farmers have made much more effort to maintain those footpaths properly and consequently they have an excellent relationship with ramblers. Does my hon. Friend agree that a general right to roam would put at risk the present good relationship, break down trust and lead to quite of lot of environmental damage? Will he educate the Opposition? If they want to win votes in the countryside, they should drop the policy of a general right to roam.

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend puts the matter in a nutshell. There is already a wide and satisfactory network of footpaths. We would not condone any failures to keep footpaths open. We believe that any imposed general right to roam beyond the present network of footpaths would elevate one interest above all others, institutionalise rights without obligations, upset rural communities and cause a great deal of damage.

Mr. Morley: Is the Minister aware that the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) advocated introducing wolves into Scotland? It now appears that he wants to train them to attack people in cagoules walking across land. Surely there is a need to be reasonable. There are large areas of land that traditionally have been open. That was the position in the past. There has been access to them for generations. It is possible to have a right to roam that will not compromise crops or livestock. It would be balanced with the needs of the people generally and those of farmers. Let us have fewer smears in Government documents and more realism in understanding that a balance could be achieved.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman is right to the extent that freedom to roam in open country may be appropriate in certain circumstances. The vital ingredient that he omits is that of agreement. I know that it may come difficult given the Labour party's philosophy, but we think that agreement is the most important element. These issues are most appropriately decided by agreement between landowners and local people, as they conspicuously have been in many good examples.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend have any plans in the near future to meet representatives of the Ramblers Association? If he does, will he tell them that it is not necessarily sensible for them to appeal against every order made by a county council extinguishing or amending the route of a public footpath? Does my hon. Friend understand that many farmers are prepared to deal with the Ramblers Association and to maintain rights of way as long as they do not interfere with their farming practices?

Mr. Boswell: I strongly agree with my hon. and learned Friend that megaphone diplomacy is most inappropriate in these instances. Last summer, we invited the ramblers to discuss with officials any specific cases under our access schemes where they considered that provision was unsatisfactory. I regret that to date the ramblers have not responded to our invitation. They would be welcome if they came forward. We would like to hear their views in detail on that basis.

Dairy Industry

9. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the dairy industry to discuss problems facing the industry. [4136]

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister and his ministerial colleagues regularly meet representatives of the dairy industry to discuss issues of importance to them.

Mr. Wareing: When the Minister next meets representatives of the dairy industry, will he bring to their notice the scandal highlighted in *The Observer* involving at least two farms that recycle milk which is past its sell-by date, mix it with fresh milk and sell it through supermarkets to the general public? Furthermore, will he carry out a thoroughgoing investigation to ensure that there are not other examples in other parts of the country, and enforce the dairy hygiene regulations that were brought into law this year?

Mr. Baldry: If there are any breaches of the regulations, and the breaches are known about, prosecutions follow. It is as straightforward as that.

Mr. John Greenway: During his discussions with dairy farmers, has my hon. Friend received any representations about the effect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy on dairy farm incomes? Does he agree that it is a touch inconsistent for the Labour party to complain that our schoolchildren are not being given enough milk to drink, when it considers it to be perfectly okay to ban beef in school canteens? Is it not about time that hon. Members on both sides of the House recognised that both the milk and the beef produced by farmers in this country are of very wholesome quality—the finest of any country in the European Union? The milk is safe to drink and the beef is safe to eat, and both should be available in all schools.

Mr. Baldry: I just think that every local authority should calmly and quietly consider the chief medical officer's advice on the subject.

Mr. Tyler: In view of those comments, will the Minister give us an assurance that the statement by the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), to me in the debate in July—

> "We have never ruled out categorically either vertical or horizontal transmission"—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 1186.]—

still represents the Government's position? What steps will he now take to reassure not only consumers but the many people in the livestock industry who are genuinely confused by the Government's advice, so that we can have some credible advice and guidance?

Mr. Baldry: I do not think that there is any confusion whatever in Government advice. Any livestock farmer simply has to read the advice of the chief medical officer or the chief veterinary officer to see that there is no confusion. Any confusion simply comes from some sections of the media, and others who have a vested interest in causing confusion in that area. There is no confusion and no doubt; the message is clear from the best scientific reports by both the chief medical officer and the chief veterinary officer, and if people calmly and quietly read those, a sense of proportion will be brought back into the debate rather more speedily.

Agricultural Efficiency

10. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the relative efficiency of agriculture in the United Kingdom and in other major EU countries. [4137]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I believe that United Kingdom farmers can compete effectively with their counterparts in other major countries of the European Union.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for confirming the efficiency of the British farming industry. However, does he agree that the nonsense of the CAP distorts the free market, and that its cost—the billions that it costs British taxpayers—enables less efficient foreign industries to compete unfairly with the United Kingdom industry?

Mr. Hogg: There are indeed serious defects in the CAP, to some of which my hon. Friend has drawn attention. We have been forward in pressing the case for far-reaching reform of the CAP, and Commissioner Fischler has now produced a paper accepting that the status quo is not sustainable. I welcome that fact, and we shall push for substantial reform.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: While we are talking about the efficiency of milk producers, if the Minister of State can really buy four pints of milk for 26p, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman advise his colleague to resign his seat and go into the milk business, to buy a milk tanker, take it round to his local supermarket and fill it up with milk in the half-gallon bottles that it sells, and then sell that milk to a farmer, so that the farmer can sell it on to a milk processor? If he did that, he would make a 100 per cent. profit.

Mr. Hogg: It is quite plain that the hon. Gentleman was not listening to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I should add that my hon. Friend has many talents, and I am sure that he would make a splendid milkman.

Mr. Dykes: May I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to visit the three very efficient farms in Harrow, East? It is always an interesting phenomenon to visit urban farms. Will he confirm that one of the ways of enhancing the efficiency of Britain's farms would be to adopt the single currency, bearing it in mind that the National Farmers Union now endorses such a policy?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has represented many interests in his time in the House of Commons, but I did not know that he was such a prominent spokesman for the agricultural community. I am delighted to hear that there are three farmers in Harrow, East. That community will be the easiest to meet in its totality.

Mr. Simpson: I am glad that the Minister is keen to recognise the efficiency of our agriculture industry. Will he explain why this country currently has a trade deficit of £6 billion in food and drink, 63 per cent. of which is with countries that have no climatic advantage over the United Kingdom? Will he explain the compelling logic and virtue of agriculture policies that have seen imports from the EC increase by 20 per cent. since 1980 and exports decrease by 3 per cent.? If we have an efficient agriculture industry, what is the point of a policy that discourages Britain's ability to provide its own food?

Mr. Hogg: There are two points to be made. First, the hon. Gentleman is enunciating a policy of fortress Britain, which—whatever else may be true about it—is incompatible with the policy of Opposition Front Benchers. Secondly, on a point of specific detail, if he contrasts food exports last September—the latest available figures—with the previous year, he will see that our exports have gone up by 10 per cent., whereas imports have gone up by 4 per cent. In other words, exports are doing rather well at the moment.

Apples

11. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what efforts he has made to improve the marketing of British apples. [4138]

Mr. Boswell: We have a range of assistance to help our growers. For example, we paid a marketing grant of £150,000 towards establishing the largest top fruit marketing group, and have seconded a leading horticulturist to boost exports. These complement the welcome efforts of the industry itself.

Mr. Arnold: I welcome the Government's support for the marketing of apples because, as my hon. Friend knows, the best apples in Britain are grown in Kent. How does it help the marketing of those apples if massive subsidies are made for the production of apples on the continent? In particular, may I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the subsidy of FF240 million to French apple producers and the subsidy of 11.6 million Dutch guilders to Dutch producers? How do those subsidies help British producers get their excellent apples to the market?

Mr. Boswell: Our help to the British apple industry and its exports and marketing is well targeted. Any assistance given by other member states to their producers—especially in areas of production and surplus—will be subject to the most rigorous scrutiny and, if necessary, will be referred to the European Commission.

Mr. Foulkes: Is it true that relations between the Deputy Prime Minister and the chairman of the Tory party have sunk so low that the Deputy Prime Minister has been reduced to eating an apple a day?

Mr. Boswell: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I advise him to eat an apple a day—he will then feel a great deal better himself.

Sir Roger Moate: Given the general agreement in this country, on both sides of the House and in the industry that the present intervention system, particularly for apples, is quite intolerable—it is bad for the consumer, bad for the taxpayers and very bad for British apple growing—will my hon. Friend get a message to the Prime Minister in Madrid that we must not accept any deal that imposes for any length of time a continuation of that intolerable and unacceptable intervention system?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend has great knowledge of the apple industry, which is an important interest in his part of Kent. I agree that the intervention system is harmful. We are entirely opposed to it and we have registered that opinion with the Community. We look forward to continuing negotiations towards a satisfactory outcome that removes the difficulties, costs and wastefulness of the current system.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

12. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of cases of BSE confirmed in the United Kingdom at the latest available date. [4139]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As at last Friday, 155,832 cases of BSE had been confirmed in the United Kingdom. I regularly meet industry representatives to discuss BSE.

Mr. Prentice: Those are disconcerting figures. How can the Government conceivably hope to reassure the public when they are ordering redundancies at the Institute of Animal Health in Edinburgh, where scientists are working at the leading edge on BSE and its human equivalent? They have been told that they have until next Thursday to come up with redundancies in order to meet the Government's target. The Minister has an opportunity now to repudiate that policy and say that it will be reversed. It is appalling.

Mr. Hogg: There are two points wrapped up in that question. The first relates to the statistics. The number of confirmed cases is declining. This time last year there were about 28,500 confirmed cases; this month there are about 16,500. In other words, we are seeing a decline of about 40 per cent. That is certainly encouraging.

On the substantive point, there are no financial restrictions on research. On the contrary, we have put another £1 million into research for next year. I asked Professor Pattison, the chairman of the independent advisory committee, whether he saw any financial restrictions on research and he said no.

Mr. French: In tackling the problem of BSE, does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that it is one thing to pass regulations on the content of feedstuffs and slaughterhouse procedures but a different thing to ensure 100 per cent. enforcement of those measures? What recent steps has my right hon. and learned Friend taken to increase enforcement?

Mr. Hogg: It is important to stand back on the question of BSE. There are two important points to make: first, we do not believe that BSE in cattle can be transmitted to humans. The scientific evidence is reassuring on that point, although it does not enable us yet to prove that it cannot be transmitted. Against the possibility that we might be wrong, we have in place very rigorous regulations to prevent specified bovine offal—the material capable of carrying the infective agent—from getting into the food chain. I have given clear instructions to the Meat Hygiene Service to ensure 100 per cent. compliance with the regulations. I called in the slaughterhouse operators on 9 November to give them the same message.

Dr. Strang: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that we welcome the tightening of BSE controls announced today? Does he agree that it was unacceptable that the existing controls were not adequately enforced, for which the Government must accept their share of responsibility? Does he agree that we should err on the side of caution when it comes to BSE? Will the Minister announce today that he accepts the recommendation of the Agriculture Select Committee that we should ban the brains, spinal cords and other specified offal of cattle under six months from entering human food?

Mr. Hogg: On matters of scientific evidence, I follow the advice of the independent advisory committee. We have done so throughout, which enables us to say with complete confidence that British beef is safe. On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, he is doing himself no credit. There are no party runs to be scored on the matter. If he tries to score them, he will simply make a clown of himself.

Tenanted Sector

13. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to revitalise the agricultural tenanted sector. [4140]

Mr. Boswell: The Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995, which came into force on 1 September, is designed to encourage landowners to let more land. The Act gives landlords and tenants much greater freedom to agree farm business tenancies that reflect their needs.

Mr. Alexander: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but is not the aim that he described rarely realised in practice? When a smallish block of 60 or 70 acres comes on the market, the young farmer does not get it because he is outbid by a neighbouring larger enterprise. According to the aims of the 1995 Act, one would have expected the younger person to be able to take it on.

Mr. Boswell: The Act has been in force for less than three months and it is early to assess its results, but the survey carried out by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, preparatory to the introduction of the Act, forecast that there would be increased opportunities generally, with a probability of a 10 per cent. overall uplift in the amount of land available for letting on tenancies of longer than a five-year term. I have every hope that, as the market settles down, there will be opportunities for new entrants.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4157]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Paris signing the Dayton agreement on Bosnia.

Mrs. Campbell: Will the Deputy Prime Minister unequivocally condemn the remark made yesterday by his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he said:

> "This bottom 10 per cent. always drive me up the wall"?

Will he further apologise to that bottom 10 per cent., who have seen a real fall of 17 per cent. in their living standards since the Conservative Government took office?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was referring to those people who have significant wealth but low incomes, which can give a wholly misleading idea of their overall position and the standard of living that they enjoy. The hon. Lady is giving a false impression of what he was saying.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the best service that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor can render to the lowest 10 per cent. and, indeed, the highest, is to reduce interest rates as much as possible and that his decision is much to be congratulated?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is presiding over one of the most exciting periods of British economic potential. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that a wider audience will notice that Labour Members jeer at the fact that, for the 27th month in a row, unemployment fell. It was 20,000 less month on month and has been nearly 750,000 down over the 27 months. I should have thought that Labour Members would cheer on behalf of their constituents.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: As the Prime Minister was unable to give any figure for the cost of rail privatisation at Question Time on Tuesday, will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that the Government's figures, following the Budget, show that the long-term cost to the taxpayer will be £850 million per year?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Lady has the quotations wrong. Those quotations come from a Labour party press release. Like most Labour party press releases, they are unadulterated rubbish.

Mrs. Taylor: Will the Deputy Prime Minister therefore take the trouble to look at the sources of the figures in those documents, every one of which is a published Government source? Will he further look at the report of the Select Committee on Transport published today, which also shows that, if rail privatisation goes ahead, taxpayers will have to pay hundreds of millions of pounds extra to keep services as they are? Is not the message clear: rail privatisation is a waste of taxpayers' money?

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady and the Labour party are so against privatisation, why have they not got the guts to renationalise any of the industries that we have privatised? Why is it that every time we take the process a step further, they jeer and produce scare stories in advance, none of which stands up when we achieve the result?

Mr. John Townend: I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Government on the unemployment figures that he has just mentioned—8 per cent. and falling, whereas unemployment in France is 11.5 per cent. and rising. To what extent is that due to the franc fort policy and French membership of the exchange rate mechanism, while we have a free and floating pound?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to all those industrialists in this country who have helped to create the jobs in the enterprise culture that we have designed as a Government. What I find extraordinary about the Labour party and the issue of unemployment is that last month, when there was a 200 increase in unemployment, the shadow Employment Secretary put out a press release in which he said that that recognised

> "the final collapse of the Government's shuddering economic recovery."

The fact is that those figures have now been revised and we have discovered that last month, as in each of the past 27 months, unemployment fell. Why does not the Labour party recognise that far from a shuddering economic recovery, we have a buoyant economic attitude in this country which is creating wealth at one of the fastest rates in western Europe?

Mr. Beith: Have the Deputy Prime Minister and his colleagues considered the point of order made by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) that it would be an outrage if social security regulations that could make 10,000 people homeless and destitute were to be implemented before Parliament had had a chance to debate them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Member raises an important question. I can assure him and the House that there will be an opportunity to debate these matters before they are implemented. I give that assurance.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Did my right hon. Friend notice in yesterday's *Hansard* a very good Bill on protecting those who wish to disclose information in the public interest? Has he further noticed that there are serious problems here in the House for those who might wish to do that? I particularly refer to members of the press corps who have been cajoled and coerced, I gather, by some strange people: a shadowy figure from Hartlepool and an ex-journalist from *Today*. Will he join me in encouraging them to break free from that and blow the whistle on that strange shadowy company over there?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Conservative Members have raised it before but no answer comes. Is it the intention of the Labour party, if elected to power, to put Alastair Campbell as a civil servant into No. 10 Downing street to inject Labour party propaganda into the presentation of Government policy?

Q2. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4158]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cunningham: Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that the £850 million on-going cost of rail privatisation would be better spent on improvements to the west coast main line, which serves my constituency?

The Deputy Prime Minister: What I do believe is that offering the private sector the chance to provide the cash for the innovation and modernisation that we all want is much more likely to achieve the result than continuing with nationalisation, which I notice, significantly, has not achieved that result over the years.

Mr. Rowe: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that of all the counties in England, Liberal and Labour-run Kent county council retains the largest share of its education budget at the centre? How does that sit with the oft-repeated complaints from the Opposition that too much is spent by the Government on administration?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is wholly consistent with the theme of what the Opposition say. Most conspicuously, they will not say that they will put up taxes but they constantly talk about the need for increased expenditure. They want it all ways, which proves that the sums do not add up and that they are not fit to govern.

Q3. **Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4159]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hill: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand my sense of shock this morning as I witnessed the evidence of wanton destruction and looting in central Brixton and parts of my Streatham constituency? Will he join me, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and the vast majority of the local community in condemning those acts of violence? For the sake of Brixton's reputation and future, will the right hon. Gentleman also affirm that the acts that we witnessed yesterday evening were not a re-run of the events of 1981 and 1985, as has been portrayed, but the actions of a small criminal element? Finally, will he confirm that there is no intention of backtracking on the regeneration funding committed to the locality and that Brixton's future will be reassured, as is the will of the local people?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I unreservedly join the hon. Gentleman in condemning the violent minority who attacked police officers and property in Brixton last night. I wholeheartedly agree with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, representatives of the local community and the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), who spoke eloquently this morning in condemnation of those unacceptable acts of violence, which we all deplore. If we are to bring hope and opportunity to those urban communities, it is vital that they become attractive places for people to live, work and invest. All parties have made a massive attempt to bring that about in the past few years, and that process must continue.

Mr. Luff: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that neither he nor the Prime Minister would ever contemplate threatening the Union by introducing an elected Scottish Parliament? If they were ever tempted by such an idea, will he confirm that they certainly would not think of giving it tax-raising powers and then try to deceive the British people by saying that they would not use those powers?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is extraordinary that Scottish Labour Members of Parliament are to contemplate a tartan tax to make taxes higher in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. I also find it extraordinary that English Labour Members of Parliament are prepared to give powers to their Scottish colleagues, which would be exercised by Scottish Members in England, while English Labour Members would have no such powers in Scotland.

Q4. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4160]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Deputy Prime Minister recognise that it is not only with British Rail that privatisation has been taken too far? Is he aware of the anger and indignation felt by people in Britain at the appearance in an estate agent's brochure of the magnificent complex of buildings in Greenwich currently occupied by the Royal Naval college? Is he also aware that the Secretary of State for Defence refuses to reveal the organisations that are bidding to take over those magnificent buildings? As it comes hot on the heels of the fiasco of county hall, is it not clear that the nation's heritage is not safe in the Government's hands?

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman believes that, he will believe anything. As the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, the preservation of the buildings at Greenwich is of prime national importance and nothing will be done to prejudice it.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: As unemployment has now been falling for 27 months in a row, has my right hon. Friend noticed the recent comments by the Director-General of the CBI, who said that a combination of increasing social regulations from Europe via the social chapter and a single currency would be "an employment-destroying disaster"? Does not that show the importance of the opt-out that we achieved at Maastricht and the hypocrisy of those who talk about creating jobs but then support policies such as the social chapter and European monetary union, as the Opposition do?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I shall have the opportunity tomorrow to lay the foundation stone of Siemens in the north-east. One of the reasons why a German company comes to invest and create jobs in this country is that we do not have the impost of the social chapter, whereas Germany has. I would have thought that Labour Members, whose constituencies have gained enormously from the inward investment coming to this country, would seek to enhance it, and not to destroy it.

Q5. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4161]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Clwyd: Has the Deputy Prime Minister noted the good news from south Wales that Tower colliery in my constituency, which was bought by the workers a year ago, has made a pre-tax profit of £3.5 million in the first year? *[Interruption.]* That has been achieved despite the fact that the right hon. Gentleman told those workers that there was no market for their coal. Is not the lesson to be learnt that if the conditions are right—[HON. MEMBERS: "Privatisation."]

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must be heard.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is not the lesson to be learnt that if the conditions are right, and if workers are given control of the means of production—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hear the hon. Lady out. *[Interruption.]* Order. Hear the hon. Lady out.

Mrs. Clwyd: If the workers are given control of the means of production they can turn in profits, whereas the capitalists throw in the towel.

The Deputy Prime Minister *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Control yourselves.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not want to intrude on private grief, but perhaps the hon. Lady has not caught up with events. Those words have been deleted from the clause, although I realise that a large number of her right hon. and hon. Friends are just waiting their time to bring them back. The hon. Lady had better have a word with the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) because she has got the language wrong—the soundbite does not fit with the language of those on the Opposition Front Bench. The real message behind what the hon. Lady has just said, the real triumph, is that it is privatisation that has made those profits possible.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for the details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows—

MONDAY 18 DECEMBER—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Remaining stages of the Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill.

Motion on the Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations.

Debate on Her Majesty's Stationery Office in relation to its future work for Parliament on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 19 DECEMBER—Until 7 o'clock, debate on the common fisheries policy on a Government motion.

Motion relating to Scottish Standing Orders.

WEDNESDAY 20 DECEMBER—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House, the first of which will be the traditional three-hour debate held just before a recess in which I have to answer for everyone on everything.

Proceedings on the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill.

I expect to make a statement next week about business after the recess.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that limited information. He will be aware that I am extremely pleased that we are to have a debate on HMSO next week, so that we can assess the feelings of the House with regard to the privatisation, and the impact it might have on us in Parliament. That debate will be on an Adjournment motion. Can the Leader of the House give us a promise that, before the privatisation takes place, the House will be able to vote on whether it is wise to proceed in that way, especially as that particular privatisation will directly affect the House?

Secondly, the Deputy Prime Minister said earlier this afternoon that the proposed regulations on asylum and the withdrawal of benefits are not to be implemented before being debated in the House. We are pleased that the Government have responded to our representations. Will the Leader of the House state exactly when those regulations will be laid, when they will be debated and when they are expected to come into operation?

Thirdly, I have raised on previous occasions with the Leader of the House the "Day of the Jackal" loophole in relation to access to birth certificates. The subject was raised again last Monday by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) in the debate on the Asylum and Immigration Bill. On Monday, the Home Secretary said that he would like to take action on that loophole, but that he did not think that there was sufficient legislative time. As we are not under great pressure during this parliamentary Session, may I press the Leader of the House on what the Government intend to do about that loophole?

The pressure on parliamentary time itself becomes an issue when we hear that the Government have, in an announcement in Committee today, delayed the implementation of the new student loans scheme. As we have not yet seen the Bill expected from the Department for Education and Employment on nursery vouchers, surely we are right to conclude that the Government's legislation is in chaos. If we could make practical proposals, surely discussion of them would be a better use of parliamentary time than debating some of the Bills that might not end up on the statute book or be implemented.

Mr. Newton: I shall take those questions in order. No specific parliamentary procedure is required for what the Government are proposing in relation to HMSO. The first step is, as the hon. Lady has rightly acknowledged, to allow the House a proper opportunity to express its views on House aspects of the matter, in line with Madam Speaker's request. That is how we should proceed.

The hon. Lady has heard and welcomed what my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said during Prime Minister's questions about asylum benefits. The regulations will be laid before the House as soon as the Secretary of State for Social Security has had an opportunity to study the report, which he has only recently received from the Social Security Advisory Committee. We expect the regulations to come into force next year, but I repeat the firm assurance given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister that they will not be implemented until the House has had the opportunity to debate them.

On the issue of what the hon. Lady calls the "Day of the Jackal" loophole, I have not had an opportunity to discuss the position since the exchanges on Monday. But I shall do so and give the hon. Lady an appropriate response.

Lastly, on the subject of legislation—particularly education legislation—I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has said that the Government think that it will be appropriate to start the student loans scheme in 1997 rather than 1996. That proposal was made in Standing Committee this morning.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Before the House rises for Christmas, will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate on democracy? An article in yesterday's edition of the *Daily Mail*, following the sad death of our friend, Sir David Lightbown, said that the Labour party was thinking of getting the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) to resign and force a by-election. It stated that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon would—in the paper's words, not mine—be imposed upon—

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): No quoting.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: I am not quoting.

Mr. Faulds: He is.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not quoting. He is attempting to speak if given the opportunity by other hon. Members to do so, and I shall see to it that he is given that opportunity. The hon. Gentleman should speak up.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: It said that the hon. Gentleman would be "imposed" upon South-East Staffordshire. I lived in Staffordshire for some years and I assure my right hon. Friend that the people there are very independent. I do not think that they would like to have a turncoat "imposed" on them. A debate on democracy might provide an opportunity to flush out the Machiavellian princes of darkness who seem to inhabit the Labour party and who have such contempt for democracy.

Mr. Newton: I certainly understand why my hon. Friend has raised the issue: Conservative Members find the notion of imposing candidates from the centre quite extraordinary.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Following the Deputy Prime Minister's very welcome announcement that the social services orders will not come into effect until the House has had a chance to consider them, will the Leader of the House also give an assurance that they will not come into effect until the Social Security Select Committee has concluded its consideration of them?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give that latter assurance at the moment—not least because, according to my inquiries this morning, it is not clear precisely when the Social Security Select Committee intends to conclude its deliberations. The assurance that the Deputy Prime Minister and I have given provides the Social Security Select Committee with an opportunity to express its views if it wishes to do so.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): Will my right hon. Friend find time in the new year for a debate on responsibility in local government? I ask for such a debate against the background of events this morning in Dorset, where the Liberal-controlled county council has forced through a ban on beef products in all of our schools against the advice of the chief medical officer and the committee examining bovine spongiform encephalopathy. The council, which is run by a small cabal who force their views upon the people of Dorset, issued a diktat and the schools had no chance to state their views. I believe that such a debate may prove very useful if we can find time for it.

Mr. Newton: I shall consider what my hon. Friend has said. There will be a further opportunity to debate local government matters generally when the local government finance orders are brought before the House in the usual way fairly early in the new year.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to my early-day motion 144:

[*That this House, mindful of the increasing needs of the United Kingdom's ageing ex-service population and the many problems of younger members of the ex-service community, in direct consequence of Options for Change, considers that there is now a pressing need for a sub-department of Ex-Service Affairs within an existing Ministry and with a designated Minister to be responsible, as the only fundamental and long-term solution for the care and welfare of ex-Service people and their dependants; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government now to respond positively to the Royal British Legion's urgent call for a sub-department to be established.*]

It is concerned with the care and welfare of ex-service people whom the Royal British Legion supports so strongly. In particular, has he seen that the motion has now attracted the support of a virtual majority of Members of Parliament who are at liberty to sign such motions? Can we have at least an oral ministerial statement next week on the Government's response?

Mr. Newton: I do not recall whether the right hon. Gentleman was present when the matter was debated on the Floor of the House earlier this year, but ministerial comments were made during that debate. The Government believe that the creation of a Department that is specifically responsible for former service people in the way that the right hon. Gentleman suggests would simply add another tier of administration without improving the present arrangements. We believe that the provision for former service personnel is best integrated with that for the community as a whole.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Will my right hon. Friend enlighten us about the debate on Scottish Standing Orders to which he referred? Will that debate provide an opportunity for all hon. Members to discuss the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, in his recent interview and during his visits to Scotland, wholly repudiated the claim of right and personally humiliated the shadow Secretary of State?

Mr. Newton: It is not for me to pre-empt your views, Madam Speaker, as to what would or would not be in order during a debate on the Standing Orders, which are concerned principally with the role of the Scottish Grand Committee—but no doubt my hon. Friend will have a try.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Although I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) during Prime Minister's questions objecting to the violence in Brixton, it would be very foolish for hon. Members to believe that there was no just cause for it—yet another death of a black person in police custody. There have been more than 70 such deaths in the past decade and the families involved cannot get justice or even evidence of what has occurred. They believe that the system is rigged and if they cannot have the matter heard in the House they will take to the streets. When will Parliament debate black deaths in custody so that the system may be changed properly?

Mr. Newton: In view of the implications of what the hon. Gentleman has said, perhaps he should discuss them first with his hon. Friends who were sitting two Benches in front of him not long ago. They clearly stated that they considered that a small criminal element had been responsible for those activities, and did not attempt to justify them as the hon. Gentleman has. In my view they were right, and the hon. Gentleman would do well to reconsider what he has said.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is considerable concern among Members on both sides of the House—particularly Conservative Members—about the on-going influence and authority of the BBC's overseas service? While there might be grounds for adjusting its capital budget, many of us feel that there is no justification for reducing its operating budget. Will my right hon. Friend try to find time for a short debate on the subject?

Many of us are also concerned about cuts in capital spending, especially when they affect the future economic progress of our constituencies. Will my right hon. Friend try to find time for a debate on infrastructure capital spending? My constituency will be affected if urgent road projects do not proceed in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Newton: I shall always consider suggestions such as those made by my hon. Friend. I should point out, however, that funds for the World Service have increased by 50 per cent. in real terms since 1980. The current

[Mr. Newton]

proposals entail virtually no change in the allocation for current costs—this deals directly with a point made by my hon. Friend—and are directed mainly towards the capital side.

I think my hon. Friend will acknowledge that, in this context as in others, there is significant scope for private funding under the increasingly successful private finance initiative.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will know that we have heard statements on Scottish and Welsh expenditure. Northern Ireland, however, has again had to be content with a press release. I understand that the House, not the press, votes Supply. In future, will it be possible for a statement on public expenditure in Northern Ireland to be made in the House rather than in a press release?

Mr. Newton: That question is linked with one that the hon. Gentleman asked me last week, to which I undertook to give further consideration. Let me answer them both at once. This year, the Secretary of State for Scotland made his statement about local government expenditure to the Scottish Grand Committee.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): As to next Wednesday's debate on the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, I was the defeated Conservative candidate in the Hull, North by-election in January 1966, nearly 30 years ago. In the course of the by-election, Mrs. Barbara Castle promised to build a Humber bridge, which has already cost public funds well over £400 million—perhaps not far short of £500 million—which kept me out of the House for four years and which costs the taxpayer £100 million a year. Will there be time in Wednesday's debate for us to discuss whether that amount—nearly £500 million—should be charged to the Labour party and not to the unfortunate taxpayer, as a consequence of Labour's disgraceful electoral bribe?

Mr. Newton: I profoundly hope that there will be time for the matter to be discussed.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to an article in today's Glasgow *Herald* about the transfer of media monitoring from the Scottish Office to a private company, and the dangers of funding party political propaganda from the public purse? That directly contradicts the statement made to me by the Secretary of State for Scotland in the Scottish Grand Committee that he knew nothing about the matter.

I am sure that the Leader of the House did not intend misleading the Scottish Grand Committee to be one of the new Scottish procedures. Will he arrange for a statement to be made to clarify the matter?

Mr. Newton: I shall arrange to be better informed about it before next week's debate on the Standing Orders.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I support the earlier call for a debate on the imposition of candidates? During such a debate I would be able to highlight the plight of Gravesham Labour party, which has had a women-only short-list imposed upon it. That constituency party has responded with an overwhelming majority against the imposition. It sent a resolution to the Labour party head office in Walworth road opposing the imposition. The response was a diktat saying that it does not matter what Gravesham Labour party thinks about it—

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. My attention is distracted at the moment. I have a point of order, but I have not heard it. I shall take points of order afterwards. The point of order obviously relates to what the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) is saying so I shall caution him so that I do not have a point of order later.

Mr. Arnold: May I point out that the reaction of the local Labour spokesman was to say that, despite the fact that there had been an overwhelming majority vote against the imposition in the constituency, this is new Labour democracy?

Mr. Newton: I hope that I will not tempt any hon. Member to make a point of order. I shall merely repeat my earlier observation that, to Conservatives, the way in which the Labour party proceeds in these matters seems quite extraordinary and indefensible.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Leader of the House may recall that Madam Speaker kindly afforded me an Adjournment debate on the activities of Campbell's Soups in my constituency. He may know that I am campaigning throughout the country to advise the wider public not to buy Fray Bentos or Campbell's Soups products. I wish to teach Campbell's Soups a lesson: that it should reconsider its disgraceful decision to close a highly profitable plant in my constituency. In light of the fact that an American multinational company, in which the majority of shares are held by one family, took such a decision through its British subsidiary, is not there now a need to debate how multinational companies are able to operate within the free market system?

Mr. Newton: The United Kingdom has gained enormously over the past few years from investment by a wide variety of companies, many of which could no doubt be described as multinationals. They have provided many tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of jobs. One of the reasons why they come here is that they feel that our business environment is one in which they can take decisions on a commercial basis. We would be very unwise to tamper with that environment.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend find an early opportunity to have a debate on education so that I can draw the House's attention to the success of the application made by Beauchamp college in my constituency to become a technology college, as announced yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State? May I also invite him to schedule such a debate so that we can draw to the attention of the parents of children attending the Robert Smythe school in Market Harborough in my constituency the benefits of grant-maintained status, a status already enjoyed by three other schools in my constituency and which I am sure will also be enjoyed by the parents, teachers and governors of the Robert Smythe school?

Mr. Newton: I hope to provide many opportunities to debate education in the new year when we publish the

Bill relating to nursery and grant-maintained schools to which the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) adverted in her opening question.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am glad that there seems to be broad agreement in the House about the need to tighten legislation on knives. In view of the terrible tragedies that have occurred and which I mentioned on Monday, why is it necessary for the Home Secretary to nit-pick with my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary? Would not it be useful if the Home Secretary were to come to the House early next week and say that he will meet my hon. Friend to see what agreement could be reached, including the possibility—only the possibility—of making it more difficult to purchase knives in the first instance? Since there is broad agreement, why is the Home Secretary adopting a totally unnecessary confrontational style? The public recognise the need for action, and the House should deal with that.

Mr. Newton: I do not think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has adopted a confrontational style. He has sought to assist in the rapid response to the considerable public concern about an important matter. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for indicating his support for the basic propositions in the Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Why has it been decided to postpone the debate on the common fisheries policy, which my right hon. Friend announced last Thursday for yesterday, until next Tuesday? Do not the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and others involved in the European Fisheries Council meeting at the end of next week, need the maximum amount of time to consider the representations made during the debate, so that the Government's policy on fishing may accord as much as possible with the will of the House?

Mr. Newton: The arrangement of business for the three days on which the House is sitting next week has proved rather complicated—as the House will have realised from the business I read out. It simply seemed more sensible to do it in the way I announced this afternoon. Nevertheless, the fisheries debate will be in good time to meet the primary need for a debate before the Fisheries Council which, as my hon. Friend said, is later in the week.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): As we are approaching the season of good will in which families are drawn together, should not we discuss the position in Northern Ireland, where at least 258 people have been placed in exile by paramilitary groups? The families of the disappeared are still seeking the bodies of the people who have been killed. Last night, two so-called punishment beatings took place in the course of which people were kneecapped. This would surely be an appropriate time to discuss those problems and to put the matter in the correct context.

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to find time for a debate, at least not next week. However, I am sure that there will be widespread approval in the House for the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks—that we would all like an end to that kind of activity in the interests of the families and people involved, and of progress towards a satisfactory outcome in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on suitable locations for education referral units for secondary pupils, so that I can tell the House about the most senseless suggestion by Ealing's Labour council—that Oldfield primary school in Greenford is a suitable location for such a centre? The council's other suggestion is that a building in Islip Manor park, Northolt would be a suitable location for such a unit.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Oh, God.

Mr. Greenway: I am being interrupted and shouted at by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). If he does not defend his constituency, I defend mine. Those units are not suitable for the places I mentioned in my constituency, and the unit should be referred to the Elthorne youth centre, which would be much more suitable.

Mr. Newton: If my hon. Friend, who is certainly a doughty defender of his constituency, were to choose to appear on Wednesday morning and raise that matter in the three-hour debate to which I have already referred, I shall try to ensure that I have an answer.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we debate the surprising information in a letter from the Minister for Transport in London which says that the Department of Transport, after careful, scientific calculations, has come to the conclusion that company cars are 30 to 50 per cent. more dangerous than private cars? That means an additional, probably avoidable, 6,500 to 9,250 accidents a year.

One would expect company cars to be safer, because they are driven by mature, experienced drivers; the cars are new and well maintained; and they are driven on motorways, which are safer than normal roads. Is not it vital that we have a debate to discuss how to avoid such a large number of accidents? Probably, the explanation is that the drivers do not own their cars and do not drive as safely as drivers with a financial interest in their cars.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman's explanation is right, I suggest that it gives rise to a number of general points on which Opposition Members might like to reflect. I have not seen the letter, and the right course for me is to draw the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will my right hon. Friend consider finding time for a debate on the operation of Standing Committees following the Nolan report? He will be aware that before I entered the House I was involved in the broadcasting industry for 20 years, supplying finance and services to broadcasting companies from Indonesia to Chile and from Botswana to Iceland—as well as to the BBC and Capital Radio here in London. Yet I now understand that I will not be allowed to serve on the Committee considering the Broadcasting Bill. Is that a general rule: do knowledge and qualification to discuss a subject constitute disqualification from serving on the relevant Standing Committee?

Mr. Newton: I have seen my hon. Friend's letter to Sir Gordon Downey—I hope he will not mind my

[Mr. Newton]

mentioning it—which he kindly copied to me. I have no doubt that Sir Gordon will wish to draw it to the attention of the new Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which my hon. Friend will doubtless have been glad to note was appointed by the House and its membership agreed in a motion last night.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May I again press the Leader of the House for an early debate on the state of the textile industry? Two weeks ago I told him about the 129 job losses at Bairdtex in Trawden, in my constituency. This time last week I told him about the 50 job losses at Smith and Nephew. This week 61 jobs are to go at the Carrington Viyella Holmefield mill in Barrowford, where colour woven fabrics will no longer be made in any quantity. Jobs are haemorrhaging from the textile industry, which used to be the economic mainstay of my area. That is a proper issue for an urgent debate.

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a dedicated debate, but I would once again draw attention to the opportunities next Wednesday morning, when the Leader of the House will have a chance to make some comments.

Mr. Foulkes: I should like to back up what my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) has just said. If there is such a debate, we can also, I hope, debate the carpet industry. In my constituency a number of jobs have been lost in the Richards carpet factory, thereby creating tremendous problems. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House would welcome an opportunity for such a debate, so I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will give it serious consideration.

Mr. Newton: I always give serious consideration to points that deserve it—and those raised by both hon. Members undoubtedly do. For the moment, however, I must point yet again to Wednesday morning, which increasingly looks as if it is going to be quite a busy time for me.

Madam Speaker's Statement

4.2 pm

Madam Speaker: I too have a short statement to make about Wednesday mornings. As the House knows, under the new Standing Order No. 10 the period from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm on three Wednesday mornings in each Session is allocated to Select Committee reports chosen by the Liaison Committee.

The Chairman of the Liaison Committee has informed me that the Committee has selected the following Wednesdays for my approval: 7 February, 24 April and 26 June. I have agreed those dates, and I think it would be helpful if they were generally known as far ahead as possible. The actual reports to be debated on those three Wednesdays will be chosen by the Liaison Committee nearer the time and notified by my office a week in advance.

The three half-hour debates on these dates, from 12.30 to 2 o'clock, are unaffected and Members should submit topics to my office in the normal way.

Point of Order

Mr. Alfred Morris: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, to correct the record. I ask the Leader of the House to accept that he was totally mistaken in saying that my motion on the care and welfare of former service people was discussed early this year. Will he also accept that when what the Royal British Legion is asking for was debated by the House the motion was carried, since when nothing has been done to give effect to that decision? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that caused great resentment not only in the Royal British Legion but among former service organisations generally?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. I must not extend business questions, but I see that the Leader of the House is willing to reply so I shall allow him to do so.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman knows, because he and I have been doing business for a long time, I would not have wanted to convey a misleading impression, and I readily accept that it was not his motion that was discussed. But the issue that he has raised, as he himself acknowledged, was discussed in a debate last year, and the Government's view was made clear at that time.

ESTIMATES DAY

[1st Allotted Day]

VOTE ON ACCOUNT, 1996-97

Class XI, Vote 1

Breast Cancer

[Relevant documents: The Third Report from the Health Committee of Session 1994-95 on Breast Cancer Services (House of Commons Paper No. 324), the Government Reply thereto (Cm. 3007), and the Department of Health and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Departmental Report 1995: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98, (Cm. 2812).]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a sum not exceeding £13,948,653,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by the Department of Health on or in relation to hospital, community health, mental health, family health and family health service administration services, National Health Service trusts, and on related services.—*[Mr. Horam.]*

4.4 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am very grateful to the Select Committee on Liaison for recommending that the House debates this estimate in so far as it relates to the very important topic of breast cancer services. I shall, of course, concentrate on the report published recently by the Select Committee on Health, which I have the honour to chair. The recommendations of the report were unanimous.

I should like to thank all my colleagues on the Committee for the very hard work that they put into the report, and for the very good spirit in which it was discussed. I should also particularly like to thank our specialist advisers, Professor Michael Baum of the Royal Marsden hospital and Professor Roger Blamey of Nottingham City hospital.

I shall begin by outlining the main conclusions and recommendations of the report, and the main points of the Government's response. There are a few questions that I should like to pursue with the Minister, which I hope he will be able to address in his speech.

Although the United Kingdom does not have a particularly high incidence of breast cancer—the disease is more prevalent in the United States of America, New Zealand, Canada and several other European countries, including France, Italy and Denmark—we have almost the highest recorded breast cancer mortality in the world. Breast cancer claims the lives of more than 13,000 women every year in England and Wales alone—more than any other cancer, and more than any disease other than heart attacks and strokes. None of our witnesses was able to offer any explanation of why breast cancer mortality should be so high in this country.

The Government's target, set out in 1990, is

> "to reduce the number of breast cancer deaths among women invited for screening by at least 25 per cent. by the year 2000."

It is clear from the very wording of that target that the national health service breast screening programme is at the centre of the Government's plans to reduce breast cancer mortality.

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

No reduction in breast cancer mortality from the programme is expected to be observed until around 1997, as there is a "lead time", which means that the full benefits of the programme will not be observed until those women who have benefited from the early detection of their breast cancer begin to enjoy additional life years. None the less, we were impressed by the fact that the programme has met or exceeded all its interim quality indicators so far, largely as a result of its excellent quality assurance programme, and especially the efforts of its national co-ordinator.

One of the great strengths of the quality assurance programme is that it operates not only in individual screening units but at district and regional health authority level. RHAs are responsible for purchasing quality assurance services and for the operation of the quality assurance reference centres in each region.

In 1992, the chief executive of the NHS management executive told the Public Accounts Committee that the standards laid down centrally for the programme were "non-negotiable", and said:

> "If there are purchasers that want to try to step out of line"—

that is, to try to purchase a service that does not meet national specifications—

> "they must be brought back into line by the regions. That is the role of the region and we have made that extremely clear".

The national co-ordinator of the NHS breast screening programme also told us that she occasionally had problems with district health authorities which were trying to purchase services that did not meet national standards. That is why the quality assurance programme is so important to the screening programme. It ensures not only that the service provided matches the service for which it is contracted, but that the service for which it is contracted meets the national requirements in the first place. We recommend that the QAP should be preserved in something like its present form after the dissolution of the regional health authorities next April. That could be achieved either by central funding of the programme or by bottom slicing from district health authority allocations.

In their response, the Government said that they had issued guidance to the effect that

> "it is vital that quality assurance systems should continue to be funded and operated in the future to the same high standards as at present."

The Government have also said, however, that they will move from the present system, under which RHAs are responsible for purchasing quality assurance, to a system of lead district purchasing, which will be funded through the common services levy.

I recognise the steps that the Department is taking to ensure that the QAP continues to operate at all three levels, but I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister were able to assure us that the programme will not become simply a means for purchasers to check on provider units. We must continue to ensure that the service purchased meets the national standard.

The Select Committee on Health recommended, on the strength of the best evidence now available, that the upper age limit for inclusion in the call and recall system for screening should be extended from 65 years to 69, and that the Department of Health must ensure that women over that age are aware of their right to a three-yearly mammogram on request.

Professor Forrest's report, on the strength of which the NHS breast screening programme was originally established, suggested an upper age limit of 64, on the ground that there was lower acceptance of screening by women of older ages. It is difficult to understand what basis was used for that assertion, as the Swedish two counties study—one of the key pieces of clinical trial evidence on which the Forrest report drew—showed that 80 per cent. of women up to the age of 74 accepted invitations for screening.

There are two good reasons, I believe, for including older women in the screening programme. First, the risk of breast cancer increases with age. Secondly, the cancer detection rate among older women is much higher than among younger women.

Conversely, we found no evidence that extending screening to women under the age of 50 would be beneficial. None of our witnesses supported that proposal. Professor Martin Vessey of the advisory committee on breast screening explained to us that, apart from the lower incidence of breast cancer in women under the age of 50, it is also difficult to screen for breast cancer in pre-menopausal women, as

> "the hormonal environment in the breast is different"

and the breast is much denser, making it more difficult to obtain accurate readable mammograms. The Committee was pleased to note the Government's response, which is to conduct clinical trials in screening older women.

The NHS breast screening programme is a model service. It has strong central co-ordination, a set of auditable national performance targets, and a quality assurance programme that has been praised by the National Audit Office. However good the screening programme, however, screening alone will not lead to a reduction in breast cancer mortality.

As we were completing our report, evidence emerged that breast cancer mortality was already beginning to fall in 1989. As I have said, such an effect could not have been generated after only two years of breast screening. It is probable that the welcome reduction in mortality is the result of improvements in the treatment of more advanced breast cancer.

There are ways in which treatment for women with both screen-detected and more advanced breast cancer could be improved. There was a wholehearted welcome for the Government's policy framework for commissioning cancer services. The Government's plan is that cancer services should be arranged into three tiers—primary care, designated cancer units and designated cancer centres.

The designated cancer unit will normally be a district hospital with a full range of support services for cancer patients. More importantly, however, it will have site-specific clinics for patients with the commoner cancers, led by a consultant specialist. Those will be clinics that deal with only one type of cancer, such as breast cancer or gastro-intestinal cancer.

In practice, that means that, where there are several hospitals in one area, purchasers and providers may agree between themselves that a unit for certain cancers or groups of cancers will be established at one hospital, and a unit for another cancer or group of cancers in another hospital. Such clinics would also treat patients with related non-malignant conditions—for example, women with non-malignant breast problems, which account for about 90 per cent. of all breast disease, would be seen in a specialist breast unit.

The cancer centre will be part of a large general hospital or a teaching hospital, and will offer the same range of services as the cancer unit. It will also offer specialist clinics for the less common forms of cancer, and a full range of support services for the local cancer units, including

> "those treatment regimens which are too specialised, technically demanding or capital intensive to be provided by the cancer unit."

That could include radiotherapy, for example.

The most important point to make about the policy framework is that it is based on sub-specialisation. It is not acceptable that a woman with a serious life-threatening disease such as breast cancer should be treated by a general surgeon who might spend most of his or her time dealing with a muddle of other surgical conditions. In addition to a specialist breast surgeon, the specialist breast unit should have a multidisciplinary team of other specialists with specific training in the management of breast disease.

The advantages for patients in such units are manifold and great. Each unit will see enough patients to operate a dedicated clinic for new patients with breast problems each week—a one-stop shop, at which women can have all their diagnostic tests done at the same visit.

Rapid diagnosis is of the utmost importance. It allows women who have breast cancer to receive treatment at the earliest opportunity, and permits the timely reassurance of women who do not have cancer. Patients who have breast cancer will receive a high-quality package of care planned by a multidisciplinary team of specialists, rather than what the British Breast Group report, "Provision of breast services in the UK", described as

> "ad hoc therapy being carried out by an individual acting without interaction with other members of a team".

More importantly, there is evidence that patients treated in such units have improved survival rates. A paper in *The Lancet* last spring showed that women treated by a consultant who sees more than 29 new cases of breast cancer each year have a 30 per cent. better survival rate than those treated by a consultant who sees fewer new patients.

The specialist unit also represents a very efficient way of treating breast cancer. Mr. Hugh Bishop, of the British Association of Surgical Oncology breast surgeons group told us:

> "a specialist breast unit is actually more efficient. It does fewer benign breast operations, it does fewer unnecessary investigations . . . and processes people more efficiently and in a more kindly way."

That is the Government's vision for the future of breast cancer services in the United Kingdom, and it is a vision shared not only by the Select Committee but by organisations such as the British Breast Group, the British Association of Surgical Oncology breast surgeons group and the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund.

While the Committee welcomed the Government's new initiative, we believe that it could be improved further. We believe that there must be some mechanism for ensuring that a hospital which is designated as a cancer unit or a cancer centre is providing the necessary services to the required standard. There is a real danger that every hospital with a consultant surgeon will simply hang out a sign saying "Specialist Breast Unit", and will designate itself as such, without having suitably trained specialist staff or the necessary critical mass of patients that is so vital to the good running of such a unit.

The British Breast Group recommends that a specialist breast unit should see a minimum of between 75 and 100 new cases of breast cancer each year. That serves to ensure both that the general level of expertise among the team is sustained and that the unit remains cost-effective. By issuing a set of national mandatory standards for specialist breast units, the Department could ensure that all women with breast cancer receive the highest standards of care.

During our inquiries, a definition of a specialist breast unit was produced by an ad hoc group consisting of representatives of various organisations involved in the management of breast disease, including several of the royal colleges. The Committee published the definition as an appendix to its minutes of evidence, and it can be found on page 191 of that volume. The same ad hoc group met again recently, and it has further revised the definition.

I have praised the mechanism which the NHS breast screening programme has in place to ensure that all screening and assessment units provide a high-quality level of service through its quality assurance programme. It is a Rolls-Royce among breast cancer services. Unfortunately, many women whose breast cancer is not detected by the screening programme receive a second-hand Trabant service. They might be referred to a general surgeon at a local hospital who has no special training in the management of breast cancer, does not work closely with a team of oncologists, radiologists and cytologists, sees only a few cases of breast cancer each year, and is not subject to any external mechanism of quality control.

In our report, we concluded that the QAP is one of the great strengths of the programme, as it operates at a level above individual purchasers and providers. We recommend that the remit of the national co-ordinator of the NHS breast screening programme and the regional quality assurance teams should be extended to cover the provision of services for women with symptomatic as well as screen-detected breast cancer.

Such an extension of the quality assurance programme would enable the Department of Health to ensure that all hospitals which were operating specialist breast units met the minimum mandatory standards. My noble Friend Lady Cumberlege and the chief medical officer told the Committee that they were worried that a mandatory service specification might stifle useful innovations at a local level. I fully appreciate their concern, but the mandatory requirements which the Committee proposed are the minimum requirements. There is no reason why they should prevent units from providing a higher level of service than is specified.

Perhaps I might draw an analogy with the patients charter. The charter lays down the minimum level of service that patients have the right to expect, but does nothing to prevent providing units from exceeding those standards. I am pleased that the Department of Health is

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

working to develop service guidance for the common cancers, but I shall be grateful again if the Minister will assure the House that this will be sufficient to stop hospitals simply hanging out a sign.

Breast cancer is almost unique, in that a quality assurance system operating at national and regional level is already in place within the screening programme. The Select Committee believes that an extension of the functions of the quality assurance programme and the office of the national co-ordinator to include services for women with symptomatic breast disease could lead the way for other site-specific specialties. It is perhaps surprising that that proposal was supported by many of the doctors who gave evidence to us. They want their work to be subject to rigorous quality control.

Dr. Mike Richards of the British Breast Group told us that he would favour a national co-ordinator for all breast cancer services. Mr. Hugh Bishop of the British Association of Surgical Oncology told us that such a development was "absolutely essential". It is a pity that the Department is proving reluctant to build on the success of the screening programme in that way, but I await the Minister's response on the matter.

During our inquiry, the Committee learned that at least one regional health authority—North Thames—is extending the role of its regional quality assurance manager to encompass the provision of treatment for breast cancer patients. It told us:

> "Women should be offered the same standard of care from the breast service in both screening and symptomatic investigation and treatment."

The Committee considered ways in which clinical research in breast cancer might be improved. Although our inquiry related primarily to breast cancer services, our recommendations on clinical research will inevitably have benefits for many researchers working in other fields. We heard from researchers and from the Department of Health that one of the obstacles to conducting good clinical research was disputes over who was to provide indemnity for the clinicians and trusts involved in that research. The present system of providing indemnity for clinicians and trusts engaged in research is ambiguous.

The Department of Health told us that NHS indemnity covered all NHS-provided health care professionals for negligent harm resulting from research undertaken as part of their NHS contract, and that the employing NHS body—for example a hospital trust—is expected to meet the entire cost of defending, and if necessary settling, a claim where negligence is alleged.

Ultimately, it is for the employing body to decide whether to allow research to proceed or not, and a trust may decide not to allow its employees to participate in a trial if it does not wish to provide indemnity for them. Mr. Richard Gray of the clinical trials service unit at the university of Oxford told us that many trusts refused to allow their doctors to take part in trials unless they received indemnity cover from the study sponsors.

In some cases, that has led to the absurd situation in which doctors have been permitted to use conventional treatments and new treatments of unproven effectiveness in an ad hoc manner, but have not been allowed randomly to assign patients to control and study groups in a way that would allow them to gain useful information about the effectiveness of the unproven treatment. That clearly militates against the Department's efforts to encourage the practice of evidence-based medicine, of which I am sure the whole House would approve.

Good clinical research is of benefit to the whole NHS, and the Select Committee did not think it fair that the indemnity cost of that research should be provided only by those NHS bodies which participated in it. We therefore recommended that indemnity for NHS bodies and their employees participating in research which is approved by the relevant research bodies—in the case of breast cancer research, the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research—should be provided centrally by the Department of Health. The Committee was pleased to learn from the Department that it will be considering that option in its current review of research indemnity. I hope that the Minister will be able to report the latest progress of the review to the House today.

The Committee also recommended that the Department consider ways to streamline the system of ethics committees. Ethical review is an essential part of clinical research, but representatives of the UKCCCR told us that the present unwieldy structure of that committee system puts people off entering patients into trials. For a large multi-centre trial, the approval of as many as 40 local research ethics committees might have to be obtained.

There are a few good reasons why a research proposal might be allowed to go ahead in one area and not in another. The provision of information leaflets in ethnic minority languages for patients is liable to be an essential part of a trial conducted in some parts of the country, but not others. Likewise, some hospitals may have the appropriate facilities to participate in a trial and others may not.

The fundamental ethical considerations surrounding a research proposal, however, will not vary from one region to another. Breast cancer research is changing—moving towards the examination of smaller and smaller sub-groups of patients of different tumour types. It is therefore becoming necessary to involve more and more research centres in clinical trials.

I know that the Minister shares the Committee's concern about the unwieldy system of local ethics committees, and that the chief medical officer is considering ways of streamlining the system. Perhaps the Minister might be able to give the House a little more detail about that review this afternoon.

Finally, I should like to say a few words about the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research and, in particular, its breast cancer trials and cancer screening sub-committee.

The UKCCCR consists of the Cancer Research Campaign, the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, the Medical Research Council and several other cancer research charities. It was originally chaired by Professor Sir Patrick Forrest, who was instrumental in establishing the NHS breast screening programme. The Department of Health and the Scottish Office Home and Health Department have observer status on the committee. The UKCCCR provides a forum for the exchange of information on the policies and plans of member bodies, recommends proposals for the co-ordination of policies, and offers advice to the member bodies on any matters that might come before it.

Although the breast cancer trials co-ordinating sub-committee of the UKCCCR runs some trials of its own—such as those that are being conducted to examine the treatment of ductal carcinoma in situ and the use of tamoxifen—and endorses and co-ordinates large, multi-centre trials, it does not distribute the funds for such trials. After researchers have obtained approval from the UKCCCR, they must scrape around trying to find out where they can fund the research, going to committee after committee, at the mercy of the weakest of those committees, and all before they have to go through the system of local research ethics committees, which I have just described.

The UKCCCR breast cancer trials co-ordinating sub-committee can be seen as the parent body for breast cancer research, representing most of the main sources of research funding. The Select Committee believes that it would be a step forward if the UKCCCR were to have its own budget for funding trials, so that it could act as a one-stop shop for researchers wishing to undertake a trial.

We recommend that the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council identify their budgets for breast cancer research, and distribute the money through the UKCCCR in the expectation that that will provide an incentive for other research funding bodies to do likewise.

I understand that neither the Department nor the MRC has a specific budget for breast cancer research, but I cannot see why it would not be possible for them to identify the amount which they currently spend on breast cancer research, and devolve that amount to UKCCCR. The whole Committee agrees that that would be a welcome development, which would make it easier for researchers to gather vital information about the effectiveness of new treatments at the earliest possible opportunity.

I know that colleagues from the Select Committee wish to contribute to the debate, so I shall draw my remarks to a close. In my introduction, I have attempted to focus on the main conclusions of the Committee's report, but I look forward to hearing the views of other hon. Members, and, in due course, those of my hon. Friend the Minister.

4.35 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate. Breast cancer services for women in the national health service are an important issue. As the Health Select Committee acknowledged in its report on breast cancer services, we have learnt that although England does not have a particularly high rate of breast cancer occurrence, it has almost the highest recorded breast cancer mortality rate in the world.

Currently, almost 30,000 women are diagnosed with the disease annually and around 14,000 die of it. It is responsible for about 5 per cent. of all women's deaths throughout the country. Understandably, breast cancer is an emotive issue. It is also a very real issue for the tens of thousands of women who have the disease and the thousands who die from it.

We must set this debate against the background from which it emerges—the increasing inequalities in public health. Since the Black report was published, socio-economic differences in health have increased. The difference in mortality rates between the deprived and the affluent has increased substantially. The recent widening of health inequalities mirrors the gross upward redistribution of wealth since 1979. It is vital that patients should have access to the same standards of health care throughout the country, irrespective of where they live or to what socio-economic class they belong. Inequalities in health should be targeted and eradicated.

In the Government's "The Health of the Nation", mortality rates for women suffering from breast cancer are targeted as a leading priority to be reduced in the long term. The Government have recognised the importance and significance of mortality rates for women suffering from breast cancer. They know that the figures are illustrative of the condition of the public health services.

In "The Health of the Nation", targets were set for a reduction in mortality of those screened for breast cancer. In progress reports on "The Health of the Nation", the Government are, I believe, complacent in stating:

> "progress to date has been in the right direction".

Yet statistics from the House of Commons Library show that 60 per cent. of district health authorities are unlikely to meet those targets. Of the 112 district health authorities in England, 54 will fail to meet the target of a 25 per cent. reduction in mortality rates by the year 2000.

The Government's comments are therefore misleading and superficial. The Government's document on variation in health, in commenting on variations in breast cancer, stated:

> "with respect to mortality there is relatively little variation around the England and Wales average".

"The Health of the Nation" dedicates only one page to regional variations but socio-economic variations show that, although the incidence of breast cancer is higher among the wealthier classes, the lower classes are more likely to die from the disease.

Leading health professionals are concerned that breast cancer services continue to vary considerably throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No.

Department of Health public health common data showing regional and local mortality rates from breast cancer illustrate the huge variations between local health authorities and, on a wider and more significant level, large variations between regional health authorities.

I am particularly concerned about those alarming figures because they highlight the high rate of breast cancer mortality in and around my constituency. Although the registration rate for breast cancer in Doncaster is some 7 per cent. lower than the national rate, we have a disturbingly high mortality rate from breast cancer. For most of the past 11 years, the rate has been significantly higher than the national average. In 1993, it was 13 per cent. higher than the national average yet in neighbouring areas mortality rates from the disease have been consistently below the national average. The figures for North and West Yorkshire, for example, are significantly lower.

The House of Commons Library has analysed the progress made towards "The Health of the Nation" targets and assessed Doncaster as having made negative progress. Indeed, it is moving away from the targets set in 1990.

[Mr. Hughes]

A snapshot assessment of breast cancer mortality for women aged between 50 and 69 in 1993 puts the rate in Doncaster at 118 per 100,000 women, one of the highest rates in the country and the fourth worst for that year. The figures for 1994 are 82 per 100,000 women. Despite the reduction, Doncaster will still fail to meet the national standards set by the Government in their report. The Government are failing to meet their standards and failing badly the women of Doncaster.

Figures for the Trent authority show that, once again, there has been a higher than average mortality rate for the past 10 years. Let me compare those statistics with those of the neighbouring health authority. Northern and Yorkshire's statistics show a consistently below average mortality rate for each year in the past 10. The Government must recognise that those variations exist and begin to assess the local rates. They must set local targets rather than rely on a national target that could be set by a collection of varying mortality rates around the country, and seek to achieve those local targets. Perhaps they are too frightened to do so because local targets would emphasise what the Labour party has illustrated—that regional variations mean that many district health authorities would fail the Government's test.

As in any area of the health service, it is vital that women throughout the country receive the same standard of treatment wherever they happen to live. It is important that the Government make progress in meeting the targets that they have set. Why do not they publish local targets? Why has it been left to the Labour party to put those variations in the public domain? Are the Government too ashamed of the progress that has been made? We talk of statistics, but those represent people—in this case, women who suffer and die.

Access to health care and a chance of survival must not depend on where one happens to live. They must be accessible to people in all areas. The Government must monitor more effectively the progress towards their targets. They must deal with those regional variations in health care. We have shown that they have not dealt with those issues They must now begin to do so.

4.44 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I was appalled by the speech of the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr Hughes), who refused to accept an intervention when he was using statistics selectively. The Select Committee asked to see the regional differences in rates of breast cancer and those are published on page 239 of the Select Committee report.

In no area of health care can it be argued that an average figure will be the same for each area of the country. There is no reason why it should be. The population profile of each area differs and it is naive and ludicrous for the hon. Gentleman to think that all areas should conform to the norm. Each health authority should aim to bring about an improvement in the figures for its area, which is why it is important to publish figures and aim at a target. To pretend that differences show that the system is failing is wrong. As the hon. Gentleman said, although he did not pursue the point, breast cancer appears internationally to be a disease of affluence.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): The hon. Gentleman referred to page 239 of the Select Committee report, which gives the regional figures. Those figures are for breast cancer incidence whereas my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) said that, although the incidence may be higher in affluent areas, the mortality rate was higher in less affluent areas. Those figures do not reflect mortality rates.

Mr. Congdon: I accept that the table contains incidence figures. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to provide me, after this debate, with figures for mortality in relation to incidence, I should be pleased to study them. I cannot look at figures that the hon. Member for Doncaster, North holds up on the opposite side of the Chamber. I am not complacent about the incidence of or death rate from breast cancer, but it is shameful to try to make party political capital out of this issue.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Disgraceful.

Mr. Congdon: The disgrace is that Opposition Members are trying to make party political capital out of such an important issue.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Congdon: No, I shall not give way at this point. I want to make some progress.

The Select Committee carried out a useful inquiry into an issue that concerns many people, particularly women. Cancer in any shape or form is a disturbing disease that causes great anxiety and concern, and breast cancer probably causes more concern than most. It tends to strike younger women. Perhaps the most serious cause of concern is that it is often not identified until it is too late.

I said earlier that the incidence of breast cancer tends to be higher in wealthier countries. I would welcome more research into why that is so. The incidence of breast cancer is rising in the United Kingdom but, so far as I am aware from the Select Committee inquiry, no one could give substantive evidence as to why that is so. Perhaps we are simply getting better at diagnosing the disease, so we must take care when arguing about incidence.

The Select Committee was also advised that suddenly in 1989 the death rate started to decline, but nobody seems to know why. It cannot be because of screening because the programme had not started at that time. The importance of the Forrest report's recommendation to implement a screening programme has been acknowledged by all. That programme appears to have been successful, although more evaluation of the figures is necessary.

The United Kingdom was the first European Community country to introduce a national breast screening programme. It is acknowledged to have a good system of quality assurance, which ensures that it is implemented effectively. It was decided that all women between the ages of 50 and 64 should be screened regularly. The Committee received a great deal of evidence to suggest why that should be so. We were advised that screening has not been introduced for younger women because it has no particular impact on mortality; equally important, and more significant, there are difficulties in reading mammograms of pre-menopausal women. Members of the Committee were broadly prepared to accept that advice from the medical profession.

There is far more controversy, understandably, about the decision not to screen regularly women above the age of 64. The Committee was advised that there would be a lower take-up by older women, and that there is a greater risk of older women dying from other diseases. The Committee was, frankly, unconvinced by those arguments. I was therefore pleased to support the Committee's recommendation that the screening programme should be extended to women aged 69.

It is particularly interesting to look at the relevant figures on breast cancer, which show that it is more common among older women. In 1989, 8,752 women between the ages of 50 and 64 died from breast cancer, and, 11,179 over the age of 64 died. Those figures reveal that more than 60 per cent. of breast cancer deaths occur in women over the age of 64. Surely that is a good reason for extending screening to include women up to the age of 69.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Government argued that they had decided not to go ahead with breast screening for older women because they felt that it was not cost-effective. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the evidence that we received suggests otherwise? The Government's response was a disappointment to many members of the Select Committee and to people throughout the country.

Mr. Congdon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. If he had asked me that question half an hour ago I would have agreed with him entirely, but I have just happened to read in *Hansard* of 4 December that the Government have announced that, from 18 October, pilot schemes have been operating in the Northern and Yorkshire and South Thames regional health authorities to evaluate the effectiveness of extending breast screening to women up to the age of 69. I am a bit behind the times, and was unaware of that when I read the Government's response at the weekend. I welcome that announcement, and I am particularly pleased that I read about it just 15 minutes ago. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) will be pleased about that announcement as well.

Screening is effective if it succeeds in identifying those women with breast cancer early enough so that they can be treated and prevented from dying. The hon. Member for Doncaster, North referred to the relevant figures, which reveal that in 1992, just under 14,000 women died from breast cancer, which is just under 5 per cent. of all female deaths. That is a staggering number of deaths from one particular disease—something that hon. Members on both sides of the House take seriously. Perhaps it is even more significant to note that breast cancer accounts for more deaths than any other form of cancer, including lung cancer. I find that pretty incredible.

A particular problem struck me as I was interviewing witnesses before the Select Committee about screening. The one problem with breast screening is that, apart from identifying those women with breast cancer, it generates a false positive. If a woman is recalled because there is something about which the doctors are concerned on her mammogram, she may have to wait a couple of weeks for an appointment. That woman is obviously subject to unnecessary worry and anxiety. The worst thing about any form of diagnosis is when the doctor says, "We think you have a problem, but we're not sure; we'll need to see you again in two to three weeks' time." That causes a great deal of anxiety.

The key point is revealed by the following figures. Since 1987, 5 million women—a staggering figure—have been screened. Of those, 270,000 have been recalled for further assessment. That does not mean that those 270,000 women had cancer, because just 20,000 of them were identified as suffering from it. I questioned witnesses in the Select Committee about those figures and drew to their attention the fact that that means that for every woman identified by screening as having breast cancer, a further 12 went through an awful lot of anxiety. The thing that surprised me was that a strange atmosphere then descended on the Committee, as though the witnesses had never heard of those figures before. I am concerned about that.

I understand the medical profession's proper desire to ensure that the screening programme works properly and succeeds in identifying those women suffering from cancer, thus preventing them from dying. That is a fantastic achievement, but I do not believe that the profession has paid enough attention to the flip side of the coin—the anxiety caused because the screening programme fails to reduce the number of false positives. That is an important issue.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for missing the beginning of this debate. I have some constituents in the House, and they have allowed me to pop in for 10 minutes, so I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Administrators in Ealing are strongly inclined to move the breast cancer service from Ealing hospital to other hospitals at some distance from my constituency. Women in my constituency, however, feel confident about the services that they receive at their local hospital. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to avoid imposing difficult, if not impossible journeys on women who go for breast screening? Does he agree that that service should be offered at the hospital in which they are confident, such as Ealing hospital? I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to say that.

Mr. Congdon: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which reveals the dilemma created when planning any services relating to breast cancer and other diseases.

All recommendations suggest that three-tier models represent the best means of providing a screening service. One needs to ensure that a woman receives good primary care when she goes to her general practitioner, and that she is properly referred on for treatment—assuming that she has not been identified through the screening programme.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the Chairman of our Select Committee, has already said, all the research shows that a woman stands a better chance of survival if she goes to a unit that deals with more than a few cases of breast cancer a year. It has been recommended that breast cancer units should be established to cater for populations of about 200,000. I cannot comment specifically on Ealing, but from time to time there will inevitably be conflicts between trying to ensure that units of a sufficient size are provided so that an appropriate number of patients can be treated and the unit can develop the necessary skills, and ensuring that those units are not too far away from their patients.

The number of false positive results can be reduced in a number of ways. For instance, I welcome the decision to ensure that women receive their second mammogram at the

[Mr. Congdon]

same time as the first one, because that improves reliability. One will never be able to prevent all false positives, so it is even more important to ensure that all the services that women may require, including further assessment, are carried out at the same time. That means that they do not have to return for further visits, which is important.

Having identified those women suffering from breast cancer, it is crucial to ensure that they receive appropriate treatment to try to reduce the number of deaths—a point made by the hon. Member for Doncaster, North. The Select Committee report contained a number of recommendations; the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund has also made a number of important recommendations. It suggested that there should be minimum standards of care based on a list of principles.

A significant factor in the Select Committee's investigation was that a number of separate studies had all come to the same conclusion about cancer treatments, including breast cancer. I understand that it is important that people suffering from breast cancer should be treated by not a general surgeon, but a specialist. It is important that patients have a specialist breast care nurse to provide the necessary counselling during a traumatic period.

I am pleased to support the important report on breast cancer, which was unanimously approved. We all recognise that there is room for improvement and I hope that improvements will be made in all parts of the country. I doubt whether that will yield a uniform death rate, but so long as we make progress we shall have been successful.

5 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I am pleased to participate from the Front Bench in the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe). I agreed with much of what she said and with the polite way in which she suggested that the Government might want to be more ambitious about the future of the service than they are currently willing to contemplate or resource.

I say to the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) that passions often run high in the House. Today's debate is on a serious subject that requires discussion, dialogue and informed criticism. My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) gave some key statistics on access. One of the most important features of the subject is access—patients' access, access to screening and access to appropriate treatment.

It is worth placing on record some of the cold and clinical statistics. Breast cancer is the leading cause of female cancer death in the United Kingdom. It is the commonest single cause of death in women aged 35 to 54. There are about 24,000 new cases of breast cancer every year and about 15,000 women die from the disease. There are nearly 500 new cases every week and nearly 300 deaths every week. Behind every individual statistic there are members of families and extended families. The problem is huge and, in presenting the case from the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne suggested its seriousness.

It is also important to identify the fact that mortality rates have remained virtually unchanged for the past 50 years. It is encouraging to note—as the hon. Members for Broxbourne and for Croydon, North-East did—that in the latter part of the 1980s the mortality rate figures started to come down. That is to be welcomed and one of the outstanding challenges in relation to breast cancer is to maintain that reduction.

Statistics can be translated into humans. I estimate that 15,000 deaths will mean that about 100,000 people—a large number—could be involved in the bereavement process every year. The emotional and physical damage done can be devastating. All those who are given a positive diagnosis face the trauma of uncertainty and they do not know whether treatment might lead to death or a much longer remission period. A hallmark of the national health service programme is the sensitivity surrounding the treatment.

One of the key aims is to try to reduce mortality rates, but it was interesting to read in the section on variations in health in "The Health of the Nation", produced by the Government, an apt phrase that sums up the second major objective: adding years to life and life to years. Clearly, mortality rates provide a fixed benchmark in the debate; they are easily recorded. Not always so obvious are those people who have been screened, receive the appropriate treatment and may go into long-term or short-term remission, when the years-to-life and life-to-years issue is an important factor. I hope that the Minister appreciates—I am sure that he does—that the subject involves not merely death, but living. That key objective should underline our agenda.

We should place on record the House's appreciation of the national health service breast screening programme; the hon. Member for Broxbourne did so and the Opposition agree with her comments. The programme does an excellent service and has a tremendous staff; it is a national programme that is extremely well led. When attacking breast cancer over the next decade it is important to keep the national dimension firmly before the House and the general debate.

Although the service was introduced in 1987 and was fully operational in 1990, there still seems to be huge potential. There have been three or four years in which the service has made an impact on breast cancer. Bearing in mind many of the changes suggested by the Select Committee and some of the advances in technology, and given the necessary resources, the service is well placed to achieve much more in the new millennium, which is now only a few years away.

My key concern involves access and availability; at the argument's core lies the availability of screening, the availability of diagnosis and prognosis and the availability of treatment. We can argue on the degree to which availability varies throughout the nation, but we can possibly agree that availability differs throughout England, Scotland and Wales. That is not necessarily a political point, but is a fact of life: variables will influence health that the health service cannot tackle. But some variations in the figures can be tackled by effective intervention from the health service.

The availability of the service is one factor, but access to it is another. My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North and others have suggested that social and class differences have an impact on access to screening and treatment. Some district health authorities may be more enthusiastic and energetic and may give breast cancer a higher priority. I do not say that as a criticism of the national standards but, clearly, the success or otherwise of the service depends on the approach on the ground. Therefore, the key aspect of my contribution concerns the availability and quality of services, and how access to them varies throughout the country.

The national programme for breast screening shows that the figures for access to screening vary. East Anglia has the highest acceptance rate for screening: 78 per cent. of those invited are screened. In North-East Thames, the adjacent health authority, the figure falls to 62 per cent. A visible indication of screening and access to it—not a value judgment on the reasons for it—is the cold statistic from the national screening programme that suggests that acceptance of screening must be consistently above the average that has been set. The English average is 72 per cent.—the North-East Thames area is 10 per cent. lower and the East Anglia figure is almost 16 per cent. higher. As my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North said, the significant variations were not recognised in "The Health of the Nation" published earlier this year—we should bear that in mind.

My hon. Friend also mentioned some material, which we published last week, that we had obtained from the House of Commons research division. It produced a snapshot of mortality rates for 1993, which found that England had an average of 86, but that 55 authorities fell on or above that average. In South Essex there were 125 deaths and in South-West Surrey there were 45. I stress that it was a snapshot and therefore the figures must be heavily qualified, but I believe that they show the tremendous variations in availability of and access to facilities throughout the country.

Mr. Congdon: I have followed the hon. Gentleman's argument quite carefully. Has his research identified any correlation between the take-up of screening and mortality rates in a particular area? He cited the figure for South-West Surrey, but North-West Surrey has a very high mortality figure of 122. Has his research identified any such correlation?

Mr. McLeish: No, but that is a fair point. We conducted a distribution analysis, which was a fairly cold and clinical look at statistics sourced from the Department of Health and processed through the House of Commons Library. In a sense, it was a factual account of a snapshot for 1993.

I now turn to the Government's target as stated in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper, which relates to those who are eligible for screening. Our research examined mortality rates in each district health authority, measured any changes between 1990 and 1993 and projected those changes towards 2000. It is quite significant that, according to the current rate of change, more than 60 per cent. of district health authorities would not meet the target. It is not a case of whether our figure is right or wrong; the magnitude of our findings—60 per cent. of health authorities—is important. We must debate whether the Government are on target to meet their objectives at regional and local level. I hope that the Minister will respond to that specific point later in the debate.

The Government point out in "The Health of the Nation" that there do not appear to be significant variations in the English and Welsh averages. Our research contradicts that finding, although the Government have access to different technology and to technicians and scientists who provide other information. We believe that "The Health of the Nation" document is flawed to the extent that it concentrates mainly on national targets and whether we are moving towards them. The Government should look at district health authority level, and perhaps at local level, to see whether real progress is being made. Under its remit, the Select Committee was to consider ways in which the quality and availability of breast cancer services in the United Kingdom could be improved, which suggests that there may not be equal service provision throughout the length and breadth of the nation.

On regional or local health service inequality, Conservative Members stress, quite correctly, that many factors—quality of life, housing and genetics—influence health. Health service teams, whether Conservative or Labour, cannot control such factors. However, there must be general areas within the health service where we can intervene more effectively—especially in relation to breast cancer. Deaths can be prevented and programmes and service distribution can be improved.

There are inequalities in health service provision throughout the nation and there are factors that we cannot change easily. However, we can make some obvious changes and it is the responsibility of Government to look more closely at what is occurring in health and to intervene more positively. That is a key issue to consider when discussing variations in health provision and whether the health service could be more interventionist and lever change much more effectively.

The Select Committee produced an excellent report; it heard a wide range of evidence and pinpointed the changes that should be made. The hon. Member for Broxbourne has already outlined some of those changes and I expect that she is hoping that the Government will respond to them positively. The Committee recommended that the upper age limit be extended to 69 for the call and recall screening programmes. Evidence to the Select Committee suggested that that would prove very worth while. The national screening programme has outlined the cash implications of the recommendation and we are not talking about substantial sums of money. However, we are talking about possibly fewer women dying and more women receiving early diagnosis and enjoying an improved quality of life.

That is a very powerful reason why we should look closely at how a small amount of money may be used to improve the length and quality of life and spare families the agony of premature death. As the hon. Lady said, the Government have responded positively and they are taking forward several pilot projects.

The Select Committee also raised the key issue of intervals between screening. Some people were shocked by the detailed figures that showed the number of cancers that grew in three years. The national health screening programme was slightly dismayed by those figures, but it is understandable in a new programme. The three-year interval was based on experience and scientific evidence, and it must now be examined more closely.

The Government claim that they need hard evidence to support any change and the Select Committee has said that there is no point spending money until that evidence is forthcoming. I hope that the Government will demonstrate some urgency and enthusiasm in pursuing that evidence, as it comes down to saving lives and improving the quality of life of many women.

[Mr. McLeish]

Another key issue is the question of future treatment within the three-tier structure. Unlike some of the other suggestions that are more about effective clinical management of the service, this area will require resources. The hon. Lady put it in a nutshell when she said that we do not want to develop national standards that encourage every hospital in the country to establish breast cancer units that, despite appearances, would be unable to do the job because of the quality of staff. The Minister should consider allocating resources in that area: the idea of a properly resourced primary health care service, breast cancer units and specialist centres makes sense to anyone who is seriously interested in tackling the problem.

Reference has been made to the double view or double shot. The information suggests that if two views of each breast were taken at every screening—not just the first, which the Government are quite happy to implement—a potential condition could be assessed much more effectively. I sincerely hope that the Government will consider that issue, along with research and development, training and quality assurance, which I shall mention briefly in a moment.

The Select Committee also made an important recommendation with regard to the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund, which is an excellent organisation that performs a great deal of work throughout the country. Labour Members may be a little suspicious and sceptical of the patients charter, but it does recommend standards of care. If a diagnosis is complete and if life can be extended, quality of life and quality of care are inextricably linked. The Department of Health dismissed the issue by claiming that some care criteria appear in the patients charter and what is not there is not necessary anyway. I hope that the Minister will not adopt a similar attitude, as it does not address the seriousness with which the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund has pursued the charter. I urge the Government to rethink the situation.

I am worried that I have been a little over-generous in my support of the Select Committee report. I may be slightly more critical of it than the hon. Lady, but I am sure that she will understand why I must do that. There have been a plethora of reports on breast cancer in the past few years, and the Chairman of the Select Committee has now outlined in detail the Committee's concerns. Obviously the nation is concerned. There is clearly a problem, at least a statistical problem. We have seen the Calman report, research and development has been given priority in other reports and the Secretary of State has spoken of a policy framework for the commissioning of cancer services. We have had a number of debates and discussed a range of issues. The crucial question for those with cancer, however, is what the agenda for action will be.

Given the Government's response, the current slight degree of scepticism is understandable. When the Secretary of State for Health outlined the policy framework for the commissioning of cancer services last April, it was accompanied by an NHS executive memo. Although the Government were vague about resources and timetables in their policy statement, the NHS executive was not. Paragraph 6 of its document is worth reading. A Select Committee has produced an excellent report and the House is united in its wish to tackle an obvious problem, but the NHS executive states, in a rather cruel and clinical way:

> "The changes in the organisation and provision of cancer services recommended in the report will take several years to implement."

There is nothing too specific about the different recommendations. The NHS executive simply makes the blanket statement that implementation will take some years. It continues:

> "Those planning cancer services on the basis of the recommendations should do so within available resources, taking account of the assessed needs of the local population and having regard to other health and health service priorities. A great deal can, of course, be achieved through better organisation and better use of existing resources."

We accept the latter part of that. Better delivery of services is possible in any organisation if changes are made to its resources and other arrangements. Like the hon. Member for Broxbourne, however, we feel that there is no point in having a Rolls-Royce that is being serviced in the same way as—I shall not name the car of which I am thinking in case I get into trouble with my constituents, but I am thinking of a car of lower quality than a Rolls-Royce. We can see all the problems: they have been analysed. I must ask the Minister, however, whether the Government are really committed to improving the service so that it meets the standards demanded by us and the Select Committee.

Although it is not just a question of resources, they will be needed to implement many of the recommendations that have been made—the recommendation for a three-tier structure, for instance, and the recommendations relating to quality. I hope that the Minister will mention that.

Let me raise two or three practical points. The wider brief to consider the future of the service in the next millennium involves immediate and fundamental issues relating to the national screening programme. First, there is the quality assurance programme. I could not agree more with the hon. Member for Broxbourne: that programme is vital. It is this part of the service that makes it different from any other service in Europe. The quality is there, and the service is being delivered; but fundamental concerns surround the continuation of that quality. The fragmentation of the NHS has brought more confusion to the system. The hon. Lady referred to purchasing and providing. We must be cautious and sensitive in the new, artificial market, because the quality of the screening service could be affected.

I should also like to know who will be responsible for quality assurance following the changes that will be introduced in April 1996. The proposal for a regional organisation to oversee the selection of the lead purchaser looks fine on paper, but it prompts many questions about the consistency and cohesion of the whole quality assurance programme. Those involved in the national screening programme are anxious on that score. We must ensure that we do not end up with an arrangement whereby district health authorities and others are purchasing in one environment while there is confusion and a reduction in quality in the quality assurance process.

Then there is the question of ring fencing. Funding for breast cancer at district health authority level is now part of general funding, which means that, if a district health authority gives the service a lower priority than other services, the whole process could suffer. I do not believe that "The Health of the Nation" targets and a national strategy can be left to local organisations; they should not be allowed to dictate priorities.

I agree with the hon. Lady that we should be concerned with mandatory standards. We shall be setting the minimum standards, but they are important. Enterprise and innovation are fine, but let us not use them as a smokescreen to disguise the fact that a lack of central direction and standards of the highest order could result in problems within health authorities. I urge the Minister to consider ring fencing: that, I believe, is the only way in which we can ensure that priorities and minimum standards are the same throughout the service, and that we implement some of the Select Committee's recommendations.

Neither the country nor the House is giving enough thought to the demography of aging. If we decide to extend the screening programme to those aged up to 69—and, indeed, if we continue to provide the same service for those aged between 50 and 64—we shall find that an increasing number of people fall into those groups. There is currently no hint of extra resources to cater for the extra demand. Every NHS executive circular, and every utterance from the Government, suggests that most of the recommendations are accepted, but there is no flexibility in relation to cash. We are told that it must be found from available resources.

That might be possible in some areas, but it is clear that, as we enter the new millennium, demography will play a much greater role throughout the health service. The Government must recognise that if screening is extended to those aged up to 69, if the intervals between screenings are reduced and if double views at every shot are to be introduced, there are bound to be resource implications.

Let me end by reiterating my concerns. I do not want the Government to reject the idea of a national strategy to tackle breast cancer. The reforms in every other part of the NHS have devolved responsibility down the line, but this is a national issue that requires national standards and firm guidance from the centre. I should like to think that the Government will not merely pay lip service to the recommendations of expert bodies and Committees of the House.

I do not think that the Minister should put local breast cancer services at risk by failing to ring-fence money allocated to district health authorities. He should be aware that the fragmentation of the NHS could undermine nationally based programmes. I have mentioned the consequences of failing to acknowledge the resource implications of new technology, and the recommendations made in that context. It is also crucial for the Government not to undermine morale in what is an excellent service. Many members of staff are anxious about their futures, and they are right to be anxious.

So far, the Government have refused to appreciate the urgency of building on this excellent programme. Unlike the NHS executive, I do not think that we have years in which to ponder decisions. We need a national strategy. We must tackle variations; we must ensure that quality is maintained; and a seamless process must take place between screening and treatment. We can build on the progress that has been made, but the Government must approach the matter with more urgency. That is what the Opposition want, and I hope that the Minister will give us some indication that he wants to take speedier action than is currently being suggested.

5.28 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Breast cancer should not be a party political issue. In that spirit, I welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). I am particularly grateful to him for his praise of the Select Committee's report and I agree with at least part of what he had to say.

Before the Committee's inquiry, I must admit that I had little knowledge of breast cancer. As a man, it is still hard for me fully to appreciate the true horror of the disease. We were fortunate that a quarter of the Committee members were ladies, who perhaps have a better understanding of the trauma that a diagnosis of breast cancer can cause. Although I do not have a full appreciation of that trauma, the inquiry was one of the most harrowing in which I have been involved. All the Committee members found the evidence of Dr. Gwyneth Vorhaus particularly moving. She was undergoing intensive chemotherapy for the disease at the time that she spoke to us. We also heard evidence from the representatives of RAGE—Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure—which is a group of women who have had radiotherapy and some terrible injuries following it.

In examining the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer, we looked first at its rate of incidence and the associated rate of mortality. The statistics on incidence are cause for alarm. In England and Wales, the incidence rate is 56.1 cases per 100,000 of population, which puts us approximately in the middle of the range for developed countries but certainly well below the United States, which has an incidence rate of 89.2 per 100,000 for white Americans, although the rate is only 65 cases per 100,000 for black Americans. However, the rate is increasing. In this country, it rose by more than 40 per cent. in the 10 years to 1992, although that is less than in some other countries.

There is widespread variation in the incidence rate between different regions in the United Kingdom, as several hon. Members have already said. The 28 per cent. average increase which occurred between 1979 and 1989 masks increases that range from only 3.2 per cent. in the Trent region up to 47 per cent. in Wessex.

There may be a number of reasons for the variation in incidence and for its increase. I accept that the quality of statistics certainly varies widely and that, in some countries, the figures that have been quoted may be highly suspect. Improvements in detection may also explain part of the reason for the rise in incidence. All our witnesses agreed, however, that very little is known about the reasons for international or regional variations in the incidence of breast cancer or why the incidence rate is rising. The variations are so great and the rise is so sharp that there can be little doubt that women in some countries are far more prone to breast cancer than those in other countries and that the number getting the disease is rising rapidly.

The evidence is still more frightening when one comes to examine the mortality rates. As has already been said, on this measure the United Kingdom has almost the highest breast cancer mortality rate in the world. It is way above that of many countries whose incidence rate is higher than our own. That may be because our treatment of the disease is inferior to the treatment in other countries; it could also be because women in the UK are prone to suffer a far more aggressive form of the disease.

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

One of the first questions that I asked our witnesses was why the USA had a higher incidence rate of breast cancer than the UK but a lower mortality rate, and what were they were doing in the USA that we were not doing here? Professor Vessey, the chairman of the advisory committee on breast cancer screening, concluded his reply to me by saying:

"there are plenty of suggestions but I do not think that anybody really has a very good answer".

In our inquiry, it quickly became abundantly clear that we do not know the answers to these questions. What causes breast cancer? How can it be prevented? Why are there such enormous variations in its incidence between and within countries? Why is it that Japan, which is a developed country with a high standard of living, has one of the lowest rates of breast cancer in the world? Why is it that the incidence is rising rapidly, and why is it that more people die from it in the UK than almost anywhere else in the world?

My first conclusion was that much more research needs to be done. For some reason, research into breast cancer is not accorded the priority that it deserves. One in 20 women is likely to die from breast cancer and, in 1993, there were more than 13,000 registered deaths of women from it in England and Wales. That compares with approximately 1,150 notified deaths from AIDS in the UK. Government expenditure on research into AIDS, however, through the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health, was £17 million. That amount is nearly five times the expenditure on research into breast cancer.

When expenditure by charities such as the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Cancer Research Campaign is added into the total, the amount still comes to only £12.5 million, which is 70 per cent. of the figure spend on research into AIDS. We do not have a world breast cancer day, and we do not see celebrities organising concerts to raise money for research into breast cancer. I am not suggesting that we should not be spending money on researching AIDS, but I must question whether we have our priorities right. I think that there is more than a whiff of political correctness about those figures.

Given the lack of knowledge about the disease, I understand why the NHS decided to concentrate on establishing a breast cancer screening programme to enable the early detection and treatment of the disease. We were given ample evidence that screening programmes result in fewer deaths, and we have every right to be proud of the fact that the United Kingdom is one of the first countries to set up a national screening programme. Since the programme was started in 1987, 5 million women have been screened and approximately 20,000 cancers have been detected as a result.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) pointed out, however, for every cancer that was detected, nearly 10 women who did not have cancer were recalled because they had false positive results. The anxiety and fear that were raised as a result of those false results can only be imagined. In some cases, women had to undergo unnecessary clinical investigations—even surgery—as a result.

There is also a problem of false negative results when women have been told that they do not have breast cancer but who have gone on to develop the disease shortly afterwards. That is something which might be addressed by the more widespread use of double-view exposures, as has been mentioned already.

It may be that false positives and negatives are a price worth paying. We must address the question raised by Professor Michael Baum, our specialist adviser from the Royal Marsden hospital, as to whether the small benefit of reducing the risk of dying from breast cancer compensates for the undoubted harm resulting from false alarms and unnecessary interventions. He was right to ask whether the money spent on population screening would save more lives if the scarce resources were redirected to the more efficient care of symptomatic women and greater spending on research into improving the treatment of those already suffering from the disease.

I am sorry that Professor Baum did not raise those issues at the time of our inquiry. They are, however, serious issues which deserve examination, and it was a great pity that the media chose simply to report that he had declared the breast test to be useless, which was certainly not the case. I believe that Professor Baum remains a supporter of the breast screening programme.

Professor Baum was also entirely right about the need for more informed choices by patients. All too often clinicians assume that patients do not want to know the details of their condition or the options that are available to them. Alternatively, clinicians do not bother to inform their patients because they think that they will not understand. I suspect that all of us have come across terrible examples of the lack of sensitivity of doctors and consultants when advising patients about their condition. Perhaps the worst example that I have ever heard was the treatment of Dr. Vorhaus, who told us that the night before surgery a junior doctor had casually informed her:

"We have decided to do a mastectomy instead of a lumpectomy."

When she asked why, he said:

"I really don't know what you are worrying about—you've got such small breasts it doesn't matter and anyway, someone with cancer should not be worrying about what happens to their breasts."

That was how she was formally told that she had cancer.

Dr. Vorhaus also told us that she met only two doctors who extended any degree of human concern, courtesy and willingness to give her information about her condition and treatment. On the other hand, she told us that she did not meet one nurse who was not helpful and supportive. Of course, that is just one person's experience, and I accept that it does not apply in the vast majority of cases. Nevertheless it should not happen, and we still have much to do to ensure that doctors treat women with this condition with the sensitivity that they deserve.

Finally, I must also pay tribute to my own constituent, Mrs. Hazel Thornton, who came to give evidence to us. She is a lay person. After an abnormality was found in a routine screening, she was invited to participate in a randomised control trial. She was given no information about the options available to her, or any details about what the trial would involve, so she refused to take part. Instead, she found out for herself about the disease and became an expert on it.

Since then, Mrs. Thornton has become a tireless campaigner for the rights and involvement of patients. She has set up the Consumers Advisory Group for Clinical Trials; she has written papers that have been published in *The Lancet*; and she has travelled across the world to give talks on the subject. Due to her efforts, sometimes in the teeth of opposition from the medical establishment, the patient's voice is at last being heard.

There is still an immense amount to do, but we are making progress. I hope that the Select Committee's report was a contribution to that, and I also welcome the response that has been made by the Government. I look forward to hearing the Minister's remarks later in the debate.

5.41 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I share the view of the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) that it is surprising that there is not more publicity about this matter. I doubt that there is anyone in the Chamber who is not either close to or who knows someone who is suffering or has suffered from breast cancer. I hope that the efforts that the national coalition has begun to bring groups together to give a much higher profile to breast cancer will succeed. I am sure that those efforts will receive support from all right hon. and hon. Members.

Hon. Members have referred to the fact that the incidence of breast cancer in the United Kingdom is not particularly high by international standards, yet we have the highest recorded rate of mortality in the world. They have also spoken of the regional variations. There may be some arguments to the effect that data from other countries may not be comparable with ours. However, all the witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee concluded that even if Britain did not have the highest mortality rate in the world, it was one of the highest, and that it deserved urgent attention.

In the United Kingdom it should be possible to rely on comparability of the data. In that context, the regional differences that have been highlighted are somewhat alarming. Some reasons have been advanced for those regional differences, but most members of the Health Select Committee came to the conclusion that the major reason for the differences in mortality was probably the poor treatment of the disease in some areas. I certainly believe that that is the most convincing reason.

We know that the treatment that women get depends on where they go. The Select Committee heard much evidence, and there is more evidence from other sources—anecdotal and statistical—that many women do not get a quality service or appropriate treatment. It would be foolish to suggest that early diagnosis and early, appropriate treatment will lead to a successful outcome in all cases. However, if detection is not early or treatment is delayed or inappropriate once the disease is diagnosed, the consequences will—almost invariably—be tragic. The Select Committee concluded that it would be possible to reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer each year by some 4,000, if we had a standard quality of service throughout the country.

Some people have criticised the Select Committee and the Government for putting too much emphasis on breast screening. They have suggested that screening is costly and detects only a minority of cancers. The latter is true and I share the view that we should always examine the cost-effectiveness of all screening programmes. However, I remain convinced that the screening programme should be maintained and improved as part of the overall strategy for detecting breast disease and reducing breast cancer mortality.

The quality assurance programme referred to by the Chairman of the Select Committee is vital to ensure that the same high-quality service is available throughout the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) expressed concern about the relationship between quality assurance teams and purchasers, following the proposed move from regional purchasing quality assurance to district health authority lead purchasers. As the Select Committee's report says, district health authorities

"will be purchasing services for monitoring their own purchasing".

I hope that the Minister will outline in his reply the role of regional offices and regional directors of public health in selecting the lead purchasers, and also the monitoring role of the national co-ordinator. That must be kept under review and I hope that the Select Committee will consider the issue once the new arrangements are up and running next year.

Since the Select Committee report, there have been some developments in the way in which mammography is carried out, which we all hope will lead to a reduction in the number of false negatives and false positives. The possible tragic consequences of a false negative are only too apparent. More accurate diagnosis and early detection can lead to early and appropriate treatment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central said, that can lead to more years of life of better quality.

We should not underestimate the effects of false positive results, which the national co-ordinator described as a "downside to . . . screening". Such false positives not only cause great anxiety and in some cases severe psychological trauma, but they lead to women undergoing unnecessary recalls, further unnecessary clinical investigations, and in some cases unnecessary diagnostic surgery. I appreciate the view expressed by Hazel Thornton of Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure, who described the programme as

"costly trawling of a limited asymptomatic public group . . . creating huge . . . psychological and physical morbidity".

That is why it is important that we do our best to eliminate the false negatives and positives.

The Select Committee believed, however, that there is definite evidence that screening by mammography is effective in reducing breast cancer mortality, certainly in women over 50. Evidence in the Forrest report convinced me that the only way substantially to reduce the number of deaths from the disease is detection before the patient presents with symptoms.

The Select Committee takes the view that it is perhaps too early to make final judgments about the efficacy of the breast screening programme, because of the lead time. We need to observe the mortality information about 10 years from the introduction—after 1997—to get a more accurate picture. I believe that we will see then that the programme has been efficient and effective.

The Committee has highlighted the problem of women placed on early recall, which might mean a wait not of a few weeks, as was suggested earlier, but of six to 12 months in some cases. Such insensitivity can lead to great anxiety, and in many cases acute depressive illness can follow. That is why I, and other members of the Select

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

Committee, urge the establishment of the one-stop shop. That may not necessarily reduce the time between screening and assessment, but it could significantly reduce the time between assessment and diagnosis and considerably minimise anxiety. That is why I believe it important to carry out the recommendations of the Forrest report for routine assessment teams comprised of clinicians, a radiologist, a pathologist, a radiographer, a receptionist and a breast care nurse. Breast cancer screening is not just to do with mammography; it includes all stages in the diagnosis of the disease.

As the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has said, it is generally accepted that there is little benefit in routine screening of younger women, but I believe that further research needs to be done to determine whether there are readily identifiable groups among the younger age groups who may be at higher risk and among whom prevention can be undertaken.

The Committee was convinced of the efficacy of the screening programme for women over the age of 50, and firmly recommended that the upper age limit for inclusion in the call and recall system be extended to 69. The evidence for that is clear, and in this respect I found the Government's response extremely disappointing. I am firmly on the side of Age Concern, the British Medical Association and the Society of Radiographers. The decision to establish some demonstration projects may be a start, but it is not enough and it is quite disappointing.

I urge the Minister to reconsider the Select Committee recommendation. What extra resources are being provided for these demonstration projects? The Government talk about advertising the fact that women over 65 are entitled to be screened every three years. I should like to know what resources have been allocated for extra screening to take account of increased take-up by the over 65s. Without such extra resources it will not be possible to screen more elderly people.

Effective diagnosis is one thing: treatment is another. We have anecdotal and statistical evidence to show wide variations in treatments and outcomes. One thing is absolutely clear from the evidence—surgeons who treat more than 30 cases a year have better survival figures for their patients. Just as we need a team approach to screening, so we need a team approach to treatment. No woman should be referred to a general surgeon working in isolation. That is why the establishment of specialist breast units with defined minimum standards and service requirements is necessary. National standards need to be laid down, nowhere more so than in radiotherapy and related areas.

The hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon spoke of the evidence given by RAGE. For some women, the treatment has been horrendous, leaving them either in pain or disabled. For some of them treatment can be worse than the disease. So the same quality of standards as is required for the screening programme needs to be applied to radiotherapy.

In this respect I should like to mention recommendations 29 and 30 of our report. The Government rejected the recommendations calling for the same service quality standards to be applied to treatment and screening, and I found that rather disappointing. The two services are wholly complementary: they involve the same training and the same commitment to specialisation. Experience gained in one sector is also gained in the other. Of course some extra staff and resources would be required; will the Minister tell us why the Government rejected these two recommendations?

I should like to return now to the role of breast care nurses, to which Conservative Members have already alluded. All the people with experience of breast cancer who spoke to us had nothing but praise for the nursing profession and for the crucial role that breast care nurses play. Obviously the remarks that follow will be from a male perspective, but many women who have been told they have breast cancer face not only the fear of the physical consequences—there is deep psychological trauma about the possibly tragic outcome of the disease—but a disease which attacks their identity as women. They feel that their femininity and their feelings about their sexuality are under attack. The women in this category to whom I have spoken have all said that the one person they could talk the matter over with was the breast care nurse. As one of the witnesses who came before the Select Committee said, "If nurses can communicate with us, why can't doctors?" So there is much that still needs to be done in terms of training the doctors.

Gwyneth Vorhaus described for us the time when she was first diagnosed as having breast cancer:

> "I was left undressed in a cubicle for over two hours at the general surgeon's clinic. I finally wandered out into a room where a junior doctor was sitting looking at an X ray and I discovered that it was my X ray. I had previously been told I probably had fibro adenoma, so I had no reason to prepare myself or bring a friend. The doctor looked very embarrassed. He turned his back on me and started muttering about 'microcalcifications and suspicious lesions'. I had to ask him to turn around and look at me. I said, 'Are you trying to tell me I've got cancer?' He still could not use the word, but his body language told me something was wrong. I believe I went into deep shock at that moment, but I was left to wander off for an explanation to my GP."

Perhaps that was an isolated incident, but as the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon said, it is one incident too many. Other women's experiences may not have been as graphic, but witness after witness has described the insensitive manner in which her first diagnosis was given her. Meanwhile everyone praises the commitment and the work of the nurses.

It is important to listen to what women have to say. I do not want to interfere in the debate about high-dose chemotherapy and stem cell rescue. Certainly, we heard Gwyneth Vorhaus say that she felt the treatment was right for her. We should do some random clinical trials to assess the value of high-dose chemotherapy. Most of us on the Committee felt that here was a woman who had exercised choice and weighed up the risks. She said that if nothing had been done she would have died. She was a mother of young children, so she felt that if anything could be done to extend her life by a couple of years, it should be done. For many of us that summed up the issue behind this disease.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said in another debate on this subject:

> "it is important not to view breast cancer as just a woman's disease because it brings devastation and grief to families affected by a sufferer's early death."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 945.]

Women with breast cancer are daughters, mothers, wives, partners, lovers. They have caring responsibilities, and their early and often unnecessary deaths devastate whole families; and the cost to communities is enormous.

When looking for the resources needed to build an effective screening and treatment programme we should always remember the 4,000 lost lives each year, and the costs of not saving them.

The Government say that they are considering the Calman proposals; I hope that they will not hide behind them. I believe that breast cancer services can pioneer the way for other cancer services. Hence I hope that the Government will look again at some of the recommendations that they have said they will take account of in due course, and that they will react more positively to the firm recommendations in this report.

5.58 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) and her Committee on this excellent report: it is most welcome. It is high time Committees of this House gave specific attention to issues involving women. I pay tribute to the many hon. Members who have kept the subject alive in the all-party group and other forums. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who cannot be here owing to an Inter-Parliamentary Union engagement. I know that she would have liked to be here.

In view of the fact that the Health Select Committee made reference to research, I am pleased to use this opportunity to raise a matter, about which the hon. Member for Broxbourne knows because I have written to her about it, and on which I was lucky enough to secure a debate during private Members' time on 14 June. It refers to research in breast cancer at the Bristol cancer help centre.

The study was published in *The Lancet* in September 1990. I do not intend to waste the time of the House in rehearsing all the arguments, because they are on the record; suffice it to say that the research purported to show that breast cancer patients attending the Bristol cancer help centre who were also having orthodox treatment were twice as likely to die and three times more likely to relapse than the controls who were having conventional treatment only. It soon became clear that the research was fatally flawed in its methodology and statistical analysis.

During a very helpful and constructive reply to the debate in June, the then Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) said:

> "I have no doubt that mistakes were made".—[*Official Report*, 14 June 1995; Vol. 261, c. 758.]

The funding bodies, the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Cancer Research Campaign, distanced themselves from the research quite early. The Imperial Cancer Research Fund said that no conclusions could be drawn. Its director general, Sir Walter Bodmer, said:

> "the research suffered from a disastrous mistake in the interpretation."

However, the Institute of Cancer Research, which organised the research, still stands by it, and has refused to release the data for independent statistical analysis.

A great deal of correspondence occurred over the summer, and I received a helpful suggestion from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Baroness Cumberlege, in a letter on 4 August. She acknowledged that I had said that there was a need for an examination of how the two sets of patients compared, and that there should be an independent judgment of the validity of comparing the two groups. I asked whether the Department would recommend an independent statistician. The Minister helpfully suggested that I approach the Royal Statistical Society for assistance, and gave me its address.

I put that suggestion to the person responsible for the research, Professor Claire Chilvers. She said that she was not in a position to be able to give that consent so I went back to the Institute of Cancer Research. Professor Peter Garland of the institute said that it would not be appropriate to release the data to me as a third party. The question is, who is appropriate? To whom should the data be released?

Neither the centre nor the women involved want any follow-up research—it would be pointless and distressing—but there is a need to conduct a statistical analysis of the data. The issue raises questions about the nature of conduct in medical research, to which—obviously—the Health Select Committee has made reference. I am sure that it is concerned.

In February 1991, the Royal College of Physicians published a very helpful document called "Fraud and Misconduct in Medical Research". It defined scientific misconduct at paragraph 2.7 as including—I stress the word "including"—piracy, plagiarism and fraud. The fact that the word "including" was used suggests that the definition was not intended to be restricted to those factors.

The report continued, at paragraph 4.5, to say:

> "all institutions and responsible bodies must insist that raw data are kept available for inspection for 10 years".

That prompts the question: inspection by whom?

The United States Commission on Research Integrity has laid down the following criteria for breaches of research integrity: a misappropriation of data, misrepresentation of research findings, interference with results, and acts that compromise the integrity of the research process.

It seems that the medical research establishment faces a clear choice. There is either resolution of the matters to which I have referred or there is eventual regulation. Although I am sure that the establishment does not really want the latter, such an issue cannot remain unresolved. While it is unresolved, it represents an obstacle not only to good medical research on cancer, but to broader issues of health research and scientific discovery.

We are all, of course, conscious that large amounts of public money fund such research, so while it stays on the record, it is a stain on the character or reputation of an organisation. Frankly, I have been astonished by the number of health professionals who have said to me, "Oh, yes. We all know that that research cannot stand." Yet while that research is forming the body of scientific research and it is not retracted, that stain remains. Indeed, it calls into question the way in which people behave when they conduct scientific research.

I call on the Institute of Cancer Research to release the data. It has to be said that *The Lancet*, in which the study was published, has not published a retraction, although it would be right to add that the new editor is doing his best to draw together the interested parties in order to resolve the matter. It is important that the editor of *The Lancet* is

[Ms Jean Corston]

able to make progress, so that a retraction can eventually be printed, subsequent to—I hope—independent statistical analysis.

Last night, at St. James's palace, the Prince of Wales held a reception in honour of the Bristol cancer help centre. He made reference to the research, and regretted the negative effect that it had had on the centre. Naturally, if such research stands on the record, charitable foundations and others will find it difficult to make donations, given that it could be said that they were spending money on an institution that has damaged people's health. It is perfectly obvious that that is not case. The Prince of Wales praised the centre's holistic approach and the way in which it focuses on the whole person rather than the illness, the cancer.

I am pleased to say that the centre, which was facing closure this month, has succeeded in raising £267,000 to enable it to continue for some more time. It is very keen to preserve the principle that the care, advice and treatment it gives should be free, and it does not deserve to live under such a cloud. I hope that it will be possible for the matter to be resolved, because it will not go away. I know that other hon. Members, whose support I have appreciated over recent months, share my concern and want to assist me in ensuring that the public money put into that research was not wasted, and that the facts emerge from some statistical analysis.

I should like to turn specifically to a couple of items in the Select Committee report. Its first conclusion states:

> "It is clear that the aetiology of breast cancer is not yet sufficiently well understood to enable any systematic attempt to reduce mortality by primary prevention to be pursued".

Although that conclusion says "any systematic attempt", other factors of scientific literature ought to form part of our understanding; it would not be right to say that nothing that can be done.

In considering just a few instances of scientific research, one finds that it is pretty certain that, if one eats animal fat, one has a 30 per cent. higher chance of getting breast cancer. If one smokes, one has more chance of getting breast cancer—and any cancer. If one is a vegetarian, one is 40 per cent. less likely to die of cancer of any sort. I understand that that research comes from Dr. Margaret Thorogood.

I must declare an interest, because I have not eaten meat for 10 years. I do, however, eat fish. I do not want to advance any argument about vegetarianism. I am aware that there is other relevant research. For example, the King's college study tells us that the incidence of breast cancer is four times higher in people who are under stress.

Only this week, on 9 December, the *British Medical Journal* contains an article about a research paper on breast cancer. It states:

> "Key messages: life events have an important influence on physical health; women with breast cancer have more severe life events in the five years before diagnosis; the way a woman deals with stress may also affect the risk of breast cancer".

I understand that there was a United States-funded study of 50,000 Chinese subjects who were given vitamins A, C and E and selenium. They had a relatively low vegetable intake, but their cancer death rate declined by 13 per cent. after five years of that treatment. The United States Government have issued guidelines on diet and cancer since 1983.

Furthermore, the Cancer Research Campaign has conducted what could be described as an epic trial. The preliminary results are based on considering cancer in relation to dietary habits throughout Europe. They reveal pronounced variations. There is a far lower rate of cancer in Greece, where people eat a great number of vegetables. Holland and the United Kingdom came out worst. Our respective diets contain more dairy products, such as cheese, cream and yoghurt.

The Women's Environmental Network conducted research into pesticides and insecticides, specifically organochlorines. It found that, in countries where Lindane had been banned, the incidence of breast cancer in the youngest group had declined by about 24 per cent. I know that there are concerns about the reliance that can be put on that sort of research, but it is part of the scientific body of opinion.

There is also the research by Peto and Doll of 1975 and 1992, which found that diet is the greatest environmental factor. It has a contribution rate of 35 per cent., whereas smoking has one of 30 per cent. It cannot be said that research findings are not sufficiently understood to enable any attempt to be made to make improvements. We have quite good statistics.

It is important to consider, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have, the disparity between the incidence of breast cancer and mortality rates. For example, the incidence is higher in the United States, but mortality rates are lower than elsewhere.

It is important also to consider the findings of Dr. Stephen Greer, which might be dismissed by some. He classifies personality types, and goes on to consider how classification may influence survival. I know from medical professionals in my family that there is much interest in the profession about Dr. Greer's findings. He categorises people according to personality. Of those with what he describes as fighting spirit, 80 per cent. were alive after 13 years. Of those described as helpless and hopeless, only 20 per cent. were alive after that period. He describes those in between the two categories as demonstrating denial or stoic acceptance.

Those who come within the higher mortality rate tend to be more passive and compliant patients. Indeed, the word "patient" imports something about compliance and passivity. It suggests that the person is one to whom other people do things, rather than someone who is an equal partner in treatment, cure and survival.

The message is often given that people can do nothing to help themselves. Institutions such as the Bristol cancer help centre are vital in the way in which they encourage people to develop a fighting spirit and a belief that they can be part of their own cure.

Last night, I met people at St. James's palace who had been told 16 years ago that they had three months to live. I met a man who had had two thirds of his liver removed. He was told that there was cancer in the remaining third and that there was no hope for him. He is still alive nine years later.

The message is that people can live with cancer. A cancer patient should be seen as part of the healing process. The work of complementary practitioners, such as those at the Bristol centre, can be extremely valuable as an adjunct to the conventional treatment that is provided by the national health service. Their work is no threat to conventional medicine.

There is evidence that people want complementary treatment. More and more general practitioners want training in it. I hope that purchasing institutions will take note. It is important to take things in the round. We know that people say that they do not want to be a nuisance to their doctor. They fear that, if they are assertive, they may not be treated well in future. I feel that a different attitude is required of some doctors.

Where it is the only route, the Bristol centre helps people to prepare to die. That is important. So often, people are sent home to die and told that they have three months and they must get on with it. On one occasion only, I came across a friend who had something to do with the Bristol centre. That was in the 1980s. She was dying with cervical cancer. She had had four cervical smears, and had been told that she was clear. It was suggested that she was hysterical. It turned out that she was right. By the time her rightness was acknowledged, it was too late.

My friend went to the Bristol centre when she was clearly dying. No one could have saved her life. Those at the centre gave her control over the last few months of her life. They made it into a remarkable period.

Obviously, research is important. Everything to which hon. Members have referred in the debate is important. I wish to be specifically identified with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. It must be recognised, however, that a patient is not merely someone to whom things are done. A patient should be part of the treatment, cure and survival.

6.15 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The debate has been widely welcomed, and I join that welcome. It demonstrates the benefit of the Select Committee system, which we have had for some years. A Select Committee may decide to examine a matter of major public interest. It will do its job properly, and update itself. It will report to the House and then ensure that the issue becomes part of the wider agenda. I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, to all members of that Committee and to all those who have contributed to the debate. This is not a party political subject.

I speak as a lay person. As a man, I come to a debate about an issue that principally concerns and involves women. I have learnt from reading the Select Committee's report and the minutes of some of the evidence. I have listened to colleagues, and I have checked some of the facts. I am aware of the severity and importance of the issue.

As the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) said, we should draw ourselves up and remind ourselves of the lethal nature of cancer in general, and of breast cancer in particular. We should make ourselves aware of the number of people in this country, irrespective of the relative figures, who continue to die of the disease when compared with those who die from other diseases that are more often talked about.

Like the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and other parliamentary colleagues, I have both parliamentary and personal experiences of those who have become ill with breast cancer. Some have come to my surgeries over the years. They have told me about insensitive responses. I endorse the claim that these stories have featured only doctors, never nurses.

It has been clear to me throughout that, specifically and psychologically, breast cancer is one of the intrinsically important areas of concern when dealing with women's health. If it is not treated properly, irrespective of whether, at the end, the condition is curable, it is something that undermines a woman's sense of her integrity, self-respect and self-worth. The disease goes to the heart of those people's being. Breast cancer is hugely important. It is not something that is peripheral to the health service; it is not something that matters only physically. It matters much more than that. Men know that, as well as women.

Most of us have known, many of us from personal experience, of people who have died unnecessarily in the sense that there was not sufficiently early diagnosis. It is not a secret that, a couple of years ago, I lost a brother. He died of malaria. He died because the condition was not diagnosed quickly enough. In days, he went from being ill with what was thought to be flu or a cold to dying from malaria.

For many women, that is the story with breast cancer. One fact that emerged clearly from the evidence to the Select Committee inquiry was that, despite our best efforts, the continuing failure by many women to present themselves, and the consequent failure to have proper treatment at an early stage, is one of the causes of the high mortality rate thereafter.

The first message that the House has heard—I hope that it is going out clearly from the Chamber tonight—is that there is every need for women to make sure that they present themselves for screening. The screening programme is hugely important, and as yet it has not reached everybody who needs it. Given the high proportion of older women who suffer from breast cancer, we must remember that presentation for screening will become increasingly important as the number of older women increases with the longer lives that, happily, people in general will lead.

So first let us encourage people to come in. I say that as somebody who, probably like many Members of Parliament, is very sceptical as a patient in the health service. I am not naturally someone who goes running to the doctor. I tend to assume that there is not a problem, and that things will get better.

Many other people do the same, and we must persuade ourselves and others how important it is not to take risks. After all, we are talking about health care that is preventive, not only in terms of one's own illness and of the consequences to one's family, but even, as the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) rightly said, in terms of the cost to the nation. Early diagnosis and treatment can be a way of saving lives—and money.

As hon. Members will know, I have the privilege of being the Member of Parliament for Guy's hospital. One of the people who gave evidence to the Select Committee was Dr. Michael Richards, who spoke both as a consultant at Guy's and as a representative of the wider community of cancer consultants.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Guy's is one of the leading centres for treating breast cancer and doing research into it, and one thing that emerged clearly from Dr. Richards' evidence was that we still have not organised ourselves as well as we could to maximise the efficiency of that work. The hon. Member for Broxbourne and other hon. Members have pointed out that the diversity of places and units in which treatment is carried out, and the small number of cases that many doctors treat per year, militate against best practice.

It is a fairly trite point, but if a doctor sees only one or two patients a year, he or she is far less likely to be competent or expert at giving the best diagnosis, results, advice, treatment and so on. It is important that, although of course there must be neighbourhood access, there should be consolidation of the best practice into the size and sort of unit that the Select Committee, and the expert evidence it took, recommended.

Thirdly, there appears to be clear evidence that we are not training enough people to deal with breast cancer as consultants and nurses. I do not know whether the figures that I have are still accurate, but I understand that, for example, there are only about one tenth as many consultants dealing with breast cancer in this country as there are in France. There is a real dearth of experts.

Likewise, one of the recommendations shows that there is a clear shortage of funds for training nurses and others who have the responsibility of care. That is completely unjustifiable. If cancer is identified in 5,000 new cases a week in this country, that means that as many cancer cases are diagnosed each fortnight as there have been AIDS cases diagnosed in the past 10 years. I say that not in any antagonistic way, but simply to show the scale of the problem that we are discussing. We must react to that by having enough experts—consultants and nurses—available throughout the country, region by region, easily accessible and able to respond to the need.

That leads me to my fourth and most important point. It is clear that with breast cancer, research financed by independent research institutions has been enormously valuable. Such institutions pay for much of the work done in the NHS. People such as Dr. Richards are funded entirely by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. Many consultant posts, and even whole units, are funded by private charitable money.

Yet we are still miles short of the money that we need to carry out the research programme satisfactorily to a conclusion. In a paper on clinical research produced only about a year ago, Walter Bodmer wrote:

> "Taking eight hundred million pounds as the total spent on medical research as a whole, and assuming, say, only a quarter of this is really clinical research, gives two hundred million pounds as the total spent on clinical research. The extra NHS costs connected with adequate provision for that clinical research would therefore be one hundred million pounds."

Much more recently, after one of the reports that came out this year, the Kenneth Calman report, the Government's response was that there would be no additional new money for the research and treatment services for which the need is clearly identifiable.

The recommendation made by the chief medical officer in April, only eight months ago, was that £200 million was needed to fund changes that would save 15,000 lives a year, by establishing the regional specialist centres that we have talked about. However, the Department of Health says that those costs must be met from existing resources.

I say to the Minister, although again not antagonistically, that I have no doubt that the British public out there would say that we must find that money. It is not acceptable for such areas of work in the health service to be held back, when there is no dispute about what needs to be done. It is clear that we must go on putting in the money to encourage more people to be screened, so that more people can be diagnosed early, and so that more research can be done and more people trained to treat the patients.

That is money that the nation must find. If there is a choice between, to put it crudely, tax cuts or more money to reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer, I am sure that the nation would vote for the money to be spent on cancer treatment rather than on tax cuts.

Although of course the debate has rightly centred on breast cancer—long may it continue to do so—the lessons apply equally to other cancers. The report, and all the other abundant evidence, makes that clear. Perhaps men are worse than women in terms of their willingness to present themselves for screening and the like. But it is most important that we develop screening programmes for other cancers both for women and for men, in all age groups, and that we encourage people to educate themselves about their health and to identify, or to give the experts the opportunity to identify, disease at an early stage.

We must remember that we have a long way to go before we have a system in place to enable us not only to deal with the diseases once they are identified but to ensure that people present themselves early enough for diagnosis and treatment to take place early enough to prevent death. The figures show that, once diagnosed, about half the cases can be treated in such a way that death is prevented.

That being so, we are only at the beginning of the road. I hope that we shall respond rapidly to the excellent work of the Select Committee, and to all the other supportive work that makes it clear that we as a country could take much more effective action on breast cancer, if only we had the mind and the resources to do so.

6.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam) *rose—*

Rev. Martin Smyth *rose—*

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Mr. Horam: I hope that it will be for the convenience of the House if I intervene at this point. I apologise to the two hon. Gentlemen who want to speak, and I shall try to ensure that there is time for them to come back after I have spoken. But if I do not speak now there is a danger that I might be squeezed out of the debate, which would not be in the interests of the House.

Mr. Corbyn: That is not our intention.

Mr. Horam: Nevertheless, I ought to get in to the debate now; otherwise there may be a risk. I believe that we have to finish at 7.4 pm promptly.

First, I am delighted that there is a health subject for debate today. Secondly, I am particularly glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has been able to secure the subject of breast cancer for the debate, as it is a matter of great concern to us all because of the incidence of the condition in the UK. I also congratulate the Select Committee on Health on its report on the subject, which has been widely welcomed by Members on both sides of the House.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne on her report. My hon. Friend has been a particularly vigorous and effective Chairman of the Select Committee since she took on that responsibility. She has a number of successes to her credit, of which this report is one. I think we all agree that it is an excellent report. It is also fair to say that there is extensive all-party parliamentary interest in this matter.

The Health Committee has considered ways in which the quality and availability of breast cancer services in the UK might be improved, concentrating particularly on the progress made by the breast screening programme in reducing breast cancer mortality, the role of clinical trials in evaluating treatments and ways in which more women might be recruited into trials and the benefits of specialised breast units in the provision of high-quality breast cancer care.

The all-party breast group has explored issues around rising incidence, mortality, treatment and research, and called for a national strategy for breast cancer. The group has done much, in my view, to make its presence felt and has lobbied on behalf of the thousands of women who contract this terrible condition each year.

I am pleased that hon. Members on both sides of the House share our concerns about the high level of breast cancer incidence and mortality. Hon. Members have already told us this afternoon of the statistics, but they are worth repeating because they are truly dreadful. Breast cancer is increasing internationally, with registration data for England and Wales showing that age-standardised incidence rose by 22 per cent. between 1979 and the latest available figures. We know that there are even greater increases in other comparable countries. In England and Wales, breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in women. Each year, some 27,000 new breast cancer cases are registered and some 13,000 women die from it.

No Government could underestimate the seriousness of a condition which affects so many women, or results in so many deaths each year. We do not know why breast cancer is increasing internationally, but some suggestions have been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) suggested that an aging population was one possibility, and obesity is another possible factor. The rate of incidence is higher in developed countries—particularly western developed countries—than in less developed countries.

These are all suggestions, but—as has been stated in the debate—there is little evidence to suggest that there are clear links between the various factors involved in this dreadful disease. I emphasise to the House that, while these are the facts, we must take account of the evidence of increasing mortality. We have to take breast cancer very seriously, and we do. That is why in 1987 we announced the setting up of a breast cancer screening programme throughout the UK—the first of its kind in the European Union and one of the first in the world.

All women aged from 50 to 64 are invited for a three-yearly mammogram, with women aged 65 or over being screened on request. Some £55 million has been allocated to establish the programme in England, with £70 million being spent on the programme for the whole UK. Funding for running the services has now been built into health authorities' allocations at an estimated cost of £27 million a year.

The screening programme is a success, and I am pleased that the Committee accorded it such praise. I am sure that the whole House will join me in congratulating those who work on the programme. A number of hon. Members made that point, and I would like to underline that. The breast screening programme is now screening some 4.5 million women and has detected more than 26,000 cancers, many at an early stage when treatment is more successful.

Fewer women are being recalled unnecessarily, and every precaution is taken to minimise women's anxiety about the test and about recall for further assessment. A number of hon. Members—including my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) and for Colchester, South and Maldon, and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker)—made this point. It is a very serious matter and while the situation is getting better, there is clearly further to go and I want to see progress being made.

I come now to quality assurance questions. We built quality assurance standards into the programme from the start, and we will continue to monitor achievement against these standards. I appreciate, though I do not accept, the Committee's concern that devolving of purchasing of quality assurance to health authorities could lead to a pursuit of cheaper options than the gold standard set nationally. We believe strongly that the independence and effectiveness of the quality assurance programmes will continue to be guaranteed by the regional directors of public health, who have been charged with ensuring that quality assurance continues, and by the national NHS screening co-ordination team.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne asked me for a particular assurance in her speech. She said that there was a danger that the QAP would become simply a means for purchasers to check on provider units, and she asked whether it would continue to ensure that the service which is purchased meets the national standard. I am glad to say to my hon. Friend that the answer to that is yes. The regional directors of public health have been charged with the task of ensuring that quality assurance is purchased to the standard set nationally, and that the service continues to the current high standards. I give her an unequivocal assurance on that point.

The breast screening programme has been based on firm evidence, and one of its strengths is that it is constantly reviewed to ensure that standards are kept up to date. That is why we introduced last August the taking of two views of each breast for all women attending their first screening appointment. We have also announced proposals for the setting up of pilot projects to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the screening programme to women up to the age of 69. That is a particular point of concern which I fully accept, given the mortality rates among women in that age group. I am glad to say that we are making progress in that area. A number of hon. Members made that point, and I can reassure them that—as far as I am concerned—the matter will be a high priority.

We are funding further research into the effectiveness of screening women from the age of 40 and screening more frequently and exploring the management of screen-

[Mr. Horam]

detected ductal carcinoma in situ. That is going on, although I think that the priority is women up to the age of 69.

A mark of our commitment to cut breast cancer deaths is shown by the fact that we have made this a target in our "The Health of the Nation" initiative. Our goal, as has been said during the debate, is to cut the number of deaths among women invited for screening by 25 per cent. by the end of this decade. That should mean a saving of at least 1,250 lives each year in England alone.

I wish to say something at this point on the question of the regional variations in the figures, a subject mentioned by the hon. Members for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). The hon. Member for Fife, Central made a point about access to screening, but I think he used the wrong word. In looking at the regional and district variations, he should have said take-up instead of access.

There are clear differences in the extent to which screening is taken up in different areas, and it is true that take-up is much lower in inner-city areas and poorer districts. Therefore, health authorities have undertaken specific initiatives and have set local targets to add to the national targets to deal precisely with this matter. There is a difference in the take-up rate, not the access rate. Access is the same everywhere, and everyone gets the same treatment. This difference will be tackled by local initiatives, research into which will be funded by the Department. We are tackling the problem of different levels of take-up in different areas.

A separate point was made by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Fife, Central and by the hon. Member for Doncaster, North about mortality rates and whether we were on target. The only sensible, tested mortality rates are for 1993. We started the programme only in 1992 so it is absurd to say one year into a programme that is meant to last the eight years until the year 2000 that we are some way off target. We clearly are not off target. We believe that we are absolutely on target.

Mr. McLeish: The subject of our exercise was to look at the base year that the Government selected—1990—take it through to the most recent year—1993—and project the annual current rate forward to 2000. I suspect that, in many respects, that was not the most scientific of exercises, but it extrapolated the trends and showed that up to 60 of the district health authorities did not meet the target. The Minister rightly criticises our figures, but can he provide for me either in a letter or now some analysis carried out by the Government to find out whether the DHAs are on target, even though they are using a national target in local areas?

Mr. Horam: I will look into the additional point made by the hon. Gentleman, but it is our firm view that we are on target.

Of course, we would like to be able to prevent breast cancer occurring at all, but so far, despite enormous levels of research both here and abroad, we do not know how to do so. The trial currently under way in the NHS to evaluate the effectiveness of tamoxifen in preventing breast cancer in women at particularly high risk may help. However, we must be cautious. The beneficial effects of tamoxifen must be weighed carefully against its side effects. It may be years before we know whether it is a real option for preventing breast cancer.

Substantial work is also in hand to identify the gene defects which cause breast cancer in a minority of women, but that work will not stop the problem. Even if we reach the point at which we can identify that a woman is likely to develop cancer because of her genetic make-up, we do not know, despite research, what we can do to stop the cancer developing. Even the most radical option—surgical removal of the breast—does not offer a concrete guarantee, as there is still a remote possibility that the disease could spread before preventive surgery is performed. That is why the Government have put so much research into establishing a national population-based screening programme. Experts agree that early detection is of enormous value in combating breast cancer and improves the chances of effective treatment.

Even recently reported critics of the programme have acknowledged that at present screening remains the best option for women and agreed that the programme should continue. However, screening is only part of the story. All women with breast cancer should have access to good advice, treatment and care, wherever they live. We know that at present there is variety in provision for breast cancer around the country and that some patients seem to have better treatment outcomes than others. The choice of treatment required in individual cases will vary depending on a number of factors, including the stage and site of the cancer and the general health of the woman. Studies of adjuvant therapy indicate that a combination of treatment options—surgery, chemotherapy, adjuvant endocrine therapy—is highly effective, but circumstances differ in individual cases. Clinicians should choose a treatment regime best suited to the individual, after discussion with the patient.

There is increasing evidence that women treated by surgeons and teams with a degree of specialisation in breast cancer have better outcomes. That point has been made in the debate. Concerns about the evidence of variations in cancer treatment options and outcomes led the chief medical officers of England and Wales to ask their expert advisory group on cancer to review how cancer services, including breast cancer, were delivered and to make recommendations for improvement. Following wide consultation, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for Wales unveiled on 24 April 1995, a new strategic framework for the future development of cancer services.

The report recommends a network of specialised care with cancer services organised at three levels. Primary care is seen as the focus of care, with GPs better informed about the availability of diagnostic and treatment services to allow them to make appropriate referrals and to be informed promptly about the outcomes of tests and of any treatment.

Cancer units will be created in many local hospitals of a sufficient size to support a multi-disciplinary team with the expertise and facilities to treat the more common cancers. A lead clinician will co-ordinate cancer services and develop treatment protocols between primary care, cancer units and cancer centres to ensure a network of care of a high standard. Cancer centres situated in larger hospitals will treat the less common cancers and support cancer units by providing services, including radiotherapy, not available in smaller hospitals.

The NHS has already taken forward a great deal of work, making good progress towards the implementation of this new strategic framework. Key elements in this are, first, regional mapping of current patterns of provision of cancer services, work to designate cancer units and cancer centres, discussion to develop explicit contracts between purchaser and provider for the provision of cancer services and plans for improving the availability and quality of data.

Simultaneously, in order to support work being taken forward regionally, the NHS executive has commissioned work to prepare evidence-based guidance in a rolling programme of work starting with the more common cancers to help purchasers and providers identify cancer units and cancer centres. Recommendations will be made on the characteristics which are necessary if a centre or unit is to be effective. They will cover the specialisation required, compatible with a high quality of service; where appropriate, guidance on the clinical management of cancers; and ways of measuring the quality of care delivered, including measures of outcome. Guidance on breast cancer will be the first product of this programme of work and will be delivered in spring 1996—not too far off.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne said that we did not want consultants to hang out a notice, as she put it rather graphically, saying, "Specialist Breast Unit", even though the unit had no special expertise. I hope to assure her that the programme that I have just outlined is designed to deal with precisely that point. It should succeed in doing so. I remind the hon. Member for Fife, Central that part of the programme will examine the evolving national picture. That will answer some of his concerns.

Concern has been expressed about research funding. I agree that we will secure reductions in deaths only if our services are built on the basis of sound scientific knowledge. In Britain we have a record of excellence in research in this area. Ours may not be the largest programme in the world, but the work is of a very high quality, and we can be justly proud of it. Moreover, it is a research programme which is well supported by many interests. The medical research charities play a significant role in the national endeavour to combat cancer, based on generous donations from the community. The contribution by drug companies is also very high. Of course, the Government are also a major player, in collaboration with those other bodies. Collaboration in research extends right across the European Union.

The Medical Research Council funds important research on cancer generally, and breast cancer in particular, including work on diet and on breast tumour imaging. It is also a key player in research to evaluate the breast screening programme, which hon. Members have rightly discussed at some length. Total spending on breast cancer research was £14.2 million in 1994-95. Total spending on cancer research as a whole is now approximately £250 million. We must remind ourselves that there are no fewer than 200 forms of cancer, so there is a great deal for the money to cover. In addition, clinical research is supported by NHS research programmes and NHS excess service costs attributed to cancer research. The value of this additional expenditure is significant and will become increasingly apparent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne suggested that we might use the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research to channel funding from the Department and the Medical Research Council. The danger is that we would lose flexibility. Improvements in research do not flow in an even stream. We cannot predict exactly what the volatility will be between one year and the next so some flexibility is essential in the research programme. We cannot meet my hon. Friend on that point.

My hon. Friend was also worried about indemnity for clinical trials, which remains a problem, and asked me to say how far we had gone in the review. We are making satisfactory progress. I hope that we shall be able to report at least some initial findings early in the new year. We are therefore dealing with that matter.

In conclusion, as I am anxious to allow the two hon. Members time to contribute to the debate, we are working on the progress already made to ensure that we can further reduce mortality from this serious condition. As has been said, the effect of screening on mortality will take some time to work through, but we estimate that 1,250 lives will be saved each year by the year 2000 and I emphasise that we are making good progress towards that end.

Moreover, in response to recent research findings, we have announced a package of quality initiatives further to strengthen the screening programme, some of which I mentioned today. Finally, in response to emerging evidence of variations in cancer treatment options and outcomes—a concern expressed both by Conservative and by Opposition Members—we have launched a new strategic framework for the organisation of cancer services, which it is predicted can increase long-term survival. Although full implementation is likely to take some years for what is a very ambitious programme, I am confident that significant improvements will be made soon.

6.50 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall be brief to allow the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) the chance to speak during the last 14 minutes of the debate. I was sorry that I could not speak before the Minister, as I wanted him to answer some questions, but he can no doubt write to me or intervene.

Like many other hon. Members, I welcome this debate and the report that has gone with it. The House should bear in mind the detailed work that the Select Committee on Health has done on the subject and the huge amount of evidence that it has taken from a wide range of organisations, which must add to the strength of that report.

We must also welcome the fact that this is the third time this year that the House has debated breast cancer. There have been two Adjournment debates—I initiated one and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) the other—and now this debate on the estimates and the Select Committee report. The fact that there have been three debates in a year seems to show growing understanding among many people that there has been a large increase in breast cancer and that its treatment here has a low success rate compared to that in some other countries. We must consider that treatment seriously, but we must also consider the causes of breast cancer. I draw the attention of the House to the powerful speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston). She mentioned the contributions made by diet, stress factors and living conditions.

I was also impressed by the point made by the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), among others, on the way in which

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

nurses and doctors treat people. It is certainly my experience that anyone who goes into hospital for almost anything generally has high praise for the nursing auxiliaries and administrative staff, but criticisms of the way in which the medical staff treat them.

Often the medical staff are incredibly highly pressed, and they tend to leave the talking and caring role to others. Frankly, that is not good enough. Highly experienced medical staff, such as doctors, specialists and consultants, should spend more time with the patients if they can and should be straighter about what is wrong with them. They should also understand the degree of shock that a woman suffers when they tell her that all the investigations unfortunately show that there is a serious problem and that breast cancer is present. They should talk the thing through. It is an amazing shock, and although men obviously do not experience breast cancer, they have experience of other forms of cancer. Perhaps the Department could do something about attitudes and training. The Minister might like to reflect on that issue and think of doing some work or having discussions with medical colleges on that aspect of training.

I must make a brief point, but an important one. In my Adjournment debate on 22 November on breast cancer and its victims, I relied extensively on information supplied by Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure, which gave evidence to the Select Committee on compensation for victims of treatment. In some cases, we are talking of women who were treated with radiotherapy many years ago. It may well have cured the cancer, but the side effects and long-term effects have been almost as serious as what was there in the first place—the loss of the use of some limbs, permanent disability and a high level of constant pain, which is something that no one should have to live with all the time. Many of those women have suffered grievously and are still suffering. It is a humbling experience to talk to them about the ways in which their lives have been affected. In some cases, the problems occurred because of accidents, in others as a result of misdiagnosis, and some were caused because, at the time the radiotherapy treatment was given, those who gave it were unaware of its power, or of the importance of targeting the radiotherapy at the cancer cells with absolute accuracy because of the danger of wide-scale tissue damage to the surrounding area.

As part of their campaign for recognition and compensation, the women have been asking for a system of no-fault compensation. The Department has constantly replied that, although it understands their concern, it is not persuaded of the case. It has said that the women should take their cases to court individually. As has been pointed out in the debates, that is not a runner. Either one has to be very rich to afford to undertake a High Court action that can easily cost £200,000, particularly if it is not successful, or one has to be so poor and have such a strong case that one can get it all done on legal aid. Also, it is not a runner because the fault of an individual or organisation must be proved. That is the great failing because many of the people who gave the treatment could justifiably say that there had been a genuine accident on their part and could claim ignorance of the consequences of the treatment.

I have two brief questions for the Minister. First, when the then Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), replied to the debate on 22 November, he mentioned the examination and report that the Royal College of Radiologists was to undertake shortly. Many people were concerned that the college was undertaking the research and thought that there should have been an independent inquiry—perhaps semi-judicial—into the problem of compensation for victims of radiotherapy. He said that he would rather await the college's report. As it is now out, I would be grateful for the Minister's response.

Secondly, on accountability, the then Under-Secretary of State said:

> "Our legal system holds all individuals accountable for their actions, which arguably has a deterrent effect on malpractice. No-fault compensation could remove or weaken it."

That might well be so, but it does not answer my earlier point about changed systems, technologies and knowledge. In response to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), he went on to say:

> "Although I have outlined some of the reasons why no-fault compensation has been thought inappropriate, we have recently accepted that a system should be tried for mediation in such cases. The Minister of State recently agreed to set up pilot mediation schemes that may make it easier to reach agreement. We have no wish gratuitously to defend certain cases or to cause any unnecessary delays."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 639-40.]

I would be grateful to hear what progress has been made and whether the Minister is prepared to reconsider the whole question of a no-fault compensation system to deal with the problems that those women have suffered or are still suffering and that have caused them to incur enormous and horrendous expense merely because they are the victims of problems caused by radiation treatment given when they were dangerously ill with cancer. Obviously, they are grateful to be alive, but they should be able to live decently, and that requires them to be compensated for the injuries that they have suffered.

6.58 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the fact that I have a few minutes to comment and recognise that the response from the Department of Health included Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I was happy to be a member of the Select Committee on Health which considered the problem. Interestingly enough, since the report was commissioned and the Government response issued, I have received one of the largest mailbags I have ever had. People have been writing to urge us to ensure that the Government implement the recommendations. The Government generally welcomed the report, with one or two qualifications, which I would ask them to reconsider. They can do something positive.

I regret the fact that I was not present for the central part of the debate—I was speaking to a professor from one of the medical schools in Belfast. I discovered to my amazement when I entered the Chamber that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was talking about research in the Department and the fact that the Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services has not been appointing a director for research and development. There is supposed to be a fixed percentage of the budget for that. This year, no clinical research awards at all have been made in Northern Ireland. I ask the Government to reconsider the use of the funds that are available to develop that aspect.

I pay tribute to the work of Action Cancer, which has pioneered going out into the workplace and the rural community with a mobile van so that people can have mammograms taken in their communities without having to travel to Belfast. When we recently met the Minister responsible, he assured us that the claim that Action Cancer would have to foot the bill for that work—it provides coaches, and so on—was false. I have discovered from the tissue typing pool in the city under the new trust scheme that it has to be paid by Action Cancer. The Minister assured us that that was false. I ask the Minister to press the Department, and perhaps particularly the Eastern health and social services board, to pay the bills for which it is responsible. It is an abomination to expect a charity to start doing that work over and above the other work that it is doing.

I sympathise with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) who again raised the issue of RAGE, Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure, and put it on record that the arguments for specialist breast centres stem from that. It is obvious that some people who were not expert in the field gave wrong advice and, as a result, some patients live in perpetual pain and suffer from paralysis and disability. The argument is clear that specialist breast centres are needed throughout the nation. It is not only national centres of excellence for breast screening that are needed; we also need national centres for breast treatment.

I draw attention to Professor's Blamey's response. As a world specialist in the field, he recommended in December that there should be movement. He stated:

> "Our argument is that a very good service was introduced for breast screening, precisely the same service is required for women presenting with symptomatic breast disease. Why not emulate this successful model?"

Why not let the nation take the lead?

My final point is simple. The anxiety that is sometimes created as a result of the pressures that affect this nation adds to the rate of cancers. There is a link there.

Mrs. Roe: With the leave of the House, I shall quickly sum up. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his remarks and assurances and express my deep gratitude to all the hon. Members who have participated in this important debate on a vital subject.

In conclusion, I make one important point. There has been a great deal of interest in breast cancer recently, and rightly so. It is a dreadful disease—the third largest cause of death for women in this country. However, I would not like the Committee's recommendations to be seen as relating exclusively to breast canner. I believe that, building on the success of breast screening, a national network of specialist breast units can be established with a national co-ordinator and a quality assurance programme integrated with that of the national health service breast screening programme. I also sincerely hope that that will lead the way for networks of site-specific units for other common cancers.

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraphs (4) and (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).

Class XVI, Vote 1

Financial Services Regulation

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a sum not exceeding £30,079,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by Her Majesty's Treasury on economic, financial and related administration, including debt management; payments to certain parliamentary bodies; and certain other services including expenses in connection with Honours and Dignities and a grant in aid to the Private Finance Panel Executive.—[*Mrs. Angela Knight.*]

[Relevant documents: The Fourth Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1993-94 on Retail Financial Services Regulation: An Interim Report (House of Commons Paper No. 236), the Second Report from the Committee of Session 1994-95 on Financial Services Regulation: The Building Society Sector (House of Commons Paper No. 26), the Second Special Report from the Committee, containing the Government's Reply thereto (House of Commons Paper No. 283), the Fifth Report from the Committee of Session 1994-95 on Financial Services Regulation: Self-Regulation at Lloyd's of London (House of Commons Paper No. 187), the Fifth Special Report from the Committee containing the Government's Reply thereto (House of Commons Paper No. 745), the Sixth Report from the Committee of Session 1994-95 on The Regulation of Financial Services in the UK (House of Commons Paper No. 332), the First Special Report from the Treasury Committee of Session 1995-96, containing the Government's Reply thereto (House of Commons Paper No. 98), and the Departmental Report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Smaller Departments: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98 (Cm 2817).]

7.3 pm

Sir Thomas Arnold (Hazel Grove): The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee is most grateful for the opportunity to debate the regulation of financial services in the United Kingdom. It goes almost without saying that the growth of financial services in our country in recent years has assumed an importance that none of us could have foreseen. The reputation of the City of London—indeed, the reputation of our country—is inextricably bound up with that growth and it is an area of life and an activity about which we can truly say that the eyes of the world are upon us. It is for that reason that the Committee has been especially concerned during a long-running inquiry to consider the issues of transparency and accountability. I shall make some further reference to those principles in my remarks.

I thank my colleagues on the Committee for their patience and diligence during the two years in which we have been examining the issues. I thank our Clerks for the long hours that they have put in and the many witnesses who have appeared before the Committee. I also thank my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury for her response on behalf of the Government to our report, dated 12 December, which the Committee received just in time for this debate. I shall make further reference to that in a moment.

I want to give the House something of the flavour of the way in which the Committee carried out its work. We approached the subject in a remarkably non-partisan way

[Sir Thomas Arnold]

and, mostly, with open minds. We listened carefully to the evidence and for the most part reached our conclusions without votes. Clearly, there were some differences of opinion, as one would expect, but they were not generally major ones. The entire proceedings were remarkable for the degree of open-mindedness and fair-mindedness on the whole Committee.

It is for that reason that I should like to draw the attention of the House to what was arguably the one substantive vote, which took place when we came to debate, discuss and agree the final report. It involved a series of amendments moved by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). It raises some important issues that we should consider this evening and with which I propose to deal head on.

It is perfectly true that there are some differences in emphasis, style and tone between the Government and the Opposition on the regulation of financial services, but I do not believe that they should be exaggerated. There is not an unbridgeable gulf across the Floor of the House on the matter. A degree of consensus is apparent, which is to be welcomed in the national interest. For the reasons that I gave at the start of my speech it can only be in the public interest that the Government and Opposition for the most part find themselves in broad agreement on how to tackle some difficult problems and respond to new opportunities and challenges.

The amendments moved by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire went further in the direction of proposing that we should replace the present arrangements with a structure that would more closely resemble the American Securities and Exchange Commission. That led to a vote in the Committee. The key sentence in his amendments is to be found in our report on page xliii in amendment 93B, which states:

> "The Committee recommends that the ultimate objective should be for the SROs to be folded into SIB to become serving departments."

In the event, the amendment was lost because I exercised a casting vote with the Noes.

The report shows, however, the progress of the argument and the difference between Conservative and Opposition members of the Committee. I do not believe that the difference is serious because, while structure in these matters may be important, what ultimately matters is the quality of regulation. We all agreed that we required good, well-trained and properly motivated and paid regulators and staffs, who would enjoy respect in their profession in the City of London and be regarded throughout the world as thoroughly professional men and women doing an important job. We concluded that the regulators in the new organisations have coped well with the immense changes that have swept across the financial markets and the City of London in recent years, although there have been some trying and testing moments and there will no doubt be more in the future.

The majority of the Committee did not feel that the time was right to go as far as the hon. Member for North Warwickshire proposed, but we understood perfectly what motivated him, the intellectual argument that he was putting and the manner in which his proposal was put.

In a fair-minded and positive response to the Select Committee report, the Government have left open for the future many aspects of this debate. At a time of rapid evolution, it is sensible to allow the changes being made to work their way through before deciding on the timing for the changes that the Committee proposes.

The Select Committee holds the firm view that, henceforth, ministerial responsibility for all aspects of financial regulation and supervision should be concentrated in the Treasury. That view has already provoked a certain amount of controversy. I draw the House's attention to paragraphs 118 and 119 of our report. Paragraph 119 says that we want to encourage

> "HM Treasury to adopt a more interventionist and active role in the co-ordination of financial services supervision and regulation."

Some commentators immediately fell on the word "interventionist" with an unwarranted zeal. The key word in that paragraph is not "interventionist" but "co-ordination". Evidence that the Committee took revealed that we require better co-ordination and one department of state to build up a core of expertise and understanding of the issues and personalities involved so that, when and where it is necessary to bring people together or, more trenchantly, knock heads together, that can be done with a full and proper understanding and awareness of exactly what is involved. As time went by, we were increasingly uneasy about the division of responsibilities between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry. We felt that the time had come to concentrate resources and activity in the Treasury so that a group of civil servants and their ministerial chief would have an even better grip on current events.

We attach considerable importance to that proposal. I was encouraged by the tone of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary's reply because, while she did not give our recommendation a full and firm yes, she certainly did not say no. She drew attention to the Treasury's memorandum of June 1995 to the Committee, which referred to the arguments in favour of such a transfer of responsibilities, and went on to say:

> "However, the recommendation raises wider issues which would need careful consideration before final decisions are taken."

If time permits this evening, she may care to tell the House exactly what some of those wider issues are.

The Committee felt that concentrating effort in the Treasury would bring about an improvement in what some quarters clearly regard as either a duplication of effort or an overlapping of functions. The co-ordination to which I referred could thus be better achieved.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite the valuable work that the Committee has done on this subject, members of the industry are still concerned—I am aware of that concern as deputy chairman of the all-party group on insurance and financial services—that regulation is too often targeted on bureaucratic form filling and not enough on catching criminals who prey on our constituents?

Sir Thomas Arnold: I shall have something to say about criminals later. I sympathise with what my hon. Friend says. It is important to note that Mr. Andrew Large, for example, of the Securities and Investments Board recently said that he would be in favour of moving, when and where possible, towards reducing bureaucracy and form filling, provided that greater transparency and disclosure by the firms with which he deals can be assured. He believes that a trade-off may prove possible. I welcome that and hope that he will explore the matter further.

I shall refer to just one or two specific matters in the report without trying to be exhaustive. I draw the House's attention to paragraphs 60 and 61. The Committee felt that the time had come to review the Financial Services Act 1986 not because we did not believe that the Act was flexible—clearly, it is—but because it may be deficient in some respects. Paragraph 60 says:

> "The problems faced by the regulatory system in dealing with products which do not fall clearly within the remit of one regulator come to the heart of difficulties rooted within the Act itself . . . The key exclusion from the Act is lending."

An example of that which probably struck the Committee more than any other was the fact that mortgage choice is not regulated under the Financial Services Act. The Committee took evidence in respect of a difficult problem with home income plans, which caused us a great deal of distress and anxiety. We certainly do not want to see that happen again. It was an unfortunate and, in some ways, deplorable affair, which caused us a great deal of upset. It is for those reasons, again based upon evidence, that we felt that the time had come to look again at the Financial Services Act, and to consider whether it is sufficient to deal with the rapidly changing market.

That theme is taken up again in paragraph 66 of our report, where we draw attention to the plethora of regulators in the United Kingdom. The evidence from Mr. Sharples of the Securities and Futures Authority was particularly impressive. He said of international regulatory conferences:

> "I have always been embarrassed because we sit round this table and there are two from France, there may be a couple from Germany, three from the United States and usually about ten from Britain: the Bank of England, the Treasury, the SIB, the SFA and so on."

That is why the Committee concluded:

> "The implication is that regulatory diversity in the UK means that it is unclear who the lead regulator is in a particular area or for a particular institution."

Such confusion occurs from time to time. We went on to state:

> "This confusion is not conducive to the formation of a coherent international approach, where a clear vision of developments in the market and the appropriate regulatory response is essential."

When my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) intervened, he talked about crooks and other such problems. The collapse of Barings bank took place during the course of the Committee's inquiry. That led us to reflect deeply on the problems of international co-operation and the need to have clear demarcation lines in terms of regulation. Mr. Sharples' evidence was very much in our mind when we considered the collapse of Barings and its consequences.

The Committee's report went into some detail on the nature of regulation and supervision. I do not propose to rehearse those arguments. In compiling the report, the Committee was concerned to provide not merely opinions but a quarry of useful evidence and advice from distinguished outsiders that could be used in future by the Government, the Opposition and other parties, regulators and the City. I hope that we shall achieve that objective because I am sure that the papers and library of evidence that we have built up will help greatly in that process.

It is clear that there have been and continue to be some tensions and difficulties between the SIB and the self-regulatory organisations. I do not find that altogether surprising because, over time, the SROs, and the SIB above them, have gradually become more accustomed to using the Financial Services Act, and have therefore enhanced and developed their roles. They have become much more proactive. As Mr. Large put it in paragraph 92 of our report:

> "Yes, the SROs have become stronger frontline regulators and I think we should regard that as a success rather than a failure. It is exactly what we all intended."

His judgment was and is correct. The SIB has also increased its role in a manner that I welcome.

I recognise that the tensions between the SIB and the SROs will not disappear overnight, but with patience and the passage of time, and given the hard work taking place now, I am sure that some of those difficulties will be overcome.

I should like to refer to Barings and the position of the Bank of England in some detail. One reason why the Committee is so keen for the Treasury to take full responsibility for the regulation of financial services in our country is that, in addition to the work on which we spent a great deal of time—all the operations of the Financial Services Act—we recognised that the Bank of England, as the lead supervisor and regulator for the banking industry, and responsible as it is to the Treasury, also, in practice, must have dealings with other financial institutions, some of which are not regulated by the Treasury.

The Committee has had plenty of difficulties and scandals with which to deal, Barings being the most recent. In the past decade three serious scandals have affected the Bank of England—Johnson Matthey, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International and Barings. Each time, the Committee has been given assurances that lessons had been learnt and that improvements have been made. That information is most welcome, but life does not stand still and in our fast-moving world the pace of events seems to dictate that, sooner or later, another batch of problems and another crooked deal comes to pass and the result is a catastrophe.

The collapse of Barings was a catastrophe, and most people recognise it as such. As I said in Committee to Mr. George, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Committee is not engaged in a witch hunt against the supervisory staff of the Bank of England—far from it. We recognise the long hours and the hard work that they put in, but we are entitled to question the apparent discrepancy between the report of the Board of Banking Supervision into the collapse of Barings and that which the Committee has now received from the inspectors appointed by the Minister of Finance in Singapore, in which a different tale apparently emerges. For that reason we will want to take further evidence in the new year to try to get to the bottom of what happened.

We all welcome the review of the Bank's supervisory functions that is now being undertaken by Arthur Andersen. The Minister referred to that report in her reply to the Committee's report. She specifically stated that before committing herself to a further review of the Bank's supervisory functions by the Treasury and the Government, she would want to take into account the report from Arthur Andersen and the Committee's future report into the details surrounding the collapse of Barings.

As the House knows, the Committee took a great deal of evidence on Lloyd's. I do not propose to dwell too much on it beyond saying that, once again, we were of

[Sir Thomas Arnold]

the opinion that events as they unfolded showed the need for a greater concentration of effort within the Treasury and the need for external regulation. When all is said and done, we were not of the opinion that confidence could be fully restored in Lloyd's by the current regulatory arrangements. I know that there are those in the market who find that irritating, but that is the judgment that we reached on the evidence that we heard, and it continues to be our view.

We recognise that Lloyd's has gone a long way towards making improvements, and of course we welcome that, but we feel that more needs to be done. It is encouraging that, as far as I know, not one single policy-holder has yet been in the position where the market has refused to pay. On the contrary, Lloyd's has continued to function throughout its difficulties, and I hope that it will be able to trade through them and emerge all the stronger. Precisely for the reasons that I gave at the start of my speech, however, the Committee believes that in the interests of transparency and accountability the market would be strengthened and its reputation enhanced if our proposals were accepted.

In conclusion, I welcome the support that the Government and other Departments have given the Committee in terms of the expert witnesses from the Government who have appeared before us. I welcome my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary's positive reply to our recommendations. I urge her to take them seriously and not to allow too much time to elapse before putting a number of them into effect. I hope that the Government, the official Opposition and other parties in the House will feel able to move ahead in a way that will command general support.

7.29 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): I start by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold), who chaired the Select Committee in an admirable fashion and produced a report that was broadly agreed—except for our arguments over the relationship between the SIB and the SROs. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good work and I wish him luck in his continuing chairmanship.

The Select Committee has played a valuable role. Some of us came to the subject with open minds: in my case, it was an open mind perhaps tinged with ignorance. I have certainly learnt a good deal during our 46 sittings. We took a massive amount of written evidence, which seemed to go on and on; we sometimes felt that it would never end. The Select Committee has given the general public a great opportunity to see what is happening in the City and to argue out the case. It has given the institutions a chance to discuss matters in public and it has given the regulators a chance to argue their own corner; they certainly did a fair amount of that during our sittings.

We produced a broadly agreed report; there was a difference of emphasis, but the report is extremely useful. It is useful for the Government—I know that there are some differences of emphasis within Government Departments about what should happen and we have been helpful to them on that. The report is useful for Labour because, if after the next general election we should be in government, it will provide a mine of information that was not previously available on which to base our Government policy.

The City and financial services are of great importance to the economy and to the general public—given how much of our money is managed in the City of London and how many of the products produced by the financial services industry are used by members of the public. It is therefore essential that the general public have confidence in the effectiveness, openness and honesty of the institutions and firms operating in that sector. That is the case for regulation—for having the markets regulated.

One has to ensure that the regulation does not interfere to such a degree that it piles costs on to firms. But there is a counter-argument which is just as important—I would say more important. Unless the public have confidence in the institutions and firms, we lose out as an economy. The public have been worried about one or two sectors, which has affected business. There is a strong case for good, high-quality regulation.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does my hon. Friend agree that another reason for carefully studying financial regulation is that we now have a much wider and less sophisticated consumer base of financial services products than we did a generation ago? Many more people are purchasing mortgages and private pensions—many more unsophisticated people are purchasing financial services products and they therefore need the best and most effective form of regulation that we can provide.

Mr. Radice: I agree with my hon. Friend, whose keen questioning of witnesses I have always valued. She certainly made that point clearly during our sittings.

I shall now turn to what I might call the North Warwickshire point. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) on his promotion to the Front Bench, which is well deserved. He moved an amendment that was referred to by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove, which represents the nub of the argument between the two sides—inasmuch as there was an argument, this was it.

We all agreed that there was a problem involving the regulators fighting among themselves—they did so publicly in front of us, so we could hardly avoid drawing that conclusion. There was a problem involving confused responsibilities—some of the witnesses said that. There was a problem about who was responsible for the regulation—a responsibility that has changed over the period. The title SRO is now a misnomer as they are no longer self-regulatory organisations, but have increasingly become—we propose that they should become even more so—organisations containing a majority of public interest members. They are no longer organisations that simply represent the industry professionally—which is, perhaps, how they were originally conceived.

The SROs have changed and the proposal that the Labour party supports—we turned it over in our minds over a long period and were uncertain about which was the best model—is one where the SROs are, in the words of my hon. Friend's amendment, folded into the SIB. We are not envisaging a massive, bureaucratic organisation—on the contrary, there would be two departments: one responsible for retail and the other responsible for wholesale. Our model would keep some of the best aspects of the SROs such as professional involvement; we need experts who know how the markets work. Such involvement should still be guaranteed, but we would eliminate the unnecessary duplication that occurs at present through the SIB and the SROs. By eliminating duplication, we could reduce costs.

That structure provides a better model and, through our search for consensus, we made a nod towards the possibility of creating that model. In the full body of the report we said that if the regulators could not come together more effectively than in the past, the case for the model that I have proposed today and that my hon. Friend suggested in Committee will be much stronger. In essence, assuming the general election is 18 months away, the intervening time will provide a good testing period to discover whether the two are moving closer together.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The period is unlikely to be longer.

Mr. Radice: But the period might be shorter, which is the point that I am making. Those 18 months will provide a good testing period in which people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will be able to test to discover whether the organisations are coming closer together and whether the model proposed in the amendment is the best one. The intervening time will provide a good testing period for the regulators.

We produced a separate report and investigation on Lloyd's, although we mentioned the subject in the body of the main report. It was a great experience for me and for many of my colleagues who heard the witnesses who appeared in front of us. I think that one must conclude, as the Committee did, that Lloyd's represented a massive self-regulation failure. That is why the Committee was persuaded that there should be an independent external regulator who is answerable to the Treasury. There can be no practical argument against that case. The Government, even in their dying days, should accept that argument—as I hope that any future Labour Government would. It is a helpful and a sensible move that would help to restore the worldwide reputation of Lloyd's, which has taken a considerable battering in the past 10 years.

My last point refers back to the comments of the hon. Member for Hazel Grove. I have learnt a lot from my service on the Select Committee. I was not a member of the Committee at the time of the collapse of Johnson Matthey, but I chaired the sub-committee that examined the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, because the then Chairman, as a chartered accountant, had a vested interest and did not wish to become involved. I examined the BCCI case very carefully and I concluded that it represented a supervision failure on the part of the Bank of England. I was not convinced then that the Bank's supervisory role should be separated from its monetary responsibilities, although we laid down some clear proposals to improve the Bank's supervisory capacity and abilities—some of which it followed and others of which it did not.

We then saw the collapse of Barings. Most people who considered it objectively would conclude that the Bank of England did not do a very good job supervising Barings. Quite a lot of evidence in the Singapore report—which makes very interesting reading—points to that interpretation. I am not embarking upon a witch-hunt against the Bank of England, but we must have more effective supervision.

In the report, the Committee asks: is the Bank sufficiently divorced from the culture of the banking industry? Some might say, although I do not believe that it does, that that conflicts with the next question: does the Bank have the necessary expertise to be an effective regulator? One of the problems with Barings and BCCI was that the Bank of England did not know enough about the market that it was supposed to supervise. We have asked those questions, but as yet we have not reached any conclusions about them.

I have now changed my mind; I have been swayed by experience and by recent events and I am now in favour of a separate body. When the Committee visited Frankfurt, we talked to officials from the Bundesbank who argued very strongly that the bank's reputation as a monetary body was more powerful because it was not responsible for bank supervision. Therefore, if mistakes were made in the supervision area, they would not affect the bank's monetary position. I think that that is quite a strong argument and the Bank of England, which is now trying to develop its role in monetary affairs, should consider it very seriously.

Ms Abbott: Does my hon. Friend agree that, apart from the points that he mentioned, there are three problems with the Bank of England as a supervisor? First, it is wedded to a hands-off, laissez faire form of supervision. Specifically, it conducts much less on-site examination than the supervisors that we visited in America and in Europe. There is too much stress on the personal character of the people leading the institution as opposed to the detail of checks and balances.

Secondly, the Bank's perception of its role as supervisor is rather different from the way in which the public perceive it. It believes that its role is to ensure that there is no risk to the system and once it is sure of that, it tends to think that its job is done. However, the ordinary punter in Hackney or North Warwickshire tends to think that the Bank should offer some degree of security to depositors and consumers. Thirdly, the Bank of England cannot be shifted from its belief that it is absolutely the best supervisor in the world.

Mr. Radice: I congratulate my hon. Friend on that brilliant mini-speech in which she encapsulated her arguments—or perhaps trailed the arguments that she will use on another occasion. She is absolutely correct: they are the proper arguments to deploy.

I have now come around to the view that bank supervision should be conducted by a separate body. I do not know the Labour party's position in that regard, but the Government continue to support the Bank of England and its view that banking supervision should not be separate. I think that it would be better for the Bank of England, for banking supervision, banks and the general public if we were to make that reform.

I think that I have spoken quite long enough. This is my last speech in the House as a member of the Select Committee—I had my last hurrah in Committee when the Chancellor appeared before us yesterday. I believe that Select Committees perform good work. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee comprises a curious body of men and women who have very different and disparate

[Mr. Radice]

views on many matters. It is quite remarkable how, more often than not, we manage to produce agreed reports. A key feature of the Select Committees is its power to send for persons and papers; that is what makes Select Committees powerful. Mr. Andrew Marr, the brilliant columnist for the *Independent*—

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Brilliant?

Mr. Radice: Yes, I think that he is brilliant. He wrote a book entitled "Ruling Britannia", in which he makes the enormous error of playing down the role of Select Committees. He says that interviewers on programmes such as "Newsnight" are much more powerful interrogators than Members of Parliament. That may be so, but they do not have the same powers. They cannot send for the head of the civil service or the Governor of the Bank of England and question them. They cannot call people from Lloyd's to appear before them. Select Committees have an enormous advantage which we must put to good effect because that is what makes our work valuable.

I wish my Select Committee colleagues—if I can call them that—well in their further deliberations. I hope that their next report about the City and regulation is not quite so long in coming as this one was.

7.48 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Under class XVI, vote 1, no fewer than 12 documents are listed on the Order Paper as relevant to this debate. Of those documents, the sixth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee is unquestionably the most important.

The Committee was ably chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold), and other hon. Members who are present in the Chamber served on it. I congratulate them on what is undoubtedly an excellent report. It contains a mine of evidence and information and reaches a number of very sound conclusions—although I am not entirely sure that it would serve the purpose of the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who seems to believe that a future Labour Government could use the report as a basis for financial services legislation. I do not think that he will find himself in that position, but were he to do so, I suggest that the matter be viewed in a rather wider historical perspective. He vouchsafed that he learned things when serving on the Committee, and I am sure he did, but I wonder how much attention he paid to the long history of the subject, and in particular, the long history of the retail side.

The sixth report is the most up to date, but in considering the insurance, savings and investment side of the industry, we must go back to 1982 and 1984, when the Gower report was produced. We have debated the subject almost continuously for more than 10 years, and a number of substantial reports have been published during that time: the Gower report, the Securities and Investments Board report in 1989, the Clucas report in 1992, and Andrew Large's report in 1993. Each was regarded at the time as the report to end all reports, but the debate has continued nevertheless.

During those 10 years, there has been a significant restructuring of self-regulatory organisations. During a five-year period following the Financial Services Act 1986, it was continually said that the Act was not working as well as people had hoped. The Treasury said that such legislation should be given time to "bed down": that was its favourite expression.

When the "bedding down" period became too long to be credible, we were told that it was not appropriate to embark on new primary legislation, because that would send the prospect of a solution to the perceived problems too far into the future. We have been stuck in a limbo, in which practitioners in particular recognise significant deficiencies in the workings of the Financial Services Act, but there is a difference of opinion on how those deficiencies should be rectified and on whether primary legislation is required.

Meanwhile, during those 10 years, the poor practitioners have been trying to run their businesses. They have been faced with rule books and practice directions that have changed, and with consultation papers heralding further change; they have been buried under an enormous burden of constantly changing regulation. That is not the sort of environment in which any business—particularly the savings, investment and insurance business—can hope to prosper.

It is easy to lose sight of the original purpose of the Financial Services Act. I can sum up that purpose in six words, although many volumes have been published that say the same thing: "Sell something suitable and be honest." The attempt to implement that principle, however, has gone seriously wrong. The original intention was laudable, but its execution has backfired and, in some respects, has proved self-defeating.

The original principle was that the client must have a proper choice of product, accompanied by independent advice that came to be described as "best advice". That is a praiseworthy aim in itself, but major institutions found it impossible to implement. Soon after the Financial Services Act, many institutions with household names endeavoured to offer independent advice and a proper choice from a range of products, but one by one they dropped out.

The last two big names to provide such a service were the National Westminster bank and the Bradford and Bingley building society; I believe that the Bradford and Bingley is now the last major institution that is still clinging to the principle of offering independent "best advice". The requirement to offer clients that service has been made so difficult to deliver that institutions have abandoned any hope of doing so. Surely that is contrary to the original intention of the Act.

Another principle was that the client must be given good value. There have been many examples of clients being sold poor-value products. They had been sold life insurance or investment policies whose returns were unreasonably low, or whose surrender values were discounted to a ridiculous extent.

The worst abuses appear to have been removed at the expense of giving everyone poorer value: the overall costs of compliance, especially in the insurance sector, have become massive. Institutions have huge compliance departments devoting their efforts to ensuring that no rules are broken, and ensuring that lengthy procedures are followed. They impose spot checks themselves, or try to ensure that, when such checks are imposed by visiting regulators, they measure up to requirements.

That has used up a large amount of management time in an unproductive way. Moreover, the process has been so costly that products offered by some institutions have become considerably less competitive than they would otherwise have been. After all, the costs of compliance—the costs of the whole regulatory regime—are ultimately borne by the investor or the policy holder: they will come out of his premium or deposit. That is the part of his money that is not invested, which means that investment returns are worse than they would otherwise have been.

That is one reason why business has become so much more difficult to write for the retail sector and the life insurance companies. The institutional compliance costs have become greater than is justified, which detracts from the potential value of the product.

Ms Abbott: The Select Committee has already heard all this heart-rending stuff about the tremendous burden of regulation. Before Opposition Members all break down in tears, will the hon. Gentleman answer a question? If the problem is too much regulation rather than too little, why have we seen the horrendous scandal of mis-selling of personal pensions, home income plans and endowment mortgages?

Mr. French: I do not mean to sound heart-rending; I think that I am reflecting the views of the management of most leading life insurance companies. Such companies can make an important contribution to our economic life and our business potential overseas.

The hon. Lady picked on three examples. It is true that the industry has failed in those cases, but they do not remotely represent the way in which the industry conducts its business generally. It is possible to identify shortcomings in almost any industry, and the hon. Lady has identified three important shortcomings, but in the context of all the business undertaken by those institutions, even those shortcomings—heart-rending though they may be—are comparatively insignificant.

Another problem that has made life difficult for institutions endeavouring to sell life insurance and investment-related products in particular is the fact-find, which has to be completed whenever a sale is made. I have seen fact-finds that extend to 72 pages. They are for products which may be fairly but not over complex. That is a very thorough approach, but I suggest that it is, in fact, overkill, that it is too thorough. It makes it extremely difficult, even for an honest and straightforward salesman, to clinch a deal that might otherwise have been clinched comparatively easily.

In addition, the sheer drudgery of going through a lengthy fact-find makes the prospective client suspicious and inclined to defer purchasing a policy which he might be well advised to have. It is an example of the best being the enemy of the good, when, in order to ensure that not a single tiny detail is missed, one must go through a procedure that results in the business not being done at all. That is a disadvantage, of course, to the institution, but also to the prospective policy holder.

Mr. Forman: Is my hon. Friend sure that all the excessive questionnaires, which I have also seen, are attributable to regulatory obligations? I have a feeling that many of the questionnaires, which no ordinary person is under a legal obligation to answer, exist to create market opportunities for conglomerate financial institutions which wish to pass information from one part of their activity to another in order to open up other avenues of business.

Mr. French: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but there is also a third explanation. More questions may be asked than are strictly necessary, but only in order to ensure that the approach is very cautious, and that nothing that a compliance officer or regulator might subsequently say should have been noticed was not noticed. That is what I describe as overkill.

Too many questions are asked and too many answers are received, so that the financial institutions are not caught out. If they are caught out, the penalties are severe. I accept, however, my hon. Friend's point that additional information may be thought highly desirable for marketing purposes by other parts of the same institution.

Let me give the House another example of where I think that the regulatory regime is too burdensome. Friendly societies are in the business of selling comparatively small policies, what they call small ticket business involving premiums of, say, £10 or £20 a month. Even though the salesman is selling such a small policy, the full panoply of the regulatory regime falls on him, and the enormous cost of regulation is reflected in the value, or otherwise, of the policies that he sells.

That is acceptable if the policies involve a large premium, or if the sellers are institutions offering a broad range of policies. In the latter case, the regulatory cost of the £10-a-month policies can be shared with that of the £500-a-month policies, so that the cost is evened out. Friendly societies, however, do not have large-premium business. That means that there is a conflict between the cost of regulation within the premiums that they are charging and the Government's present policy, which is to give a tax concession to people paying premiums to friendly societies on qualifying policies. I have evidence that the value of the tax concession in respect of such a policy can be outweighed by the cost of the regulatory regime. That is a ridiculous situation that requires attention.

One of the consequences of the difficulty that the industry has had in following the requisite sales procedures correctly has been the generation of new forms of what are known as direct products. Very often, they are execution-only products, and no advice is offered. Of course, they are attractive, because it is the giving of advice and the responsibility involved in giving it that are expensive. If products can be sold separately from the giving of advice, they are likely to be easier to sell and, if correctly sold, might represent better value for the purchaser.

With such products, however, there is absolutely nothing to prevent the client from buying something wholly unsuitable. That means that they escape the regulatory regime completely, and ever more products are being sold in that way to avoid the heavy regulatory regime that would otherwise apply.

It has become easier to sell such products thanks to the recent improvements in technology. Much has become possible because the telephone and computer can work swiftly together to clinch sales. I believe that the problem will become greater as financial services come to be offered on the Internet—indeed, this is already happening—and become available on a cross-border

[Mr. French]

basis. There is likely to be a proliferation of direct, no-advice, execution-only products, which escape the regulatory regime altogether even though they may be wholly unsuitable for the person buying them.

I have a high regard for the people currently responsible for the Personal Investment Authority and the Securities and Investments Board. They are undoubtedly trying to act in the best possible interests of the consumer and the industry. Ultimately, there must be common ground between those two interests. However, an independent financial adviser, who is a member of the PIA, came to my surgery last week. He brought with him the PIA rule book, the PIA fact-find—or his version based on what the PIA requires—and copies of 16 consultative documents issued by the PIA or the SIB in the past 18 months or so. He felt that he should have a passing interest in all of them, or that he should at least have read them. He said that, if he were an employee of Allied Dunbar, for example, he would have a department to read the documents for him and advise him when he needed to take notice of them in the daily conduct of his business.

However, as he is an IFA heading a company of only eight people, the responsibility fell on him. He said that there were hundreds or even thousands of IFAs across the country in exactly the same position. One day in every fortnight—or 10 per cent. of his business time—had to be devoted to reading the latest material from the self-regulatory organisation. He suggested that the situation was out of control.

That might be the right way to deal with people proposing deliberately to be dishonest or negligent in their selling of products, but it should not be necessary for that person, as an honest and competent intermediary, to devote 10 per cent. of his time to reading the rule book instead of going out and getting the business on which his living depends. I have considerable sympathy with him. The current rule books are too complex, burdensome and detailed. They work on the assumption—a wrong assumption—that people in the industry will always do a bad job.

In general, all this is doing great damage to the insurance and personal investment industry. It does not help customers, except in a small number of extreme cases. Meanwhile, it is increasing costs and reducing the value of the products on offer. It also renders those products less sophisticated and less tailor-made to the client—the exact opposite of the original intention behind the Financial Services Act.

Moreover, insurance and investment institutions are being prevented from enjoying the sound, thriving domestic market which is so essential if they are to play their proper part in European and world markets. We have a wonderful basis on which to build; this country's institutions are highly sophisticated. They have a marvellous opportunity to do well in overseas markets, but the current domestic market is proving so difficult that what could be golden opportunities are being lost.

I agree with a number, although not all, of the proposals in the Select Committee report. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove about placing all responsibility for the retail and wholesale markets with the Treasury.

I should like a greater recognition of the fact that we should not throw the doctrine of caveat emptor out of the window. It seems only right to invest some responsibility in the client for what he is doing. At present, all responsibility seems removed from him. That is why I was pleased to read the recent speech by Andrew Large on this very point. He said:

> "Over time we may see a shift away from the bulk of the customers placing trust and reliance in financial advisers towards a situation where more of them take full responsibility for their own investment decisions."

That is the direction towards which we should strive. I am certain that there should be less prescription. The benefits of a product, and its price, should be clearly presented; but there must not be so many prescriptive rules governing the exact procedures involved in selling the products.

I also believe that regulation requires some cost benefit content. It is all too easy for self-regulatory organisations to make regulations without regard to their cost to the industry. Whenever new regulations are made, some assessment of the likely accompanying costs should be a requirement. I also agree with the proposal to rationalise the SROs. The proposal most often made—one SRO for the retail and another for the wholesale side—commands a great deal of support.

Lastly, we need a vigorous enforcement mechanism and effective redress for people when things go seriously wrong. At present, a huge amount of effort is devoted to ensuring that nothing goes wrong in any sale of any retail product. If something small goes wrong, someone may suffer a small amount of damage. The greater effort should therefore be directed to vigorous enforcement when there have been serious departures from what should happen.

All this leads me to my final conclusion. I have great respect for the Minister who is to answer the debate. I believe I am right in saying that her view is that what we want can be achieved through existing legislation. I, on the other hand, have reached the view that primary legislation will be necessary to reach our objectives.

8.14 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I was waiting with bated breath to see what conclusion the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) would arrive at. When it came, it was not quite what I had been expecting. Most of his speech seemed to be against regulation, so his ending surprised us.

I defer in these matters to other members of the Select Committee, because I joined it only when most of the work had been done and most of the evidence had been taken. I am therefore not as apprised of the issues as is the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). Nevertheless, we all have an interest in them.

Whatever our differences of view, no one is looking for heavier regulation. What we want is more effective regulation, to engender confidence at home and abroad. The reputation of the City of London and of our financial services and banking regulations is an important factor in the confidence of the home market and of our European and international markets.

The crises and scandals can have an international impact—the banking scandals are a case in point; the impact of the Lloyd's crisis might be termed intermediate;

then there are the domestic scandals which also affect the reputation of the City. That is why we must all be concerned to find a regulatory framework which is effective, confidence-inspiring and good for the City's reputation, at home and abroad.

The hon. Member for Gloucester rightly said that there is a balance to be struck: regulation must not stifle the flexibility and innovation which are characteristic of British financial service institutions and which render them world class. There is a huge cultural difference between our system and the conservative and cautious approach in Germany to the financial instruments of saving and investment. The approach in the United Kingdom is far more creative and flexible; in general, that means that every pound invested through the City of London will produce a better return. Of course, more risks are involved too.

All this points to the conclusion that we need to get the balance right. We cannot afford another catastrophe at home or abroad, because the City's reputation is already tarnished. If we fail to ensure that the system can anticipate scandals, we will face a problem that could have long-term repercussions for the City's earnings.

It is widely argued now that the self-regulatory organisations are wrongly described. They have become much more formalised; there has been some blurring at the edges, resulting in confusion. There is a clear need to tidy up that confusion. Indeed, some of the problems to which the hon. Member for Gloucester referred may have arisen precisely because of confusion over where the boundaries lie. That could be reduced if the lines of communication were made clearer.

Here, too, a fine balance needs to be struck between practitioners and consumers. Perhaps there should be an over-arching umbrella under which a bilateral division is set up. Even if boards are set up with a slight majority of practitioners, to ensure that regulations are based on knowledge of the internal workings of the market, the effective chair should perhaps be drawn from the consumer side so as to provide balance and confidence.

I certainly do not intend to launch a broadside against the Minister's response to the report, which I have managed to read through quickly. I would say, however, that there was a wait-and-see flavour to her response, suggesting that she is not quite as apprised as we are of the need for definitive action in all these areas. The hon. Member for North Durham pointed out that, after three major banking scandals, it is becoming difficult to believe that the Bank of England is the right institution to regulate banking.

The hon. Gentleman's point about the Bundesbank and the benefit that the Bank of England would have from that separation is powerful. That must be worthy of consideration as we move towards a more independent central bank. The Minister knows perfectly well that I and my party favour an operationally independent central bank and believe in any case that, if we move towards monetary union, we will have to take that step. That being the case, it seems better that the Bank concentrates on its role as monetary regulator, and divests itself of the role of banking regulator.

Having given that as my personal opinion, I say to the Minister that I am not sure about her waiting for the Bank's report—which is presumably the Arthur Andersen report—and the Select Committee report. Although all of us on that Committee are grateful for the role and status that she gives the Committee, and in spite of the very important points made by the hon. Member for North Durham about the power of Committees to take evidence, the Government should commission their own clearly independent inquiry, at the very least—if they do not accept the argument—to determine whether the separation would be beneficial.

This is no pejorative criticism of Arthur Andersen or any consultant at all, but when the Bank of England commissions a firm of consultants to look into something independently, the consultants tend to work out who the purchaser is and what kind of reply they might be looking for; it is only human nature. The report therefore inevitably falls into the category of being commissioned by the Bank of England.

It is not entirely clear what the Bank of England's view is. Eddie George says that he is relaxed, and is not fighting hard either way. That being the case, the Government therefore would not cause any particular difficulties at the Bank if they were to commission an independent report.

The members of the Committee who worked on the report throughout produced a great deal of detail, a great deal of information and a clear indication that specific steps need to be taken to move the matter forward. It may be that the Minister wishes to leave the decision on action to the next Government. That might be the right thing to do.

But there are one or two useful things that the Minister could do to show that the Government were in control and recognised that we were moving in the right direction. The industry itself has been moving in the right direction, but pretty well everyone one talks to acknowledges that we need a reformed legislative framework. Indeed, there is potential cross-party agreement on the desirability of that.

In his opening remarks, the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold), rightly stressed that, whatever the differences among members of the Committee, the strength of common ground is much more important. In that sense, there is plenty that the Government could do to move the matter forward without opening up party differences. I would certainly regret it if the issue became in any way a party political battleground, because the working of these markets, both at home and abroad, is a vital component of the British economy and must be got right.

The system is not working correctly at the moment, and nobody really believes it is. We are exposed, due to the question mark over the reputation of our financial services institutions and the City of London, and we have a duty to ourselves, as well as to the City's international reputation, to do something about it. The Committee has produced a report that points in the right direction, and I urge the Minister to take it up with slightly more enthusiasm than her response suggests she intends to do.

8.23 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I declare my interests as they are registered in the Register of Members' Interests. They are in some way relevant to the debate in the sense that they give me a background in these matters that is slightly more knowledgeable than it

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

would otherwise be. From that point of view, there is no harm in Members of Parliament having openly declared outside interests.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) not only on the compelling way in which he spoke, but on the highly competent way in which he chaired our Committee through this long set of hearings. He managed with his usual subtlety to produce a well-balanced report and one with which, broadly speaking, I found myself in agreement, even though—alas—I was not able to be present at the final voting sessions on the report.

It is good that the House had the opportunity to listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French). Although what he said might not have been flavour of the month with all Opposition Members, it needed to be said. There is another point of view on these matters, which was well reflected in my hon. Friend's speech. I commend him for the way in which he put his case.

I remind the House of the vital importance of financial services to our national economy—both now and in the future—especially services in the City of London, which is almost a form of shorthand for them. I hasten to add, though, that many other financial centres are growing where offices and so on cost less, which are very important. I think of Edinburgh, Brighton, Cheltenham and a number of other places.

First, it is perhaps not widely known that financial services represent about one sixth of our national economy—and the proportion is growing all the time. Secondly, the City of London itself has an unduly—or perhaps I should say very strikingly—high proportion of global equity and bond trading, of foreign exchange transactions, of derivatives trading, of marine, life and non-life insurance and of fund management. That is not just because we are the widely acknowledged leader in our time zone, as it is called, but, I can say quite dogmatically, it is because in certain specialty areas there is no financial centre in the world to match the City of London. Long may that remain. It is a vital national interest that it should be so.

I would like to comment on the collapse of Barings, which has been mentioned in the debate. With the wisdom of 20-20 hindsight, the collapse of Barings may not have been such a bad thing; it was sad, but salutary. I say that because it was large enough to trigger a major review and shake-up of the necessary controls, especially on derivatives and rocket scientists' instruments, but it was small enough not to threaten a systemic collapse either of our financial system or of the global financial system. From that point of view, again with 20-20 hindsight, it has served not only our interests but the wider interests rather well.

Looking at some of the main issues in our report, I should like to say a word or two about first principles. First, the protection of investors and consumers is obviously the main concern of the House of Commons in financial services, and rightly so. Indeed, it was the Committee's main concern. But that protection and general safeguarding of their interests should not be taken to the extent, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester has already said, of removing all need for caveat emptor and of removing all moral hazards. After all, people are expected to be grown up in most other areas of their life, so why should financial services be a notable exception?

Secondly, it would not be wise for us to over-burden the sector with excessive rules and costs, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester also said. Thirdly, one must recall that all jurisdictions these days—tax and regulatory—are in fact involved in a form of international global competition. It was not always like that, but it is now, in a world of footloose capital and mobile individuals. As a result of that, we have to take account, as must the Treasury, of the danger of driving lucrative and lawful business offshore if our regulatory and tax climate were to become too intrusive.

Fourthly, if we move, broadly speaking, from trust to contract, which is a brief soundbite describing what has been going on over the past 10 years, we must recognise that we are being driven in a more and more legalistic direction. One has only to look across the water to the United States to see the downside of that if it is allowed to be taken too far. Therefore, while protection of the consumer and the investor must be absolutely important, it must be balanced by the rather commonsense factors that I have just mentioned.

My second theme is the structure of regulation, with which the Committee's report is largely concerned. I remind the House, not that it needs to be reminded, that the current structure traces itself back to the free concordat between Lord Parkinson—who is now in another place but who was then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—and Sir Nicholas Goodison.

The deal was done essentially in relation to the stock exchange. It eventually found its way through to the Financial Services Act 1986. It gave birth to what the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) has described as self-regulation. That is a misnomer in today's world. More appropriate would be the term practitioner-influenced regulation. That is what it is and that is what it should be. In other words, it is regulation by consent based upon what is practicable.

We may write as many elaborate rule books as we like—there were some signs that the Securities and Investments Board would do that in the days of Sir Kenneth Berrill—but that merely creates extra problems rather than new solutions. I am delighted that the trend of the SIB was pulled back to some extent by subsequent chairmen. Mr. Large is doing an excellent job and getting the balance about right.

It is worth saying that good regulation is in the market interests of the regulated. That is important. In responsible and reputable markets such as those based in London and other cities in the United Kingdom, practitioners see good regulation as being in their market interests. They want a good regulatory structure within which to operate and they wish to abide by its regulations. Enormously adverse publicity is attracted to any financial institution if it gets things wrong or steps on the wrong side of the line. That demonstrates the strength of my argument.

Paragraph 26 of the Government's response takes up the argument whether there are too many layers of regulation. In the Select Committee, Opposition Members, especially the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), expressed the view that there are. They argued that rather than having the departmental level, the SIB level and the self-regulatory organisation level, we should have two rather than three. It was suggested that at the departmental level the Treasury should have sole responsibility.

I quibble only about the desire of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire and his hon. Friends to make three layers into two. On reflection, I think that the three-layer system is satisfactory and, by international standards, is working pretty well. I agree, however, with Opposition Members in their keenness to give the Treasury sole and therefore lead responsibility within Whitehall for arrangements at departmental level. That makes good sense. I happen to know that the Treasury is becoming increasingly geared up for that purpose and is attracting many well-qualified people to its ranks to undertake supervisory functions in so far as they belong in a Department of Government.

If I had to justify the continuation of three layers, which is what I favour, I would argue that the top layer, the Treasury, would provide the necessary public accountability through Ministers to the House for the framework of law and for the broad lines within which the structure operates. The middle layer, which is represented by the SIB, would be there to regulate the regulators. That is the way in which Mr. Large describes his main role. The bottom layer, in a hands-on and day-to-day way, would administer regulation and ensure that wherever possible it was done with the intelligent and active co-operation of the regulated.

As I have said, the regulated recognise that it is in their interests to co-operate and to be on the right side of any line. On my quick reading of the Government's response, which I accept took place only this evening, I was glad to read the concluding sentence in paragraph 35, which states:

> "The Government considers that the review mentioned by the Committee would be destabilising for an industry which has already seen considerable change and therefore is urging all regulatory bodies to ensure that such a review will not be necessary."

I agree with that sentiment and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will adhere to it.

I support the idea of the Treasury being given the sole and consequently key departmental role in the three-layer structure, but I would like to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister, when she replies, a little more about the Government's thinking. As set out in the Government's response, it is delphic. Paragraph 26 reads that the Government are quite warm to the idea of having the Treasury as the main Department involved, but adds that

> "wider issues . . . will need careful consideration".

The House deserves to know what some of those wider issues are. It is unfortunate if the Minister has to be coy. If that is the position, we might have to pursue the matter elsewhere at a higher level.

The present structure is, broadly, working rather well and needs to be left well alone. We should not spend all our time in this place pulling up plants to see how the roots are getting on. There is no decisive advantage in fundamental change. That is the point that I made in some of the friendly arguments that I had with the hon. Member for North Warwickshire when in Select Committee. We used to cross swords on the issue.

The corollary of what I have just said is that the House and legislators generally should remain constantly vigilant about these matters and not be complacent. Our financial services attract some of the brightest and most energetic in our society, but some of them may be tempted from time to time to transgress. It is vital that we as the supreme regulatory body in the United Kingdom be alert to any danger of mis-selling or malpractice. Aside from that, I do not want to end on a negative note. Let us celebrate the contribution that is made by financial services to the economy, jobs, inward investment and everything else. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise that contribution.

8.36 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): First, I declare my interests as in the Register of Members' Interests. I declare also an interest that I understand is still not registrable, which is that my wife works at the London international financial futures exchange. I understand, as I have said, that it is not a registrable interest but it is something that the House will wish to know before I continue.

It has been a good debate because we have seen what is often apparent in the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service—that is, a measure of strong agreement throughout all parties. I welcome that consensus.

We are not discussing a barnstorming report. Nevertheless, it is a worthy report. It highlights important issues that need to be considered but are not capable of instantaneous solution. Nor should they be capable of it.

I do not propose to go through the details contained in the report. That has been done already, and extremely capably, by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold), who chairs so excellently the Select Committee, and by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), whose presence in Committee we shall greatly miss. We are pleased that he has transformed himself to another Select Committee—or that is what we understand—but we shall miss his wise advice and contributions to our meetings.

The report is important because we have highlighted the purpose of regulation. I say that because the purpose of regulation is not immediately obvious. Indeed, the purpose is difficult to define. Regulation varies enormously depending on what we are trying to regulate. One of the most obvious purposes of regulation is to stop wrongdoing. It is clear that the purpose of regulators is to catch crooks. That is the easy part of understanding regulation.

With regard to protection of the public, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), protecting the public is a complex business. If we try to protect them in the wholesale markets it is necessary to have a certain form of regulation, whereas in the retail market a very different form of regulation is needed. It is possible to say that the Financial Services Act 1986 has worked quite well in wholesale regulation, but perhaps less well in the retail sector. Not only have enormous burdens been put on to the practitioners in the retail sector, but there have been significant failures of regulation, such as the mis-selling of products, which has already been described.

Perhaps one of the major purposes of the regulator, and possibly therefore of regulation, is really to create transparency. It is to enable people to exercise the right of caveat emptor when they are buying a product, and to know what they are buying. Frequently, perhaps

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

especially in the retail sector—although I know from experience that it happens in the wholesale sector too—the same product can be packaged so as to make it hard for someone who wishes to buy it to determine from whom to buy it, to the best advantage of the purchaser.

Of course, another purpose of regulation is to avoid crashes, such as that of Barings. Another theme that emerged from our report is that regulation in the banking sector has not been very effective in stopping crashes, and I shall ask in a moment whether that could be improved.

However, the real purpose of regulation is more than all those things: it is to instil confidence in the markets that are being regulated. That was one of the criticisms that came out of our separate report on Lloyd's. The question was not whether Lloyd's is being properly regulated now—although there is no doubt that it was not properly regulated in the past. In some ways, whether it is properly regulated now is not the issue. The issue is whether the people who might place their insurance business with Lloyd's believe that it is being properly regulated. That is the strongest argument for an external rather than an internal regulator for Lloyd's. The question is purely one of confidence.

We have heard about the conflict between the Securities and Investments Board and the self-regulatory organisations. That has led some members of the Select Committee, as well as other hon. Members who are not members of the Committee, to conclude that the SIB should absorb the SROs. In some respects that is a perfectly rational argument, and it is not an argument with a great political element to it. The decision should be made on grounds of practicality and functionality.

Rather as was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), I suspect that a system of dynamic conflict between the SIB and the SROs is rather helpful, in that it answers the age-old question: who will regulate the regulator? A regulator's ability to become complacent—and, one must say, corrupt—is substantial. Although none of our regulators has shown any sign of being corrupt, there are examples from all round the world of regulators who have become extremely corrupt, and one does not have to look far, either geographically or back in history, to find them.

There is a great need for somebody who monitors regulators very closely and who, indeed, has a certain amount of conflict over turf with them, so as to ensure that there is a degree of competition.

That leads me on to the role of the Bank of England, especially in the light of the collapses of Barings, of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International and of Johnson Matthey. The question is whether the Bank of England is capable of supervising banks. I do not think that that is an especially political argument. Again, it comes down to practicality, and I would summarise it in a straightforward way.

Do we believe that there is an overlap between the role of the Bank of England, first in its regulation of monetary policy and its management of the Government debt—an important, traditional and large function of the Bank—and secondly, in its ability to regulate the money markets and to provide banking supervision?

Is there a transfer of knowledge between the Bank's management of the various money markets? In other words, by being an active member and participant in the markets, is the Bank of England able to understand problems arising in the other participants in those markets? Can it see problems arising before they become serious, and can it judge the ability of the management with which it is dealing in other institutions? Can that then feed into its appraisal of those banks and its decisions as to whether they are being properly run?

None of that can possibly be a substitute for the Bank's ability to go in and do a proper audit and inspection of the banks, but it may have access to additional information to which a separate regulator would not have access. If that overlap exists, it is important that it be retained. And the question whether the overlap exists in practice is capable of being determined by a proper inquiry. Possibly the Arthur Andersen inquiry will establish that.

If the answer is that there is a benefit, the Bank of England should retain its supervision of banks. If not, the answer is probably that it should lose that supervisory role. However, I add one caveat, because my experience, having in the long-distant past worked for an American bank that was regulated by the American banking system, is that that system of regulation, which is separate from the American equivalent of the Bank of England, was very bureaucratic and intense, yet not very effective, as has been shown by the number of bank collapses throughout the United States.

Before anyone suggests that a change in the way in which we supervise the banks would, by definition, produce a better system of supervision, we should look hard at the experience in other countries, because it may not necessarily support that conclusion.

The Committee is still in the throes of examining the causes and consequences of the Barings collapse. One of the questions that we need to consider closely is whether the Bank of England can co-operate properly with banking supervisors in other financial centres. One of the big difficulties that we as a Parliament face, and which the Bank of England will also face, is the growing problem of competitive regulation between financial centres.

There is a large and increasing incentive for regulators in evolving financial centres to provide cheaper and less stringent regulation than we provide in London. The consequence of that would be either that the quality of our supervision would decline, or that London would lose business. I am sure that the Select Committee will return to that subject, and I look forward to debates on the Floor of the House on the future of banking supervision in general.

8.48 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I start by acknowledging the work of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which has been praised by every hon. Member who has spoken—[HON. MEMBERS: "They are all on it."] Surely there must be at least one Member present, other than me, who is not a member of that Select Committee. I can praise the Committee genuinely, as I am not a member. In particular, I can acknowledge the way in which the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) introduced the Committee's report.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). It would be wrong for me not to acknowledge his work on the present report and on previous reports of the Select Committee. I have always found his contributions helpful, and equally helpful is the advice that he is prepared to give his colleagues behind the scenes. Of course, my hon. Friend is not leaving us altogether; as is common knowledge, he is moving to another Committee. I am sure that the House will acknowledge his work.

I would like also to acknowledge the work of my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), to whom reference was made in just about every speech tonight. My hon. Friend did so well on the Select Committee that he was put in the Opposition's Treasury Front-Bench team and, as a result, cannot say anything tonight. He is here with us tonight, and I can assure the House that he has been saying plenty sotto voce during the debate.

Most hon. Members who have spoken have made the point that the financial services industry is of immense importance to this country. It has been said that that was not fully appreciated 10 to 15 years ago. The industry—broadly defined—employs nearly 2.5 million people, and not just in the City of London. Clearly, the City of London—as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said—is one of the three main financial centres in the world, and it is unquestionably the major centre in our time zone.

Although we are mindful of the competition from other European centres, London does have a pre-eminent status, and the critical mass is here. It is home to more than 500 foreign banks, and many other institutions from outside the United Kingdom are in London because of its importance in the world. It is very important that no Government should do anything that would discourage people from coming to London and remaining in London. We should do everything that we can to continue to encourage London and to build its reputation. This is an industry we are very good at operating and, for that reason, it must be encouraged.

The industry is not just based in London. Many towns and cities in this country depend on the industry for employment. I represent the constituency of Edinburgh, Central, and Scotland is now Europe's fourth-largest financial centre in terms of funds under management. The industry is important to this country not only as a wealth creator but as a service provider. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) made a series of interventions which, taken together, amounted to a speech. She made the valid point that, unlike in the past, most people now have some contact with the industry in terms of buying products.

I shall return later to the question of regulation of the retail end of the market. It is crucial that people have the confidence to deal with the retail end of the market, which will grow more important as more and more people want to make provision for themselves and their families. We want to promote saving and we want to encourage people to save. Therefore, it is important that people are able to make informed choices between products and between product advisers. It is important that there should be as much diversity as possible, so people can get the sort of products they need.

Clearly our discussion tonight has been about the nature of regulation and what it is meant to achieve. One of the objects of regulation must be to ensure that the public interest is met, whereby people who want to buy long-term products are put in the position where it is more likely that they will buy the right sort of product, and less likely that they will make a mistake. I use those words advisedly, because I should acknowledge at the outset that it is not possible to have a foolproof system of regulation. Nobody is asking for that, and arguing for such a system would waste everyone's time.

I am conscious of the fact that there is some regulatory competition, and the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) referred to that point. I do not think that we should get carried away about it; I do not think that we are quite at the stage where people will leave because of it. However, there are worrying signs. I worry when I see people involved in retail sales setting up bases in Luxembourg and Dublin because of the advantageous regimes there. One wonders how, in the single market, some regimes are able to offer all the encouragement that is not apparently available in this country. The Minister might dwell on that point when she comes to reply.

One of the things that the Government can do in Europe, and I shall return to this point shortly, is to ensure that our institutions are playing on the much-clichéd level playing field.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman will notice that I paid tribute to Edinburgh in my speech. He should avoid the danger of being complacent about the point of regulatory competition. Evidence has come before the Committee, and we know from other sources, that large multinational conglomerate financial institutions are placing an increasing part of their firepower—if I can call it that—in countries such as India, where there are educated and competent people who are well able to do the job, and communist China. Over the horizon lies the prospect of Shanghai becoming a booming financial centre in its own right. In addition, these places do not recognise western versions of intellectual property.

Mr. Darling: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says, but I made the point that we should not get carried away. There are those—I have not heard any of them tonight—who argue that we should have a minimal level of regulation to compete. I intend to return to this point shortly, and I am conscious of the fact that there are problems which must be dealt with. As the hon. Gentleman will find out, the thrust of what I have to say is that it is necessary not just to simplify the structure of regulation but to revisit the nature of regulation because this country is going down the wrong path and a change of direction is necessary. That has been the Opposition's belief for some time. I caution those who would say that the best thing would be to try to compete with those countries where there is no regulation whatsoever. No hon. Member from either side of the House has said that, but the view exists and it must be dealt with.

The Select Committee covered a wide range of subjects, and I shall touch on one or two before I return directly to the Bank of England and to the SIB regime which have dominated our discussion tonight. I agree in general terms with much of what the Select Committee had to say, but I wish to look at a couple of points briefly.

The first is the question of Lloyd's. We agree that external regulations are overdue and should be put in place. That view is not unique to the Opposition—Conservative Members have mentioned it, and the council of Lloyd's happens to take that view. I hate to inject a note of controversy into the debate, but it is matter of

[Mr. Darling]

regret that the former President of the Board of Trade—now the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary, or whatever he calls himself—told the council of Lloyd's that the Government would not sanction legislation. The reason for that was perfectly obvious to Opposition Members—it was because of the political embarrassment in which the Government would have found themselves. At least 49 Conservative Members are members of Lloyd's, many of whom are in the Cabinet.

The House may remember the last time we debated financial services in the House. The Opposition started off with a general review of what was happening, but very soon two Conservative Members—one who had lost a lot of money and one who was a member of the council of Lloyd's—started saying things to each other in such a way that outsiders would have found it hard to believe that they were in the same party. I can well understand why the President—as he then was—took the view that the Government wanted nothing to do with the matter.

It is intolerable that the interests of Lloyd's and of the reputation of the insurance market in Britain should take second place to the political embarrassment that the Government would endure if they introduced a further Lloyd's Bill to allow for external regulation. We believe that external regulation is essential and at an appropriate opportunity we intend to give Lloyd's that assistance. That would also help Lloyd's to make the recovery on which it is embarking. I acknowledge, as other hon. Members have done, the work that Lloyd's has been doing.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I am a little puzzled by the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Before I go further, I remind the House of my declared interest in the matter. The hon. Gentleman admits clearly that the council of Lloyd's would be happy to co-operate with any legislation that might be introduced. How might that be embarrassing to the Government?

Mr. Darling: The council of Lloyd's was keen for legislation to be introduced. I cannot remember whether the hon. Gentleman was present for the earlier discussion on Lloyd's. He will know that whether it is a matter of controversy to his colleagues depends on where they stand on Lloyd's. It was good of the hon. Gentleman to declare his interest. He might also declare that he has just walked into the Chamber. He may have missed the introduction to the debate.

A section of the report dealt with plea bargaining and enforcement. I caution hon. Members to be careful before institutionalising plea bargaining as a way of resolving problems in the City. The Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States uses it, but its modus operandi is different. I argue strongly against buying from the United States an off-the-shelf solution to our problems. That is not to denigrate the SEC. It is an American creation for the American market. I declare an interest as a Scots lawyer. I am wary of importing American legal methods into this country unless there is good justification for doing so.

I want the Select Committee to do some more work to find out whether the regulatory system could be used to better effect in matters such as insider dealing. The law on insider dealing has fallen into disrepute. There has been a handful of prosecutions in the past 10 years. A number of recent cases, to which I shall not refer, for the sake of brevity, have led the public to believe that the law on insider dealing is not enforced. People who work in the industry will tell anyone who cares to listen that there needs to be a change. Perhaps the regulatory system could help; the criminal law is not working. If there were an effective deterrent, instances of insider dealing would be greatly reduced because people would believe that they had every chance of being caught.

No one is asking for more regulation. I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. We do not need more regulation. We are talking about effective regulation and fewer rules that work. Four rules that work are worth far more than 400 that do not. I agree with the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that we have an innovative industry. That is why we and everyone else have shied away from notions of supervision or authorisation of products. That would be stifling and unnecessary.

Talking of fewer rules that work, let me return to Europe. Many companies and institutions now face the problem that, in addition to having to deal with the United Kingdom domestic regulatory regime, they have to deal with an increasing number of regulations from Europe as well as meet their international obligations. As we have heard, most institutions in Britain trade throughout the world. Compliance officers frequently have to deal with three or four different regimes. Usually, none of them tries to do the same thing. They are often contradictory and do not always fully equate with the business practice of the company.

One of the reasons why we argue that we ought to be at the heart of Europe is that it is high time that our influence was felt more when regulations are formulated. The European Commission has a tendency to regulate for an industry that does not exist as such across Europe. The structure of the United Kingdom industry is very different from that of the industry in Germany, Italy and other European countries. It is important that the British Government fight for British companies and argue the British corner and that we do not allow ourselves to be lumbered with regulations that impose a burden on our country.

The United Kingdom industry has a sophistication that is not always reflected elsewhere. Our companies and institutions will be at a competitive disadvantage if they face rules and regulations that were never designed for the United Kingdom industry. I am not a Euro-sceptic, despite what I have just said, but the Government could do more.

The Committee examined regulation and supervision. I should like to make a few remarks that I hope will encourage the Committee to look further at certain issues. Such work provides a useful basis for policy formulation by the Government, I hope, and certainly by the Opposition.

When we pose the question, "What are supervision and regulation?", we cannot make the distinction often enough that the City of London—our financial services industry—is many different industries, so a generalised approach to regulation simply will not do. We have to distinguish between supervisory requirements, where we are guarding against systemic failure, and regulation, where we are dealing with the conduct of business. We must recognise the difference between what is required at the wholesale end of the market, where we are dealing with relations between institutions and the doctrine of caveat emptor can apply more or less unencumbered, and what is required at the retail end, where we are dealing far more with customer protection and that doctrine must apply.

The object of the regulatory system must be geared not only to protecting members of the public from unscrupulous selling techniques or bad advice but to enabling them to make a genuine and informed choice. I would slightly temper the doctrine of caveat emptor because the object of the regulatory system, particularly at the retail end, must be to put buyer and seller on an equal footing.

I must say a word or to about supervision and prudential supervision with particular reference to the banks. On Barings, suffice it to say that we know that it collapsed because of incompetent management. How can a bank shift its entire capital out of the country with no one asking what is going wrong? How could Sir Peter Baring, within a couple of days of the collapse, say that it was all the work of a competitor? I cannot imagine that any competitor could do as much as the company managed to do to itself.

The people who run Barings now should think long and hard about paying bonuses to those who were involved in the collapse of the bank. It sends the wrong signals around the world. Just as we in the House have to think about how others see us, so corporate institutions must do the same. Barings might like to reflect on that and a bit of humility would not go amiss.

The real lessons that we have to learn are for the Bank of England and other regulators. As has been said, Barings was the third major failure with which the Bank had to contend. The Board of Banking Supervision produced a good, but damning, report that should cause us some concern. We were particularly struck by the board's observation in paragraph 14.35 of that report:

> "We believe the Bank should explore ways of increasing its understanding of the non-banking businesses (particularly financial services businesses) undertaken by those banking groups for which it is responsible".

Again, one has to wonder how the Bank of England did not understand the broader financial services activities of the banks that it regulated, given that so much of their profits now come from that source. I trust that the Bank is now doing so.

I also find it difficult to understand why the Governor of the Bank of England is so defensive towards those of us who have been critical. Our criticism has in many ways been remarkably restrained. In the summer preceding the collapse of Barings, the Governor said that there was no need to worry about derivatives because, "These chaps know what they are doing." Those of us outside and who, in whatever capacity, are charged with deciding what supervisory regimes are appropriate are bound to have regard to what the Governor said then and what happened subsequently when Barings collapsed.

The culture of the Bank of England and its attitude to supervision need to change. A new executive director responsible for regulation is to be appointed next week. The Select Committee might want to have that individual before it at an early stage, to find out whether there will be a change of emphasis.

We have heard references to the Arthur Andersen report. Perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity to deal with two matters. I strongly believe that any system is only as good as the people who employ it—that is crucial in supervision and regulation. We have spent some considerable time exploring opinion on the matter and it has been put to me that one of the problems in the Bank of England might be the difficulty that it has in attracting and keeping appropriately qualified staff. There may be pay and status implications. Clearly, the Bank can do a certain amount by finding resources from within itself, in the obvious way, but the Government may have to face up to the fact that it may be necessary to consider the pay structure and the structure of the Bank itself, if it is to deal with an increasingly complex area. Leaving aside whether the Bank has to do so in the long term, in the short term the Government may have to face up to that problem.

There has been much talk about the structure of the regulatory system and it would be appropriate to say a word or two about our view of whether the Bank of England should be the supervisory body. For the sake of completeness, for those who follow our proceedings outside the House, the *Financial Times* published an interview with me on 10 November which is wholly accurate and which summarises the state of our thinking.

I made several points in that interview. The argument about whether the Bank of England should be the supervisor is finely balanced and we have not reached a conclusion. There are arguments for and against making a change. For making a change is the fact that major structural exchanges are taking place in the industry. The neat distinctions between banks, building societies and insurance companies are disappearing. Indeed, the Building Societies Commission may find that the number of bodies for which it is responsible will diminish quite sharply. It is expected that most major building societies will have moved over to the Bank of England's supervision because of conversion in the fairly near future.

In the light of that, one is bound to ask whether it is appropriate to have the Bank of England, the Building Societies Commission, the DTI and others all concerned with prudential supervision. My guess is that, in the not-too-distant future, it will be appropriate, for that reason if for no other, to revisit the issue of who should be responsible for prudential supervision. At the moment, it is historical accident as to whether an institution comes under the supervision of the Bank of England, the Building Societies Commission or the DTI.

The second argument was touched upon by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham. If there was a body such as, for example, a banking commission, fully focused on regulation, it might improve the quality of regulation. That was raised by Lord Justice Bingham in the Bank of Credit and Commerce International report and is a model followed in other parts of the world. I accept that there is an argument for that. Against that, the most important feature of supervision and regulation is the quality of people involved; changing, or removing to another office, the brass plate does not resolve the problem. At the end of the day, it is the people who matter.

Despite what hon. Members have said about the reputation of the Bank of England, it still enjoys a formidable reputation and can still attract staff because of its status. More important, it is recognised to have a formidable reputation around the world. We should be

[Mr. Darling]

careful about lightly interfering with it until the case is made for change. The argument is finely balanced and we are keeping it under review. We certainly do not want to throw out the good work that has been done by, say, the Building Societies Commission.

Hon. Members referred to the need for international co-operation. One thing that will have caused hon. Members some concern is that when the Singapore authorities published their report into the collapse of Barings, one got the impression that there was an attempt to knock the ball out of the Singapore court, preferably into the court of the Bank of England. In the Barings collapse, there was an obvious dispute between Simex in Singapore and the Osaka authorities in Japan. Such regulatory competition is thoroughly unhelpful.

Hon. Members have said that they are depressed about the turf war between regulators in this country. More worrying, in some ways, is the turf war that results when markets, and therefore regulators, are in competition. The Government need to take the lead because it is Governments who operate in that area.

The Securities and Investments Board met its international counterparts earlier this year. The concluding document was entitled the "Windsor declaration"—strangely enough, because the meeting took place in Windsor. Such co-operation is essential. I agree with what was said about the need to have a lead regulator in the case of each institution. Again, the BCCI case highlighted that need. The hon. Member for Hazel Grove made the point that, in international terms, having one regulator is important. That was supported by Christopher Sharples—who did good work at the Securities and Futures Authority before he moved on—in his evidence to the Select Committee. That again points to the desirability of having one regulator of international standing.

I want to consider the SIB regime, which has been the subject of much discussion tonight. There are two parts to the matter. One involves structure, the other the nature of regulation. The structure needs to be changed as the present system is cumbersome and full of duplication. The view that it needs to be simplified commands increasing support within the industry.

We propose to make the SIB directly responsible for the regime broadly covered by the 1986 Act. We do not want to create a Securities and Exchange Commission and we shall not create a bureaucracy. I do not want an organisation run by lawyers. I can say that because I am a lawyer and I know what happens when organisations are run by lawyers. We no longer need a distinction between SROs and the SIB, as that is expensive. One can see the difficulties with pension transfers, for example, on which both the SIB and the Personal Investment Authority make parallel rules.

Under our system, the SIB would still have practitioner input and two separate operating divisions, broadly along the lines of the Securities and Futures Authority and the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation on the one hand and the PIA on the other. I stress that we want to build on what we have and avoid traumatic disruption. The change that we suggest is radical but incremental, and it would be welcomed. I see no reason why the recognised exchanges—LIFFE, the stock exchange, Tradepoint, and so on—should not continue, following the American maxim, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

I agree with what the Select Committee said about self-regulation: let us end it. It might cause the Home Secretary some embarrassment as he introduced the 1986 Act, although embarrassment does not seem to put the Home Secretary up or down so we should not worry too much about that. Self-regulation is a misnomer. The present system is rooted in statute. The problem with self-regulation is the public's perception that trade interest dominates, which is extremely damaging.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No, I shall not give way as I want to give the Minister time to reply. I am not being unfair to the hon. Gentleman, as he has not been present for the debate.

The regulatory system has gone completely wrong. The Government are mistaken to think that, by working with the industry and hoping that something will turn up, the position will improve. A radical rethink to this country's approach is required, particularly at the retail end of the market.

As the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) said, the costs are substantial. The other day, I spoke to a large institution, which reckoned that some 5 per cent. of the cost of selling a product arose because of compliance. Given that it takes some six hours to sell a pension policy, one must wonder whether we are going down the right road. I asked a life assurance office to try to sell me a policy to demonstrate the difficulties. After an hour, I was bored and fed up. I wanted to hear no more about the financial services industry or pensions, and we had not even begun to discuss the product. We were still struggling with how much we spent on groceries each week. I am bound to ask whether that is how to sell a pension. I wanted to know about the product; what happened if I gave it up too early; how much I would receive; what expectations were reasonable.

I often visit institutions where the compliance department is growing faster than the marketing department. That cannot be right. Whenever I attend meetings or lunches, I notice that the compliance officer is always in attendance. I do not know whether that is to watch what the directors say to me or whether it reflects the compliance officer's growing importance. I make those points to show that compliance is getting out of hand. I would tolerate that if the public were happy with it and felt that it was a price that people had to pay. But neither the public nor the industry has confidence in the system, which is why I believe that radical change is necessary.

The system is also irrational. For example, personal equity plans, which are widely sold, have no disclosure requirement on management fees, whereas the sale of pensions and other savings products is regulated and subject to disclosure. I agree with the Select Committee's comments in paragraph 60 about the inclusion of lending within the purview of the Financial Services Act. That is extremely important, and mortgages are a case in point. The selling of a mortgage is often the starting point of the sale of many other products, which is why in the 1980s institutions thought that it was a good idea to buy estate agencies. They thought that if they could collar people at the start, they could sell them everything under the sun.

It so happens that many estate agencies are now on the market, if anyone is looking for one. The selling of mortgages is not regulated, whereas everything else that follows from it is regulated—that cannot be right.

Many institutions are going for execution-only sales, not because that is necessarily what the customer wants, but to avoid the burden of compliance. The entire market is being distorted by a regulatory system that does not work. On a serious note, I have already mentioned that 2.5 million people are employed in the industry and it is an open secret that there will be job losses in the next year or so—perhaps a great many. One of the drivers of job losses is the compliance cost. If we can lift the burden of compliance, some individuals may keep their jobs. We should take that option extremely seriously.

I believe fundamentally that the approach to compliance, in particular the advice by box ticking, is misconceived and wrong. If the late Robert Maxwell had still been with us, he would have ticked every single box that was ever thrust in front of him. Nick Leeson completed compliance forms. In neither case did that stop what eventually happened.

A problem with the self-regulators is that they are becoming increasingly defensive and are producing more rules and regulations to protect their own position. The approach to compliance through box ticking must come to an end. Instead, one should concentrate on education and training. One of the best protections for a lawyer or a doctor is their own professional qualification. They know that if they do anything wrong they will be struck off.

The answer to many of the problems in the financial services industry is to concentrate on education and training, and, having done that, to trust the individual. We will always have problems somewhere, because it is impossible to have a foolproof system, but we should opt for a system based on education and training. We will not get the necessary change unless there is a change in the structure and culture of regulation. Many people look to a Government to give a lead.

We must also look at the role of management. It was management as much as unscrupulous salesmen who sold the personal pensions. It is management that insists on selling targets and which sometimes has a commission structure that makes mis-selling more likely than not. The nature of regulation has not been concentrated on nearly enough and it is something that the Select Committee might like to consider.

The consensus is that the present system is not working and that primary legislation is needed to change it. This is an extremely light Session of Parliament. I understand the Minister's difficulty, because she has been given an instruction from above that the only legislation that the Government will contemplate is that which puts what they call "clear blue water" between them and us. The result is that we have one vote a week. Many people outside who depend on the industry for their livelihood and members of the public who want to use that industry will wonder why the Government are not legislating when such a political and industrial consensus exists about the direction in which we should go.

I must ask the Minister, how many more reports and failures will there be before we get the Government to act? I do not accept the Government's wait-and-see approach, and their hope that something will turn up. That is not the correct approach. Radical change is needed.

Even if legislation were passed now, the lead time between that and improvements being made would be about three years. We cannot wait much longer. I hope that the Minister will accept the urgency of the situation and will announce tonight that the Government accept that changes are needed. It would be a great pity for the industry if it had to wait for a change of Government to get the change in regulation and supervision that most of us would like to see.

9.23 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): This has been a particularly useful debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) on introducing it. I notice that he said that the Select Committee's report provides a quarry of useful evidence for the future. The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) said that the report provides a mine of information. Clearly the consensus in the Committee runs to the phrases used in the House. I should also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for North Durham on his last hurrah. I hope that he enjoys his spell on the Public Service Select Committee as much as he has enjoyed his time on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee.

Before answering the specific points raised in the debate, I should like to comment on the financial services industry of the United Kingdom. London, Tokyo and New York are the three largest financial centres in the world. In Europe, Edinburgh is the fourth-largest centre after London, Frankfurt and Paris.

Therefore, while we are here today to discuss financial regulation, we must all remember that we have a fine success story and a thriving industry about which we should all be proud and positive. It would not be so if our regulation were too harsh or if our regulation were too light. We would not have as many foreign banks as we do; we would not have £666 billion under fund management; we would not have the largest and liveliest futures and options market in the United Kingdom if it were not an attractive and effective place in which to operate.

We also have in the City of London a foreign exchange market that is 50 per cent. larger than that of anywhere else, a domestic equity market that is three times the size of Paris or Frankfurt and the greatest concentration of insurers, pension funds and foreign bankers in the world. That good success story does not make me either complacent or blind to glitches or unaware of the need to look to the future, but it means that criticism of our existing system should be balanced, as should be calls for change. The essential combination, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) said, is to have a regulatory system that catches and deals with fraudsters quickly, protects investors and ensures quality professional standards while avoiding a bind that is so tight that the average man, woman or company finds it difficult to operate within it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove raised a number of issues, the first of which was his concern that regulators need properly motivated staff. I agree: it is a professional industry and professional regulators are required. The movement from the industry into regulation and out again, as part of a career projection, is happening. That means that new blood from the industry, well versed

[Mrs. Angela Knight]

in the clever tricks of the trade, is coming into regulation. That process will benefit not just regulation but the industry as a whole.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the structure of regulation. There is more than one view on it in the House and, more to the point, there is more than one view from those who work in the industry. I agree that there are problems that must be tackled, but I question the call for structural change. First, as soon as open season was declared on the regulatory structure, it would divide both the industry and the regulators between those who wanted change and those who wanted to stick with the status quo. This summer we saw some skirmishes in that sphere, which gave us a flavour of what would happen if the proposal were implemented.

Secondly, having made a proposal, there would be a period of consultation, followed by a period of debate, followed by a period of implementation and then, no doubt, there would ultimately be a compromise. If we were lucky, we might achieve something better, but who is to say that that would happen? We would certainly get something different. If, having put the industry through a period in which it was split between those who wanted change and those who wanted to remain with the status quo and having taken the proposal through the House and achieved a compromise, we then told the industry to implement the proposal, the consequence would be change, which would bring a cost to the industry.

If we wanted to introduce structural change, we would tell the industry that there would be a period of uncertainty for two to three years as the new system was sorted out—and all that just when the existing system was bedding down and making more effective use of the flexibility at its disposal.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way as, contrary to the impression given by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), the miracles of modern science have allowed me to follow the debate from my office while dealing with the work imposed on me by my private Member's Bill, which will be to the great benefit of his constituents.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the problems in the industry exist primarily in the retail and personal sectors and that self-regulation in the wholesale and professional sectors remains almost entirely satisfactory? To impose further change on the retail sector now, when it is just getting over the trauma of the establishment of the Personal Investment Authority, which we should have had in the first place, would impose unnecessary burdens on the industry as a whole.

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend is quite correct, and that is the point that I was trying to make. I thank him for casting light on the issue, in the same way as he does on our days and our nights. My mission with regard to the Financial Services Act 1986 is to ensure that the current system is working well. The Select Committee report refers to its strengths, and it points particularly to its flexibility. We shall draw on those strengths to make regulation truly effective.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said that the structure of the boards should be examined further. He proposed that the chairmen of the boards of the self-regulatory organisations should be drawn from the consumer side—I hope that I have not misinterpreted him and that he will not need to set me straight. The composition of boards formed the substance of his point and I agree with comments in that regard.

I also agree that the term "self-regulatory organisation" is a misnomer and I concur that "practitioner-influenced regulation" is a better description. Although I agree with much of the substance of the report, I am concerned about the review that is proposed in paragraph 93. I believe that such a review would prove destabilising for an industry that has already seen considerable change.

Mention was made of home income plans. That issue has caused considerable distress and many investors have received assistance. Prior to the introduction of the FSA, investors had to take legal action with little chance of recouping their losses and I realise that many people face residual debt. We are urging all lenders to look sympathetically on anyone in that position, as I understand that several are doing already. Immediately before the debate began I had extensive discussions with the Building Societies Commission about the matter. We discussed involving building societies in home income plans and voluntarily submitting their cases to the building society ombudsman.

I turn now to paragraph 118 and the way in which the Select Committee has encouraged the Treasury to adopt a more interventionist and active role in the co-ordination of financial services supervision and regulation. I am sorry that my reply to that suggestion was considered delphic. I said that the recommendation raises wider issues that will need careful consideration before final decisions are taken. There are wider issues involved if we are considering bringing all regulation under one Department. For example, we must consider the implications for other Government Departments and for interacting areas of policy. In answering the Select Committee, I clearly indicated Treasury inclinations in that area.

Mr. Forman: As far as I know, there is only one other Government Department that could create an obstacle. Can we not talk some sense into the Department of Trade and Industry and give responsibility to the Treasury?

Mrs. Knight: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment; I am sure that the DTI will heed his words.

Several hon. Members referred to Lloyd's. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), the Minister for Trade, sends his apologies for not being present for the debate this evening. He suspected that the subject of Lloyd's would come up, but he was unable to be here as he had to address a meeting in Nottingham. I have been asked to convey his apologies to the House and to assure hon. Members that he will take up and answer any points raised on the issue.

Lloyd's wrote a letter to hon. Members prior to the debate, in which it says:

> "Lloyd's remains committed to achieving the successful implementation of its plans for reconstruction and renewal".

Lloyd's must clearly undertake that task if it is to resolve its problems. The letter continues:

> "it is not where regulation is done that is important, but how well it is carried out".

Whatever our views on Lloyd's may be, I think that we would all agree with that. Let me remind the House, however, that we have agreed on the need for a fundamental review of the regulatory regime for Lloyd's that would consider the options of continuing self-regulation and independent external regulation. That review may well not start before mid-1997, as Lloyd's is seeking to resolve various complex problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) made some pertinent points about the retail side, citing a number of reports. I agree with him that there is a need for stability, and that all who work in the sector are strongly opposed to change. I rather liked my hon. Friend's succinct encapsulation of the original purpose of the Financial Services Act in six words: "Sell something suitable and be honest."

During the past few months, I have spent a good deal of time listening to people in the financial services industry. We must work with them to ensure that any unnecessary burdens are removed. That is why I support the regulators' efforts to implement the strategy contained in the 1993 Large review, and, in particular, the emphasis on supervision and enforcement. That must be delivered more efficiently to provide proper investment protection.

I am concerned by what my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester said about the length of the fact-finding procedure. It need not be over-burdensome. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), I suspect that part of the reason for the long-windedness of the form is that those who drew it up wanted considerably more information than was actually required.

Attention was drawn to the need to ensure that friendly societies are not over-regulated. The Personal Investment Authority is currently considering the decisions reached by a committee that it set up to examine friendly society regulation. As the committee was chaired by the chairman of a friendly society, I am sure that its conclusions will be relevant and positive. The PIA has announced that the training and competence of home service agents will be examined, and proposes the establishment of a new qualification known as the home service planning certificate, which should ease the burden on those who sell on behalf of friendly societies.

We must not forget the invaluable role of independent financial advisers. The high streets in our towns and villages invariably contain an office or shop with a sign saying, "Car, house and other insurance, pensions and financial advice". Those offices are run by men and women who have often learnt their skills in the nearby office of a well-known insurance company, or have been trained in a bank. They are as important to the local community as the butcher, the solicitor, the accountant and the supermarket: they provide general insurance services, and help people to plan for the future. The need for those independent advisers has never been greater; the requirement for individuals to take control of their financial future is obvious.

When we discuss regulation and the future of financial services, we should bear in mind the real need to avoid sweeping statements and generalities. We should remember who we are talking about and what we want them to achieve. No system will ever be perfect, but successful regulation of the retail sector can be achieved through training and competence requirements, disclosure and a lighter touch. We need a less prescriptive regime than the present one. This is the so-called disclosure dividend, of which so much has been said; now, much must be made of it. The regulators and the industry are well aware of my views.

The laws of caveat emptor apply to a considerable extent, so those who buy investment policies must themselves be trained. They need to know what they are asking for and what questions to ask, and they need to understand the replies.

Mr. Darling: The Minister speaks of the need to train those who buy investment policies—the public. How does she propose to train the public?

Mrs. Knight: There are a considerable number of ways in which we can do it. The first would be to talk about precisely what it is that an investor should be asking. When an individual has decided that he is going to buy a second-hand car, for example, he goes to the car showroom—possibly to four or five car showrooms—and looks under the bonnet, gets in the car, and takes it out for a drive on the road. If he is not confident about his knowledge of the vehicle, he will get a friend to come and have a look. If he is still not sure, he will get the Automobile Association to look it over. Only then will he will spend his money.

The same responsibility for one's actions has to be taken if one purchases a pension—a sphere of which neither we nor the individuals involved have taken sufficient cognisance.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Lady surely must accept that there is a substantial difference between buying a second-hand car and buying a pension. The whole point of the regulatory regime is to ensure that the buyer and the seller are put on as equal a footing as possible. The way to ensure that is to concentrate on the training, competence and professionalism of those who sell pensions. The hon. Lady's comparison, frankly, will make many members of the public wonder about the Government's attitude. I think that she should clarify what she has said.

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman's comment is really a bit too much. Individuals must take responsibility for their actions; they must ask questions. It is true that a car is a tangible entity and a financial service is not. There are obvious differences, but that does not mean that individuals can ignore the responsibility that they have themselves to ask questions about the product that they are buying, whether it is a financial service or something else.

The regulatory regime is there to assist the individual and ensure that there is training and competence for the salesman. I do not think that it is right and proper to say that an individual does not have to take any responsibility for his action in the sphere of financial services. He must have the same responsibility as in other spheres.

Mr. Carrington: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Information must be provided so that one financial product can be compared to another by an individual who does not have specialist knowledge or training. We are talking about regulation to ensure that the industry provides products that are easily comparable by someone who is not a specialist.

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend is correct, and that is what disclosure is all about. Disclosure provides individuals with knowledge about what they are buying, which was not previously the case. I say again that each individual has a responsibility to ask questions and think about what he is buying. The Government also have the responsibility to

[Mrs. Knight]

ensure that there is a working regulatory framework and the other features that have been mentioned by hon. Members. I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and hope that he agrees with what I have said.

I also hope that when the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) leaves the Chamber, he will think through some of the points that have been made because I think that his comment went a little bit far—perhaps it was on purpose. We are talking about people, companies, independent financial advisers and people's futures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington made the point that capital is footloose and that countries are in competition around the world in financial services, as they are in other spheres. He asked what was being done to ensure that this country takes due cognisance of that fact in its regulatory process. I assure him that we are promoting the competitiveness of the financial services industry in the United Kingdom. We are ensuring that it is in a fit state to respond to the ever-increasing pace of developments in products and techniques, and we are keeping a careful watch on the burdens that our own regulatory system may impose so that the right balance is struck between encouraging innovation and maintaining proper protection for the investor.

I take issue with the point that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central made about whether the Government were doing enough to fight Britain's corner in Europe. I can assure him that we are, and in a robust manner. We are arguing in the European Union for an approach to financial regulation that enhances Europe's strengths vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and for an approach that does not tie down too tightly the United Kingdom, which has specialities in this field that other European countries lack. I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will remember that when he takes up this matter again.

We are also fighting to obtain maximum access for our firms in overseas markets, either as part of multilateral negotiations or through bilateral efforts—and by looking at some products. It is quite correct that competition has come from Luxembourg, to name but one country; part of our response to such competition comes in the form of new products, of which open-ended investment companies are an example.

Barings has been mentioned several times in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove highlighted the differences, as he saw them, between the Board of Banking Supervision report and the report of the Singapore authorities. I assure him that the two reports come to the same general conclusion, however. The Singapore report may come to firmer conclusions about the motives of certain senior managers, but it is important to remember that the BOBS report did not have access to much of the evidence in Singapore. Both reports have been extremely useful.

Much has been said today and for several months about the Barings collapse. The episode carried serious messages for management in every financial institution around the world. Even those—there were many—who said that it could not possibly happen to them put investigations in hand just to be on the safe side. If there is a silver lining to the whole affair, it is that the entire international financial system is likely to be somewhat more secure as a result.

There are important messages for regulators and supervisors as well. The Governor of the Bank of England has welcomed the 17 recommendations for the Bank in the Board of Banking Supervision's report. The Bank will respond to the board by the end of the year on its implementation of the recommendations, and the Governor expects to send a copy to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee once it has been presented to the board.

Arthur Andersen has been appointed to review the way in which the Bank approaches supervision. The report should be completed by next April. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has asked the Treasury to conduct its own review of the role of the Bank as prudential supervisor of banks. With the Arthur Andersen review under way, however, and with the report by the SFA due shortly, together with the Select Committee's decision to undertake its own inquiry into Barings, it makes more sense for the Government to await those findings before deciding whether yet another report is required. A further report before the first report has been completed strikes me as slightly silly; waiting for those reports seems rather more sensible.

The clear message to those who regulate as well as to those who manage financial institutions is that in a fast-moving and changing market the need to be up to date with precisely what is happening and its possible consequences is paramount.

International co-operation has been highlighted in the debate. With the globalisation of business, international solutions are required. We take that very seriously. The United Kingdom is in the forefront of efforts to strengthen co-operation. We have negotiated a memorandum of understanding with several countries. The United Kingdom is an active member of the International Organisation for Securities Commissions and of the Basle banking group. In the summer we hosted a conference at Windsor, to which the regulators of futures and options exchanges from 16 countries were invited. They all jointly issued a declaration on the protection of customers' positions, funds, assets, default procedures and co-operation in emergencies. I can assure the House that we take our responsibilities seriously and pursue them actively.

I end by thanking the Committee for its constructive and helpful report. Although I cannot pretend to agree with every word of it, I do agree with much of it. It is an excellent effort to move forward with the debate on the regulation of financial services.

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Tuesday 19th December, the Speaker shall—

(i) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Fisheries not later than three hours after their commencement or Seven o'clock, whichever is the later, and Standing Order No.14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents) shall not apply;

(ii) put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Scottish Business not later than one and a half hours after their commencement, such Questions including those on any amendments to the Motion which she may have selected which may then be moved.—[*Mr. Newton.*]

HUMBER BRIDGE (DEBTS) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—[*Mr. Newton.*]

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th December 1995, relating to fisheries: total allowable catches and quotas for 1996, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

9.48 pm

Sitting suspended.

10 pm

On resuming—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates), put forthwith the deferred Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings on Vote on Account, 1996-97 (Class XI, Vote 1, and Class XVI, Vote 1).*

Class XI, Vote 1

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £13,948,653,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by the Department of Health on or in relation to hospital, community health, mental health, family health and family health service administration services, National Health Service trusts, and on related services.

Class XVI, Vote 1

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £30,079,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by Her Majesty's Treasury on economic, financial and related administration, including debt management; payments to certain parliamentary bodies; and certain other services including expenses in connection with Honours and Dignities and a grant in aid to the Private Finance Panel Executive.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions which he was required to put at that hour, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.).*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1995-96

Resolved,

That a supplementary sum not exceeding £1,915,196,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for defence and civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1996, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 4 of Session 1995-96.

ESTIMATES, 1996-97 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That a further sum not exceeding £81,414,396,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for defence and civil services in Classes I to X; Class XI, Votes 2 and 3; Classes XII to XV, Class XVI, Votes 2 to 15; Classes XVII and XVIII; and Classes XVIII, A and XVIII, B for the year ending on 31st March 1997, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 5, 6 and 7 of Session 1995-96.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. Michael Jack.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Mr. Michael Jack accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1996 and 1997: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 18 December and to be printed. [Bill 13].

Channel Tunnel Railway Lines

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.2 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): When I had my previous Adjournment debate on the subject of blight and compensation in relation to channel tunnel trains, I earnestly hoped that it would be my last debate on that subject. I assume that my hon. Friend the Minister took the same view, especially as the debate began at 6.53 in the morning. Unhappily, I am obliged to return to that key issue, because important issues remain unresolved. Indeed, a major new issue has emerged since I brought the subject before the House.

I wish to raise three specific issues. The first is the well-worn topic that I have been addressing for more than four years—the extent to which the provisions of the Land Compensation Act 1973 apply to existing lines to the channel tunnel, on which very major works have taken place to enable them to accommodate both passenger and freight trains.

I have consistently argued that that Act applies to at least some areas of the existing lines, and that interpretation has been endorsed by counsel, Mr. Gregory Stone, on behalf of the local authorities concerned. I believe that it was also endorsed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who was then Minister for Public Transport, because of what he said in response to my Adjournment debate on 13 January 1994. I will not repeat what was said in that debate, apart from quoting again from the letter I received from Bob Horton, the chairman of Railtrack, on 19 September 1994. The chairman took a very different view from that of myself, Gregory Stone and the Minister concerned. Mr. Horton said:

> "We could probably debate indefinitely the interpretation of the words that appear in Hansard. Railtrack's position is clear: even if the Minister was accepting on behalf of the Government that the Land Compensation Act 1973 does entitle those living near existing railway lines used by Channel Tunnel traffic to claim compensation (subject to proving diminution in value), Railtrack does not agree with that interpretation of the Act. I am afraid, therefore, that Railtrack will continue to resist these claims".—*[Official Report,* 15 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 1292.]

Railtrack's apparent conclusion in September 1994 was that it would resist all claims for injurious affectation compensation under the Land Compensation Act 1973 from properties anywhere along the existing lines to the channel tunnel from Waterloo to Cheriton, and through either the Tonbridge line or the Maidstone East line.

In the ensuing months, it appears that there has been a change in Railtrack's position with a view to its legal responsibilities. Unhappily, Railtrack has been extraordinarily unforthcoming in making public its change of view. The first indication which I picked up that it had changed its view was in the letter I received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 24 July this year, in which my right hon. Friend said:

> "Railtrack contend that the vast majority of the engineering works carried out on existing lines in Kent do not constitute works of reconstruction, extension or alteration within the meaning of the Act."

The significant phrase in that sentence was "vast majority". If it is the case that Railtrack contends that the vast majority of works do not trigger entitlement to compensation, the very clear implication is that Railtrack does now accept that a minority of works at least trigger an entitlement to compensation.

It was because of that clear implication that I wrote back to the Secretary of State for Transport, asking him to obtain from Railtrack a list of the engineering works along the existing lines which Railtrack does accept fall within the meaning of the Act, and therefore trigger an entitlement to compensation.

The reply I received from my right hon. Friend, dated 6 October this year, was both extraordinary and extremely illuminating. My right hon. Friend said:

> "You also asked for a list of the works that Railtrack clearly accept as falling within the meaning of the Act. I do not doubt that some of the engineering works that Railtrack have carried out may qualify as eligible works within the meaning of the Act; indeed, I understand that in a limited number of cases the company is considering claims and have instructed surveyors and compensation specialists to advise and negotiate with surveyors representing claimants. My officials asked Railtrack for a list of eligible works, but the company says that, to date, it has not accepted that any of the works cited by claimants qualify for compensation within the meaning of the Act. Therefore it is unable to provide a list. Although I have no power to intervene statutorily in Railtrack's handling of compensation claims, I intend raising this matter personally with Bob Horton at my next regular meeting with him."

I have to say that I found that to be extraordinary. First we have the Cabinet Minister responsible for the matter accepting in that letter that some works do qualify. We have a clear statement from him in that letter that Railtrack also clearly accepts that and has instructed surveyors and compensation specialists to negotiate with surveyors of the claimants, but at the same time, with extraordinary stubbornness, Railtrack is deliberately refusing to supply the list of eligible works that I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport demand.

I consider Railtrack's behaviour evasive, obstructive and well below the level of public accountability that one would expect from a public body such as Railtrack. I believe that its attitude is in breach of the provisions of the citizens charter. One of the kernel points of the charter is that public bodies and authorities should inform individual citizens of their rights. The taxpayers charter clearly states in relation to HM Customs and Excise:

> "You are entitled to expect HM Customs and Excise to help you to understand your rights."

I submit that it is equally incumbent on a body such as Railtrack to help people understand their rights to compensation—rights in law, passed by Parliament. On this issue, it is incumbent on Railtrack immediately to make public a list of the eligible works that have been carried out along the existing lines—those works which in its view trigger an entitlement to compensation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been asking for such a list for months. I have been asking for it for months. It is Railtrack's obligation to disclose the list. I hope that my right hon. Friend will obtain it from Railtrack and make it available to all Members of Parliament for constituencies between Waterloo and Cheriton. I hope that he will make certain that that key information is placed in the public domain.

The second issue that I want to raise is the major blight that is being created by the proposals of the Central Railway Group to create an additional freight line from the midlands to Cheriton. The new scheme is already creating substantial blight. Those who consider that their homes are already blighted should exercise considerable care and take professional advice before they accept the proposals put before them by the Central Railway Group under its so-called property protection scheme. The proposals will involve individual householders making a contractual commitment to the company to sell their home to it at an agreed price at some future date.

The group's proposal contains a trap. Payment for those homes will take place only if the scheme goes ahead. It could be years before it is decided whether the scheme will go ahead and the individuals concerned could be left in blighted limbo for many years. They should give careful consideration to an alternative means of removing themselves from that blighted position.

I have received an important letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dated 13 October 1995, in which he makes it clear that if the Central Railway Group makes an application to him to handle the project under the procedures of the Transport and Works Act 1992, the statutory provisions will take effect from the date of the application. My right hon. Friend's exact words were:

"Assuming an application is made, the statutory blight provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 take effect from the date of the application."

That is extremely important to those who believe that they may suffer from statutory blight and I want my hon. Friend to deal with the following three questions in his reply.

First, will my hon. Friend confirm that those affected by statutory blight, because of the Central Railway Group's proposal, will be able to serve a blight purchase notice on the company to buy their homes at full, unblighted value from the date of its application for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992?

Secondly, will my hon. Friend confirm that those affected by statutory blight will also be entitled to obtain from the Central Railway Group the statutory home loss payments that were increased by the Government in 1991?

Thirdly, will my hon. Friend also provide this assurance? If his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considers that the immediately available financial resources of the Central Railway Group are not sufficient to enable it to discharge its financial obligations to meet blight purchase notices, when the order comes before the House for debate on a Government motion, will he advise the House in the motion to refuse to proceed with the project?

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, on both the issue of compensation and the key second point about the Central Railway Group, a large number of constituents of a considerable number of hon. Members who might not be here this evening are equally affected by the problems of blight? It is a huge worry for them. Through no fault of their own, they are going to suffer horrendous financial difficulties.

Sir John Stanley: I wholly endorse what my hon. Friend says. This is a massive proposal and it affects a large number of constituencies and individuals, all the way from Rugby in the midlands to the Cheriton terminal area in Kent.

The third group of constituents to whom I must briefly refer are those who are blighted and still without compensation along the line of the channel tunnel rail link. As far as those in my constituency are concerned—those on Blue Bell hill in particular—I very much welcome the markedly different attitude that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken compared to that of his predecessor in relation to the findings of the ombudsman on maladministration by the Department of Transport.

I welcome the fact that, when writing to my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—my right hon. Friend said:

"the Government is prepared to consider afresh whether a scheme might be formulated to implement the Committee's recommendation that redress should be granted to those affected to an extreme and exceptional degree by generalised blight from the CTRL"—

the channel tunnel rail link—

"from the period June 1990 to April 1994 and how it might operate."

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us in reply when we can expect his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to produce proposals to give effect to the recommendations of the ombudsman, which were accepted by the Select Committee.

10.18 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has reminded us, this is not the first time that we have debated these issues, although this evening it is at a more sociable hour. I thank him for this further opportunity to respond to him about the concerns of his constituents, for whom he has been such a vigorous and persistent advocate.

First, it is important to be clear about the provisions of the Land Compensation Act 1973 and the other measures intended to alleviate any adverse effects that may be caused by the operation of the railway system.

The Land Compensation Act 1973 allows householders to claim compensation from the responsible authority when the value of their property is diminished by physical factors, such as railway noise or vibration, caused by the use of new or altered public works. In the case of railways, the Act is not specific as to what is meant by "altered works" but it refers to their being

"reconstructed, extended or otherwise altered."

My right hon. Friend knows that the Act also provides for compensation to be claimed where there has been a change of use in respect of an existing railway line, but that in this case the Act specifies that "change of use" does not include intensification of an existing use. There is therefore no statutory requirement for compensation to be paid purely because traffic on an existing railway line has increased; this parallels the situation for roads. If people buy properties near an existing railway line—or, indeed, a road—they do so knowing that traffic can change in composition or volume. The law does not therefore require the body responsible to pay compensation in those circumstances.

In the case of an altered railway line, my right hon. Friend will appreciate that it is not for me to determine whether particular works undertaken are covered within the meaning of the Act; this is, in the first instance, for the responsible authority—in this case, Railtrack—to decide. It and its predecessor, British Rail, carried out the works.

[Mr. John Watts]

As my right hon. Friend knows, Railtrack has not to date accepted that any of the works cited by householders seeking compensation under the Act are works of

"reconstruction, extension or other alteration".

It is not for the Department of Transport to interpret the law but if householders believe that they have a case, the Act provides for them to pursue it with the Lands Tribunal and, ultimately, the courts. Householders who are not satisfied with Railtrack's response to their claims should seek professional legal advice.

As my right hon. Friend has acknowledged, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no statutory locus in the matter, he has both written and spoken to the chairman of Railtrack to ascertain the current position on claims which have been submitted to the company. The situation has not changed since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to my right hon. Friend in July and October this year, although Railtrack is conducting some technical investigations following claims arising from works in the area of Bickley. The outcome of those investigations is awaited. I give an undertaking to my right hon. Friend that both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will pursue a response from Railtrack on the outcome of those investigations.

My right hon. Friend mentioned also the proposals of the Central Railway Group. I am pleased to confirm that statutory blight provisions under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 will take effect from the date of an application under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

People whose land, or rights in land, would be compulsorily acquired under the proposals and were unable to sell their property at the open market value, would be able to serve blight notices on Central Railway. If Central Railway did not accept the owner's valuation, the matter would go to the Lands Tribunal for settlement.

Landowners who are entitled to serve blight notices may also be entitled to home loss payments. These are made in recognition of the personal distress and inconvenience suffered by people who are displaced by an authority acting under statutory powers.

In addition, people whose property, or rights in property, would be compulsorily acquired, are entitled to disturbance compensation for their reasonable expenses in moving. This would cover legal costs of conveyance of the house or flat, and other reasonable expenses as a result of the compulsory purchase.

If only part of the property is wanted, it may be possible to require Central Railway to buy the whole of the property, but this will depend on the particular circumstances. People affected in this way are advised to consult a solicitor or surveyor. If Central Railway disputes the claim, the matter can be referred to the Lands Tribunal for a decision.

Outside the limits of deviation of the works, claims for compensation for depreciation in the value of a property can be made under the Land Compensation Act; I have already outlined the provisions included in that Act.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the option to purchase scheme that Central Railway has been offering. I can confirm to him that I am advised that signing such options does not affect a person's statutory rights under the compensation code.

With regard to the ability of the proposer of a scheme under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to fund the compensation, we would need to be satisfied that compensation could be paid. When a motion to allow the scheme to go to a public inquiry comes before the House, hon. Members, too, will wish to be satisfied that sufficient funding is available to deal with compensation for blight before the House gives authority to take the scheme to a public inquiry, which would be the next stage.

I am also grateful to my right hon. Friend for this opportunity to explain to the House the current position in relation to the Government's response to the sixth report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration about the channel tunnel rail link and exceptional hardship. The House last had a substantive discussion of this case in a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 6 March.

It may be helpful if I remind the House briefly of the history of this subject. The Parliamentary Commissioner's report was published on 9 February. The Commissioner had investigated five specimen cases relating to individuals who claimed that they could not sell their properties and had suffered exceptional hardship during the period of generalised blight relating to the rail link from June 1990 to April 1994. He found that my Department was guilty of maladministration in not considering the position of persons who had suffered that exceptional and extreme hardship and in not providing for redress where appropriate.

My Department has consistently rejected the Parliamentary Commissioner's findings: initially in its response to the Commissioner, which was published as an appendix to his report, and later in evidence given to the Select Committee by the permanent secretary on 1 March and by my right hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio, the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) on 23 May.

The Select Committee published its report on 25 July endorsing the Parliamentary Commissioner's findings in this case. The Government seriously considered the Select Committee's recommendations and my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Transport gave the Government's response on 1 November. That response was published the same day in the Select Committee's fifth special report.

The House will be aware that the Government concluded that they had to continue to resist the finding of maladministration, and that any new principle of administration implied in the Committee's report was unacceptable, but that they were prepared to consider afresh whether a scheme might be formulated to implement the Committee's recommendation that redress should be granted to those affected to an extreme and exceptional degree and to look at how it might operate. The Government agreed to look again at the possibility of a compensation scheme out of respect for the Select Committee and the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner, and without admission of fault or liability. We also made it clear that the Government would have to consider seriously the possible costs of a scheme, which cannot yet be established, and that, in view of their responsibilities to the taxpayer, they could not offer an open-ended commitment on an uncosted basis.

Our consideration of whether such a scheme might be formulated is currently under way and we shall make as speedy progress as possible, taking account of the Government's undertaking to consult the Select Committee as proposals are developed and the need to consider seriously the possible costs of a scheme. However, until the process of fresh consideration is completed, it is impossible to say whether or what compensation arrangements might eventually apply.

I hope that I have been able to give my right hon. Friend a soupcon of reassurance on some of those important matters. I continue to appreciate his close interest in compensation and related issues. I hope that this will be the last time that we debate these issues, although that is ultimately a matter for my right hon. Friend.

Sir John Stanley: On my hon. Friend's first point, will he assure me that he and the Secretary of State will provide the House with a list of any other places along the line, apart from Bickley, where Railtrack feels that the works in question would entitle people to compensation? Will he ensure that that list is included in the information that he will give the House?

Mr. Watts: If there are instances of "new or altered" works which Railtrack accepts fall within the definition of the Act, those will be included in the list and that information will be made available to my right hon. Friend and the House. The difficulty is that until there are such works which Railtrack accepts are within the definition, there is no list. Therefore, any list that I might supply would merely be a blank piece of paper. We will convey to my right hon. Friend any information of the sort that he seeks which we can obtain from Railtrack.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 18 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to increase the contribution of the national lottery to charities. [4633]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The national lottery has exceeded expectations with the huge contribution that it has made to charities. I can today announce that it has raised the magnificent sum of more than £1.3 billion for the good causes fund. More than 3,500 lottery awards, totalling more than £825 million, have been made to projects throughout the country. More than 75 per cent. of all awards made so far have been to charitable or voluntary sector bodies. Today there have been a further 128 awards, including 88 to caring charities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Marshall: While everyone recognises the great success of the national lottery, does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a feeling about that the director general of Oflot has been guilty of surprising errors of judgment and that too little of the national lottery money goes to genuine charities by comparison with high-falutin' causes, to which there have been too many awards?

Mrs. Bottomley: The distribution of resources from the national lottery has nothing whatever to do with the director general of Oflot. That system was, of course, set up by Parliament. The caring charities have now received 1,409 awards, and that is only the beginning. The lottery has exceeded expectations in the amount of money that it has raised and caring charities have undoubtedly benefited—including Barnardos with £600,000, Arthritis Care with £481,000 and, on Friday, the Pre-School Playgroups Association in Wales with £427,000.

Dr. John Cunningham: Given that the National Lottery etc. Act places on the director general a number of overriding public duties—first, to maximise the net proceeds for distribution from the lottery and, secondly, to secure that the lottery is run with all due propriety—does the Secretary of State think that the director general of Oflot is fulfilling those duties? Is it not time that she laid down a code of practice for the director general and his staff and published it so that anyone can know what is expected of them? Does she recognise that if she allows Mr. Davis to remain in his post many people across Britain will be astonished?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Gentleman is correct that the duty of the director general of Oflot is three-fold: to maximise the return for good causes; to ensure that those who play the lottery are protected; and to ensure that the lottery is run with all due propriety. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the National Audit Office report, which commended the process of evaluation of applicants for the licence. On that occasion, it described the work of the director general of Oflot in very high terms as being

"comprehensive, consistent, logical and properly controlled."

Subsequent events have been discussed at very great length by the Public Accounts Committee last Monday. The right hon. Gentleman and the House will be aware that my Department received a preliminary report from Mr. Davis on those matters. Officials have discussed the subject with him this morning. I need to consider the issues raised carefully. I do not intend to take precipitate action. It would be inappropriate and unfair to say more about the matter today. I shall, however, report to the House in due course.

Mr. Tim Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the NAO report shows that the director general of Oflot evaluated the applications for the licence to run the national lottery in an exemplary manner? Does she also agree that although he may have been guilty of some misjudgment, that is absolutely no reason to demand his resignation?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is my understanding that the National Audit Office clearly said that the director general acted throughout the process in accordance with the statutory duties placed upon him. He has been extremely rigorous and thorough, he has kept detailed notes of all events, and he has been entirely open in discussion with the Public Accounts Committee and with my officials.

Mr. Kaufman: Given the serious potential for corruption that exists as a result of the vast sums of money with which the national lottery is and will continue to be awash, is it not clear that the whole basis of the national lottery as a privatised monopoly is unacceptable? Is it not also clear that when Camelot's licence expires in 2001 the lottery should be operated in the public sector—with the huge profits going to the public and not to private enterprise—and that if elements of the potential for corruption continue, Camelot's licence should be revoked early?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the regulatory structure for the lottery was agreed by Parliament. I cannot share the right hon. Gentleman's belief that matters operated by the public sector are necessarily operated more effectively or more efficiently. I am reminded that in the past we subsidised nationalised industries to the tune of £50 million per week. The taxpayer now benefits from the profits of privatised industries to the tune of £50 million per week.

So far as I am aware, our lottery is the most effective and efficient anywhere in the world. With the right hon. Gentleman, I want to ensure that it retains the absolute confidence of all those who participate in it.

Sir Michael Shersby: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have just seen a remarkable demonstration of the

Labour party's real objection to the whole issue of the lottery—the fact that Camelot makes a profit? Does she further agree that there is not a shred of evidence to show that Mr. Davis acted either corruptly or improperly, and that what we have seen over the past two days has been a disgraceful attempt to impugn the reputation of a distinguished and reputable accountant who has carried out his duties to the full satisfaction of the National Audit Office? Will my right hon. Friend take that into account when she considers the matter?

Mrs. Bottomley: I will indeed note my hon. Friend's comments carefully. I am aware of no suggestions of dishonesty about Mr. Davis. I have heard only that his reputation on professional matters is consistently and highly regarded.

Mr. Alan Williams: It is a week since Mr. Davis indicated in answers that he had taken free trips from a company that he is supposed to be monitoring. The Minister will have been aware of that within hours. Why, a week later, is she is still saying that she cannot make up her mind whether he should go or stay? Most considered opinion is that the man should go—not for dishonesty, but for sheer lack of judgment.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is not my view that a knee-jerk reaction is appropriate in the circumstances. We have an extremely successful and competitive lottery that is highly regarded around the world. I have made it clear that I will report to the House when I have had time to consider the details involved.

Tourist Spending

3. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what analysis she has made of the latest figures on spending by tourists. [4634]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Overseas tourists spent almost £9 billion in the UK up to October—a 13 per cent. increase. Tourism is worth about £36 billion a year—5 per cent. of gross domestic product. There are 88,000 new jobs related to tourism in the year to June.

Mr. Banks: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. Does she agree, however, that the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe face a challenge to regain a higher share of the world tourism market? While proposals by the European Commission to raise the profile of tourism are to be applauded, does my right hon. Friend agree that any amendment to the treaty should be scrutinised with great care to ensure that a ceiling is placed on any new department and that regulatory powers are excluded? Does she further agree that regulations such as the social chapter threaten to price the rest of Europe out of the market?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks strongly, particularly on behalf of his own constituency, on a subject about which he has great knowledge and he is absolutely right that it is an increasingly competitive world market. We are determined to fight for a greater share of that market because of the potential for wealth creation and job creation. I entirely share my hon. Friend's deep concern that spreading Brussels bureaucracy and European control over such an important industry could do it untold damage. The introduction of the social chapter and the minimum wage would destroy jobs and opportunity in that vital industry.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Secretary of State aware that one of the most popular forms of tourism in my constituency is that promoted by language schools? Many of them are unregulated and take children as young as 10 and 11 during the summer months, who cause great problems in the city of Cambridge. What is the Minister's attitude to that problem, and what does she intend to do about it?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am well aware that the response of the Labour party to every problem is to tie organisations up in regulation, bureaucracy and licences. I am also aware that the hon. Lady's constituency is a tremendous centre of arts and cultural heritage, and thus has great tourist potential. I am also aware of the huge number of lottery awards that her constituency has been given, which has made it an even greater tourist attraction.

I will look into the issue raised by the hon. Lady in an open-minded way to see whether any sensible approach can properly be taken. I would, however, be extremely reluctant to inhibit the opportunities of language schools, which create a great number of jobs and other opportunities not only in the hon. Lady's constituency but elsewhere.

Sports Facilities, London

4. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the provision of playing fields and similar sports facilities in north-west London; and what policy guidance is given by her Department when local authorities seek to sell such areas. [4635]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): The provision of playing fields and sports facilities in north-west London is a matter for the relevant local authorities to consider, seeking expert advice from bodies such as the Sports Council. The Government's planning policy guidance note No. 17 outlines the factors that local authorities should consider before allowing playing fields to be redeveloped.

Mr. Dykes: My hon. Friend the Minister monitors carefully what is happening to playing fields up and down the country, and I thank him for the work that he has done to ensure that quite a few of them remain in public sector hands. Bearing in mind the fact that the Labour party's official policy document advocates, similarly, that the ownership of playing fields should remain in public hands, is it not preposterous that incompetent Camden council, which has a Labour majority and is one of the worst local authorities in Greater London, is now proposing to dispose of at least two out of its three principal playing fields? Will my hon. Friend make sure that that example of double-standard cynicism is withstood and will he monitor closely what happens if the council foolishly tries to raise excess funds from the sale of those playing fields to outside commercial interests instead of keeping them for the local community?

Mr. Sproat: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words, and for drawing that matter to my attention in our previous discussions about the important issue of the Prince Edward playing fields. I hope that Camden will continue to allow those playing fields to remain in existence, because it is an important part of our sports policy that as many playing fields as possible remain open to public access.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Is the Minister aware that Camden council, far from being incompetent, is constantly praised by the Department of the Environment, no less, and is constantly receiving charter marks and recommendations for the excellence of its service? May I further point out that Camden has no plans to sell its playing fields. In fact, it is consulting a range of interested parties, including sports associations and local communities, about them. There is little point in any local authority attempting to maintain its sports facilities, however, if the Government consistently underfund any kind of youth provision. Will the Minister therefore speak to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment about whether there can be a positive change in the Government's approach?

Mr. Sproat: I am glad to hear about Camden council's catalogue of virtues. I hope that they will include making absolutely certain that those playing fields are not sold for development but remain for people to play sport on.

Museums and Galleries

5. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information she has received on visitor satisfaction in relation to the national museums and galleries. [4638]

Mr. Sproat: The statutory responsibility for managing a national museum or gallery rests with its trustees. However, the information submitted to the Department in the corporate plans of national institutions indicates that the vast majority of visitors are very satisfied with their visits.

Mr. Spring: In assessing quality, will my hon. Friend state how many galleries and museums have been awarded a charter mark? Does my hon. Friend agree that museums and galleries can play a crucial part in highlighting our unique national history? Will he give all encouragement to museums and galleries to publicise our rich history to as wide a circle as possible?

Mr. Sproat: From memory, I can tell my hon. Friend that three museums and galleries have charter marks—the imperial war museum, the Victoria and Albert museum and the national museum of science and industry in Manchester. I congratulate all three on that. As to the second part of my hon. Friend's question, I agree strongly that we would wish to see an increase in the understanding of our national achievements. A review that I am carrying out of museums and galleries will play an important part in increasing that understanding.

Mr. Gunnell: Following action in the Minister's Department, we now have a national coal mining museum in Yorkshire. While visitor satisfaction is high at that museum, there are concerns about the price of admission. Does the Minister accept that it is a part of the role of his Department to ensure that those museums which are supported are within reach of the public who wish to visit them?

Mr. Sproat: The short answer is yes, and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the part that he has played in the development of the national coal mining museum. It is a wonderful museum, which I know is currently preparing a business plan to see how it can get more funds to expand. My Department will do everything within reason to help in that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is it not the quality of our national museums and galleries that attracts so many thousands of visitors from overseas?

Mr. Sproat: Yes—about 60 per cent. of all visitors to the United Kingdom say that visiting museums is one of the key reasons for coming to this country.

Digital Broadcasting

7. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future of digital broadcasting. [4641]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Broadcasting Bill covers digital terrestrial broadcasting. The framework is designed to stimulate the creation of a fair and competitive market. We want access for new entrants. We aim to safeguard public service broadcasting and the interests of viewers and listeners.

Mr. Hain: The people of Wales will be pleased that there is now an opportunity under the Bill to receive both Channel 4 and S4C. However, the Bill is extremely deficient in at least one other respect: the total failure to address the convergence of telecommunications and broadcasting, especially with digitalisation. Is there not now a very strong, if not unassailable, case for a single regulator for both broadcasting and telecommunications? When I put that point to the Secretary of State's predecessor on 23 May, he said that in principle he was interested in the idea. Seven months later, are not the Government in danger of being overtaken by the rapid growth in this area? For example, NewsCorp has taken a multi-media stake in MCI, 20 per cent. of which is, in turn, owned by British Telecom. Is not this whole area developing very quickly?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is a very exciting area, and I was pleased by the favourable response to the publication of the Bill from almost all the players in the industry. There are huge opportunities for industry, for jobs and for Britain. I am pleased by the hon. Gentleman's comments about Channel 4 and S4C in Wales, and the opportunities which now exist for them. In my view, it is not appropriate at present for Oftel and the Independent Television Commission to merge, as each has an important job to do. However, it is clearly of great importance that they co-operate and the hon. Gentleman will find that, on a number of issues—not only those in the Bill but other matters on which we are about to consult—there is a close and constructive relationship between the two bodies because, as the hon. Gentleman has said, of the importance of the increasingly converging areas.

Mr. Gale: My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on seeking to ensure through the Bill that the existing terrestrial broadcasters have adequate digital capacity to ensure that they lead the way in the development of new services and new programmes. If my right hon. Friend believes—as she clearly does—that good programming will lead the digital television revolution, is it not time that we freed up Channel 4 from its funding formula and allowed that money to be invested in good new programmes?

Mrs. Bottomley: I believe that there is good news for Channel 4 in my announcement on Friday in that we intend to ensure that it retains more of the revenue. It must be remembered—I am sure that the House is well aware of this—that the independent television companies pay to the taxpayer about £400 million a year. When thinking about a future funding formula, therefore—which we do not anticipate deciding on before 1997—all the options and the realities of the situation will be reflected on.

Dr. Moonie: In welcoming the right hon. Lady's commitment to full and fair competition, may I ask her why there is nothing about conditional access in the Bill?

Mrs. Bottomley: We are shortly to consult on proposals on conditional access and the consultation will be conducted through the European Communities Act 1972. It is not necessary for it to take place through the Bill. This week, the hon. Gentleman will see the further proposals and the details involved.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate the research and development directorate of the BBC at Kingswood Warren and the research department of NTL in Crawley Court, formerly the privatised arm of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, on their pioneering work in digital broadcasting—both digital audio broadcasting and digital terrestrial television? Will she please liaise with her right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to ensure, as we shall be one of the first broadcasters of digital radio and television in the world, that we make use of the opportunity to be the first exporters of digital television converters and digital audio radio sets?

Mrs. Bottomley: I strongly share my hon. Friend's wish to congratulate all those involved. He mentioned NTL, which bodes well for the privatisation of the BBC transmission services. Incidentally, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) was not here to ask his question on that subject. My hon. Friend is right to say that digital technology provides great opportunities for British industry. *The Guardian* said in an editorial:

> "If British companies rise to the challenge then it could provide lots of new business not just in Britain, but in the rest of the world, as the ripples of the digital revolution spread . . . But this time, at least, they can't say the Government didn't try to help."

Mr. Dafis: I welcome the proposals in the Bill for the funding arrangement for S4C and the commitment to link it to the retail prices index. However, does the Secretary of State recognise the need for the base level funding, from which the RPI link will follow, to be sufficiently high to enable the production of the additional programmes that will come through digitalisation and the arrangements now being made? May we also assume that when further frequencies become available as analogue is switched off, or at the first opportunity, S4C will be granted true parity with other service providers?

Mrs. Bottomley: It would be rash for me to make further commitments so far ahead. I believe that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that we have listened carefully to the concerns of S4C. We have sought to strike a balance between the interests of all those involved in this important industry. I note the hon. Gentleman's points about the basis on which the funding formula is established.

Mr. Stephen: My right hon. Friend will be aware that many hon. Members on both sides are concerned that digital broadcasters should observe the highest standards of taste and decency. Can my right hon. Gentleman explain why, if the existing codes of conduct are adequate, in April and again in June this year it was possible to screen a film called "Goodfellas", which included stabbings and shootings? In 146 minutes, it contained no fewer than 212 uses of the f-word and on four occasions the f-word was used in conjunction with the word "mother".

Mrs. Bottomley: I will come back to my hon. Friend with detailed comments about the programme that he described. He will know that the introduction of the Broadcasting Standards Council, which combines the strengths of its two predecessor bodies, is intended to ensure that with the greater freedoms that come out of the digital revolution there will also be an enhanced sense of responsibility in the interests of audiences and the public. I am determined that the BSC's work will be strengthened. There will be a requirement to keep a note of the steps that programme makers take as a result of complaints that have been upheld.

Football

8. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will bring forward proposals to give football fans more influence in running the game, with special reference to measures to enable more fans to sit on the boards of clubs. [4642]

Mr. Sproat: The administration of sport is a matter for the relevant governing bodies. Decisions on who sits on the boards of football clubs are for the clubs themselves to make.

Mrs. Prentice: Has the Minister had the opportunity yet to read Labour's charter for football, in which we recognise the role of the supporters and their concerns? Is it not time that those supporters, who make such a financial contribution to our national game, should have their concerns heard in the boardroom? Does he agree that it is a welcome development that after discussions I had with the consortium that is bidding for Wembley as the national stadium, the consortium has agreed to look at ways of involving fans in discussions about how the sport can be developed?

Mr. Sproat: I did, alas, have a chance to read the Labour party's charter for football. Having read it, I am not surprised that it has sunk without trace. I have had the pleasure of meeting both supporters' associations, but it remains up to the clubs themselves as to whether they wish to have members of those organisations or, for that matter, any other organisations, on their boards. They are perfectly free to do so if they wish.

Mr. Hawkins: When considering the concerns of legitimate football fans in looking forward to Euro '96 in this country next year, will my hon. Friend pay special attention to the need for liaison with the police—and especially with the football fans intelligence unit in the national criminal intelligence service—to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of legitimate fans do not have their pleasure, and public order, spoilt by the small minority of mindless hooligans who have besmirched Britain's reputation in the past? While we look forward to a successful Euro '96 tournament, will my hon. Friend join me in wishing the England and Scotland teams success against Holland and Switzerland?

Mr. Sproat: I certainly join my hon. Friend in wishing the best to Scotland and England. We have taken all the measures that we think fit to keep hooligans out. For instance, if we know of people with records of football trouble arriving at a port, we have the power to ban their entry. If they are caught offending in a British football ground, they will be taken before the courts and they can be released on a bail that will prevent them from attending any other football matches in June next year.

Mr. Tony Banks: The board of Chelsea football club would have been a rather dangerous place to put anyone on, given the arguments between Ken Bates and Matthew Harding in recent months—a UN peacekeeping force might have been more appropriate—although they have now kissed and made up. Would it not be appropriate to consider a charter for football supporters as they are so often treated as a necessary evil in grounds and many rights have been and are infringed both in and outside grounds? A football charter might be appropriate for the 1996 European championships.

Mr. Sproat: No, I do not agree. It is true that hooliganism has been falling and attendances at grounds rising, although some problems remain and it is up to the clubs themselves to sort them out. I pay special tribute to what has been done by the Football Association, the Premier division and the Football League in sorting those problems out. A great deal of praise ought to be directed at them.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that forward-looking clubs such as Swindon Town have already established shadow boards and take every opportunity to involve responsible fans to the fullest possible extent? That is no doubt the reason why Swindon Town stands at the top of the second division. Can my hon. Friend think of any other idea advanced recently that is sillier than that proposed by the Opposition?

Mr. Sproat: Not easily, in the time that it takes me to get from the Bench to the Dispatch Box. I agree with my hon. Friend. Nothing in the football charter that was new was sensible, and nothing that was sensible was new. I am sure that Swindon Town football club is right to involve the fans as much as is proper, which is exactly what the fans want most.

Mr. Pendry: Is the Minister aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) is right: a host of issues currently concerns football fans, including sharply rising admission charges, inadequate facilities for away supporters and the lack of discount schemes for the young, the unemployed and the disabled. We recognise that no Government should dictate to those who run sport, but will the Minister join all the football authorities—the Football Association, the premiership, the Football League, the players' union and many others—in endorsing the proposals contained in Labour's charter for football, which will ensure that spectators are given proper representation on bodies in which they have an interest? Far from sinking without trace, we must now reprint many more thousands of copies of that document to meet demand.

Mr. Sproat: I cannot believe that any football ground would welcome being told by a future Labour Government, if such a thing should come to pass, what admission prices it should charge. We all know that football has many difficulties, such as the taking of drugs and bungs, with which the proper authorities—the Inland Revenue and the police—are dealing. The last thing that football wants is a couple of Labour politicians on so-called "task forces" sticking their noses in and telling football what it must do.

Arts Funding

9. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the effects of the overall funding provision for national heritage, with special reference to the arts. [4643]

Mr. Sproat: The areas covered by my Department are being funded on an unprecedented scale. The lottery has increased the amount available for the arts by some £224 million, more than doubling the amount provided previously.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for the excellent news. The arts have done extremely well. Not only does the Arts Council provide £186 million but the national lottery provides nearly £200 million. Will my hon. Friend deal with the problem of donations to the arts from the national lottery? The arts can receive money for capital costs but not for revenue costs, so an orchestra can receive resources for a trombone but not funding for the conductor.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right. As well as the £186 million which the Arts Council of England will receive—there are other grants for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—local authorities pour millions of pounds into the arts, as does the national lottery. My hon. Friend makes an important point about revenue costs which many people in the arts and sport would like to see resolved. My right hon. Friend and I are looking at how the lottery spends its money to see what can be done.

Mr. Cohen: May I suggest that the Minister view the annual London lecture given by Jeremy Isaacs of the Royal Opera house and broadcast on Carlton television yesterday? Mr. Isaacs said that, because of a shortage of public funds for the arts in London, standards were beginning to slip. Will the Minister start to put some funds back into the arts in London?

Mr. Sproat: Of all the people who could complain about arts funding in London, the man who has just received some £55 million for the Royal Opera house is hardly the one to do it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) said, we are putting £186 million into the Arts Council, and more than £200 million will go to the arts through the national lottery. We are also putting money into the arts through local councils. So the arts, which receive almost £700 million a year in London and elsewhere, do not have too much cause for complaint.

Mr. Jessel: Should not the tickets purchased by audiences be regarded as part of overall arts funding? As last month the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £3 billion extra in purchasing power in people's pockets, why do not the arts bodies set out to attract a substantial part of that increase, which is 600 times as large as the marginal cut in the Arts Council's budget?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend's question is as sensible as his playing the other day at that concert was marvellous. No one who heard him as the soloist in Schumann's piano concerto will forget it. He was wonderful. What he says is right.

Perhaps I may take the opportunity to say that it is not only a matter of tickets; sponsorship by business of the arts is about £82 million this year, which is not a bad contribution.

Millennium Exhibition

10. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to announce the identities of the operators chosen to run the millennium exhibition. [4644]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My colleagues on the Millennium Commission and I expect to announce the preferred site and operator combinations for the millennium exhibition in late January 1996.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Millennium Commission will choose an operator on the basis of the commissioners' ideas for the content of the exhibition and the continuing heritage benefits to the site or sites on the shortlist? Would it not be better for the commissioners to consider all the options available, choose the best combination of them, obtain a few more ideas from the public or from public organisations and make the final decision on the basis of that mixture? Would that not be a more sensible way of going about obtaining the type of millennium exhibition that we all want, and hope will be a success?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is a timetable for planning for that great celebration, and we need to make progress and bring the uncertainty to an end. He will recall that it was Ethelred the Unready who presided over the last millennium. Enormous care has gone into seeking sites, short-listing sites and inviting bids from different operators. The Millennium Commission is aware of the seriousness of that task and of the enormous potential of all the sites under consideration. I will indeed ensure that my fellow millennium commissioners are aware of the anxieties expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend will recall that, in the strict meaning of the Saxon description of Ethelred the Unready, he was the unraed, meaning the ill-advised. I hope that my right hon. Friend feels that she would be ill-advised if London were to dominate the millennium celebrations in the edifices built or events put on. In the midlands, at the national exhibition centre, there is a site with perfect communications, which happens to be only three miles from the monument that marks the centre of middle England.

I wish our colleagues in Ulster, Scotland and Wales great success with their excellent projects, but, as for England, will my right hon. Friend focus resources and attention on the national exhibition centre site?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend, with his great learning, must be aware that Birmingham has had many lottery awards from the different distributors already. He is correct, however, in saying that the national exhibition centre is a perfect site for a millennium festival, as are the east London meridian site in Stratford, the Greenwich site and, indeed, the Derby site at the heart of the nation.

The difficulty for the millennium commissioners is that, each time we have visited all four sites, we have been caught up in the enthusiasm of people hoping that they will be able to hold the reception there. We are determined, however, that that will be a festival of tremendous significance, celebrating the achievements, ability and potential of our nation as we move into the new millennium. We all take the choice of site extremely seriously.

National Lottery

11. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to make changes in the distribution of funds from the national lottery. [4645]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national lottery is a great success. I am prepared to consider modifications to build on that success. Specifically, I am keen to ensure that the funds that it produces are used to maximise the range of facilities and the number of opportunities for people throughout the country.

Mr. Pope: Will the Secretary of State review the operation of the millennium fund? The minimum grant of £100,000 effectively disfranchises many small towns and organisations from bidding for projects. What is the point in having funding for projects of local significance when, in many parts of the country, the effect of the £100,000 threshold is that many smaller organisations cannot bid?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the Millennium Commission has a minimum award of £100,000, but many of its projects are umbrella projects which bring together smaller schemes. The groundwork trust projects, the millennium forests and the 2,500 miles of cycle track affect and serve many parts of the country. The other distributing bodies make much smaller grants. That is the view of the Millennium Commission to date, but I shall discuss with my fellow commissioners whether we should modify the rule in the near future.

Finally, the Millennium Commission is consulting on millennium awards and a way of investing in people as well as in capital. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will ensure that organisations which they think could take up the opportunity respond to the consultation process.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend consider altering the rules to allow lottery funds to support regional opera productions? Lottery funding supports film productions, but not opera productions. It is difficult to see how some regional opera houses—particularly touring opera productions—will benefit from lottery distribution that is only for capital expenditure. Touring opera companies visit many theatres throughout the midlands and the north of England in particular, and sponsoring opera production would assist many regional companies to expand their programmes and their audience appeal.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is only early days for the national lottery. The rules established for the early phase have been in operation for only 10 months and we did not start making awards until last March. It is quite remarkable that 3,530 awards have been made during that time, including 638 in the arts field.

I am having discussions with the chairman of the Arts Council and the other distributing bodies on whether we could introduce sensible modifications to make the lottery even more successful. I am mindful of my hon. Friend's comments that funding for the arts is a partnership process. Business and local authority sponsorship, the contribution that people make through the box office, taxpayers' contributions and the lottery awards must make sense as a coherent whole.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court of Appeal

28. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average notice given for Court of Appeal hearings. [4663]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans): Cases in the Court of Appeal are dealt with individually and the period of notice depends upon the circumstances and the urgency of the case. The convenience of the parties is taken into account as far as is practicable.

Mr. Mudie: The Minister will be aware that fewer than five days' notice is given for many cases that are heard in the criminal division of the Court of Appeal. He will also be aware that, as a result of that short notice, too many people facing imprisonment have their cases heard without sufficient time to obtain any professional legal representation. Does the Minister agree that that is a totally unacceptable way of dispensing justice? Will he inform the House what steps he will take to ensure that individuals facing an appeal or possible imprisonment have sufficient time to arrange their representation?

Mr. Evans: I am rather surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman complain about the speed of justice in the criminal division of the Appeal Court, as it is more usual to hear complaints about delays in justice in the civil division of that court. I know that the Master of the Rolls pays great attention to that problem and the Government have sought to resolve it by providing more judges.

In the context of appearances before the criminal division, the Government generally believe that justice should proceed speedily, but I am happy to examine any circumstances in which it is claimed that it has been dispensed so speedily that justice has been denied. However, I am very surprised to hear a complaint that appeal hearings are occurring too quickly; I usually hear complaints to the contrary.

Mr. Alex Carlile: In welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new ministerial appointment, I ask him to consider allowing further hearings of the Court of Appeal criminal division to take place in the regions. He knows that the court has sat in Cardiff in the past. I suspect—I urge this view on him—that the process could be more speedy if hearings were to take place in places such as Cardiff and Manchester.

Mr. Evans: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his welcome, which he delivered with characteristic sincerity and generosity. I am very much aware of the experience of the criminal division of the Court of Appeal sitting in Cardiff. As the hon. and learned Gentleman will know, I was in practice in that city at the time and I was concerned with one of the cases that came before the court. Since taking up my present appointment, I have considered that possibility. The advice I have received so far is that it is not likely to lead to speedier justice, and may even create a delay. However, I shall continue to keep the matter under review. If the particular difficulties that have been highlighted can be overcome, we should work towards the Court of Appeal sitting in other parts of the country from time to time.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I welcome the speed of cases reaching the Court of Appeal, but is not one of the major reasons why cases are not reaching the civil division of the Court of Appeal that too many judges are now preoccupied with judicial review? Is that not causing a problem with the judiciary that will shortly become a problem for anyone running a Department that is challenged at every turn by a number of judicial reviews? Is it not time that close attention was paid not to abolishing judicial reviews, which fulfil a necessary and important function, but to curbing some of the enthusiasm that is grinding into the ground the operation of Government and the courts?

Mr. Evans: I have noted my hon. and learned Friend's views on the operation of the judicial review, but it is primarily the work load in the civil courts that has led to such a substantial increase. I have discerned an increase of some 61 per cent. in the work load of the civil division of the Court of Appeal since 1991. Furthermore, more judges have been appointed. Since 1993, we have had five additional Appeal Court judges, but that has not made a significant contribution towards reducing the backlog, which is increasing.

The Government have taken additional steps. My hon. and learned Friend probably knows that fixed time limits have been introduced in respect of oral arguments in the civil division of the court. I am sure that hon. and learned Members will be delighted to learn that lawyers have been taken on to ensure that appeals that reach the civil division are ready. It is totally unacceptable for a case to come before the civil division of the Court of Appeal with some requisite paperwork missing so that the hearing has to be aborted.

Legal Aid

29. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received in respect of the reform of legal aid. [4665]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: More than 180 responses to the Lord Chancellor's Green Paper have been received from a wide range of interested parties, including the legal profession and consumer bodies. Their comments and suggestions are being analysed and a series of meetings with some of the major respondents has been taking place.

Mr. O'Brien: When considering any reforms of the legal aid service, will the Minister have regard to balancing claims for civil action and claims for criminal action? Money is being spent on defending people who have offended against society rather than on those who have been offended against by society. In my constituency, many people wish to apply for legal aid to defend themselves against actions by quangos such as the health service and those employed by those quangos, or by private companies, but they are denied that opportunity because of the lack of resources.

Will the Minister ensure that any reforms undertaken help to balance the position and help people who have been offended against by society? Will he also consider allowing specialist views to be obtained by people who have a housing or health grievance or who are victims of crime? There should be more balance to help innocent people who wish to pursue a claim through the courts.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should note that the Green Paper that is the source of the consultation exercise is entitled "Legal Aid—Targeting Need". That is primarily the focus of the exercise. We are seeking to ensure access to legal services within an affordable legal aid budget.

May I take issue with one remark by the hon. Gentleman? He suggested that there was a lack of resources. Surely he is aware that the legal aid budget has more than quadrupled in the past 10 years. Expenditure on legal aid is 14 times higher than when the Labour party was last in office. In those circumstances, there is no question of there being a lack of resources; it is a matter of ensuring that resources are targeted correctly, and that is what the consultation exercise is all about.

Sir Anthony Grant: In considering any reform of the legal system, will my hon. Friend bear in mind, first, that there is far too much litigation? We do not want to become like the United States, which is rapidly turning into a lawyers' paradise. Secondly, will my hon. Friend bear in mind the increasing injustice being done to people who are just above the limit for legal aid but not necessarily well off, who can be blackmailed by those receiving legal aid?

Mr. Evans: Let me deal with my hon. Friend's second point first. He is absolutely right, and, as he will know, that very point is highlighted in the Lord Chancellor's consultation document. It has been the subject of public concern, and has also been raised by many hon. Members. We must examine ways of dealing with the difficulty.

As for my hon. Friend's substantive point, it is also important for us to find alternative ways of resolving disputes. My hon. Friend will be delighted to learn that the Lord Chancellor's Department hopes to publish, early in the new year, a document outlining the alternative forms of dispute resolution. We hope to devote considerable attention to that document. Although we shall always need the courts, and a structure allowing disputes to be resolved in that final venue, anything that we can do in the meantime to end disputes on the basis of keeping legal costs to a minimum and enabling the issues to be distilled into just a small number of issues must be worth while.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the Minister wishes to keep legal aid costs down, will he undertake a detailed examination of the number of cases in which, after a legal aid certificate has been granted, no action—or very little action—is taken by the legal firm concerned for at least 12 months? Will he consider the effect of that on the overall costs of legal aid—quite apart from the fact that it does not deliver an adequate system of justice to those of our constituents who need it most?

Mr. Evans: I am sure that the hon. Lady will be aware that all legal practitioners have a professional duty to ensure that they deal with cases with due diligence. As one who was in practice, however, I recognise that in a number of cases practitioners may fall short of fulfilling that duty. If the hon. Lady knows of such instances, they should be drawn to the attention of the professional bodies concerned.

Family Law Bill

30. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has had with respect to the Family Law Bill. [4666]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received a number of representations, including representations from my hon. Friend, in relation to the proposals contained in the Family Law Bill. I am also aware that my hon. Friend has been to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, and I trust that she was reassured by what he had to say.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, but I was not reassured by what the Lord Chancellor had to say to me. Is my hon. Friend aware that there is grave disquiet throughout the country about the Family Law Bill, which will hasten the break-up of marriages? The victims of such break-ups are undoubtedly the children: children of broken marriages are more likely to turn to crime and subsequently to carry knives. Surely my hon. Friend agrees that we must do all that we can to enhance marriage.

Mr. Evans: I am disappointed to learn that my hon. Friend has not been reassured to date. I look forward to ensuring that she is reassured during the months ahead. Let me also tell her that it is not the existence of legislation to deal with instances of marital breakdown that causes such breakdowns; sadly, marital breakdown is a fact of life in our society. I entirely agree with her about the effect on children. She will know that that has been one of my main interests since I have been in the House and before. It is very important that we recognise that perpetuating a system that is based on conflict does nothing in the circumstance to help the position of children.

Mr. Boateng: The Minister is welcome to his place. He has been bloodied by his friend the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). Let us hope that he is unbowed, at least on this issue. Will he give the House an assurance that the Family Law Bill has been properly costed and that there are funds available for a comprehensive mediation service? If such a service is not in place, we shall not be able to give families the support that they deserve and would have another example of the Government wishing the end without willing the means.

Mr. Evans: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome and I welcome him to the Dispatch Box.

The Family Law Bill rightly places an important emphasis on mediation, but it also does something that I hoped would be welcomed by the Opposition: it showsthat the Government have not set out the precise framework in which that mediation is to be offered. We are prepared to take that forward on a pilot basis. I reiterate that assurance to the House today.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We have made very poor progress in the past hour. I hope that, after Christmas, questions will be much brisker and exchanges much swifter across the Floor of the House. Progress today has not been very good at all.

Madrid Summit

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the meeting of the European Council at Madrid, which I attended with my right hon. and learned Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have placed the conclusions of the Council in the Library.

I shall deal first with economic and monetary union and then with enlargement—the two most important matters discussed over the weekend.

The decisions that the European Union must take on those two issues over the next few years could be the most crucial steps for Europe since the European Community was founded. They will have a profound effect on the political and economic stability of our continent over the next generation.

On economic and monetary union, the Madrid Council decided on a name for the single European currency. "Euro" was not a name that attracted universal enthusiasm around the Council table; it will not ease the task of those seeking to market the idea of a single currency, but one or more of the member states had rooted objections to each of the other names suggested.

A more fundamental decision was to study the implications of seeking to introduce a single currency in 1999. As the House knows, I have for a long time argued that the introduction of a single currency by a small minority of states would raise very serious questions about its economic consequences and about the way in which Europe functions. At the informal meeting in Majorca in September, there was general agreement that those questions needed to be examined carefully. At Madrid, a study was formally commissioned.

The Maastricht treaty lays down strict criteria for entry to a single currency. It is now certain that, on a proper interpretation of the criteria, only a small number of member states will meet them if a single currency is introduced in January 1999. Before taking such a step, the European Union needs to consider what it would mean in practice. It must consider its effect on the states outside the single currency area, as well as those inside it. It must consider how decisions would be taken. It must ask whether the result would be divergence rather than convergence of European economies. It must consider the potential effects on employment and the demand for resource transfers. The risk of monetary instability is one of the questions to be examined.

Some have argued for rigid linkages between those inside and those outside a single currency, by reverting to an old-style exchange rate mechanism. That is a course that has been tried and has failed. I have made it clear to our partners that I would not recommend that sterling should return to such a system.

Europe needs coherent answers to those and other questions, and I am glad that the Madrid Council decided to examine them. The opt-out that I negotiated at Maastricht protects the United Kingdom from being forced into an unworkable system, but it is vital to our interests and to the interests of Europe as a whole that a single currency does not begin and then fail, thus causing economic turmoil right across the European continent.

I now refer to enlargement. Ahead even of prosperity, the European Union exists to provide security and stability for the peoples of Europe. For that reason, I believe that enlargement is the most important task facing the European Union. Having demolished the iron curtain, we must never again have a dividing line running through the middle of Europe.

Ten or more countries are hoping to negotiate entry to the European Union in the coming years. This is an historic opportunity to entrench stability through a union of democracies right across the continent, and one that I passionately believe we must take. The Madrid Council gave further impetus to enlargement. The European Commission has been asked to produce opinions on all eastern and central European applicants as soon as possible after the end of the intergovernmental conference. That is a necessary step towards full accession negotiations, which are likely to begin with at least the most advanced of the new applicants, as well as with Malta and Cyprus, in about two years' time.

The Madrid Council considered reports from the Commission on the implications of enlargement for the European Union's policies, and those are profound. To be affordable and to be consistent with the EU's obligations under the general agreement on tariffs and trade, the common agricultural policy will have to be reformed when the Union enlarges, and so will the structural and the cohesion funds. At my insistence, it was agreed that future meetings of the Council would examine the implications. The Madrid Council has therefore taken an important step towards combining policy reform with enlargement, both of which are essential to the European Union's future.

I shall deal briefly with some of the other subjects that were discussed at Madrid. It was agreed that the intergovernmental conference would start at Turin on 29 March. The conference will be conducted by meetings of Foreign Ministers supported by a working party made up of a representative of each Minister and of the President of the European Commission. No decisions were taken at Madrid on the substance of the intergovernmental conference. Work on the agenda will be carried out under the Italian presidency by Foreign Ministers.

The drive to promote subsidiarity was again strongly in evidence at Madrid and was vigorously supported in informal discussion. The Commission has been instructed to examine the continued need for existing Community legislation and for proposals that are now on the table. It is now widely recognised that the United Kingdom was right to reverse the trend towards greater intrusiveness by the Commission. There was also support for our approach to job creation, flexible pay relating to performance, the curtailing of non-wage labour costs and the reform of social protection systems. Increasing emphasis is being given to small and medium-sized enterprises and to the need to cut the burden of red tape and over-regulation.

The campaign against fraud and for better financial management, which I launched at the Essen Council a year ago, gained further weight at Madrid. The House will welcome the higher priority that is being given to intergovernmental co-operation against drug trafficking. At Madrid I presented, with President Chirac, an initiative to help Caribbean states to crack down on the trans-shipment to Europe and elsewhere of huge quantities of drugs that are produced in Latin America. That initiative was agreed by the Council and is now part of the European Union's policy.

[The Prime Minister]

On external affairs, the Council underlined the importance of successful implementation of the Bosnian peace agreement and gave support to Mr. Carl Bildt, who will be there leading the international civilian effort. It also discussed the European Union's relations with Russia, Ukraine and Turkey and welcomed the agreement at the recent European Union/United States summit to strengthen the relationship with the United States.

At the Council, the key decisions for the future were identified rather than taken. The programme of work for the next five years, the "Political Agenda for Europe", is set out in the Madrid conclusions. It is a formidable programme. In that period Europe must review the treaty at the intergovernmental conference; review the Union's policies, including the common agricultural policy and the structural funds; take decisions on a single currency; carry out enlargement negotiations; determine the Community's future financing; contribute to new European security arrangements; and develop its relations with neighbouring countries, especially Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and other Mediterranean countries. The decisions that we take in that period will determine the shape of Europe well into the next century. They will vitally affect the United Kingdom's interests and our future security and prosperity. That is why, at successive meetings of Heads of Government, I have argued for cautious and careful consideration before decisions are finalised.

The European Union must carefully weigh the practical consequences of all those issues. Its decisions must be securely grounded in reality. We need, above all, a Europe that works. In that respect, important steps were taken at Madrid, as they were at Majorca a few months ago. They would not have been taken if we had not been prepared to raise the difficult questions and to demand practical answers to real problems. In the interests of the United Kingdom, it is essential to continue taking a hard-headed approach at the centre of European policy making, and I intend to go on doing so.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): May I thank the Prime Minister for his statement? There are several areas with which we can obviously agree.

On enlargement, I warmly welcome the European Council's commitment to begin negotiations at an early date. Will the Prime Minister clarify whether those negotiations will indeed begin at the same time as negotiations with Cyprus and Malta? Will he also tell us how the European Union intends to differentiate between countries that will enter more rapidly, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, and the others that will take more time? I agree totally with what he says on the common agricultural policy, but instead of using the need to reform the CAP as an excuse to delay the entry of those countries into the European Union, should not we rather be using enlargement as the lever for changing the CAP?

I welcome the agreement at the Council to open the intergovernmental conference in March next year. I also welcome the agreement on the importance of the European Union tackling unemployment as

"its principal social, economic and political objective",

as well as the strongly expressed support in the President's conclusions for social partnership and job creation measures. However, how is such support for job creation measures and for help for the unemployed consistent with the savage cuts in the training in work programmes for the unemployed in this country today?

I accept and agree with the Council's decision to take more effective action on racism—the Ministers all committed themselves to taking further action on that issue. Will the Prime Minister perhaps tell us what further action he believes we should take here? I also welcome the progress towards implementing the principle of subsidiarity in European law making at the Council, but how can he agree so much with the principle of subsidiarity in Europe and deny it so completely here at home in the United Kingdom?

May I come to the heart of the matter, which is monetary union? Can we be clear on that which has now been agreed unanimously by the European Council: that the Maastricht timetable stands, that the third and final stage of monetary union should begin on 1 January 1999, that all the criteria for convergence, for the setting up of the European central bank and for the fixing of currency conversion rates have been reaffirmed; and that the Prime Minister has agreed to it all in Madrid, despite his objections?

Why then has the Prime Minister been so utterly powerless in this situation? Whatever happened to those great new alliances that we kept reading he built with the French, his triumphal visit to Italy, and his constant claims that the rest of Europe was coming round to his way of thinking? Why was he driven to concealing his impotence with the fig leaf of some study into the effect of the single currency, which was so threadbare as to be an embarrassment to behold? May I tell him why? It is because no one knows what his position on monetary union is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Conservative Members criticise us for our position—*[Interruption.]* They cannot have it both ways. They spend half the time criticising us for having a position on the single currency and the other half criticising us for not having one.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he still believes in monetary union, as he used to say he did? Does he want to delay it or does he in fact want to abandon it? Are his hesitations about a single currency those of economic practicality or are they those of constitutional principles?

We do not know what the Government's position is. We do not know because one half of his party believes, as we do, that it depends on Britain's national—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about the Labour party?"] I am saying what our position is. Our position is, like that of some members of the Prime Minister's party, such as the Chancellor, that it depends on national economic interests. The other part of his party, however, believes that there is an insuperable constitutional objection to monetary union. But what is the Prime Minister's position? We have made our position clear: what is his position?

Is not it the case that the divisions between those Conservative Members who believe one thing and those who believe another are so deep that they consign the Prime Minister perpetually to weakness and indecision on the very issue that matters? Is the Chancellor right, for example, in saying that it is 60:40 likely that there will be currency union? Does he agree with that or not? Is the Chancellor right in saying that we may have to decide by March 1998 whether we shall aim at joining?

Is the Prime Minister seriously going to go into an election not telling us where he stands on the issue of constitutional principle? Is he going to tell us or not? Is he going to be driven to a referendum despite his earlier rejection of it and despite the fact that his Chancellor described it as mad—not as a way of letting the British people decide, but as a way of letting the Conservatives avoid deciding the issue of principle? If that is what he is going for, as the papers have been briefed, is it credible that the Cabinet—with one half siding with the Chancellor and the other half with the Defence Secretary—could ever put a united proposition on joining the single currency to the British people? *[Interruption.]* Some Conservative Members are shouting out that we are the poodles of Europe, and others are saying that we have not made up our minds. The fact is that we have a position set out and the Prime Minister does not. Until he is prepared to say personally what his position is, they cannot resolve the impasse.

For too long, is not it the case that Government policy has proceeded on the fantasy that the rest of Europe was not actually going to proceed with monetary union? Of course it may still not happen, but we can no longer assume that it is not going to happen. Indeed, after Madrid, we should surely assume the opposite. I put it to the Prime Minister that it is simply no longer tolerable that, because of the divisions in the Conservative party, a proper national debate on the single currency is postponed, the Cabinet muzzled and the Chancellor sworn to silence on an issue that profoundly affects the future of this country.

Is not it time for a serious and well-informed national debate to begin? The Government's European policy after Madrid is still in tatters and uncertain. Rebuilding that policy is essential for Britain's credibility. To rebuild it, we must have the debate on this issue that has been suppressed for too long, and time is running out.

The Prime Minister: I shall first touch on the points on which I am in agreement with the right hon. Gentleman. I, too, as he acknowledged, am in favour of enlargement. On the timing of enlargement, as I said in the statement, a small number of states—and in answer to his particular question, that will depend on the Commission's opinion, which will largely be based on economic criteria, so it is an unknown number—will begin negotiations at the same time as Cyprus and Malta. The matter of which ones they are will depend on the detailed examination of their economies, which will take place immediately.

On the common agricultural policy, I am of course doing precisely what the right hon. Gentleman asked me to do over using enlargement as a lever for change—which we have long argued is necessary—and reform, to which a number of Labour Members are late converts.

Of course unemployment is important. Much of the debate on unemployment was concerned with the need for deregulatory moves and for cutting down the costs that have led to so much unemployment across Europe. What was signally missing from the right hon. Gentleman's tirade was an acknowledgment that it is here, in this country, that unemployment is falling, and that it is in the socialist countries of Europe that unemployment is in some cases well over 20 per cent., and in other cases 12 or 13 per cent., where non-socialist Governments have inherited the effect of socialist Governments.

There was no substantive discussion among Heads of Government on racism. There had been discussion at an earlier stage. There is general agreement that where there are loopholes in legislation across Europe, individual countries will seek to deal with them. The loophole that arises with the United Kingdom is over the fact that it is possible to print racist material here. It cannot be distributed here, but it could conceivably be printed here for distribution abroad. Clearly, that is a loophole that we would wish to block and I have indicated that we will certainly block that. There are some minor technical issues still being worked out, but I do not envisage that they will cause any great difficulties. They will be examined.

The points about subsidiarity are familiar. We have debated them on many occasions in the past. We are a single nation state. The point about subsidiarity is taking authority from nation states to a central body, not the distribution of authority within a nation state.

On economic and monetary union, the right hon. Gentleman is certainly correct to say that we reiterated the treaty timetable. The treaty timetable was originally in the Maastricht treaty. For those who are able to meet it—that is an unknown and probably small number—it has again been reiterated.

The right hon. Gentleman had something to say about divisions. He was not of course as clear as he might have been about his own position. Does he agree with the deputy leader of the Labour party, who again was in Europe making mischief on other matters over the weekend? Does he agree with the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who said of a single currency,

> "Yes we are against a single currency"?

Or does he agree with the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who said that he was

> "Personally . . . in favour of a single currency"?

Does he agree with his Members of the European Parliament, who are in favour of a single currency within the time limits and timetable, or with the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who said some time ago that setting such a timetable would be "irresponsible"?

It is good to see that there is such clear-cut agreement and leadership in the Labour party on that vital issue. If the right hon. Gentleman had observed the faces behind him, I do not think that he would have said much about agreement in the Labour party. I seem to recall reading recently that one third of the Labour party is in favour of a single currency, one third is against, and one third of them have not yet made up their minds or do not know. That is the right hon. Gentleman's idea of agreement on that extremely difficult and complex position.

I have made it perfectly clear on a number of occasions that there are questions about a single currency that are vital to this country's interests, which are not yet known. It is the answers to those questions that I have demanded are examined in the European Union. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to make up his mind on the most important single economic issue that we have faced this century without the facts, let him take that position in this great national debate—although if he is entering into a great national debate, he might make up his own mind what his own position is before he tries to debate with anybody else. Those are issues of immense importance. We will demand that they are properly discussed so that a proper decision can be taken in the interests of this country, when the facts are known and not before.

The right hon. Gentleman contradicted himself. He said that I had said that a single currency could not proceed, and that it would not happen. Then he said that, of course,

[The Prime Minister]

it may not—in successive sentences. What I have said consistently is that the small minority may proceed. It is dangerous if a small minority proceeds and is not ready, and it is potentially damaging if a small minority proceeds without knowing the implications for the majority of countries that do not proceed.

Even on the most favourable interpretation and the most optimistic scenario, fewer than half the citizens in the European Union would be part of a single currency union at the outset. That is quite apart from the position of the 10 or more countries that may enter the European Union over the next few years, but which will not be remotely ready for European currency union for very many years in most cases.

For as far ahead as we can see, whether a minority goes ahead—there is certainly a chance that a minority will—it is undeniable that a majority will not be in a single currency in 1999, and a majority will not be in a single currency for very many years.

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): Will my right hon. Friend, in contrast to the Leader of the Opposition today, keep his mind open to the idea of a referendum on a single currency, should the Government at any stage decide that it is in Britain's interests to join?

The Prime Minister: I recall discussing that matter with my right hon. Friend as long as two years ago. I know that he has thought long and hard about the implications for Europe and for this country of a single currency. I agree with him that we need to be clear about the circumstances and the conditions. The study that we commissioned in Madrid will help in that.

I can certainly reassure my right hon. Friend that, for a decision of such magnitude, we shall keep in mind the possibility of a referendum, if the Cabinet were to recommend British entry. That has been in my mind, as my right hon. Friend knows, for a long time and it remains there. I think that it is right to keep that before us for consideration.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Watch that space. Is not it the case that what the Prime Minister has today described as a formidable programme is what he told us a year ago had about as much relevance as a rain dance? Some rain dance.

Does the Prime Minister understand that the whole nation has now spotted and understands his formula for ducking difficult decisions on Europe? It consists of obstructionism abroad, and appeasement at home; of playing the Euro-realist in the conference chamber, and the Euro-sceptic in the columns of *The Daily Telegraph*. Does the Prime Minister believe that that is the kind of leadership this country needs on an issue of such importance, and that we should be asked to hide from our future to cover the divisions in the Conservative party?

Does not the Prime Minister understand that trying to face both ways at once in Europe means that he cannot see what is right in front of him? What is now in front of us in Europe is rising nationalism within our borders, deepening chaos outside, and—I regret—the strong probability of isolationism growing in the United States of America. Chancellor Kohl can see that; President Chirac can see that; and every other leader in Europe can see that. But the Prime Minister is so mesmerised by the divisions in his party that he is blind to it.

The Chancellor said only two days ago that he believed that there was a 60:40 chance of monetary union occurring before the end of the century, and that the economies that would join it would be the strong ones. Does the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman started off by completely misquoting what I wrote in *The Economist* two years ago. The answer to his first question, therefore, is no. He was talking complete unadulterated rubbish, and continued to do so for some time. What I actually wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* was what I said in the conference chamber to my fellow Heads of Government. The right hon. Gentleman can therefore be in no doubt that the message I deliver here in this Chamber is—

Mr. Ashdown *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: Oh, the right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. He was there, was he? It was he who brought in the tea, coffee and the biscuits. What I said in that conference chamber is what I said here, what I wrote down and what I will take to the country.

The fact is that the right hon. Gentleman does not understand the issue. He has a slogan. He believes that whatever happens in Europe, he and his colleagues should rattle along behind it whether it is right or wrong, whether it is considered or not and whether it is in this country's interests or not. He does not know enough about the subject to consider the implications.

What the right hon. Gentleman said was copper-plated nonsense. He does not know, for example, what would be the effect of a partial EMU among some countries on Community decision taking. Can he tell me the answer to that question? Of course, he cannot. He does not even understand the question, let alone the answer. I shall spare the House the long list of the other questions that he does not understand.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Is not it high time that we stopped talking about a single currency, as what is now envisaged is clearly a core currency? That is the expression that we should use. Is not it equally apparent that it is inconceivable that the members of an enlarged Community would be able to move towards a single currency in the foreseeable future?

On a referendum, is not this a highly complex issue? My right hon. Friend has rightly pointed out that the leader of the Liberal party does not understand it. The public do not even know the difference between a single and a common currency. Will my right hon. Friend therefore bear the complexity of the issues in mind?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is entirely right to draw the distinction between a single and a core currency, because, as I said to the House a moment ago, at the outset only a minority would be members. In the couple of decades ahead, with the growth of the European Union, there is no prospect that there would be one single currency right across the enlarged European Union. Of course, it may cover some countries—that has certainly always been possible—but it will not cover them all. My right hon. Friend is right about that.

On the complexities of a referendum, I understand entirely my right hon. Friend's point, and that is why we are considering the matter carefully.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The Prime Minister is clearly moving in the right direction—*[Interruption.]* Will he confirm what he has previously said: that the United Kingdom will not join, or rejoin the exchange rate mechanism during this Parliament? If that is so, as I believe it is, will he confirm that the United Kingdom will not join a single currency on 1 January 1999 for the simple reason that whatever may be the wishes of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we shall not conform with the necessary qualifying rule of rejoining the ERM two years before the actual decision about the single currency is made in March 1998?

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that when he said that he would not recommend that Britain should join or rejoin the ERM after some countries have gone ahead and joined the single currency, that means in effect that we shall never join the single currency because one cannot join it unless one first rejoins the ERM?

The Prime Minister: Let me try to clarify matters for the right hon. Gentleman. I was interested when he said that I was moving in the right direction, because the look of pain upon the faces of those on the Opposition Front Bench was a joy to behold. That was one of those occasions when I am so pleased that we have television in the Chamber.

I certainly reiterate to the right hon. Gentleman that I made it perfectly clear that we would not go back into the ERM in this Parliament. As I said in my statement, I do not propose that I would take sterling back into a changed ERM in the next Parliament either. The right hon. Gentleman concluded from that that we shall not meet the Maastricht criteria, but that is no longer the case, because the ERM that existed at the time of our membership no longer exists. If one were to apply those strict criteria, the reality would be that nobody would be able to enter a single currency. The other Maastricht criteria, of course, fully apply, while the ERM criteria for all of Europe disappear because, the right hon. Gentleman may recall, they were effectively to be a part of the inner band of the ERM, which no longer exists.

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): As the number of difficult and technical issues connected with the move to a single currency mount, does not the wisdom of my right hon. Friend in negotiating a double option for Britain become more and more apparent? Will he give the country an assurance that he does not intend to throw away either of those options in the near future?

Secondly, will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, while criticising the opt-out that my right hon. Friend negotiated, clutches it to his own bosom? As the Leader of the Opposition says that there are no constitutional issues attached to a move to a single currency, is not the logic of his position that, if Britain were to be convergent, we would automatically enter a single currency?

The Prime Minister: That is certainly the logic of the Leader of the Opposition's position, and we look forward to his early confirmation of that, so that no one can be in any doubt when he begins the great national debate that he has called for. With regard to my right hon. Friend's earlier remarks, both the opt-outs are the envy of many of our European partners, which wish that they had negotiated them. I intend to exercise to the full the opportunities given to this country by that negotiation.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): May I congratulate the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on publicly resisting the demand of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and other Euro-sceptics that the Government rule out the option of Britain joining a single currency within the next Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I indicated, first in my reply to the Leader of the Opposition 10 days ago and again over the weekend, that I was not prepared to rule out the option of joining a single currency in the next Parliament. Nobody should draw any conclusions either way about that, and I will reiterate to the hon. Gentleman why that is the case.

It is very important that this country's voice—raising questions that would not have been examined but for this country—is heard in the negotiations right up to the time when a decision is taken as to who should join and who should not. Whether we exercise the right to opt in or to opt out, this country—and every other country in the European Union—will, in one form or another, be affected by the decision to proceed to a single currency, even if only a minority of countries proceed. Upon that basis, I do not believe that this country's voice—one of the most powerful in Europe—should be excluded from that debate.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I very much hope that my right hon. Friend succeeds in his opposition to federalism in Europe, but does he accept that monetary union is tied up with political union? Does my right hon. Friend agree that we sold the pass at Madrid, because we did not disagree with the determination of the other member states—buttressed by the determination of Germany and by a capitulating France—to go ahead with political union? Does he agree that we must ensure soon—in a White Paper or by some other means—that we no longer go down the route of political union? Should we not utterly repudiate the use of British taxpayers' money on a propaganda exercise by the European Commission to promote the very political union that my right hon. Friend has expressed himself to be so against?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that the pass was sold in our discussions in Madrid. We agreed to discuss questions which must be discussed but which have not yet been discussed. It would be folly to proceed without having detailed and proper answers to those questions. Many aspects of political union will come up in different parts of the intergovernmental conference. We are considering carefully our precise response to all the important points that will come up there.

On the expenditure on publicity, I am bound to say that the Commission's public relations campaign was not, as reported, put to Heads of Government at Madrid and received no specific endorsement from Heads of Government at Madrid. The reason is that the Commission has authority to determine the proportion of its budget to be spent on information work and has chosen to exercise it in that fashion. It was emphatically not a matter that was put to Heads of Government at Madrid and endorsed by them.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The Prime Minister will have noted that on page 8 of the communiqué, there appear the words:

"kept on a sound track".

Assuming that those words refer not to some method of amplification but to sound money within Europe, and in view of the fact that the Prime Minister has rightly said that the decision is one of the most important this country has taken for, perhaps, 200 years, will he consider the establishment of a super, high-powered Select Committee, with representatives of all parties in the House thereon, to examine and come up with hard facts as opposed to opinions? Such a Committee would have the extra benefit of enabling certain parties to concentrate their own minds.

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that the words "sound track" relate to sound money and sound economic policies. The guiding lights of those were first put in the Maastricht treaty, at British insistence. They remain there for any move forward to EMU and have the strong support of a number of other nation states. I shall reflect on what the right hon. Gentleman said. Within Government, we shall conduct our own examination of whether those matters are being followed, quite apart from an examination of the outcome of the Maastricht criteria.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his excellent questions at Madrid about the ill-named "Euro", its huge potential cost for the European budget, its divisive potential and its threat to employment in Europe were penetrating and timely? It is a great pity that we have not heard similar intelligent questions from Opposition Front-Bench Members.

Looking ahead, does my right hon. Friend accept that if we get to the transitional period, when a hard "Euro" will circulate along with the national currencies, the system will have some resemblance to his own plan for the hard ecu, which he put forward five years ago? Will my right hon. Friend suggest a more intelligent and modified version, if we get to the transitional period, to make it a permanent period on the ground that nothing lasts like the provisional?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is correct to say that in the proposed transitional period of 1999-2002, the new currency will effectively co-exist as a parallel currency with national currencies rather than as a core currency, to use the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). That is similar to the hard ecu proposal which I first put forward in 1990, except that it would not proceed, as the hard ecu would have proceeded under my proposal, by a market-driven route to become a single currency, but would move, under the present proposals, arbitrarily on a fixed state to become a single currency.

It may be that as we approach that period, the prospect of reviving the sound economics of the hard ecu proposal will return. At the moment, enthusiasm for proceeding under the Maastricht treaty route remains and I am not optimistic about the hard ecu reappearing. In economic terms, I do not believe by any stretch of the imagination that I am the only Head of Government sitting round the table who now regrets that we did not take that route.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Andrew Faulds.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Was there any discussion in Madrid that because of the plasticity of European purpose, or perhaps lack of policy, America had to step in to sort out the Bosnian imbroglio and bring just the possibility of peace?

The Prime Minister: There was some discussion of future policy in Bosnia. There was no look back on how the present position came about. There was considerable discussion about the peace implementation force and about the activities of Carl Bildt in ensuring that the civilian aspects of the Bosnian peace are carried forward. We spent some time discussing that and no one is in any doubt about the huge matters that still have to be dealt with.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that any core currency is bound to contain both France and Germany? France's attitude towards the core currency will be vitally influenced by whether Britain is there as a balancing power against Germany. Are we not going to create great resentment if we do not tell France and Germany as soon as possible what our attitude in principle is?

The Prime Minister: Our attitude is one of practice. We shall make our decision when we know precisely what the circumstances may be that would impact upon our country. Whatever interest we may have in helping France or other countries to make up their mind, and I appreciate that they may welcome a view of where Britain might be at some stage, the first obligation that we have is to make the right decision for this country. I do not believe that we can make the right decision for this country until we know the answer to questions as yet unanswered and know the economic circumstances that have not, as yet, unfolded.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Does the Prime Minister exclude UK participation in any exchange rate arrangements if EMU does go ahead?

The Prime Minister: I certainly do not exclude UK agreement to matters such as inflation targets in order to ensure a market-driven route towards largely convergent economic policies and secure exchange rates. I do not believe that going back into the artificiality of an exchange rate mechanism, which, on this occasion, would be outside the core currencies, is a negotiable proposition among the Heads of Government and it is not one that I would wish sterling to join, as I said earlier.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the way in which he is handling these issues? I remind him that a policy which is both careful and cautious is a policy of prudence and that, bearing in mind the complexity and the scale of the ultimate decisions on the matter, he is absolutely right to occupy the crease and bat for Britain as long as it takes?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has a long and distinguished interest in European matters. I assure him that I shall continue to do that. When I indicated to the House earlier that the decisions taken upon monetary matters and enlargement were crucial not just to the future of this country but to the future of all Europe, I did not regard that as a casual throwaway line, but I meant it to be taken absolutely as I stated it. It is fundamentally true. For that reason, I believe that we have an obligation to be cautious. The burden of proof must rest upon those who wish us to make the change rather than those who wish us not to do so. I think that we are right to be cautious and I will remain cautious.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not the truth of the matter that the Madrid decisions, with which the

Prime Minister acquiesced, represent another two or three small steps towards economic and monetary union? Why did not the Prime Minister vote against some of the issues that were presented to him? Why did not the Government decide to oppose that barmy name "Euro" for the currency? Is not the fact of the matter that the Prime Minister has come here today to represent a lot of camouflage about the Madrid summit to try to appease his Back Benchers, when the truth is that he sold out at Madrid and that the people out there will understand that?

The Prime Minister: If camouflage was needed, I would have thought that it was between the Labour Front Bench and below the Gangway on that side of the House. If there is going to be a debate, I suggest that it starts on Labour Benches, and Labour Members can try and work out precisely what their position is. We now see just how split, despite all they have said, they really are on European matters, and have been right from the start. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, in every respect, is no.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): While it is correct, as my right hon. Friend has said, that if the wrong decisions are taken on monetary union, the result will be turmoil and chaos, could I possibly dig out of him an admission, however tentative, that if the right decisions are taken, to create a currency union among 150 million of the world's richest citizens could be highly beneficial to all the nations concerned?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend puts precisely the question to which an answer needs to be found. We cannot be certain of an answer to that question without answers to the questions that I asked in Madrid, which is precisely why I asked those questions. We need to know the answers before making a judgment, which is the view of a number of people in Europe. Equally passionate views are held in the opposite direction. Until we know the details and answers to those questions, it is not possible to take a rational view of the implications of a single currency. That is what I seek to provide.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My question is on a different but increasingly important issue, in view of events in Russia: the Community's relations with the Ukraine. What exactly are we doing to help those people? In his talks with President Kuchma last week, what did the Prime Minister respond to the President, who is also the former technical director of Baikenor, on technical co-operation, not least in relation to the Ukraine's valuable resources in space, which are left over from the Soviet Union, and the skills that could benefit us all?

The Prime Minister: I raised a number of matters when I spoke to President Kuchma a week or so ago. As the hon. Gentleman and the House would have expected, we discussed Chernobyl and spent some time discussing the package of support that the international community has now provided for closing Chernobyl at the turn of the century. We also looked at a variety of ways in which we could increase the trading and investment relationship between the United Kingdom and the Ukraine. There is huge scope, particularly in the energy sector, for the mutual benefit of British investment and for British technology to go into the Ukraine, where it would be warmly welcomed by the Ukrainians. I also stressed to President Kuchma that one of the inhibitions to ensuring that that investment can proceed are the present financial and legal restraints in parts of the Ukraine.

That was the substance of our discussion. It was an extremely worthwhile visit, which will be followed up by further ministerial visits to the Ukraine. I hope that some of those will take with them high-powered delegations of business men, so that we can examine the business relationship between the United Kingdom and the Ukraine and build on it, because the Ukraine will be an important part of the European business scene in future.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Despite the usual trading of insults between the party leaders today on this momentous matter, which is of great importance to this country, and the regrettable lack of listening to the sensible suggestions made by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, would not it be a good idea for the party leaders to get together? As a large majority of Members of this House are in favour of EMU, they could, on a free-vote basis, present the positive factors in favour of monetary union to the British public.

The Prime Minister: I always believe in the politics of rationality. My hon. Friend pitches a question that would demand a high price for the Leader of the Opposition in terms of discussing the reality of what lies immediately ahead. I saw no great sign of it from the leader of the Liberal Democrats this afternoon. If we can determine the answer to the questions that I have put, they will be material to framing the opinions of people in this House and beyond about the desirability or otherwise of the course that was set out some time ago. I reiterate the same point because it is undeniable: without that information, credible decisions cannot be taken. I am trying to provide it. I shall then willingly make it available to the Leader of the Opposition in a tutorial or in any other way that he wishes.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): As a decision must ultimately be taken, will a time limit be placed on the study? What will happen once the study becomes available? Will it be widely available and how will we move into decision mechanisms?

The Prime Minister: It is not quite clear how long the study will take. I saw it reported that it will take two or three years. That is clearly nonsense—it will take nothing like that. I would expect a report when we get to Florence in the summer, but I am not sure whether it will be the definitive report, and neither is anybody else. Once the report has been produced, I am sure that it will be discussed by ECOFIN and the European Council. It may be placed on the European Council's agenda, but that has not yet been decided.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In view of the substantial misery and unemployment created already by European fixed exchange rates, is the Prime Minister aware that people with all kinds of views of EMU will enthusiastically welcome his statement that, in the event of the "Euro" being established by a small number of countries, there is no way that sterling will have a fixed relationship with it? Am I correct in my interpretation and, if so, does the Prime Minister accept that that will be very widely welcomed, not only in the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend sets out the position entirely accurately. It is as he says.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I say to the Prime Minister that, personally, I very much welcome the concept of a single currency, although certain safeguards are necessary, including making unemployment levels part of the convergence criteria?

On a more practical matter, was the story in the Sunday newspapers—that the Queen's head is too large for the "Euro" coin—true? If that is so, does the Prime Minister intend to negotiate the size of the coin, or does he have more drastic measures in mind?

The Prime Minister: On the hon. Gentleman's first argument about unemployment levels, I simply have to say to him that, if he were to make unemployment levels part of the convergence criteria, there would be no single currency in his political lifetime, however long that is likely to be.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): It depends what the banding is.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady says, "It depends what it is." She probably believes that the 13 per cent. of France is a good convergence level. I am not sure that that is what her hon. Friend had in mind. Perhaps that is another difference between Labour Front and Back-Bench Members; I cannot imagine. We seem to be uncovering so many differences today that it is difficult to determine. Let us hope that we can go on and find some more.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): As very few countries will be able to qualify for the single currency, will my right hon. Friend say what the position of those countries will be when they find that their economies are subject to intense competition from the countries that do not form part of the single currency? Will he give the House an assurance that, in that event, there can be no suggestion of any reprisals being taken by members of the single currency against countries outside it?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend puts his finger on precisely one of the matters that I have been raising with our colleagues at the European Council. It is precisely for that reason that some of the countries that anticipate that they will be in a single currency have asked for an exchange rate mechanism outside the single currency, to prevent the flexibility with which countries usually deal with economic difficulties. The danger of that, apart from the inherent difficulties that have been demonstrated several times in the past six or seven years, is that it would lead to very high structural levels of unemployment in some of the weaker-performing countries in the southern part of Europe.

That is precisely the matter that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) brought to the forefront of my mind a moment or so ago, when he suggested that unemployment levels should be convergent. If that were the case, many of the southern countries of Europe would never, on that basis, be likely to meet the criteria for gaining admission to a single currency. That might mean that a European Union—although I believe that it will become more variable in the application of its policies to different members, and I believe that that is desirable—would for the first time find a fundamental variation in policy on one of the very basics of the whole basis of the European Union, that is, the currency question.

Those are questions of immense importance. There is, as yet, no credible answer to the question that my right hon. Friend asks. I am asking for one.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): As economic and monetary union surely requires the convergence of the total economies of the member states, why is it that only certain indices in the public sector are included? Why not also include comparable indices in the balancing private sector?

Surely economic and monetary union also requires the establishment of a centralised, absolute monarchy of bankers, who are separate from national Governments and from the institutions of the Community. However, surely one of the principles of European Union is to defend the western view of democracy, which is voting into power assemblies that, in turn, control government? Is not that an anomaly, and will the Prime Minister tell us whether the European Council has explained that anomaly? If it has not, will he do so now?

The Prime Minister: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's earlier comments about convergence, although he is plainly wrong when he refers to convergence as only affecting matters in the public sector. One of the most important convergents is a high degree of price stability. Price stability, which has clear implications for what is happening elsewhere in the economy, not only is a matter for the public sector, but goes right across the economy as a whole. The hon. Gentleman is wrong on that point and I think that his subsequent points were addressed and determined many years ago.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his description of the other member states, which he said were rushing like lemmings over a cliff towards currency union? While 150 million people may be inside the currency union, is it not a fact that 5.5 billion people remain outside it? Is it not a perfectly viable option for this country to choose to opt out of monetary union and model ourselves on the thousands of economies round the world—large and small—which have independent currencies?

The Prime Minister: That is certainly an option. From the moment when I negotiated the opt-out at Maastricht, it has always been possible that this country might decide to take the decision, in its own interests, not to be a part of a larger currency union. There is no doubt that we could continue without entering into a currency union. We would have to decide whether the balance of advantage for the Government, the City, the economy and our future trading relationships rested with our being in or being out. That is precisely the substantive point. Of course we could be out and there is no doubt that we could stay out. We shall have to weigh the balance of advantage when the time comes.

My hon. Friend is correct in his earlier point: more citizens of Europe will be outside the single currency at the outset, and for some years afterwards, than inside it.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will the Prime Minister confirm that it was the common understanding of our partners at Madrid that no substantive decisions would be made on the IGC until after the conclusion of the election in this country? Does that not mean that, increasingly, this Administration will be seen by our partners as a lame duck Administration, which is bad for Britain?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman builds his question upon a false premise, as there was no such agreement at Majorca or at Madrid. When we begin the intergovernmental conference, which will be launched in Turin on 29 March, I hope that we shall begin to take decisions as we move through the year. Decisions will not all be held to the end of the year. We may complete the intergovernmental conference within a year, or it may take longer. If we complete it within a year, the whole matter may be determined within the lifetime of this Parliament. That is the decision that I have reached and, unless the hon. Gentleman was serving biscuits somewhere, he is in no position to shake his head.

Sir Archibald Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): Does my right hon. Friend agree that much of the drive in Europe has come from Germany, which has a lot to do with the fact that Chancellor Kohl is ashamed of Germany's past and frightened for its future? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the democratic institutions in Europe are woefully inadequate? If we drive towards political union without proper democratic representation at the centre, it will lead to the emergence of fascist and ultra-nationalist parties, which will want to withdraw from Europe and break up the European Union. That would deny Chancellor Kohl the goal that he is seeking and, for many hon. Members, would lead to a very unsatisfactory outcome.

The Prime Minister: The democratic institutions of Europe are bound to be considered at the intergovernmental conference. That is true of both the present powers and nature of the European Commission and the other institutional questions, which will be considered expressly during the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. We must examine those issues for another reason, apart from those set out by my right hon. Friend. As the European Union enlarges—as I profoundly hope that it will—I believe that it will provide an historic opportunity for this generation of politicians to change the face of Europe in a thoroughly beneficial way. In those circumstances, many of the present institutions of the European Union will prove inadequate to deal with the enlarged number.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Prime Minister. We must now move on to the second statement. I regret that so many hon. Members are disappointed, but I have kept the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box for more than an hour.

Rail Franchising

4.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the franchising of passenger rail services.

The House will be aware that, on Friday, the Court of Appeal, considering an application for judicial review by Save Our Railways, found against the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising on whether the passenger service requirements for some of the first seven franchises had been developed in accordance with the instructions and guidance that had been issued to him by the Secretary of State.

The court ruled that the franchising director could proceed with the award of the first three franchises—Great Western, South West Trains and London Tilbury and Southend Rail—although it ruled that the PSR for LTS Rail was not consistent with the instructions. The court also ruled that the PSRs for the next four franchises were similarly inconsistent. In doing so, the court was overruling an earlier judgment of the High Court that had dismissed the judicial review.

The court's ruling comes after the franchising director made excellent progress in preparing the first franchises for award to the private sector. Indeed, the first three franchises are ready to be awarded soon.

We have, of course, given careful consideration to the implications of the court's judgment. I confirm that, as planned, the franchising director hopes to announce the award of the first three franchises later this week, and I welcome the court's agreement that he should go ahead with them.

The court has been concerned with the consistency between the franchising director's instructions and guidance and the PSRs. It is, in the court's words, a "limited legal problem". The court has not questioned the Government's policy. Indeed, the judgment describes the franchising director's approach to developing PSRs as

"intelligible and in no way irrational".

The franchising director has prepared his PSRs in a manner which my predecessors and I have consistently approved. We believed them to be consistent with the formal instructions and guidance that were given to him. The Court of Appeal has now examined the meaning of the existing instructions and guidance and concluded that the existing PSRs are not consistent with them.

I have decided, therefore, to clarify the instructions and guidance to the franchising director to ensure that they reflect beyond doubt the policy that we have always followed. Franchisees should have flexibility to adjust commercial services, but the franchise agreement should ensure that a core service level is protected so that service levels operated by franchisees are broadly similar to those operated immediately prior to franchising. My intention is to ensure that the work done in developing the PSRs so far can be relied on in the continuing franchising process.

I am pleased to tell the House that, while clarifying the franchising director's instructions, I intend to go beyond the requirements of the Court of Appeal judgment. I shall instruct him, when considering the award of future franchises, to take account of bidders' contractual

[Sir George Young]

commitments to, and future plans for, providing services over and above the PSR. In practice, bidders for the first franchises are offering significant commitments in addition to the minima required by the invitations to tender, and they have been taken into account by the franchising director when evaluating bids, but I have judged it right to require him formally to do so for the future to ensure the continuation of that policy.

In view of the uncertainty generated by the court's judgment, I hope that the House will welcome this statement of the Government's intentions. Our concern is to ensure that passengers should be allowed to enjoy as soon as possible the benefits that franchising will bring. The Government's policy has been clear and consistent and I assure the House that there will be no change as a result of last Friday's judgment.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the Secretary of State confirm that his statement amounts to an admission that the early franchises prepared by the franchise director, who is a creature of the Secretary of State, did not guarantee services as good as those currently provided by British Rail? Does he further agree that the courts found that five of the seven early franchises were in breach of his guidelines and undertakings to Parliament?

Will the Secretary of State clarify his statement in plain language? Is he admitting that, because the early franchises were not in line with his own guidance, he now plans to rewrite the guidance and reduce the minimum standards required to "a core service level"—which is a new concept—and to take into account non-contractual promises? Will his revised guidelines permit the four franchises that were ruled illegal by the Court of Appeal to go ahead without revision?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the first three franchises should now be withdrawn? First, the franchise for the London-Tilbury-Southend line was held to be illegal by the Court of Appeal, although for technical legal reasons it was not stopped; in honour, it should be stopped. Secondly, it would be wrong to let early franchises on the basis of guidelines that are different from those that will apply to later franchises. Indeed, I think that it would lead to litigation.

Finally, does the Secretary of State accept that even those who initially supported rail privatisation now believe that the method chosen by the Government is a disaster and will produce less investment and worse services in return for more public subsidy? Will the right hon. Gentleman now agree to halt the privatisation process and review progress? Surely he will agree that it is wrong for him to proceed on the basis of party dogma. His duty is to protect the national interest—and that requires him to halt the process of rail privatisation.

Sir George Young: I was pleased to see on Ceefax that the hon. Lady is reported to have welcomed Railtrack's current 10-year investment strategy. That strategy is possible at the higher level envisaged only because we are privatising Railtrack. At no point has the hon. Lady or the Labour party made a commitment to provide more resources for Railtrack, but more resources will be available as a result of privatisation.

The court specifically ruled that the franchising director should be allowed to go ahead with all three of the first franchises, as it would be detrimental to good administration if he were prevented from doing so. I hope that he will proceed; I think that when he does, and when the franchise bids are in the public domain, people will realise that much of the concern that has been expressed is unfounded.

I hope that the hon. Lady noted from my statement that, to deal with some of the concern that has been expressed, I am giving guarantees over and above those that were necessary to comply with the court's judgment. It is important to understand that the minimum PSRs are not the same as the timetable. I genuinely believe that, as we make progress with franchising, and as people see the quality of the bids and the range of services provided by the private sector, much of the concern of the past few weeks will be shown to have been unfounded.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Do not the Government's critics seriously underestimate the level of service that will be provided under the franchises? Will not the timetables prove less of a mirage than some of those published by British Rail? At present, services can be removed with relative impunity—as, for example, on the London to Cambridge line, which goes through my constituency. No guarantees whatever are given.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Under the structure that we are introducing, passengers will be given guarantees that were not available to them before. First, key fares will be guaranteed and linked to the retail prices index or lower. Secondly, as my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, services specified in the contract will have to be provided for a minimum of seven years. That guarantee has never existed under a regime operated by British Rail.

I also agree with my hon. Friend's view that, now that we can make progress with the awarding of franchises, people will realise that a better service can be provided. We want to hear from the Opposition at some point whether they will confiscate franchises from the private sector even when they provide passengers with a better service at less cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Secretary of State will know that, in our previous debate on this matter, it was made clear that the PSRs were based on the existing British Rail timetable. It appears from the right hon. Gentleman's statement that they will be based on something broadly similar to existing services. By what criteria will he be guided in future in ensuring that the PSRs are legal?

It seems that the right hon. Gentleman intends to proceed with the first tranche of three franchises with the current PSRs rather than with what would be preferred. If that is so, does he recognise that inconsistencies will be built in across the region between two levels of service? What action does he propose to overcome that inevitable disparity?

Sir George Young: I said in my statement that I planned to change the guidance and instructions, and explained the general lines on which that would be done. I shall, of course, place the new guidance and instructions in the Library so that hon. Members may inspect them.

I genuinely believe that the franchising director is approaching the matter in the right way. The country has been divided into 25 regions. The franchising director is inviting people to bid for services; he will then choose the best bid. I believe that, when we make progress with the policy, the hon. Gentleman will see that it is possible to run a railway that is better than that of the past 30 or 40 years, which has consistently declined. Our policy will unlock access to fresh investment that will not be constrained by being in the public sector, and will invite people outside British Rail to operate services. I think that it is possible to provide a better range of services, to market those services more efficiently, to introduce more creative fare structures and to reverse the historic decline in railway use—and I believe that our policy will do that.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): The guidance that my right hon. Friend has announced will be widely welcomed both in the House and outside. It would be disastrous if the first three franchises were not awarded. Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents, who have lived with an inadequate British Rail service for half a century, are now looking forward to a better service, and look to him to ensure that the process goes ahead?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. I can confirm that the franchising director has said that there have been good quality bids in response to the invitations to tender. I hope that, in the near future, it will be possible to proceed with the franchise for LTS Rail; my right hon. Friend's constituents will then be able to see the quality of the service being offered, and the debate will move from the theoretical to the actual. People will be able to see for themselves exactly what services are being provided, and I am happy for our policy to be judged on that basis.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not demeaning for a Secretary of State to have to rewrite the rules to bring the bids into line? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us precisely how much each taxpayer will have to pay if the Government write off billions of pounds of debt, throw away the assets of the railway system and, on top of that, make taxpayers provide a larger subsidy than they provide now?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady will not be surprised to learn that I do not agree with the thrust of her questions. All our experience has shown that, at the end of the day, the taxpayer does better when nationalised industries are privatised. We are familiar with the £50 million a week that the nationalised industries were costing us, and the £50 million a week that the privatised industries now bring in. I see no reason why our privatisation policy should not bring benefits not only to taxpayers but to passengers.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Opposition were truly interested in the travelling public and the railway industry, they would oppose any further delays and uncertainty? If we are to secure much-needed investment, the faster we get on with the franchising process the better. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that the next batch of franchises will be let very rapidly, particularly the franchise for the South Eastern Train Company?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I hope that, now that we have clarified the legal position, the franchising director will be able to make good progress with the next round of franchises.

What we must hear from the Opposition at some point is where the extra investment is to come from if it is not to come from the private sector. Is it to be secured by means of higher taxation or higher fares, or would Labour cut the level of service provided by British Rail?

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I welcome the good news—for those who have a railway in their area—that fares will be pegged. Will the Secretary of State confirm, however, that the secret of the process is the question of core services? "Core services" means scarcer services. The right hon. Gentleman appears to be doing to our rail services what Beeching did some years ago: he pulled down a three-storey mansion and replaced it with a cottage. Now that the cottage is to go, what will be left, particularly in the north-west?

Sir George Young: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has looked at the details of what is proposed by the franchising director. Every station and every line is guaranteed, and we have opened or reopened some 229 stations since we came to power in 1979. The Beeching decimation was a feature of a previous Labour Administration. I am determined to reverse that and to secure a prosperous railway that is built on the private sector, that is more customer-oriented and that is not wholly dependent on taxpayers' funds. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be better served by the railway that I have just described.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the franchising director will look in particular for a commitment to improve industrial relations when franchise companies run the lines?

Sir George Young: The franchising director is responsible for deciding who shall pre-qualify for the bids, and I know that he will take into account the factor that my hon. Friend has outlined.

During the past few years, British Rail has been disrupted by industrial action. I hope that the more regional approach that we have promoted—whereby local employees deal directly with one of the 25 operating companies—will reduce the likelihood of national strikes. I believe that smaller units of management and a better relationship between staff and local management is a better way in which to promote good industrial relations.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): If the Secretary of State were to respect the Appeal Court's decision, would he be required to give new instructions to the franchising director? Will he put rail privatisation to the test and allow a vote in the House—or is he too worried about the reactions of his Back Benchers?

Sir George Young: No vote is required in the House to change the instructions. I would welcome such a debate and a vote and would hope that the Opposition would come clean on their policy for British Rail. Do they believe in a publicly owned BR? If so, how would they pay for it?

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is the inevitable complexity of some of the arrangements that causes uncertainty and concern among my constituents, and that he would go a long way towards reassuring my rail-travelling constituents, of whom I have a large number, if he were to give us some idea how the new policies would address the problems that are caused by the unreliability of services, the problems of signalling failures, which are

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

all too frequent, and the fact that overcrowding is now a characteristic of all too many services on the Carshalton line?

Sir George Young: Overcrowding will be dealt with specifically in the franchising director's requirements.

The new regime introduces tough penalties for Railtrack if it fails to provide a path, and for the train operator if it fails to use a path that is made available to it. The new financial regime will provide a strong incentive for punctuality.

I think that everybody who looks at this matter objectively agrees that we are more likely to get the investment that we need if the railways do not operate within the constraints of the public sector, competing against hospitals and schools for investment. The best answer that I can give my hon. Friend is not to tell people, rather to show them by making progress with the policy so that they can judge for themselves the quality of service that can be provided.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): How many adequately remunerated lawyers are available to the franchising director and the Department? How in heaven's name did they manage to get it so wrong?

Sir George Young: The franchising director was successful on judicial review; Justice Macpherson dismissed the challenge, awarded him costs and refused leave to appeal. Last Friday, the Court of Appeal overturned that decision on what it described twice as a limited legal problem. It also identified at the end of the judgment a possible solution—that the Secretary of State could change the instructions. That is the solution that I have adopted.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): As, for the first time, passengers will now have guarantees on services and fares, can my right hon. Friend tell the House how those guarantees will be monitored? Will he continue to drive on in the way he announced, because Conservative Members want to put the passenger first, whereas the Opposition wish to leave left-wing trade unions in control of a nationalised industry?

Sir George Young: The House will be refreshed by my hon. Friend's robust common sense.

The franchising director has all the powers that he needs to ensure the guarantees on services and fares. The operator will not be able to increase fares beyond a level approved by the franchising director, and there will be a clear contract outlining the services that the franchise operator has to provide. That will be part of the contract with the franchising director.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Secretary of State admit that one of the key reasons why the exercise of privatisation is taking place is, among other things, to reduce the number of trade union jobs on the railways? Now that he has come up with a new proposal to rewrite the timetables—I presume that there will be fewer trains—how many fewer jobs will there be?

Sir George Young: The object of the policy is to get more people to travel on the railways and to improve the quality of service that they receive. I very much hope that the railways of the future will provide good, well-remunerated employment for those who work on them.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I am a regular traveller on the very unsatisfactory London-Tilbury-Southend line, which has problems, including those of this morning. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great danger that, after privatisation, every time a train is late or a light bulb is not working, privatisation will be blamed? Will he tell the whole story—I am sure that it will be a good one—and publish every three months details of what has happened, such as whether there are more passengers and whether the trains are more punctual? Will he tell the public and the House the whole story about the first lines to be franchised so that the public can see precisely what has happened and whether things are getting better, as I believe they will, or worse?

Sir George Young: I recall travelling on that very train service with my hon. Friend three or four years ago, when he took the opportunity to communicate to me some of his views on the Common Market.

I think that there will be intense public interest in the first franchised services when they become operational next spring. I welcome that publicity and am confident that those who win the franchises will respond to it, because they will have the same interest as the Government in showing that the new regime is a better way to meet the needs of the passengers. I welcome all publicity about the progress that will be made as our policy develops.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): What confidence can the House and the country have in the Secretary of State's statement that he intends to issue new guidance and instruction, as the previous guidance and instruction was found not to be legal? Surely the door has been opened for an individual to take a passenger service requirement to court. As the Secretary of State knows, the taxpayer is paying £23,000 per day in legal fees alone associated with rail privatisation. Will he tell the House how much last week's legal adventure cost the taxpayer and how much he expects the taxpayer to have to find in the future?

Sir George Young: If the hon. Lady tables a detailed question, we will give her the information. I am confident that the action that I have outlined today—a potential solution outlined by the Court of Appeal—is the right way forward, and I believe that it will give a better deal to her constituents who travel by rail. I hope that, at some point, the hon. Lady and her party will come clean on how they would provide the level of investment now envisaged by Railtrack which is over and above that which would have been provided by British Rail.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when the privatisation of British Rail was first announced, the Isle of Wight was at the top of the queue? Unfortunately, for reasons that nobody has been able to discern, it is now at the bottom. When my right hon. Friend sends the franchising director instructions, will he tell him where the Isle of Wight is, and remind him that it is the most simple of all privatisations? Can we please get on with it? Everyone on the Isle of Wight is extremely anxious to get the train out of the station and on to the track so as to give a better and more comprehensive service?

Sir George Young: I am delighted to hear of the appetite for privatisation among my hon. Friend's constituents. I shall ensure that the franchising director is aware of my hon. Friend's enthusiasm that that particular franchise should be brought forward.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): When the Railways Bill was before the House, Ministers repeatedly assured the House that franchised services would be based on the BR timetable. The Secretary of State has now amended that to "broadly similar to". Will he tell the House whether that amendment would increase or reduce the minimum requirement for franchisees?

With specific reference to the east coast service between London and York, will he confirm that the passenger service requirement will allow franchisees to drop the number of weekday trains from 26 to 17 a day? Will his new formulation allow such a large drop? Will he say what will be the minimum number of daily weekday trains between London and York under his new formulation?

Sir George Young: It is worth reminding the House that the Select Committee on Transport endorsed the broad approach that the franchising director has adopted in identifying minimum PSRs. The Select Committee stated:

> "We also have no objection in principle to the omission of profitable services form PSRs since it would be in franchisees' interests to provide them."

The hon. Gentleman will find some reassurance in my statement because, when awarding future contracts, the franchising director will have regard not just to minimum PSRs but to the totality of services that are offered by those who are bidding for the franchises. It is important for people to understand that minimum PSRs are not the same as timetables. I hope that my statement goes some way towards removing concern.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the franchising director's announcement later this week for the London-Tilbury-Southend line will enable the successful bidder to state the level of service that is intended? I suspect that it will be far in excess of the minimum PSR. Does my right hon. Friend further agree that the successful bidder will announce the future investment programme which, I suspect, will also be welcome news for my constituents—although Opposition Members who represent the vested interests of the trade unions may not be so happy?

Sir George Young: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Now that we have resolved the uncertainty, it is important to make progress and to put in the public domain the level of services that are being offered. When that happens, my hon. Friend's constituents will see exactly what is offered by those who have bid for the franchise. I hope that the franchising director will soon award the LTS Rail contract.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Does the Secretary of State agree that Doncaster is a major station on the east coast main line? At the moment, 33 northbound and 32 southbound trains stop at Doncaster, but there is increasing speculation that in April 1996 that number will be significantly reduced. In the light of last week's Appeal Court judgment, will the Secretary of State guarantee that those services will not be reduced?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman is making the mistake, to which I referred a few moments ago, of assuming that the minimum PSR equals the timetable. The Select Committee has made it quite clear that it is legitimate to specify the loss-making services. The franchise operator has an incentive to provide the profitable services. There is no advantage in ossifying the timetable by specifying it in advance and giving a franchise operator no freedom or flexibility to grow the market and respond to it. If the hon. Gentleman is patient he will see that his fears about dramatically reduced services are unfounded.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Does my right hon. Friend understand that his best Christmas present to the people of Worcestershire would be to put all the pressure that he can on the franchising director to ensure that the franchise for the Great Western main line service is announced this week? Does he understand my enthusiasm for winning for my constituents the improved services that franchising will bring and for the first ever guarantees of express trains between Worcester, Evesham and London since the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton railway began services in, I think, 1853?

Sir George Young: I welcome my hon. Friend's enthusiasm and I share his hope that we may be able to make progress with the Great Western railway in the near future. I think that we shall see franchisees offering services above the PSRs and, of course, they will have incentives to attract more passengers to their trains. We want to reverse the historic decline in the use of the railways. The structure that we are promoting is the right one to do that.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): If the Isle of Wight is at the bottom of the list, will the Secretary of State put Lancashire and the north-west there instead, because that would certainly be welcome? Despite what the right hon. Gentleman says about PSRs, people believe that they will lead to a reduction in service provision. Will he guarantee that those who win the franchises will not be able to come back at a later date and ask for a reduction and a renegotiation of their seven-year contracts?

Sir George Young: They will have seven-year contracts with the franchising director. I invite the hon. Gentleman to wait. I hope that, within a few days, he will see for himself whether those who win the franchises offer services above the PSR—as I believe will be the case. The hon. Gentleman will also see whether they offer better services than British Rail. When that information is in the public domain, people will be able to judge for themselves whether our rhetoric or that of the Opposition is correct.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the Secretary of State recall that, the last time a group of his hon. Friends rebelled on these issues, the Secretary of State gave commitments, one of which has been mentioned today, on the retention of timetables and the stability of fares, and about British Rail being allowed to bid for franchises? Is not it true that all the proposals have been watered down, that the Secretary of State is not honouring any of the commitments and that, overall, he will create a weaker service in the long run?

Sir George Young: I am not aware of having broken any undertakings given by any of my predecessors. I have developed a policy that was worked on by a number of Secretaries of State and I have taken it forward. I hope to have the good fortune to be Secretary of State while the benefits of the policy come into the public domain.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Does the Secretary of State accept that, on the first three franchises, he got off

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

on a technicality? As he has announced that the PSRs for the franchises that he is holding back will be "broadly similar" to the current timetable, has not he now established a two-tier franchise, with the first three franchisees being penalised far more than the others? In relation to the Great Western PSR, there is a 100 per cent. cut to the existing timetable, and the line between Swansea and Paddington has had, on average, a 20 per cent. cut. Are those timetables "broadly similar"?

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Appeal Court judgment he will find a response to his question about GWR.

Mr. Ainger: It is a technicality.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman speaks about a technicality, but the Court of Appeal spoke about a "limited legal problem". It stated:

> "We confine our attention to the much more limited legal problem defined above. In approaching that limited legal problem the court must steer very well clear of any involvement in making or evaluating substantive decisions."

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that, if these matters reach the public domain, he will see for himself whether GWR plans to provide the basic minimum or whether it plans to provide much more than that. If we can make progress, the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question will shortly be in the public domain.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): The Secretary of State drew great comfort from the court's finding one aspect or another of his policy not to be irrational. Does he see that it would be wholly irrational for the rest of the country to be served by franchise holders who guaranteed to provide services that were equivalent to the old BR timetable while those who served the south-west were at liberty to reduce them considerably? If the much-derided British Rail is capable of providing 14 services a day form Taunton to London, why should the new franchise holder be asked to guarantee to provide only eight? Will the Secretary of State make it a matter of policy to put the south-west on the same footing as the rest of the country regardless of whether there is a technical hitch with that part of the court case?

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman waits he will see whether SouthWest Trains or Great Western Railways are putting in only the minimum PSR. If, as I expect, they put in more than that, the hon. Gentleman's question falls.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Secretary of State's quite extraordinary inability to answer the questions asked by my hon. Friends the Members for York (Mr. Bayley), for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and by the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) reveals the fraudulence of his statement. Does he not understand that the courts have told him that it is unlawful to propose passenger service requirements that are 20, 30, 50 or 100 per cent. below the existing timetable? He cannot tell the House that the import of his new guidelines is that it will be impossible to present passenger service requirements at the same unsatisfactory levels. Will he answer my hon. Friends' question about whether the door is still open for the kind of passenger service requirement that the courts were concerned with? Will he recognise that this will be remembered as the day that the passenger service requirement was redefined as a "core service level"—three weasel words that will be understood throughout the country even if they are not understood by the right hon. Gentleman's Back Benchers.

The Secretary of State also evaded the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). Will he say clearly whether, when the ballyhoo about the franchises has died down, it will be open to franchisees to come back and demand either a reduction in service or more money from the franchising director as long at the Tories are in office?

Sir George Young: I invite the hon. Gentleman to read my statement again. I made it clear that I was going beyond the steps necessary to meet the Court of Appeal's decision. I hope that I gave him some reassurance that the timetable was not the same as the PSR.

The approach that the franchising director has adopted was described by the Court of Appeal as

> "an intelligible and in no way irrational approach."

It is a broad approach that was supported by the Select Committee. The Court of Appeal pointed out that it was open to the Secretary of State to amend the instruction. I have told the House that that is what I propose to do.

The important thing is to move this debate on from the theoretical to the practical to enable the franchising director to award franchises and to enable people to see the quality and frequency of service that is being offered. People will judge for themselves. I suspect that, in 18 months' time, or whenever the election is, Opposition Members will fight shy of saying, "We are going to cancel all this and give it back to British Rail." When we hit an election, when the services are up and running, people will find that they are popular and better, and the Labour party, as it has done before, will do a U-turn.

Orders of the Day

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

5.11 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I explained at Second Reading that the Bill was an enabling measure that will allow the Government to offer a package of benefits to certain overseas Hong Kong officers. In particular, we propose to put in place schemes, by Order in Council, to pay officers compensation for loss of their career prospects, and to provide Hong Kong overseas pensioners with a measure of protection for the sterling value of their pensions. Officers would be allowed to retire prematurely before 30 June 1997 and be entitled to resettlement help.

I am grateful to hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee that examined the Bill. All hon. Members who spoke recognised the contribution that Hong Kong overseas officers have made to Hong Kong's success, and that they should receive benefits similar to those provided to their predecessors in 42 former British dependent territories. It is gratifying that no hon. Member questioned the Bill's object and I am especially grateful for the serious and responsible speeches made by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), and for the detailed study of the matter by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who kindly notified us that he was monitoring elections elsewhere, but that he had no questions to raise.

The Bill passed through Committee unamended and I do not have any Government amendments to propose. I did, however, give a ministerial undertaking in Committee to provide the House with two reports, which would set out the sort of resettlement provided to officers who decided to retire prematurely and the expenditure on the various schemes. They would also provide an assessment of the impact of early retirements on the Hong Kong civil service. The first report will be presented to the House before 1 January 1997, and a second before 30 June 1997.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.13 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Throughout the deliberations on this proposed legislation, the Labour party has backed the Government's position and its reasons have always been clear. First, the Bill ends the uncertainty faced by members of the overseas civil service. There has been a protracted negotiation period and I think that all the civil servants are delighted that that process has been completed and that the Bill is before us. Secondly, the Minister rightly says that the scheme is in line with 42 other schemes, which is why we also support the proposal, although conditions and circumstances in Hong Kong differ from those in the other 42 cases. Clearly, it is correct that the treatment of overseas civil servants in Hong Kong should be similar to that of civil servants in all the other cases. Thirdly, the Bill gave us an opportunity to give our thanks to the

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

overseas civil servants who have worked in Hong Kong over many years, and who have helped to make a substantial contribution.

Like the Minister, I welcome the way in which the Committee dealt with the issues. As the Minister said, my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) is not able to be with us today. He is monitoring elections in a much warmer climate and I am sure that he is doing that job with his usual commitment to detail. It was because of him that we had much more detailed information about how the pension scheme would work and the sterling guarantee. On behalf of all Committee members, I thank him for that.

I thank the Minister for his concession, if I may use that word, to us in Committee and for his promise this evening to make two reports available in the run-up to 1997. That will be welcomed by all hon. Members because it will give us the opportunity to continue to monitor the scheme and how it works.

I put on record the fact that we had a good debate in Committee about the nature of the sterling guarantee. I think that all of us recognised that there were anxieties about that. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham voted for an amendment that tried to change the nature of the sterling guarantee, but I was much more minded—I think this is the Labour party's official view—by the argument that these discussions had been going on for some time, that there had been a negotiation process and that the people directly involved in those negotiations were happy with the proposals that had been made. They did not view them necessarily as ideal, but negotiations are always of that description and Ian Strachan, on behalf of the overseas civil servants, has made it clear that that was the best offer in town and that it was one that they were prepared to accept.

It is important to stress again that the guarantee is based on a pessimistic scenario, that it is in all our interests—not only all the political parties represented in the House but the people living and working in Hong Kong—that that scenario is never realised in practice and that we need to take a much more optimistic view of the way in which the system works.

I join the Minister in the words that he uttered at the end of his short speech: I put on record again our thanks to the people who have worked in the overseas civil service and to those who have worked for the Hong Kong Government. The success of Hong Kong, economically and politically, has depended greatly on the integrity and competence of those who have worked for the Hong Kong civil service. It is not without surprise that one hears time and again the comment that the rule of law, economic success and the civil service go hand in glove in Hong Kong. The Bill has given all hon. Members an opportunity to put on record our gratitude and our thanks, and the fact that we have a civilised rule of law that has operated so effectively in Hong Kong. One hopes that it will continue to operate so effectively after 1997.

We wish all those overseas civil servants well. There is an expression in terms of Hong Kong about the through train. I notice the anxiety on the Government ministerial Bench that the through train may not be working as effectively at the moment in terms of parliamentary business, but I will come to a stop as we have moved from rail privatisation to the next issue. I am sure that other hon. Members will have an opportunity to speak before the franchisee passes on the baton to whatever Minister will reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon). It would be a tremendous success for my hon. Friend if, in his maiden Front-Bench speech, he could not even persuade any Minister to have the courage to come to argue against him. I congratulate him on that.

We have supported this measure throughout. We gave a promise that we would not delay it. We have not done so and we welcome its implementation.

5.18 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the Front-Bench spokesmen for not being present when the debate commenced. I was at another meeting from which I found it difficult to tear myself away.

As the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), who spoke on behalf of the official Opposition, said, we had a most interesting and illuminating debate in Standing Committee, which was characterised by a genuine desire on the part of all the hon. Members who took part to arrive at the best possible decisions, in the interests of the people in whose interests the Bill has been conceived.

The stability and the dignity of the handover, which is to take place on 1 July 1997, will undoubtedly be enhanced by the quality of the civil servants and of the civil service which has characterised the administration of Hong Kong for such a long time. It is therefore right that those who have played such a prominent part in that administration should, so far as is possible, have their interests protected and preserved.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and I were not able to persuade the Minister or any other member of the Committee of the virtues of the amendment that he moved and I supported. During the debate on that amendment, however, all Committee members recognised the need to ensure that the interests of those for whom the Bill has been conceived will be properly preserved, not only for now but in the future.

There is no doubt that these are complicated times in Hong Kong—if I may put it that way—as the date of the handover approaches, but there is little doubt that the Bill is a proper recognition of the contribution that so many people have made to the stability of the colony.

I am happy that the Bill should proceed unopposed and that it should receive Royal Assent as soon as practicably possible.

5.20 pm

Mr. Hanley: With the leave of the House. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) for his remarks and for pointing out that we had a vote in Committee. I know, however, that, the vote having been taken, the issue is now regarded as having been satisfactorily dealt with by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and, I believe, by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East. It is good that the House should hear that. I am also grateful to the hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) for the way in which the Bill passed its Committee stage.

As the Member for Leeds, Central said, the Bill has been examined in very fine detail. It now goes to the other place and, as the hon. Gentleman said, I hope that it will come back to this House unscathed and as quickly as possible, because the people for whom we are providing are the people whose contributions to Hong Kong have helped to make it such a flourishing place.

Hong Kong will continue to flourish, and it will be a great success story, up to transition and beyond. The Chinese believe that, we believe it, the world believes it, and Hong Kong also believes it—Hong Kong believes in itself. With the Bill we can reward those who have helped to make Hong Kong such a special place.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Copyright

5.22 pm

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): I beg to move,

That the draft Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

The regulations amend the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988 in order to implement all the main provisions of Council directive 93/98, which harmonises the term of protection of copyright and related rights to the European Union.

The directive became due for implementation on 1 July this year, and we very much regret that the complexities of the regulations have meant that we have been unable to complete the preparation in time to meet that date. Indeed, work still remains to be done on legislation to implement article 4 of the directive, which requires the introduction of a new form of protection for unpublished works in which copyright has expired. That article is therefore not covered by the present regulations. We intend, however, to deal with that remaining aspect as soon as possible.

The 1988 Act already complies with one of the main requirements of the directive, which is a 50-year period of protection for copyright in sound recordings and broadcasts and for the rights of performing artists. The directive should be of significant benefit in bringing the duration of those rights in the rest of the European Union to the same level as those in the UK, particularly in relation to the UK sound recording industry. That is an area of considerable economic importance to the UK and, up to now, the terms of protection have been much shorter in several other member states, including Germany.

The directive means, however, that the 1988 Act has to be amended to increase the basic term of copyright in literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works. It will increase from the present life of the author plus 50 years after his death to life plus 70 years. Although that term previously applied only in one member state—Germany—two other member states also had terms longer than those in the United Kingdom: in Spain the term was life plus 60 years and in France it was life plus 70 years in the case of musical works.

Harmonisation at life plus 50 years would therefore have been difficult because it would have meant protection reductions in three member states. The directive was, moreover, subject to qualified majority voting, and it became clear that most other member states were willing to accept harmonisation at life plus 70 years.

In those circumstances, the UK agreed, albeit reluctantly, to accept the increased term, although I know that there has been quite a lot of debate and controversy about that. It follows, however, that there will also be an increase in most other member states, and the United Kingdom's authors, composers and artists should benefit at least as much as those from other EU countries.

The directive also means that the duration of copyright in films, which is currently 50 years from the making or release of a film, is changed by the regulations and put on a similar footing to the terms for literary and like works. Copyright in films will now last for 70 years from the death of the last to die of the principal director, the authors of the screenplay and dialogue and the composer of any music made specifically for the film.

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): As I have an interest in this matter, I hope to say a few words if I have the privilege to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a differentiation between moving photographs and still photographs. If the Government are prepared to allow the special extension for films, why do they not extend it to still photographs? What is the difference between the two?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but the categorisation of "film" in the sense of video film was accepted as the basic definition for this purpose. If photography as such were to be considered an art form, that might bring it under aspects of copyright other than the particular element of video or visual presentations, which are generically called "films". I shall certainly consider what my hon. Friend has said in case there is a distinction that may have eluded me.

Copyright in films will now last for 70 years from the death of the last to die of the group of people consisting of the principal director, the authors of the screenplay and dialogue and the composer of any music made specifically for the film. The underlying reason for the change in approach is that several other member states already protect films on a life-plus basis rather than for a fixed period.

I should also like to explain that the directive requires that the increased copyright terms that it sets will apply not only to future works but to existing ones. That means that the copyright of works currently in protection in the United Kingdom will be extended. Revival of copyright will also occur in the case of works which, although in the public domain in the United Kingdom, are still protected elsewhere in the European Union. However, the terms set by the directive apply essentially only to works from the EU. Those from outside the EU will receive the term granted in the country of origin which, in most cases, will be less than the European Union term.

A number of the regulations relate to transitional provisions in relation to extended and revived copyrights. The Government are well aware of the difficulties that revival could cause, but without this approach there would be no effective harmonisation for a considerable time and UK sound recordings and performances would suffer from remaining out of protection in several other member states.

Moreover, we have tried to do as much possible to ensure that there are adequate safeguards to protect users who would otherwise be adversely affected by revival of copyright. Clearly, it would be wrong if anything done before the regulations came into force and copyrights revived were retrospectively to constitute an infringement of revived rights. That will not be the case, but, necessarily, the safeguards go much further. For example, where arrangements for exploitation of a work in which copyright will revive have been made before 1 January 1995, nothing done in pursuance of those arrangements after the regulations come into force will infringe the revived rights. That means, for example, that if a publisher has entered into commitments to produce an edition of an affected work before the date that I have announced, he will be able to fulfil his commitments without incurring any liability to copyright owners.

We have also had to establish who is to own extended or revived rights. That is not dealt with by the directive but has to be resolved, since otherwise it would be unclear who is entitled to authorise particular works or to benefit from them, with the result that future use of works could be inhibited. On that aspect, we have tried to take an approach which is both fair and produces the greatest legal certainty. In essence, we have concluded that those objectives are best met by providing that the current owner of copyright will own the rights extended by the regulations and that the last owner of the original copyright will own revived rights.

The House will realise from this introduction that the directive raises difficult questions of balance between competing interests, which have to be addressed in the regulations. We have consulted widely on the legislation—first, through a consultation paper on the issues of ownership of rights and safeguards for users and, secondly, through a consultative draft of the regulations. In all, more than 200 different representative bodies, firms and individuals were consulted. I have also had many representations from colleagues who have taken a particular interest in the matter, and I am grateful to them for the cases that they have made—personally and on behalf of the organisations that they have introduced to me.

We are grateful for the detailed and helpful responses. Frankly, this is not an easy matter. Ultimately, it requires that a balance be struck. We have carefully considered all the points raised. I am confident that we have arrived at conclusions which are both fair and workable.

There is one further matter on which I should comment—the date on which the regulations are due to come into force: 1 January 1996. I am aware that there is concern among interested parties about whether that means that copyrights due to expire on 31 December are extended, as opposed to being revived. I assure the House that the effect of the regulations is that those copyrights will continue in force and be extended. The concept of time being continuous is very relevant. I assure the House that I have taken the most detailed instructions from my officials, whom I have cross-questioned on the matter, and they have satisfied me that the law—and the text—says exactly what it should say. I present the regulations for the attention of the House.

5.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): I thank the Minister for his presence—and for his brevity, something that has sadly characterised too much of the Government's public contribution to this debate. As the Minister said, the regulations concern a complex and difficult area of law. Too often, the law relating to copyright is seen as a specialist subject of concern and significance to a particular and—possibly—rather narrow group of legal practitioners. Perhaps that feeling is reflected by the modest attendance in the House. Yet its importance underlies the entire provision of information and entertainment in this country. Without effective copyright laws, here and across the world, it is impossible to imagine how books could be commercially published, how music could be distributed and how films could be shown in cinemas.

Moreover, as the revolution in information technology gathers pace, copyright will become still more significant. As we move from mass media to the availability of films and music on-line and transmitted digitally into the home, effective copyright law around the world will be crucial. Copyright law will therefore be at the centre of a series of commercial relationships, vital to the country's trading and financial interests, and vital to those who create, develop and distribute new ideas and information.

Although the Labour party will not be voting against the implementation of the draft regulations, Labour Members believe that there are significant problems with their content and, perhaps more significantly, with the timetable that has been followed. We have a series of concerns about the extent to which the draft regulations reflect the European directive on which they are supposed to be based and the fact that they are part of a comprehensive redefinition of the law of copyright in this country and at European level, to which I hope that the Minister will be able to respond.

I shall first deal with the timetable for the legislation. The draft regulations implement the European Union's duration directive, harmonising the term of copyright, which, if approved today, will come into force in this country on 1 January 1996, as the Minister said. The regulations are, as the Minister conceded, already six months late. Since the regulations are not amendable at this stage, we are left with the uncomfortable position of having to accept their general thrust—which we do—while not being able to make the necessary detailed amendments. In the interests of the greater good served by the regulations, we are at this stage prepared to accept them.

Having said that, it is important to place on record our reservations. In particular, why has it taken the Minister so long to lay the draft regulations before the House? He referred repeatedly to complexity, but a careful study of the timetable would be useful to Members. The regulations are based on a directive that was published on 29 October 1993. It took more than a year—13 months—for the Department of Trade and Industry to produce a consultation paper. That was produced on 5 December 1994. It was not the most sophisticated of documents, although I recognise that it was necessary to address certain questions.

The consultation paper, which as I said took 13 months to produce, simply asked a series of questions. It did not provide the answers—although it provided some guidance—yet it asked questions of those who were consulted. The consultation period went on for a further 12 months. The regulations were published on 6 December 1995. In my experience, draft regulations normally contain the precise date of publication. It is curious that in this case—Members will observe it if they look at the regulations—the regulations are somewhat coy about when they were published. It says that they were published in 1995. They were in fact published on 6 December 1995. I suspect that the reason why the precise date is absent is that the Government are embarrassed about taking so long to produce the regulations.

What that means to the House is that although the Department had some 13 months to issue its consultation paper—a series of questions without any particular answers—and then took a further 12 months to produce the regulations, it has given the House eight working days to consider what the Minister has described as a complex series of proposals. Indeed, before the proposals come into law on 1 January 1996, the House has precisely 10 days in which to consider their complexity, debate them and reach a conclusion.

I would be perfectly willing to give way to the Minister if he wished to explain whether the reason for that was simply Government incompetence or a deliberate and calculated snub to the House. That is a serious question, given that we have to consider these matters, complex as the Minister acknowledges, in eight working days, and have not been given the opportunity that his own Department was given to consider them over years. I shall gladly give way.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I reassure the hon. Gentleman and the House that no snub was intended, nor was there incompetence. There was, as I saw for myself, a whole series of very complex attempts at drafting the regulations, since their concept is not easy to express in succinct form in legislation. That is therefore what has taken so long—as well as my insistence that there was the widest possible consultation.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the Minister for his observations. I am sure that the House appreciates the difficulty that he has had with the complexity of this matter. However, individual Members also have to wrestle with that complexity in reaching their views, which cannot be done satisfactorily in a short time.

I invite the Minister's comment on another subject. He mentioned the consultation repeatedly. That consultation has gone on for 12 months. The Minister told us that some 200 responses were received by the Department. Of course, none of those responses is available to Members. They are available only to the Minister, and therefore no one else knows what balance of representation was contained in those responses.

Would it not have helped the Minister's case enormously if, when he was explaining the rather short time that Members have to consider the regulations, the results of the consultation had been made available in the Library? Then, we could have seen how the argument had developed in the same way that he and his colleagues could. That would have meant that we would have had some idea how the different arguments developed in the preparation of the regulations.

The Minister candidly conceded that certain aspects of the directive were not covered by the regulations. Practitioners and others in this area are concerned that, notwithstanding that the terms of the directive have been available for more than two years, we still do not have a comprehensive enactment of those terms. Can the Minister say clearly when the entire directive will be implemented, including article 4, and when the other aspects of the directive not mentioned in the regulations will be laid before the House?

I hope that the Minister will answer that question because, as he has repeatedly reminded the House, the point of the legislation is the need for European harmonisation. As one of the Ministers most enthusiastic about Europe, he knows that the purpose of harmonisation is to ensure that we do not have different levels of protection in the legal systems of different member states. That was the reason for enacting the duration directive, yet the Government, after more than two years, are able to enact only part of that directive. I hope that the Minister will clarify the timetable for other aspects of the directive.

The Minister properly made reference to some criticisms that have been made of the implementation date. A number of organisations concerned about copyright, notably the British Copyright Council, have expressed their anxieties about the date on which the regulations will come into force. The Minister failed to explain why 1 January 1996 had been chosen.

[Mr. Hoon]

The criticism made was that 31 December 1995 would have been preferable. That date would have allowed a new, longer period of copyright to apply to the United Kingdom works whose copyright protection will expire under the present law on 31 December 1995. Although such works will clearly be governed by the regulations, there is concern that they will be subject to the regime governing revived copyright. Had the directive been implemented by the due date of 1 July 1995, they would have enjoyed the additional protection conferred by extended copyright.

I am sure that all the organisations concerned will be pleased by the Minister's assertion that the change of date will not change the legal position. However, I should be grateful if he could explain precisely why 1 January was chosen rather than 31 December. In giving that explanation, the Minister would be able to reassure those affected by the regulations that his and his advisers' understanding of the position is correct.

There has been some concern that certain United Kingdom works—previously in the public domain, but now returning to copyright protection under the regulations—will qualify under United States legislation for the restoration of copyright protection, in the USA, to certain foreign works that had lost it for largely technical reasons. One of the principal, qualifying factors affecting that restoration is that the work in question must be in copyright in its home state on 1 January 1996. I hope that the Minister can reassure the British Copyright Council and all those whom it represents on that point.

On the essential question of duration, the importance of harmonising the laws across the European Union is clear. The Minister has made the case very well. However, it is equally important that that issue is considered in the context not simply of European law, but across the world. Now that we have achieved a degree of standardisation in the European Union, can the Minister explain what efforts the European Union will make to ensure that its new, longer period of duration is consistent with the law of copyright elsewhere in the world? Clearly, it is not sufficient simply to ensure that there is standardisation in the European Union when countries such as the United States may be heading in a different direction on duration.

Article 6 establishes that the duration of copyright in a sound recording remains unchanged at 50 years. I am worried that some difficulties may arise—from the difference between 50 and 70 years—that will affect sound recordings used in films. Copyright in films is an especially difficult subject, and the Minister touched upon it. Although many people talk rather glibly about film being a director's medium, directors are given only what are described as moral rights in a film under UK law, because of the way in which UK law has historically viewed rights in films.

The approach in this country is to grant copyright to the person undertaking arrangements for the making of the film. In practice, that has meant the producer or his production company. He makes a series of contractual relationships with writers, composers, directors and performers, with the result that the producer owns the film in a legal sense. Therefore, the common law solution to a series of distinct copyright problems in the complex business of making a film has been based on contractual arrangements agreed between the different parties. However, the person who bears the financial risk—the producer—is placed in receipt of the ultimate financial reward, and therefore the copyright protection.

That approach, as the Minister knows, is in stark contrast to the continental approach, because other legal systems subscribe to a different philosophical view. Those systems consider the rights of authors as central to the definition of who bears the risk and receives the benefit in the creation of a film. Copyright in a film, therefore, is held jointly by the artistic elements in the film, and copyright law recognises the artistic contribution of a number of collaborators.

Most importantly, the directors benefit from that approach in continental law in negotiations with producers over contracts, for example in the assignment of rights and the length of time for which they are hired to make the film. The directors are in a much stronger position, and that inevitably means that those rights are reflected in the price paid for their services.

The European directive on duration provides that the principal director of a cinematographic or audio-visual work shall be considered as its author or one of its authors. Member states shall be free to designate other co-authors. As I understand it, it would be necessary to amend section 9 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to implement that proposal in the United Kingdom. Unless I missed it, the regulations do not appear to do that, so notwithstanding the idea that the directive seeks to harmonise European law, it will simply create the considerable legal discrepancy that I have described. That is a significant problem with the regulations.

Under the directive, member states are free to designate further co-authors of films. Can the Minister tell us whether the United Kingdom intends to do that as well? It seems likely that other countries will designate as co-authors others such as writers, so surely that will multiply the differences in copyright law between different member states. The draft regulations touch upon that problem in the provision on the death of an author, which refers to the period of time after the death of named individuals who participate in the making of a film. If we are to establish a consistent principle across the European Union, it is important that we should act consistently on the rights of authors.

It is important to consider the implications of revived copyright. The change in the duration of copyright means that copyright will be revived for a number of different works currently in the public domain, and thus are no longer subject to copyright. I have seen various lists of the copyright holders who will benefit from that change—for example, those who hold the copyright on the work of James Joyce, John Buchan, Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling. The list also includes Sir Edward Elgar and D. H. Lawrence, who once lived in what is now my constituency. All of the rights holders to those people's work will enjoy a benefit as a result of the implementation of the draft regulations. On a more serious note, the House should be aware that Adolf Hitler died on 30 April 1945, so any rights on "Mein Kampf" will be revived by the regulations.

Copyright protection will be restored to authors who died between 1925 and 1945. As the Minister said, the issue is who should benefit from the restoration of those rights. The Writers Guild of Great Britain has consistently argued, perhaps not surprisingly in the circumstances, that revived copyright should vest in the author's estate rather than with the last copyright owner where there has been an assignment.

In a sense, revived copyright is a windfall—perhaps unlooked for when negotiations on assignment were conducted. It might be possible that revived copyright was anticipated when an assignment contract was made, but it is difficult to accept that argument. It is therefore at least arguable that the beneficiary of the windfall should be an author's descendants, because it could not have been imagined at the time of assignment that an extra 20 years of rights would subsequently become available. The Department of Trade and Industry has obviously considered that issue, and I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us in more detail than he spelt out in his opening speech why it decided that the benefit should go to those to whom the rights had been assigned rather than the beneficiaries under any will.

The revival of copyright has important implications for British heritage. It has been stressed to me that, in particular, the copyright on many works by British composers who died between 1925 and 1945 will be revived. The list includes not only Elgar, but Delius and Holst. In most cases, their estates are charitable trusts whose royalty income is spent on stimulating musical activity and the continuing development of British cultural life. With the anticipated rise in disputes and references to the Copyright Tribunal, as set out in the regulations, such income is likely to be depleted. That might also mean that proportionate income is not available to support and encourage today's composers and performers. The use of revived copyright works or arrangements could, however, pay for any loss suffered by those charitable trusts as a result of such legal disputes and legal costs. The extra income made available by revived copyright could therefore benefit the United Kingdom's cultural community, but that would not be possible by simply transferring rights to assignees.

At this stage, it might not be appropriate to study in great detail the detailed provisions governing rights in respect of revived copyright. The Minister must bear in mind, however, that the particular timetable he has chosen, which does not allow the House the time that it might normally expect to consider such regulations, means that we have not had an opportunity to table amendments—assuming the regulations to be substantive legislation—or to encourage the Minister to think again about certain aspects of the draft regulations.

The statutory licence regime has been subject to as much criticism as any of the other proposals contained in the regulations. That regime will reduce copyright in the circumstances anticipated to the right to remuneration as set by the tribunal, if not agreed upon. That is the cause of some concern because that regime appears to place the United Kingdom in a different position from Germany, for example, which offers a guaranteed right for the full 70-year period. I would be grateful if the Minister could provide us with more detail about the statutory licence regime, because the regulations revive a system that previous copyright legislation had abolished.

As I understand it, the regulations originally included a proposal that would have preserved the ability of composers and performers to object to recordings of their work and to prevent their performance. The Government had given a formal undertaking that that right to object would be retained, but it does not appear in the regulations. The compulsory copyright licence system means that as long as a royalty is paid, the composer or performer of the original work will no longer be able to object to its further use. That is a matter of concern and it is unfortunate that the Government appear to have changed their mind in that respect. I am grateful that the Minister said that, in time, article 4 will be considered, and I hope that he will be able to tell us when that will happen.

We can expect to consider a number of items of legislation concerning the implementation of the European Union directive on copyright. It was always assumed that the directive would be implemented along with the rental and related rights directive. If the Minister and his Department have experienced difficulties with the relatively modest copyright directive, I anticipate that they will have still more difficulties with the rental and related rights directive. Can the Minister explain why those directives have been separated, and when we can expect the introduction of the rights and rental directive? Can he tell us whether, on that occasion, the House will have more time to consider its implications rather than the eight working days that we have been given to look at the copyright directive?

I am grateful to the Minister for his remarks, and I hope that the House accepts that, while a series of detailed criticisms can be made of the draft regulations, in general the proposal to extend the period of copyright to 70 years from the 50 years that have been standard in this country for many years, is appropriate. On that basis, Labour will not vote against the draft regulations.

5.59 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): I declare a financial interest in the subject. Indeed, I am glad to say, it is a very substantial financial interest, as I have an income from writing, broadcasting and audio tapes. I should also put on record my thanks to the Minister for the fairness and courtesy with which he has dealt with this fiendishly complicated issue and the regulations which stem from it. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend for the way in which he met a delegation from the Writers Guild and others, which I organised on 18 July. All concerned were grateful to him, because he listened carefully to what they had to say.

Everyone I have spoken to on this matter is pleased to see the regulations, and nobody wants to delay them. I am glad to see that they are in print, and I have been asked to express appreciation to the Minister for his efforts. The matter has taken a little longer than we would have liked. Nevertheless, no one wants to delay it any longer.

Copyright is too often seen as an unreasonable cost or as a restraint on trade—in much the same way as product licensing and patents in, for example, the pharmaceutical industry and elsewhere. Legislation is frequently written from the producers' point of view, and that tends to be particularly true in the EU. In this case, the producer would be the publishers, and the publishing houses also have their views on the matter.

If there were no copyright, or if it were to be seriously damaged, it would be the creators who would be disadvantaged—the writers, photographers and scriptwriters. It is our duty to protect these people and their interests, and not necessarily always those with the

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

hefty contracts, such as one or two Members of this House and of the other place. We must protect the small earners who earn their living by doing such work. It is important that this House endeavours to protect those people.

A large number of points were made by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), but I wish to mention three main points. Some matters have been raised by the British Copyright Council, and I have passed those to the Minister. These are supported by the Writers Guild, and also by A. P. Watt, the oldest literary agents in the world, who happen to be my agents as well.

The three issues are: the date of implementation; what is meant by "arrangement"; and the missing six months from 1 July to 31 December 1995. On the first issue, the question of the date is very important. I heard what the Minister said, and I appreciate his assurances. Nevertheless, there is no good reason why 31 December should not have been chosen. .

If the date were 31 December, rather than 1 January 1996, there would be two benefits. First, any author who died in 1945—the hon. Member for Ashfield mentioned several such authors—would have the benefit of extended rather than revived copyright. Another reason—which is probably more important to living writers—is that the United States is restoring copyright in certain works which have fallen into the public domain in America under what is called "Restoration of Certain Berne and WTO works". This applies as from 1 January 1996 to works which are in copyright in the country of origin at that date, and some doubts have been raised as to whether there would be continuous copyright for works in which copyright has been revived on that very date.

I can well understand that the Department of Trade and Industry thinks that there will be no problems, but the fact is that certain lawyers who are active in this area and certain literary agents disagree strongly. The point has been made by my agent—why take the risk? Why chose a date which causes problems and concerns? If it is possible to get the date changed, that would be worth doing. I hope that when future directives and regulations on this issue are considered, we will get the date right. I dread to think what the costs could be for the Department of Trade and Industry if it gets the date wrong. Authors who lose a lot of money in the United States might decide to hold the Minister responsible.

The second issue concerns arrangements versus agreement. Under regulation 23, it will be permissible to continue to make use of works which are no longer in the public domain provided the

> "arrangements for the exploitation of the work in question"

were made before 1 January 1995. The previous draft of this statutory instrument referred specifically to the need for the existence of "an agreement" in those circumstances.

The point is strongly made on this matter again by A. P. Watt. Linda Shaughnessy, the rights director of the agency, says:

> "It would be wonderful if somehow 'arrangements' can be clarified, especially for Clause 23(3) which relates to derivative works (someone making a film, for example, or quoting from a revived work in a biography of an author)."

That happens very frequently.

> "At the moment they are only defined as 'arrangements for the exploitation of the work', which is open to wide interpretation. A plan to do something with a work but where no money (or an insubstantial amount) has been expended should not count as an arrangement. Nor should a speculative venture where for example someone has spent time producing a screenplay without any commission."

This sometimes happens without any permission, either.

> "However, if a signed contract was in place by 1 July 1995—to write a screenplay, for example, or to write a biography—then to produce the film or quote from the work of the revived author in the biography should not be an infringement. If a substantial amount of money had been expended—perhaps expressed as a substantial amount of the total monies for that project—that might also count as an arrangement. Anyone claiming arrangements to have been made should be prepared fully to disclose documentation proving this."

The opportunities for litigation in such cases are legion, and it is important that this matter should be cleared up. The previous wording seemed to be acceptable to all concerned, while the current wording seems to raise doubts.

The third issue is the question of the lost six months, which is regarded as an omission in the statutory instrument. Copies of a revived work which were printed before 1 July 1995 are not considered an infringement, but copies printed after the commencement date may be published as part of the statutory licence. What happens to works printed on or after 1 July 1995 but before the commencement date?

A sensible interpretation would be to say that copies sold before the commencement date would not be an infringement, but copies sold after would be considered as licensed by right and subject to the reasonable royalty, provided notice has been given to the copyright owner of the revived material. This, however, is probably something that the Association of Authors' Agents and the Publishers Association could decide amicably themselves. It may well be that the Minister wants to express his view on this matter, and he should certainly be aware that the lost six months could cause difficulties.

That is all that I want to say, except to reiterate my gratitude to the Minister for the careful and delicate way in which he has stepped through this extraordinary minefield.

I wish him well for all of the material which has yet to come on the issue.

6.7 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not claim the literary skills of the hon. Member for South Derbyshire, (Mrs. Currie), nor the legal skills of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon). Therefore, for both those reasons, I can be briefer than usual. I wish to raise a few points that have been put to me by the British Copyright Council, as advised by lawyers, and the British Photographers Liaison Committee.

I have no interest to declare, except that I am an enthusiastic amateur photographer who, with more pictures in the House of Commons photographic club exhibition than the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), can claim greater expertise in this area. The implications of what the Minister said about the day that the regulations are to come into force were not clear. The problem is that the date affects works whose copyright protection expires under the present law on 31 December 1995. What exactly is the Minister telling us? The copyright of such works will presumably be extended, rather than revived. Am I correct in saying that?

Mr. Ian Taylor *indicated assent.*

Mr. Mitchell: The Minister nods.

Mr. Taylor: As several colleagues have raised the point, I shall read out exactly what my legal brief says. I do not apologise for reading a legal brief because, ultimately, it is the lawyers who will have a field day with the regulations. The brief says:

> "The increased copyright terms set by the Regulations will apply on 1 January 1996, that is on commencement to 'existing copyright works', that is to works in which copyright subsisted immediately before that date. Time is a continuum, and therefore there is no break between the point immediately before commencement and commencement itself. Consequently, I am able to reassure the House that the Regulations will maintain in existence, on and after 1 January 1996, those copyrights which subsisted on 31 December 1995 but would otherwise have expired at the end of that day. These copyrights will be thereby extended, and revival is not relevant to them."

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful for that intervention although the Minister baffled me as much as Einstein's theory of relativity, on which he seemed to touch at times. The point is important because the rights of revived copyright owners are much weaker than those of extended copyright owners. The provision affects only a comparatively small number of people. Let us consider the author of a work or a photographer whose work was written or whose photographs were taken in 1945 and who died in 1945. My point is important for such cases.

If the United Kingdom had, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield pointed out, complied with its obligation to implement the provisions by 1 July 1995, which we should have done, the problem would not have arisen. The people whom I mentioned would have been protected and the copyright would have been extended rather than revived. That point is important to a small number of people.

A further point is that the owner of a revived copyright will normally be the person who owned the copyright before it expired. In the case of photographers, the owner of the copyright could be a company. As defined under the Copyright Act 1911, the owner was the person who owned the photographs at the time the photograph was taken—in other words, the person who effectively employed the photographer. If the owner was a company that has ceased to exist, the problem is who owns the revived copyright.

That problem does not arise with film because the regulations give the revived copyright in those circumstances to the principal director or his personal representative. Why could the copyright for photographs not be given to the photographer and his or her personal representatives? All that would be required would be an amendment to paragraph 10 of schedule 1 to the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to make the question of who was the author of a photograph determinable for copyright purposes. There is a difference between the treatment of photographers and the treatment of the directors of films. Perhaps the Minister will explain whether there is protection for photographers who were employed when they took the photograph by a company that has ceased to exist. Provisions of the directive remain to be implemented. The directive requires the principal director of a film to be named as the author or co-author. Why has that provision not been implemented for photographers? What will happen to that provision?

Although providing for the copyright period for films to be calculated in accordance with the directive, the regulations are silent on the relationship between that and the current law, which provides for the copyright of a film to belong to the producer. The producer is not mentioned in the list of persons in regulation 6. Again, that point is relevant to photographers.

The directive requires the introduction of a 25-year term of protection for previously unpublished works that were first communicated to the public after the expiry of copyright. Clearly, that will be a source of controversy, as it was in the consultation period. Why has nothing been done about that?

The British Copyright Council has made the point, which I must put to the Minister, that the rental and lending directive and the cable and satellite directive have not yet been implemented. As those directives are relevant to the regulations, it would be useful to know what the Government's timetable is for those regulations, which are now 18 months overdue.

I am grateful for the opportunity to put those points, which are made in a spirit of questioning so that the Minister can give further explanation about the regulations, rather than in a spirit of hostility. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield said that he supported the regulations. I always defer to what my Front-Bench colleagues say in all matters and especially when there is a speaker who is as articulate as my hon. Friend. I support the regulations, but I believe that my questions need to be answered.

6.15 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I immediately acknowledge that, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, I am chairman of the all-party photographic group. I am also a member of the council of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain and I submit a number of my photographs to an agency in the hope that one day, somebody will buy one. I am remunerated for none of those interests, so they are not declared, but I feel that these days, I should mention them before proceeding.

Both my foxes have been shot. My hon. Friend the Minister made a clear declaration that the difference between revived and extended copyright would not be affected by the date of implementation. However, we heard a fairly sorry story of the progress of consultation on the directive from the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon). I am conscious of the difficulties of consulting and I believe that one of the problems when one consults a large number of people is that if one does not take their advice, they naturally feel affronted and feel that they would like a second bite at the cherry. That is especially true of photographers; I am speaking primarily with an interest in photography. They feel that their views were ignored while the film industry was dealt with graciously, as were, to a large extent, the authors.

After I made an intervention in my hon. Friend the Minister's speech, he got on to the extremely delicate point of whether photography is art. If we got into that debate tonight, the HMSO debate would go on to the early hours of tomorrow morning. I will not follow my hon. Friend down that line, but I ask him to take on board the fact that many people earn their living from taking and selling photographs, sometimes for many years, and depend on copyright laws and protection not only for their livelihood, but for their pension and for their families' wealth in the future. It is, therefore, extremely important

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

that the photographic side of the matter is got right, especially in a day and age when more and more images are being demanded by CD-ROM, by television and by all the other agencies of moving images. This matter will become more important, not less.

My second fox was shot to some extent by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, who has read the same brief as I have; I shall not repeat word for word what he said. However, when dealing with corporate authors, will my hon. Friend the Minister answer the question why the director of a film should be able to pass on the rights in copyright, whereas a photographer who has worked for a company that has ceased to exist does not have a similar right? I have put the question simply although I know that none of those matters is simple.

I should say to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) that this is a serious matter. If she believes that if the Government have got it wrong, a united band of authors will be able to seek restitution in the courts, I must disabuse her of the idea. If the regulations go through—and they will, I suspect, because, in general terms, we do not want to throw out the baby with the bathwater—they will become law. The law of the land will be interpreted by the courts. It will be no good saying that we have got the date wrong; her author friends will have had it.

Mrs. Currie: People like me have the opportunity of a perfect revenge, because if the Minister gets it badly wrong, I can put him into one of my future novels.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Having read my hon. Friend's novel, I think that it would depend upon which part of the novel he was put into. He might become famous. My hon. Friend once attributed the start of her career as an author to my interest in her affairs. I am glad to hear that she is doing so well out of it because I am not making any money out of photography.

This is an important matter to many people. I hope that lessons will be learned from the way in which the Government have treated the directive. The questions asked by the hon. Member for Ashfield about the sections that will be attached to it are equally important. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take careful note of that, because so many livelihoods depend on the matter.

6.20 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I must begin by declaring that, as an occasional author, I might have some interest in this matter. Candidly, I am not entirely sure what the effect of the order will be as I have come late to the subject and am not an expert.

I echo what was said by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) about the way in which the matter has been handled. It is extraordinary to have nearly two years of consultation with as many as 200 people and organisations and then to leave the House of Commons so little time to consider it on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. That is not a rational way in which to legislate.

This is a complex area of law which could clearly have a widespread impact. The debate illustrates some of the general points about how not to amend the law of the land that were made last week in a debate, which I initiated, on the legislative process. Unfortunately, we cannot go through the regulations one by one, deleting those that are unacceptable and accepting those that have not raised adverse comment. That is pretty close to disgraceful.

The fact that copyright is an arcane subject that interests directly only a relatively small number of hon. Members is no excuse for legislating in this fashion. If the Minister had been able to say that, following the consultations, a broad consensus had been reached and that the difficulties had been ironed out, we would perhaps have been able to nod the measure through with a greater sense that we were not being derelict in our duty. Alas, there is clearly discontent and dissatisfaction. Although the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) is doubtless right that people want the law to be amended in broadly the direction of the directive, the uncertainties have given rise to criticism.

I have been asked to draw attention to the concerns of the Composers Estates Group and the Alliance of Composer Organisations. They fear that hardship will be caused, especially to the original authors and their heirs, by the proposed extension of the 20-year period of copyright. As I understand it, under the proposed regulations, ownership of the extra 20-year period would belong to whoever owned it immediately before the implementation date, 1 July 1995 or, in the case of revived works, the owner immediately before the copyright expired. In many cases, that would be the publisher, rather than the creator, of the work.

In the case of extended copyright, the creator's heirs will remain bound by what are in some cases out-of-date publishing agreements, often made several decades ago. The draft regulations do not allow them to be renegotiated or updated. In the case of revived copyrights, there is no obligation whatsoever on the publisher to pay royalties or to abide by any pre-existing contract.

The original European directive, which was published on 29 October 1993, was specific about the exploitation of works which were in the public domain under the old regulations but which became copyright under the new ones. It was intended that

"persons who undertook in good faith the exploitation"

of a work when it was in the public domain should not have to make royalty payments when the copyright in such work was revived. It is clear that that was not intended to apply to those who exploited works in bad faith.

The regulations ignore the reference to "good faith" and extend the immunity from paying royalties to anyone who is

"in pursuance of arrangements made before 1st January 1995"

according to draft regulation 23.

I have been informed by a lawyer who represents the Composers Estates Group that, "in pursuance of arrangements" is not a legal term of art and has no real meaning. It is sufficiently vague to have allowed anyone who exploited a copyright work after the publication of directive and before 1 January 1995—a period of 14 months—to go without paying a single penny in royalties. Such a lack of clarity is a loophole ready and waiting to be used by the unscrupulous to avoid paying royalties. Activities such as stockpiling may have been legally possible with no point of redress for the copyright owner and the potential loss of huge royalties. In this case, ignorance is a defence.

Dispensation from royalties should be granted solely to activities relating to revived works which were carried out before publication of the directive. Anyone exploiting, or arranging to exploit, a revived copyright work after the publication of the directive ought to be legally bound to have known that copyright was to be revived and that, therefore, royalties should be paid.

Draft regulation 24 states that the exploitation of revived copyright is to be subject to a compulsory licence. In practice, that seems to mean that someone who wishes to exploit a revived copyright needs only to give notice to the copyright owner of his intentions and he is then automatically licensed. He is required to agree with the copyright owner the payment of a reasonable royalty, but that does not have to be agreed in advance of the copyright being exploited. Draft regulation 24(4) states:

> "If he does give such notice, his acts shall be treated as licensed and a reasonable royalty or other remuneration shall be payable in respect of them despite the fact that its amount is not agreed or determined until later."

If the exploiter and the copyright owner cannot come to an agreement, the case has to go to the Copyright Tribunal. That can be cumbersome, time consuming and expensive. While that process is going on, the exploiter can enjoy the legal right provided by the regulations and the copyright owner is in no legal position to stop him. In essence, that means that the copyright owner no longer has an exclusive right to his property and is unable to refuse an application to exploit it, even if he considers the use inappropriate for whatever reason or if no agreement has been reached on the amount of royalties payable.

The Composers Estates Group has asserted that the United Kingdom will be the only member state with compulsory licensing. In other words, this is not an obligation that has been imposed on us by European law or for other such reasons. It is worth bearing in mind the faith that compulsory licensing was abolished in this country by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

I am also informed that someone may exploit a copyright in this country by informing the copyright owner under the compulsory licence rules. People are legally entitled to do so even if the copyright owner has not agreed to its exploitation, but that would be illegal in another member state, so someone trying to export a product that exploits copyright in that way could, theoretically, have the export blocked by another member state, which would directly contravene the treaty of Rome.

Those are serious objections to the regulations. If it were left to me to decide these matters, I would oppose them. I have no opportunity to move amendments to deal with those complaints, and the House has expressed a consensus that the greater good lies in not opposing the regulations. I am not even in a position to make that evaluation satisfactorily. Moreover, I recognise that strength of numbers is not likely to be with me on this occasion, which is not an entirely unfamiliar experience. I therefore reluctantly acquiesce on this matter, which is an example of how not to legislate.

6.30 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor: As I suspected, this has been a technical debate about what I admitted in my opening remarks are complicated regulations.

I reassure the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that, although the consultation period threw up one or two positions that were difficult to reconcile, by and large the responses from the many groups that have lobbied me over the past year have shown a broad consensus in favour of the regulations. Points of detail will always have to be worked out and some issues will have to be tested by the courts.

We were not happy with some points because this measure was effectively achieved by qualified majority voting in the European Union. It was agreed that a timetable would be harmonised, but no detailed instructions were issued in the draft directive on how some measures needed to be carried out. Differences will therefore occur between member states, as have occurred in several different areas in this category.

Mr. Hoon: Is the Minister suggesting that, where measures are enacted by qualified majority voting, that justifies a member state enacting different legislation from that enacted in other member states?

Mr. Taylor: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, who is normally a great expert on such matters, that is not what I meant at all. I meant that, when a measure is agreed by qualified majority voting, one must take an element of rough with the smooth because we considered the overall purpose to be beneficial to this country, particularly in the area of sound broadcasting. Furthermore, the directive is not so intrusive that it goes into every area on which every member country must regulate. In those circumstances, different member countries have gone down a slightly different route in applying the regulations.

I admit that we are late in applying the regulations—I apologise to the House for that—but we are not at the tail of the pack. Other countries are still wrestling with the problems and are having difficulties, as we had attempting to put the directive into proper UK regulations. It is my job not to second-guess other countries but to try to lay a comprehensive group of regulations before the House, which is what I have attempted to do.

I would test the patience of the House if I went through in detail all the questions that have been asked of me, but I shall attempt to deal with some of them. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) asked about United States law. We cannot definitively interpret US law, but we understand that the restoration of copyrights provided for by US legislation to implement the trade-related aspects of the intellectual property rights agreement under the general agreement on tariffs and trade depends on eligible works being protected in their source country on 1 January 1996. We believe that our legislation will be in force on that date and UK copyright owners should be able to obtain any restorations of copyright in the US to which they are entitled. I have asked our team to be certain about that, and I am assured that it is.

Other aspects of the directive, such as article 4, need to be implemented and we shall return to that as soon as possible in the new year.

The hon. Member for Ashfield asked about ownership of revived rights. That is inevitably a complex area and a decision had to be made. Authors will benefit from the increased term in the case of future works by virtue of being the first copyright owners. We had to identify exactly who, in all simplicity, should receive revived rights and we decided that it should be the last owner of those rights.

[Mr. Taylor]

I was asked about musicians' estates. By any reading of the regulations, if an original composer or author does not benefit, it is because at some stage they or their estate transacted those rights to someone else. They are not being denied their rights; we have gone for simplicity and determined that that is the way to proceed. Those who will benefit from the revived rights should be the last owners.

Mr. Hoon: Is the Minister entirely happy that the revived rights payment system is consistent with legislation enacted elsewhere in the European Union and, moreover, with the general principle applied in Germany, for example, where exclusive rights are guaranteed for a 70-year period? After all, that period was chosen because Germany gave greater rights than other countries in the European Union. The system for revived rights set out in the regulations does not give copyright holders exclusive rights for 70 years but simply provides a system of remuneration, subject ultimately to the Copyright Tribunal, for an extended period of 20 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is a long intervention. It is more like a second speech. I call Mr. Ian Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: I was beginning to worry about that myself, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I cannot second-guess the German position. As the hon. Gentleman said, there is no such thing as revived rights in that context in Germany because of the 70-year period. The Copyright Tribunal must tackle certain questions. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland remarked on the tribunal. Although it may not be perfect, it is a tried and tested way of proceeding. It is not for the Government to second-guess what a reasonable payment might be in those circumstances. It would be extremely dangerous for us to go on to that ground, which is why the tribunal pronounces on such matters.

We have never proposed a right to object to the use of a work. Our consultative document included a licence of right, as do the regulations that have been laid before Parliament. If my memory serves me right, that assumption applies to any arrangement entered into before 1 January 1995.

The issue of film authorship has been raised more than once. We are deferring the implementation of that provision until 1 January 1997. We intend to introduce the change when the so-called "rental" directive is implemented, which we aim to do in the near future. We also intend that the producer of a film will remain one of its authors in the United Kingdom. We do not intend to go further, and the directive does not oblige us to do so. The Commission did not say that total harmonisation of film authorship should be achieved between member states, and the directive does not proscribe that.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire asked about arrangements for timing. Regulation 23(2)(a) provides for acts done in pursuance of arrangements made before 1 January 1995 to be carried out without infringing revived copyright. We believe that it is only right that people who have made arrangements before that date should be allowed to carry out acts consequent on them without liability to ownership of revived rights.

A wide variety of circumstances may occur and the wording of the regulations must, of necessity, be fairly general. We do not consider it possible to define precisely the kinds of acts that will be permitted. When a dispute occurs, it will be for the courts to determine whether what has been done is genuinely in pursuance of the arrangements made before the specified date. The terminology concerned has been used in copyright legislation before—in transitional provisions in the 1988 Act, for example.

If necessary, my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire might read section 57(1), section 180(3) and schedule 1(6) of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. I say that because I know that lawyers will involve themselves in that matter anyway, and they might as well do so now.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) mentioned the vexed question of photographers. In no way was I attempting, nor shall I now attempt in any sense, to become involved in the difficulties of trying to define photography. It is both a profession and an art form and the two co-exist happily, but that is not the question.

The question is whether a photographer is an author in relation to the regulations. I am assured that, in that context, author does mean author as defined in section 9(1) of the 1988 Act, and that that includes photographers. I hope that the photographers in question are happy with that.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Photography is, of course, an art form as practised by myself and the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare, but it is also—which is more important—a living. The question therefore arises, what happens when the owner of the copyright is a company that has gone bust? Why does not the copyright revert to the photographer or his legatees or whatever, in the same way as it does for the director of a film?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman asks a question that I am unable to answer because I am unable to second-guess the legal position. Presumably there are circumstances in which such a right might revert to the previous owner, such as when the contract made to pass on the right to the company that went bust has fallen into desuetude. In those circumstances, it will be a question for the courts to test. I must stick to that position otherwise I should be making up law on the Floor of the House, which is a dangerous thing to do.

In my opinion, the main questions that have been asked show how difficult the regulations are. Far from wasting time, we have used our time constructively to obtain a wide range of reactions from various groups.

I admit that, in the end, Ministers and Departments must make a decision. We have made a decision, and we have laid the regulations before the House. I am delighted that the matter was chosen for debate on the Floor of the House.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire for her encouragement and for the compliments that she paid on behalf of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, of which she is an esteemed and honourable member—*[Interruption.]* Well, she is not a member, but she is a writer. I am slightly concerned that, as a result of the debate, I am to feature in some position or other in her next novel. Before I get myself into further difficulty, I shall commend the regulations to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 30th November, be approved.

TAXES

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Estates of Deceased Persons and Inheritances and on Gifts) (Netherlands) Order 1995 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 16th October, in the last Session of Parliament.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

INTEGRATED POLLUTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9491/93 and 7511/95, and of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on 2nd June 1995, relating to integrated pollution prevention and control; welcomes the Common Position achieved on this proposal on 22nd June; regrets the inclusion of certain activities in the Directive's scope, such as intensive livestock farming, food production and some industrial sectors, which do not readily lend themselves to this integrated approach; but congratulates the Government on the Common Position as a whole, which will secure the application in Europe of an innovative British approach to pollution control.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Question agreed to.

HMSO

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

6.43 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): Anyone with a working knowledge of the House or of any Department of Government, will know that Her Majesty's Stationery Office has a long and illustrious history. It is one of the oldest Government Departments remaining in existence.

In 1786, a Treasury official called John Mayor suggested that the Government might make substantial savings if they bought all their paper and stationery through a central source. As a result, Her Majesty's Stationery Office was established as a small office fulfilling precisely that role. In all its activities since then, it has continued to honour that founding purpose by providing its customers with a cost-effective and high-quality service.

From such humble origins, HMSO gradually expanded into many other sectors, including printing and print buying, all aspects of publishing and supplying stationery, office equipment and furniture. In many of its activities, it came to represent a single, authoritative and trustworthy supplier to government and, in return, HMSO has been assigned many functions vital to effective government in this country.

For more than 100 years, HMSO has acted as printer to Parliament and, as hon. Members are of course aware, has also provided a service of the highest quality and efficiency, which is vital for the effective conduct of business in the House and the other place.

Much of HMSO's official printed output has, since 1882—

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way so early in his remarks, but while he is doing a historical survey of HMSO, and bearing in mind HMSO and *Hansard's* very strong connections with Norwich, will my right hon. Friend make crystal clear his commitment to future jobs in Norwich? Will he also express his determination that there will remain a very strong presence for HMSO in Norwich in future, as there has been in the past?

Mr. Freeman: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's attention to his constituency duties, and I am able to give the following assurances about employment prospects: first, that Ministers will continue to consult the trade union representatives of the work force; secondly, that I can confirm that there are no plans for compulsory redundancies at HMSO in Norwich or anywhere else in the period running up to the proposed sale of the business; and, thirdly, that the provisions of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply. Incidentally, the provisions of TUPE are not time-limited. As far as a buyer is concerned—

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way at this early stage, but surely he is aware that, after 90 days, the requirements of TUPE are over and that there is no commitment on the part of an incoming employer to honour the undertakings laid down by his predecessor for any longer than that period.

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

The Minister should check with his officials, because that is the position, and there is chapter and verse in industrial relations law at present to show that that is the case.

Mr. Freeman: The provisions of TUPE apply, obviously, at the point of transfer of an undertaking from one owner to the other, and the owner is bound by those provisions. If an owner seeks to change and negotiate changes in the terms and conditions that apply to the work force of the business, the usual procedures for negotiations apply.

Perhaps the House will permit me to complete my answer to the first intervention, I inadvertently gave way a second time during my answer to the first intervention.

Finally, as I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) that, in searching for an acceptable purchaser of the business, we shall seek to select a company that wishes to, and has clear and acceptable plans to, expand the business of HMSO.

No Minister can give any assurances about the total level of employment or the nature of the operations of any public or private sector organisation in future, but I hope that my hon. Friend is satisfied with those four very clear assurances of our policy.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Further to the question to which the Minister has just responded, is it not the case that, the day after the change of ownership, the new employer can give contractual notice in respect of any term and condition of employment? Given that that is so, is the Minister therefore saying that he is guaranteeing, in the sale arrangements, a commitment that any future purchaser would have to give something stronger than the basic contractual requirements? Is he saying that a term of the sale will be something that guarantees that changes will not take place in contracts of employment?

Mr. Freeman: I would not use the word "guarantee". I said that, in seeking a purchaser for the business, we shall look for a company that wishes to expand the business, and therefore the job prospects. I did not say that we would either seek or expect guarantees from any company. If HMSO were to remain in the public sector, I could not guarantee what jobs would be retained. I have already forecast that if HMSO remains in the public sector, its business and its employment base will contract.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Why?

Mr. Freeman: For the very simple reason that the business of government is reducing. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, in the past 10 years, the work force of HMSO has contracted very substantially; it has halved in the past decade. That contraction is primarily a function of the reduced volume of turnover available to HMSO within the public sector.

Since 1882, much of HMSO's official printed output has had the unique legal privilege of being conclusive evidence of the matter stated and it is frequently relied on in the courts. By the end of the decade, HMSO had assumed formal responsibility for overseeing legislative printing and the then controller of HMSO and his successors were appointed as Queen's or King's printer in pursuit of that function. From that time, the controller has also administered Crown copyright on behalf of the sovereign and, by agreement with the House and the other place, he also administers parliamentary copyright. In discharging those functions, HMSO has demonstrated and enhanced its reputation for diligence and reliability, which is now well known across the public sector and beyond.

The parliamentary and statutory publishing business accounts for about 10 per cent. of HMSO's total turnover. HMSO has always relied substantially on its original activities of supplying its customers with the essential requirements of administration—for example, printing services, office equipment and stationery. HMSO naturally brings to that work the same reputation for high quality and service. Since its founding days, it has been guided by the need to minimise the overall cost to the Government, and therefore to the taxpayer, while maintaining the standards that its customers have come to expect. That objective has guided the Government's policy of reforming HMSO in the past 15 years and it must clearly be paramount in any decisions taken about its future.

For the greater part of its history, HMSO's services were funded by means of an annual vote from Parliament. HMSO's supplies were, in accountancy terms, an allied service. Therefore, its customers did not have to draw on any of their voted funds to pay for the goods and services that they received. They effectively received them free. Although they benefited from HMSO's purchasing expertise and the savings that are inevitably made when buying in bulk, there was no incentive for them to look for a better deal elsewhere. Similarly, there was no pressure on HMSO to ensure that it offered the best deal.

As alternative suppliers became increasingly available for most HMSO services, it was clear that more could be done to ensure that the cost to the taxpayer was minimised. For those reasons, in 1980 HMSO became one of the first of the Government's trading funds. That meant that, for the first time, it had to cover all its costs through customer charges rather than through an annual vote of cash. In return, it gained considerable management freedom over operational and finance matters.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend concede that, from that point, the price of *Hansard* has increased to such an extent that people can no longer afford to buy it? That was a direct consequence of the Government's decision.

Mr. Freeman: That was correct at the time. However, I am delighted to inform the House that, as a result of negotiating a new service agreement and of HMSO's responsiveness, the price of *Hansard* is now falling. I hope that the price not only of *Hansard* but of other documents supplied to the House and to the other place will continue to fall. That is a function of greater efficiency at the stationery office—I congratulate the management and the staff—and of a tougher and more businesslike attitude on the part of the House and the other place regarding the supply of documents.

Sir Patrick Cormack: My right hon. Friend knows that I am very displeased with the general plans to privatise HMSO. Do not his comments illustrate the good sense of keeping the publication of parliamentary papers properly within the control of Parliament? Is it not impossible to guarantee that if the work goes to a wholly free-standing commercial operation?

Mr. Freeman: I agree with the first part of my hon. Friend's statement. Parliament must control the supply of those immensely important services; I do not dissent from that view. I believe that the House will have greater powers than it has at present through the negotiation and execution of a contract between it and the supplier of the services. The powers would be formalised. I do not believe that any successful purchaser of all the printing, publishing and other allied business of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, as it is now called, would seek to renege from, diminish or belittle the importance of the services that it provides to the House. The contract will be extremely important and I believe that Parliament will be able to control it better than at present.

I am aware of my hon. Friend's concerns in that regard. Although I believe that it would be commercially unattractive to separate the parliamentary from the Crown business, as my hon. Friend has pressed me on that point I shall certainly reflect further on the matter. It may be that, on reflection, I shall decide that some arrangements could be made, but I offer no immediate prospect of a satisfactory solution.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Minister said that Parliament could control the business better. What methods does he have in mind to ensure that?

Mr. Freeman: I explained to the House that, for the first time in the history of the relationship between Parliament and Her Majesty's Stationery Office, there is now a formal service agreement. That was signed last week and it will come into effect on 1 January. There is a similar agreement with the other place. It is envisaged that the authorities of the House will enter into a formal contract on behalf of the House with the supplier of those services, in the same manner as many other services to the House—which perhaps are not as significant, but which are subject to normal commercial contracts. I believe that the existence of a public document that specifies the nature and the quality of services, together with the price of those services, represents a better mechanism through which the House can control the supply of the services.

Mr. O'Neill: In the event that HMSO is unable or unwilling to comply with the undertakings into which it enters, what powers will the House have to excise any damages or compensation from the printer?

Mr. Freeman: It depends on the provisions of the contract. The House may wish to have the right to veto any change in ownership or to inscribe damages into the contract or it may wish to remove the business of printing *Hansard* from other printing and publishing business. That is the nature of a commercial contract.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Is it correct that the contract could specify that any future change in the operations of the buyer should be subject to the requirements of Parliament? Although parliamentary business may constitute a relatively small proportion of the new operator's turnover, from a commercial point of view it would be under a great deal of pressure to maintain a good relationship with the House and the other place because any failure to fulfil its requirements could jeopardise the rest of its business.

Mr. Freeman: It must be right that the dozens of private sector companies that supply services to the House and the other place seek to retain their good name and maintain their business with the Palace of Westminster and both Houses of Parliament. I am sure that the same will apply a fortiori to the supply of printed documents.

Mr. Garrett: If HMSO breaks its contract, all we can do is sue it. Surely the Government should put those requirements into the tender document in the first place.

Mr. Freeman: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. It is a matter for the House and not for the Government. *[Interruption.]* One may laugh, but, although I shall be responsible for the contracts placed by the Crown with the printer and publisher supplying documents, the precise contractual arrangements are a matter for the House. Speaking on behalf of the Crown, I would envisage that any contract for the supply of such important documents as White Papers, Green Papers and other statements of Government policy would include extremely tough contractual provisions.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Let me make it clear on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, first, that the service agreement that the Minister has described is entirely independent of the discussion about privatisation and comes into force on 1 January as a result of work already done. Secondly, on behalf of the House, the Commission would expect to reserve the right to make whatever arrangements seemed appropriate if there were any default on the contract by a private organisation that took over the duties of HMSO.

Mr. Freeman: I quite accept what the right hon. Gentleman said and I agree with him.

Shortly after 1980, customers—Government Departments—were freed for the first time from the requirement to deal with HMSO and were permitted to use any supplier that offered them the best deal. The results were dramatic. The commercial imperatives placed on HMSO meant that costs fell sharply after it attained trading fund status. That could only be good news for customers. Not only were they now free to shop around but they benefited from the savings passed on by HMSO as a result of its new-found commercial freedom.

That commercialisation also exposed HMSO to true competition for the first time and the private sector was quick to seize the opportunity. Central Government were and remain an attractive market for many of the services provided by HMSO, which soon had to compete with suppliers that were well used to the rigours of the marketplace and, more important, were not bound by the same public sector regulations as HMSO. In retrospect, the management and staff of HMSO rose to the challenge remarkably well and, despite that intense competition, HMSO remains the clear market leader in the supply of printing and stationery to central Government.

Ultimately, however, that competition will work against HMSO if it remains in the public sector. For instance, its governmental status means that it is still bound by restrictions on the prudent use of taxpayers' money, which ultimately accounts for nearly all its income. That rules out decisions that would carry only normal commercial risk in the private sector. It is unable to raise investment capital in ways open to private sector business or to diversify into new markets. Most important, it cannot trade with private sector customers when its own central Government market is in decline.

[Mr. Freeman]

In such an environment, HMSO would clearly struggle to maintain its position. Although it has generally continued to meet the financial targets that it has been set, its turnover has declined by some 10 per cent. since 1990. A continued cost-cutting programme has led to the reduction of staff numbers by some 600 over the same period. To allow matters to continue in the same vein would be a gross disservice to the management and staff at HMSO, whose efforts have built on the organisation's formidable reputation and who in recent years have found their futures in jeopardy through being unable to compete fairly with other suppliers.

At the same time, to return to the old way of a protected market into which customers were tied would deny those customers and the taxpayers the benefits that they have gained since 1980. It would also imply a wholly unjustifiable lack of confidence in the ability of the management and staff of HMSO to run a prosperous, competitive business.

As I announced in the House last week, we therefore plan to privatise HMSO by means of competitive tender offer. That will allow the business to compete on equal terms with the private sector for the first time. It will be able to trade into wider markets and to diversify and expand as business opportunities present themselves. It will be able to raise funds for investment through all the channels open to private business, rather than having to apply to the Treasury. All those improvements will allow its customers to benefit from further efficiency savings and, as nearly all of them are at present funded from taxation, that will also benefit the taxpayer. At the same time, working in a more secure and prosperous environment will naturally present its staff with a more secure future.

I am convinced that, without privatisation, the business will continue to decline and its staff will face continuing job losses.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Is it not fair to say that HMSO is a centre of excellence that will attract a prospective purchaser and that, far from wanting to destroy the business, any prospective purchaser will want to keep the management team together and build on that business?

Mr. Freeman: I agree with my hon. Friend. I take a constructive attitude to the future of any business which has built its success, albeit in a declining public market, on not only its integrity but its hard work and its skill in obtaining business from Government and Parliament and discharging its function satisfactorily.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way again, but, as he is referring to the hard work and the skill of the staff of HMSO, many of whom live in Norwich and the surrounding area, will he respond to the particular point I made earlier about the importance of maintaining a strong base for HMSO in Norwich? That is traditionally so and I believe that it should continue. Can my right hon. Friend make a commitment to that?

Mr. Freeman: As I said to my hon. Friend earlier, I cannot make any forecast about how a business is organised into the future. However, having visited Norwich twice—I intend to do so again to discuss the future with management and representatives of the staff—it is clearly the sensible headquarters of the business and I know of no reason why there should be any change in that regard. I cannot forecast how the nature of the business of HMSO will change the individual loadings of specific factories or depots in future. Norwich is clearly the centre, and I see no good reason why that should change.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am particularly grateful for the assurance that my right hon. Friend gave me earlier, but surely any internationally based company could buy HMSO and produce from wherever it wished to produce and that is the blunt fact. I would not begin to impugn my right hon. Friend's good intentions or integrity, for which I have the highest possible regard, but he cannot guarantee it.

Mr. Freeman: Like many hon. Members, I spent the majority of my life in business in the private sector, subject to the rigours of the private sector. One locates businesses where that makes the most economic and business sense. I pay tribute to the management of HMSO for doing that and reorganising the business. Of course I cannot give my hon. Friend any assurance about where and how the business will be organised in future. I cannot do that with HMSO in the public sector, let alone the private sector. For the business to expand, it must be given the opportunity to compete for private sector business which I believe is available, and that must load its existing factories, if they are efficiently organised and located, which is clearly the case. That will enhance job opportunities.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I recognise that the Minister is accepting interventions; but, to pick up the point made by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), the right hon. Gentleman cannot give guarantees, yet he has tried to do so in letters to Madam Speaker and to the work force of HMSO. The Minister has also accredited and applauded the workers and management of HMSO. Does he expect a management buy-out?

Mr. Freeman: No. There is no sign of any interest on the part of the management and staff, I suspect partly because of the size of the operation. It is a significant industrial operation and one would not normally expect a management buy-out. To return to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's intervention, I cannot give guarantees about the size of the work force of HMSO in the public sector and nor can the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), who leads for the Opposition and to whom I give way.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I press the right hon. Gentleman on his statement that the public sector market is in decline? He says that the central Government market is in decline, and that may well be the case for the time being; but the public sector market is far wider than the central Government market, and the right hon. Gentleman has not yet been able to privatise the entire public sector.

Does the right hon. Gentleman take account of the fact that we now talk in terms of the public sector's being the whole European market? As I understand it, HMSO has done little in the way of marketing throughout Europe. Will the right hon. Gentleman bear that in mind when he makes statements in the future?

Mr. Freeman: The right hon. Gentleman is right. The public market, as broadly defined, is enormous. However, private sector companies could bid, for example, to print the journals and other documents of the European Parliament and the European Commission; bidding is not restricted to HMSO. I should like HMSO in the private sector to compete vigorously for that business. As a matter of policy, I do not want a public sector body, funded and ultimately guaranteed by the taxpayer, to compete for business outwith the United Kingdom public sector when other companies can compete with that business. I am confident that, given its reputation and expertise, HMSO will be able to expand its business into the European public sector when it is privatised.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He has been very patient.

May I pursue the point that the right hon. Gentleman made to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack)? He said that he could give no assurances about the location of production in the future. I wonder how that squares with his response to questions from hon. Members on 13 December, when he said:

> "We, as the customers—that is to say, the Crown and Parliament—can require the business to have a certain nature and structure . . . Parliament will be able to control the nature of the business that supplies the products."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 993.]

Is the right hon. Gentleman not flatly contradicting what he said only last week?

Mr. Freeman: I was referring to HMSO's entire business. Parliamentary business represents 10 per cent. of the total. When I was questioned about the parliamentary press, I said that the contract written by Parliament could stipulate that the work must be done at the parliamentary press works—which is, in fact, a misnomer: the press prints more than just documents for the two Houses of Parliament, but that is not inconsistent with—

Mr. Mandelson: That refers to the location.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, but I was making the point specifically in regard to the parliamentary business and the parliamentary press. If the hon. Gentleman is asking, by implication, whether the Crown—that is, various Departments—would wish to stipulate when writing contracts that certain documents must be printed in certain cities, let me tell him that I do not consider that appropriate. We would look for a contract with the stationery office that offered good value for money in comparison with the alternatives; how that was organised would be a matter for the stationery office. There is one exception, however. If the hon. Gentleman does me justice and reads all the evidence that I gave to the Select Committee on Finance and Services, he will realise that I was dealing with that specific problem. Indeed, I provided even more assurances in response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack).

Accordingly, I propose to invite offers in the new year for the whole business, apart from a small residual body to deal with necessary public responsibilities such as Crown copyright. I plan to make a written statement on Government policy for Crown copyright by early February. The sale process will allow full screening and evaluation of all bids and consultation with customers, principally Parliament. It should also allow for legally binding contracts to be drawn up between customers and the privatised business.

However, as I confirmed in my statement last week, I am not setting deadlines. There is a prerequisite that Parliament be satisfied—although I am also anxious for the uncertainty to last no longer than is absolutely necessary. It would make little commercial sense for us to withhold any of HMSO's operational businesses from the sale. Many of them are mutually dependent, and all benefit from the independence and integrity of HMSO, which I am keen to preserve after the sale. In particular, however, I note the suggestion of some hon. Members that the parliamentary press should not be sold, and could perhaps be taken over by the House. I have already responded to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire.

Hon. Members have also previously suggested that HMSO should be freed from all its current public sector operating constraints yet be retained in the public sector. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland advanced that argument, and I am sure that he will do so again this evening. The commercial freedoms that HMSO would need to compete with the private sector in new markets are incompatible with its continuing in the public sector. The first commercial freedom is the right to borrow without the burdens of public sector constraints. No Government could countenance the prospect of a public sector body's having normal commercial freedoms to borrow.

The second commercial freedom is the right to win customers in any market, public or private. If HMSO as a public sector body were allowed such freedom, its competitors in the private sector would be bound to suspect unfair competition, especially if HMSO were able to borrow money cheaply because its activities were thought to be underwritten by the taxpayer. It is far better all around, for both HMSO and its competitors, for business to be transferred to the private sector, where it can compete on equal terms and can have freer access to the finance that will enable it to expand.

The only sensible course is clearly privatisation of the bulk of HMSO as it is currently constituted. During such a process, customers will naturally want the maximum assurance that after the sale they will continue to receive the high-quality and cost-effective service to which they have been accustomed. At the same time, potential purchasers will wish to make their own estimate of HMSO's future viability, and to be sure that it will enjoy a reasonably secure level of business after transfer to the private sector. We propose to accommodate both those needs through legally binding contracts between major customers and the privatised business, wherever it is sensible to do so, and for that to come into force at the point of sale.

Parliament is, of course, HMSO's key customer. The contracts will specify all the customer's requirements, standards of service and, if necessary, the means by which the service shall be delivered, as well as price. Customers' requirements will therefore be clearly specified and fully enforceable, ultimately by recourse to law. Agreeing the contracts with HMSO's customers is an onerous task, but I have every confidence that it can be achieved with the co-operation of those customers, whose interests the contracts will protect.

Sir Patrick Cormack: In answer to an earlier intervention, my right hon. Friend gave an assurance that he would reconsider the parliamentary aspect. Will he report to the House on that specific point before pursuing his commercial inquiries?

Mr. Freeman: I have already given an assurance. I must now end my speech, as time is short and others wish to speak, but I shall foreshadow a commitment that I intend to give in a moment. I shall publish the short list of potential buyers; Parliament will have its views on their acceptability.

The needs of Parliament are particularly important, and it is vital for them to be fully protected in the new contracts required by both Houses. I note that new supply and service agreements will shortly come into force between the House of Commons and the other place and HMSO; they will provide a sound basis for the contracts. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is right: they are wholly independent of and separate from the privatisation proposals, and have an entirely different genesis. I am confident that we can reach a position that fully protects Parliament's needs in the privatisation.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does that mean that, when the bids come in, they will first be assessed to establish whether they pass certain quality thresholds, rather like television station franchises? Once those that do not pass those thresholds are eliminated, will those that qualify be considered?

Mr. Freeman: Not only would the Government wish to draw up a short list acceptable to Departments; Parliament will insist that, if it is to conclude a contract with the privately owned stationery office, the new owner of the business must be entirely acceptable.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister has talked of binding legal contracts. Does he realise that the whole set-up in Scotland will have to be rather different? Can he make any statement about the discussions that have been held with the Scottish Office about the future of the 200 people working at South Gyle, 95 per cent. of whom voted against privatisation in a poll? So much for the consultation with the work force of which the Minister speaks.

Mr. Freeman: With respect, perhaps the work force were not entirely aware of the arguments and advantages of what is proposed, not only for the unit in Scotland but for others, in Wales and Northern Ireland. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the future of those units, and any others, will be made clear before any contract is negotiated and signed. They have been treated as an integral part of the printing and publishing operations of HMSO. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have noted my earlier assurances about what is to be offered, that is, the whole.

In her letter of 28 November to the Leader of the House, Madam Speaker set out the safeguards that the House of Commons Commission considers necessary to enable the House to continue its agreement with HMSO after privatisation. It was published in the *Official Report* of 11 December. My reply on behalf of the Government was placed in the Library of the House on 14 December, and explains how those safeguards can be met, primarily through a legally enforceable contract. As well as meeting Parliament's requirements in that way, potential purchasers will have to honour recently negotiated improvements, such as reductions in the price of publications, and, I hope, negotiate further reductions.

I fully recognise that a change in ownership is a source of concern for staff. However, I am convinced that it is the best means of safeguarding their future by permitting an expansion of the business. I have already given an assurance that I shall consult the trade union representatives of the staff during the sale process. The staff and the trade unions will, of course, be kept as fully informed as possible by the management and privatisation team during the sale process. I can also give the House an assurance that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply to the sale of HMSO, and staff will transfer with their existing terms and conditions. That protection is important and applies, of course, in any transaction whether in the public or private sector. I expect the newly privatised business to be able to offer staff a more attractive future as the business prospers and grows.

In selecting a successful bidder from the short list, one of the factors that we will consider is the bidder's plans for the future growth of the business. Pension rights are protected by social security legislation. The new owner will be required to provide broadly comparable pension arrangements. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the pension scheme is non-contributory. The Government Actuary will be asked to provide an independent analysis of comparability and to approve the new arrangements as offering broadly comparable benefits. In addition, the pension fund will be under the control of the board of trustees, in accordance with trust law.

We will exclude from the sale a small residual body charged with carrying out HMSO's statutory functions. That body will also be responsible for the administration of Crown copyright and could continue to administer parliamentary copyright if Parliament so wished. Retaining responsibility for copyright in the public sector will allow us to sustain and improve the accessible and affordable publication of government information.

I confirm that the Government will seek a buyer who will maintain the integrity of the present HMSO. In no circumstances will we offer the printing and publishing businesses separately. The buyer must, of course, be acceptable to Parliament. To that end, I intend to publish the short list of bidders in due course and to invite Parliament to be involved in the selection of the successful candidate to ensure that a satisfactory outcome is achieved for work for Parliament. I undertake to consult the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, and business managers on how that should be accomplished. My dealings have so far been with Madam Speaker, acting on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, but further reflection may indicate another approach. That is the arrangement that has existed so far.

In addition to this debate, I have already made a statement to the House and given evidence to the Finance and Services Committee. I remain ready to outline the Government's plans further, in Select Committee or elsewhere.

I commend these plans to the House, in the best interests of HMSO, its customers, its staff, the taxpayer and Parliament.

7.23 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I thank the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for arranging to have placed in the Library his reply to Madam Speaker's letter to the Leader of the House dated 28 November. I also thank the Chairman of the House of Commons Finance and Services Committee, who, at my request, published the minutes of evidence of his Committee's meeting of 21 November 1995, at which the Chancellor gave evidence about the privatisation of HMSO.

Both documents have only just been made available. I do not blame the Chancellor or the Chairman; they have done their best. The real culprits are the business managers who brought forward the debate from Wednesday to today. They have played into our hands. Because the debate is taking place when the House has not had the opportunity to absorb important new information, that strengthens the argument for another debate in the new year, when even more details will be available. Will the Chancellor and the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee join me in urging the Leader of the House—I am glad to see him in his place; he has a deep interest in this issue as a member of the Commission—to respond positively to these requests?

The other day, I described the Chancellor of the Duchy as a decent man fallen among thieves. Perhaps I was unkind to thieves. I really do feel sorry for him, as he only just escaped responsibility for carrying through the privatisation of the railways—the poll tax on wheels, in the words of the late Robert Adlee when he was Chairman of the Transport Select Committee. It was out of the frying pan and into the fire. There he is in the Cabinet Office, privatising everything that moves or is stationery. *[Interruption.]* That was Matthew Parris; we should give credit where it is due. It is a grand clearance sale, or, more to the point, a closing down sale. Everything must go—unbelievable bargains. A thousand little-used Sir Humphreys are going cheap. Those are the actions of a defeated Government. They know that the voters cannot wait to take vengeance. They are scorching the earth in their humiliating defeat.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Did you write that, Derek?

Mr. Foster: Perhaps Matthew Parris wrote that, too.

Why are the Government doing that? Perhaps they need the money to start another party in the wife's name. Looking at today's public sector borrowing requirement figures, has the Chancellor of the Exchequer so screwed up the nation's finances that he has to sell off every candle end before the bailiff arrives?

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in his statement, denies that the money is important. If it is not, perhaps this is an elaborate job creation scheme: not jobs for those who work in the agencies to be sold off, as they are likely to lose theirs, but rather jobs for the boys on the boards of privatised companies, for former Ministers, defeated Members of Parliament and defeated Tory candidates. The Chancellor looks a little hurt, as though Nolan had never been necessary.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman drew an analogy with rail privatisation. Is he able to give any commitment to the House that the Labour party, if it were in power, would renationalise HMSO, when unfortunately it is not able to give such a commitment about rail privatisation?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is a little premature. The Government have not yet privatised HMSO. They could just be frustrated by an early election. Who can tell?

What other reason can the Government have? Perhaps they have nothing else to do. They have no legislative programme, except a few Bills "to smoke out the Opposition", in the words of the chairman of the Tory party.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Is not the hon. Gentleman playing a rather familiar record, because every time we have debated privatisation we have heard doom and gloom from the Labour party, when the result has been success?

Mr. Foster: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he has had gloom and doom so far, he should just stick around.

The Government have no Bills to speak of, except to smoke out the Opposition, and Parliament is on a one-day week, so we read. Ministers sit in their offices, dreaming up crackpot schemes to prove that the Government are still fizzing with ideas. The truth is that the Government are drifting aimlessly to the general election, with so little sense of direction that they grasp at anything that will appease their lunatic fringe. Perhaps the lunatics are not yet in charge of the asylum but they have certainly written the business plan. Privatisation is an idea whose time has passed. It has been fatally wounded by the greed of the fat cats.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: If the hon. Gentleman hangs on, I shall give way to him in a minute.

No doubt, hon. Members will have seen the headline on the front page of yesterday's issue of the *Observer*. It reads:

> "Fat cats get £16m boost to pensions".

The whole idea has been blown out of the water in recent months. The fat cats get the cream while the staff get their cards. The Chancellor of the Duchy is fanning the dying embers, and the grand scheme has been reduced to this—selling off HMSO.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was right to ask what the Government would sell off next. Will it be the Mace or the Dispatch Box? Such sales are worse than selling off the family silver—now they are selling off the empty boxes in which the silver was kept.

Mr. Hughes: I was happy to wait for the right hon. Gentleman to give way, and I wait in anticipation to find out whether he intends to say anything about HMSO. He said—I am sure I quote him correctly—that privatisation was an idea whose time had gone. At what point did he form that judgment? Presumably he supported privatisations up to a point and now opposes them. Which ones did he support, because from what he has said it is plain that he supported some?

Mr. Foster: That was an entertaining intervention, to which I shall not respond.

This privatisation reminds me of the Deputy Prime Minister's plan to sell off the Post Office.

Mr. Waterson: Hear, hear.

Mr. Foster: Someone still supports that sell-off. The Post Office is profitable, efficient and competitive, but we

[Mr. Foster]

were told that the status quo was not an option and that privatisation was necessary to allow the Post Office to compete in wider markets and to borrow for investment in the private sector. The Deputy Prime Minister had to back down because there was not a majority in the House for his scheme. That also applies to HMSO, because there is no majority in either House for privatisation. If the Chancellor of the Duchy gets his way, that may never be tested because primary legislation is not required.

I understand that retaining a residual HMSO to administer Crown copyright and to fulfil the functions of the Queen's printer avoids the need for primary legislation. There is some suggestion of secondary legislation connected with the trading fund, but that might involve only a one-and-a-half-hour debate in Committee. No doubt the Chancellor of the Duchy hopes to sneak this measure through Parliament without a vote, and I can understand why. It was clear from the exchanges on the statement that many Conservative Members are not enthusiastic about his plan. If primary legislation were necessary, I am sure that the Government would not proceed.

As the chairman of the Tory party admitted before the Queen's Speech, most of its measures were designed to smoke out the Opposition. Selling off HMSO fails that test because it smokes out those few Conservative Members of the sensible tendency. For that reason, heaven and hell will be moved to prevent a vote. However, in the November issue of "Public Sector Purchasing" the Chancellor of the Duchy said that the new arrangements for HMSO would not proceed without Parliament's approval. That must mean a vote in both Houses, because I know of no other test for Parliament's approval. Will the Chancellor of the Duchy give both Houses a chance to vote on this measure, which impinges on every hon. Member? Perhaps he would care to respond.

Mr. Freeman: I thought that I had dealt fully and fairly with that issue but perhaps I can confirm that my advice is that no primary or secondary legislation is needed to permit the proposed transaction to come to fruition. I repeat for the sake of clarity the assurance about the retention of HMSO's business of supplying documents to Parliament as an integral part of HMSO. Parliament must be satisfied about the supply contract for that future business. As I have said, that is a prerequisite for completing the transaction.

Mr. Foster: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that response, but he did not make clear whether there will be a vote in both Houses.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is taken in that spirit and I am sure that there has to be a vote.

Mr. Foster: I am relieved to hear that, but we shall see.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: Perhaps I may be allowed to finish this point, and then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Chancellor of the Duchy believed that if he could convince the House of Commons Commission or the Select Committee on Finance and Services he would be home and dry. That is clear from his privatisation time schedule. I am not arguing that hon. Members mistrust the Commission or the domestic Committees to conduct detailed negotiations on our behalf and to safeguard the interests of hon. Members. The guarantees that were sought by Madam Speaker in her letter of 28 November to the Leader of the House are comprehensive, although I am sure that Madam Speaker would consider adding other requirements to satisfy the House.

Mr. Robinson: Is it not open, through the usual channels, to the Opposition to force a vote on any issue on a Supply day?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and that may happen if the Chancellor of the Duchy decides to deny the House a vote. The right hon. Gentleman believed—but I have covered that bit. *[Interruption.]* That is what comes of spending 10 years in the Whips Office.

I sense from the mood of the House that hon. Members are unwilling to contract out this decision to the Commission or to the domestic Committees. I think that hon. Members will insist on deciding the issue themselves. The Chancellor of the Duchy intends that parliamentary approval should apply only to the terms of a legally binding contract, which will succeed the new supply and service agreement if privatisation goes ahead. That is clear from the right hon. Gentleman's reply to Madam Speaker.

Both Houses will wish to decide on the principle of this privatisation, and I shall explain why. First, HMSO's contract with Parliament is its most prestigious. The Government will not consider privatisation without that contract and, of course, the contract enhances the value of HMSO to a potential purchaser. However, the contract is equally important to HMSO: its services to Parliament are an integral part of the whole operation, which is why management and staff wish HMSO to remain an entity. The Chancellor of the Duchy claims to have been persuaded by that argument, but his wish to keep HMSO as an entity is driven more by the exigencies of his timetable than by any wish to satisfy management and staff. A broken-up HMSO would take longer to privatise, and the right hon. Gentleman's deadline of July 1996 may be unattainable if the House authorities cannot complete the essential preparatory work before that date. Any slippage might send the sell-off into the buffers of a general election.

No doubt, all Conservative Members will have been intrigued by yesterday's front page of *The Sunday Times*, which says:

> "Major orders alert for early election
>
> John Major has placed ministers and Conservative Central Office on 'amber alert' for a general election next autumn, six months before his term has to end in May 1997."

They are probably packing their bags now to get back to their constituencies and prepare for Opposition.

Sir Patrick Cormack: For Christmas.

Mr. Foster: Or for Christmas, but if this move were scuppered by an early general election, all the additional work imposed on the House authorities by privatisation would have been for nothing because, without privatisation, a legally binding contract would be unnecessary.

The House authorities have only just concluded a new supply and service agreement. If HMSO remains in the public sector, that agreement would continue for, say, four years. Concluding that agreement has been most time consuming for the House authorities. Drawing up a legally binding contract will prove even more arduous. Doubts have been expressed as to whether that work can be concluded to meet the requirements of the Chancellor's self-imposed timetable.

Hon. Members are entitled to ask whether any estimate has been made of the additional costs imposed on both Houses by the Government's plan. Will the House require additional members of staff? Has that additional expenditure been budgeted for? If not, can those extra demands be met? If so, what work will have to be deferred to meet those demands? Small wonder that, on 9 December, the front page of the *Financial Times* revealed a furious row between the House authorities and the Government about this scheme.

Perhaps we should ask an even more fundamental question: what right have the Government to impose extra costs on both Houses without either House being able to decide the issue from which those additional costs arise? Arguably, on that point alone, the Chancellor is under a moral, if not a legal or constitutional, obligation, to let Parliament decide whether it wants those unnecessary costs imposed by an unnecessary privatisation.

The next argument goes to the heart of the unease expressed by Parliament about the dilution of ministerial accountability because of the next steps agency initiative, let alone full-blown privatisation. At present, if hon. Members are dissatisfied with HMSO's standard of service, the Chancellor of the Duchy, as Minister with responsibility for public service, is accountable to the House. He will take some remedial action and report to the House. Here we must ask him how many hon. Members have complained about the service from HMSO. Has any formal complaint been lodged by the House authorities? If none, I suggest that the Chancellor of the Duchy should act on the principle, "If it isn't broken, don't mend it!"

What happens to ministerial accountability upon privatisation? Is the Chancellor still responsible or does that responsibility pass to the people who have signed the legally binding contract? Who will answer to the House? Precisely what sanctions are available, by whom and under what circumstances? In the exchanges on his statement, the Chancellor mentioned suspension of the contract, but surely that is unsatisfactory. The House cannot function without its essential papers. Who will serve the House while the contract is suspended? No other organisation could possibly fulfil the contract's terms on an interim or ad hoc basis.

Those are crucial issues. Can the House tolerate any dilution of ministerial accountability or a suspension of a legally binding contract as a sanction for non-fulfilment? It is clear that those issues arise only because of the privatisation of HMSO. That is why the House must be allowed to vote on the principle of privatisation.

There are other reasons why the House must exercise that right. Two hundred years ago, HMSO was set up to stamp out corruption in public sector purchasing. Because it is a market leader, HMSO is able to use the public sector's purchasing power to hold down prices. Because it acts as an independent broker, HMSO is able to spread purchasing across a wide range of firms, rather than concentrating work in a few favoured companies. If HMSO is privatised, the public sector will not benefit from those advantages.

During the whole of that 200 years, HMSO has served Government and Parliament, while maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality and meeting the most exacting deadlines required by Parliament. Will the Chancellor tell the House if HMSO has ever been investigated by the National Audit Office or the Public Accounts Committee for maladministration or for falling down on a matter of financial probity?

In January last year, the all-party House of Commons Public Accounts Committee produced one of its most critical reports about the decline in standards of administration and financial probity. The Committee said:

> "In recent years we have seen and reported on a number of failures in administrative and financial systems and contracts within departments and other public bodies which have led to money being wasted or otherwise improperly spent. These failings represent a departure from the standards of public conduct which have been established during the past 140 years."

Most of those cases arose because business men tried to short circuit administrative and financial procedures. The Government have been so dogged by allegations of sleaze that citizens no longer trust the system and we come to this pretty pass today when the lottery regulator does not even know that his behaviour is improper.

By this reckless plan, the Chancellor of the Duchy runs serious risks with HMSO's impeccable reputation. After privatisation, will HMSO still be subject to examination by the National Audit Office or the Public Accounts Committee? The Government have sullied the name of the public services by intemperate pursuit of private sector values, but they have no right to risk Parliament's name in the same way.

As a security printer, HMSO produces a wide range of security and "in confidence" papers such as the Budget. HMSO has an unprecedented record. No leaks have been attributed to it. Can the private sector guarantee to match that record? From time to time, the nature of such papers can jeopardise national security, so high is the risk. That is important to the House, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will recognise. Of course, Conservative Members will point to all sorts of market-sensitive information printed in the private sector as evidence that security printing can be handled just as well after privatisation. Indeed, in the exchanges following the statement, the Chancellor mentioned that some of the Budget papers are already subcontracted to the private sector. What he failed to mention—this is crucial—was that it was subcontracted only under the strict control of civil servants at HMSO.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Is he not aware that some highly reputable companies in the private sector, including some in my own constituency, are engaged in security printing day in and day out and conform to high standards of product quality and security? Surely he is not restating the old Labour notion "public sector good, private sector bad"?

Mr. Foster: I was not saying that; I was under the impression that the Conservative party was saying the contrary—"private sector good, public sector bad".

[Mr. Foster]

Departments may of course choose not to use the privatised HMSO for their security documents. Perhaps the Chancellor will tell the House whether it is true that the royal military college at Sandhurst has already stopped using HMSO for some of its security documents, because it could not be confident about the security of a privatised HMSO. Perhaps he could also confirm that the Ministry of Defence is already radically reviewing its relationship with a privatised HMSO. *[Interruption.]* Someone obviously hopes so. When one bears in mind the fact that Ministry of Defence contracts account for nearly 50 per cent. of HMSO's revenues, could not the privatisation be rather dangerous? Could not the privatisation be attacking HMSO's core business, and would not that totally scupper the Chancellor's argument that privatisation is necessary for HMSO to sell in wider markets?

I have dealt with the direct risks to services to Parliament; let us now examine the indirect risks. The first is the sale itself. The Chancellor wishes HMSO to be sold as a whole, apart from the residual HMSO. That might be his intention, but there has been a significant change of emphasis from what he said in evidence to the Finance and Services Select Committee to what he said in his statement. He said the same thing tonight. The worrying phrase is:

> "in any event we would not separate the publishing and printing businesses".

I am sure that the Chancellor is aware that HMSO is much larger than just the printing and publishing business. Perhaps he is unaware that the statement, which he thinks is reassuring, is actually quite worrying to the staff of HMSO.

Mr. Freeman: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that my statement represented a change since giving evidence to the Finance and Services Select Committee. The change was based on the advice of consultants, who recommended not only offering the business as a whole but in any case—whatever the response—not separating the printing and publishing business. Some might say that that represents an advance. I hope that it is a welcome change and that it gives greater assurance not only to the House but to the management and staff of HMSO.

Mr. Foster: I do not think that the staff will find that reassuring. They are completely committed to HMSO surviving as an entity. The Minister re-emphasising that he would not in any event separate the publishing and printing business will certainly not be the kind of reassurance that he imagines that it will be. Under the exigencies of having to push through a sale before the general election, surely it is possible that the Chancellor will change his mind even more—perhaps his consultants will advise him again.

Even if the Chancellor succeeds in selling HMSO as an entity, what guarantee is there that it will remain an entity for long? Rumour has it that a finance house will be the most likely purchaser. The purchase would be made with a view to flotation in two or three years' time. What guarantee is there that the new owner would not hive off bits of the business? Indeed, wringing out of HMSO's £340 million turnover the kind of profit that I have heard mentioned could be achieved only by hiving off the least profitable and concentrating on the most profitable bits of the business. Redundancies would inevitably follow. On that very subject, the Chancellor said that there would be no automatic redundancies. What does that mean?

What guarantee can the Chancellor of the Duchy give that the company would not fall into foreign ownership, which would be unacceptable to Parliament? He will recall that Madam Speaker's letter made special mention of that. What guarantee can he give that the new owner would not be driven by the market to look for cheaper and poorer quality services to Parliament? The interests of the City coincide only rarely with the public interest. Despite his good intentions, the market might exert pressures opposing Parliament's wish to make its papers more widely and cheaply available.

For all those reasons, both Houses should have the opportunity to vote on the issue, not only on the narrow terms of the legally binding contract. Those reasons are sufficient for the new Public Service Select Committee to investigate thoroughly the risks to parliamentary services, but the Committee will be able to range more widely.

For example, the thrust of the Chancellor of the Duchy's argument is that HMSO's public sector market is declining and that privatisation will enable HMSO to sell in wider markets and borrow for investment in the private sector. When challenged as to why the Government will not arrange for HMSO to operate with full commercial freedom in the public sector, he responds that that is not Government policy. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) want to intervene?

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have made my point.

Mr. Foster: I think that the hon. Gentleman said that it was daft.

Frankly, that is not good enough. The Chancellor of the Duchy is forcing through an unnecessary and unwanted privatisation—it is certainly unwanted by the staff, 95 per cent. of whom voted against it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, and we would probably find that it was unwanted by both Houses of Parliament, if they were allowed to vote. He is forcing it through on the pretext that there is no alternative, but he has not even examined the options. Will he confirm that this option was not one of those in the terms of reference given to the consultants who advised him?

HMSO staff are proud of their record in the public sector. It has met all the targets set by central Government and undergone fundamental change in the past 15 years, becoming a trading fund in 1980 and a next steps agency in 1988. It has been trading commercially since 1980 and with increasing commercial freedom as it has responded to competition from the private sector. All the changes have been negotiated with the co-operation of the staff. They are proud of their record and take pride in the high-quality service that they provide to Government and Parliament. They want HMSO to remain in the public sector.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend not filled with despair by the fact that we have a Government who are so little conscious of the importance of our sovereign Parliament that they are prepared to hand the printing of something as vital as the papers that flow from Parliament to a private firm, not because that is necessary but for the sake of a spurious argument about profit?

Mr. Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. Of course we understand—

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): It was not very helpful.

Mr. Foster: We are one party, unlike the Conservative party. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The whole scheme is being driven by the dogma that HMSO must be put into the private sector if it is to succeed in future. *[Interruption.]* I am addressing the whole argument. The Chancellor of the Duchy fails to address that argument, which is why I want him to refer the matter to the new Public Service Select Committee.

The Select Committee should also examine the costs of privatisation. For example, what has been paid to consultants and advisers so far? What is the Government's estimate of additional fees before the sale is complete? How much will privatisation cost HMSO in staff time? How much investment has been carried out already in preparation for privatisation? How far is the low profit in last year's accounts due to exceptional redundancy payments in preparation for privatisation? How much is the preparation for privatisation costing both Houses and will that be taken into account in the contract? How much will be lost to the taxpayer by sacrificing a stream of profits year on year for a one-off contribution from the sale? How far has HMSO's performance been affected by two or three years of uncertainty and the resulting staff demoralisation? How much will be lost to the taxpayer by selling off valuable assets at knock-down prices to secure a quick sale? Is this a good time to sell in view of last year's poor results?

I shall deal now with the issue of European law, and shall touch on a couple of matters related to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. I understand that the House of Commons operates under the provisions of the public service contracts regulations of 1993, which require tender procedures for contracts of service. That may mean that the House could not commit itself in advance to a contract with a privatised HMSO.

I understand, however, that if a contract were entered into before privatisation and transferred as part of the sale, the regulations would not apply. If so, that might contravene European law. In answer to my question during his statement, the Chancellor of the Duchy responded that he was advised that that was not a problem. Will he publish the points on which he sought advice and the advice that he has been given? I shall certainly publish advice that I have received from lawyers advising the trade unions, which suggests that there may be some conflict with European law.

For the Chancellor of the Duchy knowingly to flout European law might make him some kind of a hero with his Euro-sceptics, but it would be quite wrong for him to involve the House authorities in a breach of European law, and wrong for him to involve the legislature in such a breach without a vote in both Houses.

The Chancellor of the Duchy has confirmed that TUPE will apply and we welcome that—although, understandably, staff are suspicious of how long the terms and conditions of employment will be maintained under the new owner. Pensions, of course, are not covered by TUPE. Although the requirement is said to be "broadly comparable" to the civil service scheme, there are great concerns about what that will mean in practice.

The scheme should not go ahead without a vote in both Houses of Parliament. It should be referred to the new Public Service Select Committee for a thorough examination of the risks to services to Parliament, of the costs of privatisation and of the feasibility of giving HMSO full commercial freedom in the public sector.

The Chancellor must be aware that his scheme is deeply unpopular with HMSO staff. He is also clearly not the blue-eyed boy with the House authorities. His scheme is unpopular with all Opposition parties, and many of his Back Benchers are reluctant supporters. Perhaps he should observe Lord Healey's first law of holes—when one is in a hole, stop digging. That at least would bring relief to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who would not have to be a Norfolk turkey voting for an early Christmas. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman's Government want to present him oven-ready to the voters and he has been stuffed by the Chancellor of the Duchy. No wonder he is doing the turkey trot. Who would be a Tory candidate in Norwich if this madcap scheme went through?

8.5 pm

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): The House has had a treat that it has not had nearly frequently enough in recent years: a speech by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). I cannot say that I agree with everything that he said. Indeed, it could be argued that a speech of 37 minutes was a trifle long for a debate of this length. Chief Whips have said that to me on other occasions, but perhaps different standards apply to those who no longer have that great responsibility.

I shall be extremely brief, unlike some, since my job is to report on the Minister's appearance in front of the Select Committee on Finance and Services, to which the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland was good enough to make reference. I note that the right hon. Gentleman now wants to send the report to be examined in great detail by the Public Service Select Committee. The more the merrier I suppose. If my Committee were thereby relieved of another duty, I do not suppose that the Committee's members would mind too much.

But, in fairness to the House, I should say that the appearance of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave us quite a bit of comfort because he answered all the questions that we put to him and showed no reluctance whatever to appear. Indeed, he has not shown any reluctance to appear in the House, either for the recent statement or this week's debate.

If I understand the remarks of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, he says that we must have a vote on the issue. I would not necessarily mind that. I do not see how a vote could be stopped if hon. Members wanted it. As the right hon. Gentleman said, if necessary, the Opposition can use a Supply day. If those in the House want to vote they will vote. If they do not want to vote, they will not vote. It does not seem to be a particularly difficult thing for which to campaign.

There are differing views across the Floor of the House about the merits of privatisation and how it has worked on various occasions in various industries in the past, but

[Mr. Paul Channon]

that is not of great importance to me or, indeed, to the members of my Committee. Whatever our individual views on privatisation, what matters is what effect this particular privatisation would have on the House of Commons.

If we were satisfied that the House of Commons' reputation would be damaged, that the service to the House of Commons would be severely damaged or on other such grave matters, regardless of party affiliation, we would be right to be against the proposal. My Committee therefore examined the proposal and took evidence from the Chancellor in order to try to address the very natural doubts and worries felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the privatisation of the stationery office.

I accept what the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland says about the excellent service that the stationery office gives and has given for many years. I pay my tribute to it. But I do not want hon. Members to go away imagining that it has always been roses dealing with the stationery office in this House. When I was a Minister responsible for the stationery office, again and again statements were made and questions were asked because papers did not appear on time. Indeed, the same thing happened to my immediate predecessors in the Labour Government. So being in the public sector was not always a safeguard that things would be all right with the stationery office.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the absence of documents is a common complaint in Standing Committees? It is important to ensure that the record of the previous sittings is available to hon. Members serving on those Committees. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that hon. Members often raise points of order because the *Hansard* for the previous Tuesday or Thursday is not available?

Mr. Channon: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. It is some years since I raised a point of order in a Standing Committee, and I hope that opportunity will not arise again for quite a while.

I was the Minister under whose regime and benevolent rule the stationery office became a trading agency, to which the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland referred with pleasure.

We have seen in *Hansard* the letter from Madam Speaker containing 12 paragraphs of conditions that she thinks are necessary before the House could agree to a privatisation scheme. It is no secret that the matter was debated in the Commission, nor is it any secret that the matter was debated in the Finance and Services Select Committee—the relevant papers are published. I recall no resistance to the suggestion that the Minister should make a statement. I recall no resistance to the suggestion that there should be a debate. The very fact of a debate implies that, as a possible result of it, there might be a vote. Such a vote could easily be arranged in the future.

All I want to ask is whether my right hon. Friend can repeat the assurance he gave to the House on a previous occasion. Can he repeat that he will not proceed with the privatisation of the stationery office unless he can conscientiously convince the House that the 12 points of reservation that the Speaker made in her letter will be met in full? My right hon. Friend has already given us that undertaking, but I think that he must give it again to the House tonight. The House can then come to a fair judgment about the future. If those assurances cannot be given, I am sure that the House will not wish to proceed with the privatisation. If my right hon. Friend gives that assurance, I for one will be happy, at least at this stage, to look at the proposal with an open mind and to consider the evidence. I would be happy to give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I repeat the assurance that I have already given on that point. Because of the importance of HMSO to parliamentary business, it is obvious and self-evident that Parliament must be satisfied. I cannot dictate Parliament's wish or conclusions on the matter, and therefore it cannot proceed unless Parliament is satisfied.

Mr. Channon: For me, at least, that goes far enough for me to say that, at this stage, I am content to proceed further and see how the negotiations go. The Minister said that Parliament's wishes must be paramount, and that must be the aim of all of us, whether we are in favour or against privatisation in principle.

8.12 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Her Majesty's Stationery Office employs 2,800 workers, of whom 900 are in my constituency at the Norwich headquarters of HMSO. Therefore mine is a primarily constituency interest, although I also have a public service interest, as we all do.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said, HMSO was set up in 1786 to stamp out corruption in public service purchasing. It is profitable, highly successful and has declared a surplus since 1980. It is in the middle of a three-year plan. As a result of being in the public sector it has the advantage of being able to use the purchasing power of the public sector to hold down prices. It also enjoys large economies of scale, and can spread its purchasing across a range of suppliers. Those advantages have served the Government well.

One essential is that HMSO is not broken up, on or after privatisation. The Minister frequently says that he will not split its printing from its publishing activities. The right hon. Gentleman has not hitherto realised that one third of HMSO's business is in office equipment and office supplies. If those businesses were sold off—that would be a strong temptation to a private contractor—much of the overhead of the total organisation would have to be spread over printing, print buying and publishing. The loss of one third of the business would make HMSO non-viable. We fear that a major institution would buy HMSO as a whole and then, relatively quickly, resell the profitable parts and collapse the rest of it.

What guarantees of employment will be extracted from a purchaser? Every other privatisation has been accompanied by massive job losses. That is the burning question in Norwich, which has lost 2,500 jobs directly, and probably as many again indirectly in the past few years. It cannot withstand massive new redundancies. I believe that guarantees of employment in the tender from potential private purchasers are essential.

The Government tell us that the TUPE regulations will apply to the workers at HMSO, but those regulations specifically state that workers' terms and conditions may be changed for technological, organisational or economic reasons. HMSO operates on the leading edge of a number of technologies, and is therefore regularly reorganised. The protection afforded by the TUPE regulations may therefore be minimal. Equally, those regulations do not apply to transfers via change of share ownership. We understand that the current preferred route for a sale is to a financial institution, which may therefore not comply with current terms and conditions. Even the Government acknowledge that TUPE regulations provide protection only at the point of sale. If HMSO were to be broken up later, the businesses which were sold on would also not benefit from TUPE. I am strongly under the impression that the TUPE conditions last for three months and would not apply any longer to HMSO.

When I asked the Minister at the time of his statement what steps he would take to guarantee security on privatisation, he was unable to answer. HMSO is a security printer—I am well aware that there are other such printers—which produces in-confidence Government and parliamentary papers, passports, benefit books and other products where security matters, and which are subject to potential fraud. There has never been a leak from HMSO. What private sector company would offer such a guarantee when making a tender to take over HMSO?

HMSO already carries out work for the French Department of Employment and the German Post Office. Why could it not spread into the European public sector markets and British non-Government markets while being retained as a public sector body? HMSO already operates in private markets, and most of its work has already been exposed to market testing. Virtually every test has been won in-house because of the efficiency of HMSO. In fact, 75 per cent. of its goods and services are already purchased from the private sector.

HMSO has made the profit required of it while publishing important but limited-interest publications, which the private sector would be unlikely to publish because of the lack of profit in particular publications. Open government requires a state publisher prepared to publish limited-interest publications without the constraint of profit.

The Minister referred to the constraint on the HMSO of the public sector borrowing requirement, but HMSO has made no call on borrowing in the past 15 years.

In addition to employment and commercial considerations, there are, of course, important parliamentary considerations, which have been the subject of most of the speeches so far. How can a private contractor have the parliamentary experience of HMSO? What will happen if a private contractor fails to provide Parliament with the publications that it needs to do its work? If a contract replaces the present arrangements, all that Parliament can do is invoke a penalty clause. What good is that? Parliament would meanwhile grind to a halt. When will a detailed statement be made on safeguarding Parliament's interests in the cause of privatisation? Will they be made clear in the tender document? Who will be responsible if a private stationery office fails to provide the service that we need? Do the Government propose to hold a golden share in the privatised HMSO, so that at least they have some arm on it?

I have some other questions on parliamentary matters. Will the privatised stationery office be the ultimate owner of current and future stocks of Government and parliamentary publications, and of the associated electronic archive? If so, what would the situation be if the company went bankrupt or were taken into foreign ownership?

A privatised stationery office will naturally wish, in the interests of its shareholders, to extract maximum commercial value from official documents and data. How does that fit in with Government policies on public access to official information, for example, the trend to put more and more Government documents on the Internet?

The House is making an effort to bring down the sale price of *Hansard* and other parliamentary documents—a policy which will benefit Government Departments as purchasers of those documents. Do the Government support that policy? Are they making a similar effort to hold down the sale price of their documents? A Government-funded subsidy is currently paid to enable public libraries to purchase all official publications at a substantial discount. Can we take it that subsidy is not affected by the proposed privatisation of HMSO?

The Minister made a great deal of the fact that House officials recently completed negotiations of a new supply and service agreement, or SSA, with HMSO which is intended to come into effect on 1 January 1996. Are Ministers using that SSA, or related information on the House's financial arrangements with HMSO, for the purpose of discussions with potential purchasers? In other words, will the SSA be built into discussions with potential purchasers? Will the south London press—with its access to Parliament and its unique experience—continue to operate under guarantee? Because of parliamentary business, HMSO's costs are relatively high and its return from sales relatively low. This bodes ill for its survival.

I do not find the Chancellor of the Duchy's answers to the Speaker's letter sufficiently satisfying on the main points. The Speaker raised the matter of the parliamentary press in south London, and stated that there was concern that somebody who took it over

> "would be tempted to experiment with cheaper methods for providing the service"

at a risk to the service to Parliament.

The Speaker referred to the complexity of the House's documents and the procedural rules which underpin them. She said:

> "HMSO staff and management acquire experience and knowledge of those complexities as they progress from job to job in the organisation; and they are brought up in the tradition that in all circumstances the requirements of Parliament are paramount."

It is unlikely that a private contractor would see the interests of Parliament as paramount, because it is an intangible requirement and is very difficult to put into a contractual document.

There is also the question of ministerial oversight. Who will be identified within the privatised stationery office to be responsible for contact with the House? Will there be any attempt to water down the SSA with HMSO without agreement by the House authorities? I assume that there could be a period in which the SSA would lapse. The Speaker's letter continued by saying that

> "we consider that any prospective purchaser of the Stationery Office should be required to accept the agreed principles which are set out in the SSA, particularly so far as they concern the rights of the House to regulate the production and reproduction of its documents, in both paper and electronic form."

[Mr. John Garrett]

That applies also to location, and particularly to the location of the south London press that produces *Hansard*.

The fact is that this is a mere matter of dogma and ideology. The Minister speaks of new opportunities, but new opportunities could been found for HMSO without a requirement to privatise. The staff at HMSO certainly do not think that privatisation will bring new opportunities, because 95 per cent. of them rejected privatisation. The proposal is simply a product of ideology, and the least the House deserves is an opportunity to vote it down.

8.22 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate because, like the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), I have some constituency interest in the matter. HMSO is based in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but many of my constituents—I do not know exactly how many—work at HMSO.

I share one thing with the hon. Gentleman, and possibly more. My constituents' worries are no doubt the same as those of his. After all, I am sure that one could not distinguish between the letters which he has been receiving from his constituents who work at HMSO and the letters that I have been receiving. It would be silly of me to suggest that there is some kind of difference in concern across the constituency boundary.

I want to be frank with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy—there is, if not universal concern among the employees of HMSO, certainly considerable concern. That is why it is important for the matter to be debated and, to that extent, I must support some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The Government should think long and hard about the way in which they go about this change. It is my first duty to get across to the Government that any change must be in the interests of my constituents. Any other constituency Member of Parliament would say the same. However, I differ from the Opposition Members who spoke in that I would say that there is a hard commercial case to be looked at. If there is time, I shall refer to this matter again. The market has been declining, and HMSO has had to take a long look at the question of possible staff reductions. Therefore, it is wrong of the Opposition to suggest that everything can be left exactly as it is, and that everything will proceed if that is the case.

The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) complimented me by comparing me to a turkey. I may have got his comparison wrong, but it had something to do with Christmas. The hon. Gentleman would have disappointed my constituents. This is not a party political point. He spoke for some 37 minutes, but he did not say a great deal about what the Opposition would actually do to address the commercial difficulties and problems which HMSO is facing. After all, my constituents are concerned with the distinction between public and private service, but they are also concerned about jobs and prospects. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy is right to say that something needs to be done to improve the opportunities within HMSO, or any succeeding organisation, and those arguments must be taken seriously.

It is appropriate that we talk about constituency issues—or Norwich issues—in this debate, even though it is a wider-ranging debate about Parliament and *Hansard*. Luke Hansard lived in Norwich and served his apprenticeship there before moving to London in 1774. All of us who have read up on the matter know the history. It is important that, in debating HMSO and Parliament, we bring Norwich into it, and I make no apology for doing so. There are other issues which I would like to address briefly in a moment.

The issues are being considered by the House of Commons Commission and by the Finance and Services Committee. The hon. Member for Norwich, South also referred to parliamentary issues in his speech. I referred to some of the issues in an Adjournment debate in April of this year, when I talked about the cost and distribution of *Hansard*, the reporting of parliamentary debates and other important matters. I shall not go into great detail, but I hope to refer to those matters as well as talking about Norwich.

I would be very unhappy if I felt that there was any chance at all of the main headquarters of HMSO moving out of Norwich. That may sound unreasonable, but—as a constituency Member of Parliament—I would have to be unreasonable if I thought that there was any chance of that happening at all. How could I or the hon. Member for Norwich, South say anything else? The Norwich tradition is tremendous, and the strong connection with Norwich must continue. I make no apology for pressing my right hon. Friend on that particular point, as it is important. It is important that the people of Norwich retain their jobs, and also the strong, traditional and historic links which HMSO has with Norwich. I make no apology for pressing that point over and over again. It is important to me, and it will remain important to me if we debate the matter further at a later stage.

As I said earlier, many of my constituents have written to me to express their concerns about what they see as the Government's plans. I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy for the way in which he has kept me—and, I have no doubt, my colleagues in the House—fully informed about how the Government are going about this. My right hon. Friend has so far kept in touch with the management, staff and trade union side at HMSO, and has done so superbly. I think that he has visited Norwich twice—I know that he has done so at least once—and that he intends to do so again. One cannot fault him on this, and I hope that he will continue to keep fully in touch with everyone involved at HMSO.

When my right hon. Friend visits Norwich, I hope that he will find time also to visit CCTA which, curiously, stands for the Government Centre for Information Systems. I defy any hon. Member to work out that one. CCTA is situated in my constituency, and of course it is also facing changes. I hope that my right hon. Friend will approach the changes at CCTA in the same courteous way in which he has approached the changes at HMSO.

Many fears have been expressed in the correspondence that I have received from my constituents. Some of those fears are not well founded, but some need serious answers.

My constituents are rightly concerned about the effect on the Norwich economy. It is no secret that we have had serious job losses in Norwich in recent years. I hope, therefore, that my Government colleagues will take seriously the fact that the Norwich economy is an issue at the moment. Communications to Norwich are an issue and jobs in Norwich are an issue. Those points are relevant and my constituents are right to address me on them.

My constituents have referred to other issues about which other hon. Members have already spoken so I do not need to say too much about them. They refer to the possibility of asset stripping and to the possibility of splitting HMSO into units. They also talk about security, to which other hon. Members have referred. I am not saying that those concerns are necessarily well founded, but I know that people are worried about them and Ministers must answer those points.

Mr. Garrett: If there were a vote, would the hon. Gentleman vote for or against the privatisation of HMSO?

Mr. Thompson: I would want to find out first whether my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had answered my concerns. As I said a moment ago, he has gone about things sensibly. We shall have to wait and see whether he continues in a sensible way. In spite of the remarks by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, we do not know whether we shall have an opportunity to vote. My right hon. Friend has suggested that the proposal could go through in a Standing Committee. I feel—here I agree with the hon. Member for Norwich, South—that the proposal needs thorough debate and airing in Norwich as well as in the House. It is important, therefore, that I and colleagues here express all our concerns as well as—here I disagree with the hon. Gentleman—the advantages that may accrue from privatisation or from some similar change.

Several hon. Members have referred to security. I have some sympathy with the idea that there is a risk, if the civil service is left out of it all, that there will be extra leaks. The only trouble is that we seem to have an awful lot of leaks even with our present governmental system.

Mr. Beith: It is the politicians.

Mr. Thompson: I shall not respond to that.

In June 1994, I received from HMSO its newsletter, which comes out at regular intervals. Its controller and chief executive at that time was Paul Freeman; I am not sure whether that name has any significance for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Mr. Freeman headlined his article with the words "Streamlining to survive" and then made the following key points:

> "Up to 30 per cent. of current jobs may have to go for HMSO to remain competitive. Corporate services to be reduced to around 150 staff. Voluntary Early Retirement to continue."

I could reel off his key points. Anyone who suggests that HMSO's problems start as of this debate is misleading my constituents and the House. There are continuing problems which the management of HMSO have to address and which my right hon. Friend is trying to address. We must try to push some of the more obvious party political controversy to one side and to look at the serious issues.

My right hon. Friend is probably right, therefore, to suggest that the freedom to trade within the private sector will lead to opportunities for business growth and could well lead to better employment prospects in Norwich. That possibility is, of course, subject to my earlier point about the headquarters remaining in Norwich. New technology means that the staffing requirement may reduce and the volume of production by the printing presses and so on may need to increase. That is why I support the hon. Member for Norwich, South when he talks about expanding HMSO's activities to printing for the European Parliament and for organisations overseas. That must be good news whatever we do politically and it is an important point.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who is not now in his place, referred to public service. I too have some difficulty here because I am a traditionalist at heart and a conservative, as many of my constituents are. Although I fully see the commercial arguments in favour of privatisation—perhaps jobs are the issue that will really count in the end—I have some sympathy with those such as my hon. Friend who say that public service is important in itself. That does not mean that I go along with the old Labour view that everything in sight should be nationalised, but I believe that there is a concept of public service. Those of us who have served in the professions, as I have, will not allow our party colleagues to sweep aside the concept of public service. I will certainly not have that. Those in HMSO who are genuinely arguing, not in political terms, for the concept of public service should not be dismissed out of hand. To be fair, I do not think that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster dreams of doing that. I must, however, put on record that the concept of public service is an issue that we have to address.

I have made most of the points that I wanted to make on behalf of my constituents. To sum up, I believe that my right hon. Friend is handling the matter well. He is keeping people in Norwich fully informed and, as I know, he has a lot of support from those who are responsible for HMSO and for taking it forward into the future. However, my right hon. Friend has a lot of work to do to convince the employees as a whole of the rightness of this move.

The point of my speech is to persuade my right hon. Friend to do all that he can to ensure that there is, if not here in Parliament certainly within HMSO, a thorough debate about the future. Subject to all that—here I respond to the hon. Member for Norwich, South—I would have no difficulty, if the matter came to a vote, in voting for the proposals as long as I was convinced that they were in the interests of my constituents. If I were convinced of that, I could override any other reservations that I might have or any old-fashioned ideas that I might have—which unfortunately I have not got rid of altogether.

There is a parliamentary issue as well. *Hansard*, which is printed and published by HMSO is important. It should be distributed more widely and that is why I initiated an Adjournment debate on that subject some months ago. I was keen that the price of *Hansard* should be reduced. On 6 December, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) confirmed in a parliamentary answer that there would be reductions. There had been an earlier reduction in the price of the weekly *Hansard* from £22 to £12 as long ago as May. Within the past week, there has been an announcement of a reduction in the prices of the daily *Hansard*, Bills and Select Committee reports. That is a move in the right direction.

If we move to privatisation, about which I am happy subject to the conditions I outlined, we must ensure that Parliament is protected in a number of ways. One way is

[Mr. Thompson]

to ensure that *Hansard* becomes more available—whether through electronic communications and the Internet, through cheaper printed *Hansard* or through free or cheap issues to public libraries, I do not mind, but I believe that it is important to Parliament to ensure wider distribution. I have no idea whether that has anything to do with privatisation, but I believe that whatever change comes, it is important.

I know that many hon. Members on both sides agree that the reporting of Parliament is going by default. The press reporting of Parliament is a disaster; it has now been reduced to sketch writing and the trivial. There were references earlier to Matthew Parris who, dare I say it, is probably the best sketch writer.

Mr. Waterson: Where is he?

Mr. Thompson: I have no idea where Matthew Parris is. The sketch writers are here only for the first hour or so of the day and they then go off to dinner or to do whatever else they do. They certainly lead a comfortable life. Matthew Parris is probably the best sketch writer, yet even he often bases his sketches these days on matters that have nothing to do with what has taken place in the Chamber. I could expand on that but I shall not do so, you will be relieved to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is an important issue and I shall return to the subject of *Hansard* and its circulation at a later date.

I will not submit to the temptation of saying anything more on a subject about which I feel extremely strongly. I say merely that I hope that my right hon. Friend understands my remarks on behalf of my constituents. I hope, once again, that he will accept my appreciation for the way in which he is going about the debate on this important issue.

8.39 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I am sponsored by the printers union, the Graphical, Paper and Media Union, and it is perhaps appropriate that I should deal almost exclusively with that aspect of the matter.

One problem with the reporting of Parliament concerns the technical difficulties that now weigh heavily on newspapers, because of the deadlines that they have to meet, so that the presses can start rolling at a particular time. That sort of problem does not arise with HMSO. The arrangements that have been arrived at between the work force, *Hansard* and those in this House who pay the bills, as it were, mean that the service is carried out in a unique way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) mentioned a problem that those of us who sit on Standing Committees encounter from time to time: the non-availability of papers. I am assured by my friends who work on the printing presses that they would be more than happy to be able to provide that service earlier for the convenience of the House. It is the constraints that have been imposed on them over a period of time that prevent them from doing so.

It is unfortunate that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has left, because I was going to pay him something of a compliment. He is well known on both sides of the House as a courteous and solicitous man. In the past, I have had to cross swords with him on many occasions when he represented other Departments and I have always found him to be genuinely concerned. As a consequence, he is sometimes a wee bit thin-skinned and takes it all out when the barbarian hordes in the Opposition try to rough him up a bit. Although his answers this evening have been polite and courteous, they have not been satisfactory. He has almost been honest enough to admit that, in so far as he has said that he cannot give guarantees on the number of jobs after the sale of the business or what the working conditions will be.

We have given the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster four or five days' notice, but he seems to misunderstand the nature of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) referred to the criteria by which a change in circumstances may take place. When ownership changes, some three months' notice has to be given before the TUPE regulations can be altered. I think that the figure is 90 days, so it is nearly 14 weeks. That is the point at which negotiations start.

We know that such negotiations would not necessarily involve the preservation of the status quo. Indeed, there would be no point in having negotiations or giving notice if there was not going to be a change. We also know that when ownership changes, new owners are often ambitious enough to notice areas of profitability or loss that they would like to promote or cut out. As a consequence, jobs may go and factories may be moved about the country.

As a Scotsman, I remember that it was only 10 years ago that Mr. Ernest Saunders came to Edinburgh and told everyone that the Distillers company headquarters, which was then located in the city, would remain there and that Guinness, having taken over Distillers, would locate its business in Edinburgh. That may have been an early sign of the Alzheimer's disease that apparently afflicted Mr. Saunders later and from which he miraculously recovered.

I do not suggest that the people who take over HMSO if the privatisation goes through will behave as Mr. Saunders did, but unless something that will last for a long time is written into the terms of the sale, the chances of the headquarters remaining in Norwich are, to say the least, difficult. I do not say that because I wish anything to happen to the headquarters in Norwich. As one who represents a Scottish constituency, I know the importance of breaking the stranglehold of London on all business and commercial life. One does not have to be in favour of devolution as much as the Government are opposed to it—or dubious about it, like my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—to recognise that we need a diversity of not only ownership but location of ownership across the country. I am dubious about any assurances that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster might try to give us on the matter.

Hon. Members have continually returned to the point that it is somehow necessary to change ownership because the business is contracting, so there has to be some sort of commercial freedom that has hitherto been unavailable. Such a lack of commercial freedom did not restrict British Rail, prior to the threats of privatisation, from being in competition with companies to deliver parcels or, indeed, bodies. No competition was allowed in respect of the railway lines, but there was competition in respect of parcels. There is also the Post Office, which offers a range of services in the public sector, enters into competition with private sector companies and goes after commercial contracts with private businesses.

I do not understand why HMSO, in its myriad activities, cannot, for example, bid to provide local authorities with papers and services or offer to print examination papers for examination boards. If it can produce cheques for giros, why not for banks? Why could it not be allowed to print bank notes? Some of those activities might well require investment, but nobody suggests that the sizeable investment that HMSO has had to undergo over the past 15 years came from the City or broke the Treasury rules. It was generated from within the business. I cannot see why the rules that apply to some bodies that operate in the public sector should be denied to HMSO. I find the Government's blinkered attitude strange.

It is equally strange that when, at this late stage of a Parliament, the Government are trying to keep the privatisation fires burning, this is the best that they can get away with. The criteria for privatisation now are not how much money they can get or the scale of the operation; they are whether it can be achieved without legislation. That is the case with the privatisation of the nuclear industry and with that of HMSO. Both are businesses which have operated extremely efficiently and which, of their sort, could be classed as world leaders, but both are to be sold off.

We do not know what the sum involved will be yet. We shall find out, doubtless, in due course. We shall want to know whether the quality of service that the House and the country receive will be sustained. It is a service that enables people to go to HMSO retail outlets and purchase papers at the same time across the country. It publishes papers of a sensitivity that can sometimes be of tremendous commercial advantage to individuals. That service is carried out by people who are not especially well paid and who will not themselves gain from the privatisation. Those people have committed themselves to the service of the community. I emphasise the point that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) made—an ethic of public service still prevails and has its adherents.

Some of the people of whom we have been speaking, such as those who are recipients of non-contributory pension schemes, may begin to look at the matter differently if they are required to pay 6 per cent. or 9 per cent. of their salaries towards the pension fund, which will by and large, but not necessarily, just about meet present pension requirements. That is where the Minister's lack of clarity throws into doubt the sincerity of the whole operation. Between Thursday and today, the Government's position has shifted. On Thursday, HMSO was to be sold off in its entirety; tonight, the Minister said that he is willing to look at the printing and publishing business being dealt with separately. If the printing and publishing business is separate, I am not sure whether the headquarters at Norwich could survive.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because I wanted to speak on that point, but time did not permit me to do so. It was also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). I, too, have my doubts about the separation of the two sides of the business, although I realise that this is a parliamentary rather than a constituency matter. However, jobs could be at risk and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that concern, which I share.

Mr. O'Neill: Other hon. Members have raised the issue and will continue to do so.

We are not happy with this proposal. My colleagues in the printing unions are dreadfully worried about it because they have seen too many takeovers in the recent past, in which working conditions have worsened, factories and printing shops have closed down and pension funds have been messed about. We welcome the Minister's assurances, but I hope to God that his ambitions and ours will be realised. As we say in Scotland, "I hae ma doots aboot that," because we do not believe that those who want to take over HMSO will have anything like the ethics of public service behind them and will take the company's long-term interests to heart. Ultimately, they will run the company for three or four years, strip it down, separate off parts of the business that are not commercially attractive, perhaps give them away at knock-down prices, and then try to realise from the profitable core the best price that they can get. They will do that not for the taxpayers, this House or those who work for the business but simply for the company shareholders whom they represent and with whom their loyalty lies.

The House of Commons has far higher standards and far stronger commitments. We should have the right to vote on the issue and the House should have a clear prospectus of what is on offer. Until we do, I hope that no Opposition Member will encourage the Minister in the foolishness of his endeavours.

8.55 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak in this important debate. It has been interesting, not least because Opposition Members have given us a re-run of many themes and prejudices of old Labour. As the definitive voice of new Labour will wind up for the Opposition, it will be interesting to see at the end of the debate how the two philosophies are reconciled.

I shall make four main points. First, we must view the proposal as a natural progression. HMSO has had a sweep of history of some 200 years or more, but in terms of its recent history, we have been told that, in 1980, it began to recover its costs and some two years later, Government Departments were liberated from the obligation to purchase from HMSO. So competition with the private sector has been a fact of life for the organisation for the past 10 years or more. In 1988, it became an executive agency, so there is nothing new about the current proposal. It is the natural result of all that has gone before, particularly in the past 10 or 15 years.

Secondly, hon. Members on both sides of the House have echoed the view that, whatever happens to HMSO, it is important to have clear safeguards about the future role of the stationery office, especially vis-à-vis this House and the other place. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made it clear the other day that he is determined that whoever buys the stationery office will maintain its independence and integrity. That is important for all those participating in the debate. It is also clear from the points that have been

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

canvassed in the important exchange of letters between Madam Speaker and my right hon. Friend that an eventual buyer must be fully acceptable to this House.

Mr. Dalyell: Let us suppose that, at first, the buyer fulfilled all those criteria and the sale was accepted in good faith but then, for some reason that we cannot determine here and now, things went sour and became less and less satisfactory. Can the hon. Gentleman imagine himself or one of his colleagues on the Government Front Bench coming along to this House and saying, "Sorry, we have no means of producing parliamentary documents"? That scenario is not fanciful; it could too easily happen.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful for the opportunity to deal with that point. I have no dreams of being on the Front Bench, but if I were, I cannot imagine that scenario arising. This is a matter not between the Government and HMSO, but between this House and another place and the stationery office in its new incarnation. All Opposition Members have signally failed to appreciate the importance of a contractual relationship. At present, the arrangement between this House and HMSO does not come close to such a relationship. As my right hon. Friend explained, there will be a series of detailed provisions not only on the existing position but on any future changes in the stationery office's structure or operation, on the basis that it would have a paramount obligation that those would be subject to Parliament's requirements. As the hon. Gentleman knows, any contract would include two possibilities: first, to sue for damages; and, secondly, if a breach or breaches were sufficiently serious, to withdraw from the entire contract and claim a "fundamental breach", to use lawyers' jargon.

Beyond that, as I said in an intervention on my right hon. Friend, considerable commercial pressure will be placed on the stationery office's buyer to ensure that the relationship does not go sour. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said that such a relationship was a key factor in any privatisation. I am the first to appreciate that that is a two-edged sword, but it gives the ultimate buyer a substantial commercial incentive to ensure that the relationship does not "go sour".

To continue with the question of safeguards, it is also important that this is a fully transparent process. As my right hon. Friend said, the shortlist of bidders will be published and officials of this House—not members of the Government—will be involved in the selection. He went further and listed the wide range of consultations that will take place, not only through the usual channels, but more generally in the House and no doubt in another place.

As I said in response to the intervention of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the whole process will result in a detailed, legally binding and enforceable contract with the newly privatised stationery office, spelling out in great detail a range of enforceable obligations including, as I have said by way of an example, a provision that any future changes in its operation should take account of Parliament's requirements.

As a lawyer, I am the first to appreciate that the devil is in the detail. However, commercial contracts of that type are entered into all day, every day, throughout the commercial sector, and it appears to me bizarre in the extreme to suggest that there are especially insuperable obstacles to legal draftsmen about what is now proposed, especially when, in addition to the supervision of the lawyers involved, there will be such a heavy weight of other, as it were, back-seat drivers looking over their shoulder to ensure that they get the detail right to protect the requirements of the House—and all that, with the recourse to law as a back stop, should anything go especially wrong. Further, we have spoken already about the protection for existing staff under TUPE, which would mean that their existing terms and conditions would apply.

We have heard a great deal from Opposition Members about that apparent poll of employees, suggesting that 95 per cent. of them oppose the idea. Is that a surprise? If one tells people that they are likely to be hit on the head by a meteor, they will start worrying about being hit on the head by a meteor. I wonder in what terms the options available to HMSO were described to the work force.

The third main issue is: what other options exist for HMSO? We have heard some airy-fairy talk in the debate about foreign contacts, developing business overseas and so on, without any true recognition of the scale of capital outlay that might be required. We have heard about a shrinking Government market. We have also heard how, between 1990 and 1994 alone, HMSO's turnover declined by more than 10 per cent. There are job loss implications in that trend; there already have been job loss implications, and it would be foolish and irresponsible of the House not to recognise that truth.

The fourth issue is the freedom that may be introduced to the stationery office's current operations—freedom from the constraints of Government and the public sector; commercial freedom to embark on those new and exciting markets that hon. Members spoke about. The stationery office and its employees should not look nervously to the past; they should look boldly to the future. The vast experience and expertise of HMSO's staff, coupled with the efficiencies that have been won in recent years, should make it, on any view, a major player in any market, national or international.

However, as I have said, access to capital—the freedom to raise capital where and how it wishes—is essential to grow that business, like any other. In other sectors, we are witnessing the development of the private finance initiative, producing hospitals and the like, and moves to give grant-maintained schools the opportunity to borrow on the open market. That is all part of the process, which is so much a feature of the Conservative philosophy, of setting free organisations which have a role in the modern world, and which have the expertise and the commitment of their staff, but which are held back by the dead hand of the public sector.

In that context, I might mention the possibility—only briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because, were I to do otherwise, you would no doubt call me to order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman already seems to be wandering out of order, so I should be grateful if he would stick to the subject of debate, as there are other hon. Members who wish to get in.

Mr. Waterson: I was mentioning only the very same arguments that we have heard in favour of what is proposed for HMSO. Many of them could apply equally to the Royal Mail.

Finally, a significant feature of the debate has been the attitude of Opposition Members. They have opposed every privatisation, whether it be of electricity, water, British Telecom or gas, and apparently propose to oppose this one. We have heard about the railways from the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, who was not regarded as out of order in making that argument. There was no pledge to renationalise—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may be a lawyer, but he does not challenge the Chair like that. I should be most grateful if he would respect the Chair and conclude his speech, as he would appear to be doing, on the subject before us.

Mr. Waterson: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not intending to challenge your judgment, but I was suggesting that a more general issue about privatisation has run as a theme through the debate. Although I would be the first to accept that we are discussing a specific privatisation, many of the themes are common to other sectors.

However, I was drawing my remarks to a conclusion. There was no pledge to renationalise British Rail. There is apparently no pledge to renationalise HMSO.

You and I are very familiar with the process, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It begins with Opposition Members objecting strongly to a proposal to privatise. It moves on to the rubbishing of every aspect at each stage of the process, seeking to sow unjustified fears in the minds of employees, potential investors and the electorate. It continues with carping from the sidelines while the hard work proceeds and the enterprise goes ahead. The criticism becomes more muted as the privatisation is deemed a success. Labour party policies are fudged and any commitment to renationalise is quietly interred at dead of night in that rather large socialist graveyard with which we have all become familiar. Finally, there is an acceptance—usually tacit—that once again privatisation is here to stay, bringing tangible and lasting benefits to consumers, taxpayers and employees.

9.4 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) spoke at some length about privatisation, but this debate is not about privatisation in the usual sense. If the Government were serious about privatising HMSO, they would present a Bill to the House so that all hon. Members could debate the matter and consider the problems in detail both in Committee and on the Floor of the House.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is an honourable man—I have dealt with him before on transport—and he should admit that he agreed to a debate on the privatisation of HMSO, without a vote, only after sustained pressure from hon. Members and the Finance and Services Select Committee. I believe that there should be a debate with a vote—and that it should be a free vote. We are discussing the provision of services to the House. The decisions that we make in the months ahead will affect the future work of Members of Parliament, particularly Back Benchers.

When I was elected to the House in 1979, I did not realise that I could receive a transcript of the proceedings of Parliament within 12 hours of a debate taking place. Over the years, I have realised what an asset that facility is, not only to Ministers and Front-Bench spokespersons but to Back Benchers like me. When constituents write to me and ask for my views and those of other hon. Members about an issue, I can reassure them about the matter and send them a copy of *Hansard* within a few days of its being debated here. The service is very useful for Back Benchers who do not have the civil service back-up Ministers enjoy.

HMSO's services were developed over hundreds of years, and I do not think that we should surrender them willingly. We have an old saying in the engineering profession: "If it works, don't fix it". Why are we seeking to fix something that works very effectively for us and for the people of this country?

Many hon. Members have spoken about the control that Parliament exercises over the pricing of *Hansard*. Not so long ago, the Administration Select Committee—of which I am Chairman—reached the unanimous decision that *Hansard* should be produced more cheaply for those who supply libraries, schools, universities and other academic institutions. That is possible only if we retain control of HMSO.

It must be cause for concern that the service might be delivered into the hands of private printers. Unlike some of my hon. Friends who want to speak in the debate, I have never worked in the printing industry. It has always seemed an uncertain industry—Maxwell comes to mind—of ownership changes and asset stripping. I do not know whether the famous Lord Hanson had any influence over it—it is always argued in the tobacco industry in my Glasgow constituency that, if a company is profitable and has good industrial relations, there is no need to worry about it— but lo and behold, because a company was on a certain site, a new owner could take away the facilities that it provided for the sake of making a quick buck.

At present, HMSO is an excellent asset with printing facilities across the river at Bermondsey. We might negotiate a contract with another printing company, but what will happen if the facilities move from Bermondsey to another part of London? That would make it difficult for *Hansard* to be delivered on time. We all know the problems of road transportation in London.

Hon. Members know that space in the House is precious; it is used by Officers of the House, Members, back-up staff and for many other purposes. The advantage of the facilities across the river is that they provide printing and storage. No contract, no matter how tightly it is drawn up, could ensure the continuation of those facilities.

The Canadian Parliament handed over its printing service to a private contractor and it is now an absolute disaster. New Zealand is also experiencing difficulties with private contractors, as are many other Parliaments. I am not arguing about privatisation—my views are well known—but, like every other hon. Member, I want to ensure that we keep the good facilities that we have. The dedicated *Hansard* staff service all the Committees and work night and day to ensure that the printer receives the material.

When there is a crisis, the House appreciates the work of *Hansard*. I recall the Falklands and the Gulf war when Ministers and Opposition spokesmen made certain comments that we wanted to see on the record before we proceeded—and we could within hours of the House rising. We have to ask ourselves whether we want to risk losing that facility. I do not want to run that risk and I shall vote against it.

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

We should improve our existing facilities. Putting our proceedings on the Internet and improving computer links so that more people can read about what we do in Parliament has been mentioned. The press has failed abysmally to cover the work that we do. The dedicated work that Back Benchers and Ministers do receives no press coverage, but people want to know about various issues that affect their daily lives. We must have a debate and a free vote.

9.13 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I shall begin by taking up one theme that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin)—public access to the documents produced by HMSO, notably *Hansard*, and the other papers it presently produces for the benefit of the House.

There will be considerable agreement on both sides of the House that the day-to-day coverage of Parliament provided by newspapers and the broadcast media falls below the standard that is desirable if we want the electorate to be informed about the issues that are debated in the House and the arguments that are presented by both sides of it.

Earlier today, I received a letter from the Buckinghamshire county librarian expressing some concerns to which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to respond when he makes his welcome debut at the Dispatch Box. I believe that that librarian speaks on behalf of other, similar, services in expressing anxiety about the possible impact of the proposals on the availability of *Hansard* and other parliamentary papers to the general public through libraries.

As the hon. Member for Springburn said, the present policy is to supply public libraries with HMSO publications, including reports of the House's proceedings, at discounted prices, with the aim of securing a properly informed electorate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can reassure me that the Government intend to make binding arrangements for the discounts to be continued after privatisation.

I have no objection in principle to the privatisation of HMSO. It is, in my view, somewhat otiose to argue that only through the public sector can the House expect documents to be delivered on time and printed accurately. Those of us with experience in the private sector of the way in which our printing and publishing companies deal with documents such as annual reports, or companies' financial results, will know that that sector is perfectly capable of meeting the demanding standards that the House would wish to impose on it.

Some Opposition Members have tended to overlook the fact that the contract to produce parliamentary documents on behalf of the two Houses would be highly prized. The company would have every commercial incentive to ensure that it delivered a service to Parliament that would enable it—the publisher and printer—to boast about that service, and about its continuing contract with the House of Commons, when seeking business with other clients both here and abroad. I expect the pressures of the market to ensure the delivery of the high-quality service that the House expects.

I was grateful for the assurances that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was able to give about the procedure that will apply to the details of the proposed privatisation. I hope that Ministers will be able to give us more details of their thinking before long. I believe that it was the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) who spoke of the possible risk of a foreign publishing company's securing the business; I do not think that that, of itself, is to be feared. I imagine that, in any case, under European Community law it would be illegal for the Government—or, possibly, the House of Commons—to discriminate in favour of a United Kingdom company as against a company based in another European Union state.

This, however, is the important point. Will my hon. Friend the Minister assure us that all hon. Members will be informed in good time of the nature of the criteria that will apply in the judgment of the individual bids that are submitted?

Mr. Dalyell: With a foreign company, what would happen to the stringent security arrangements that now apply to the employees of HMSO?

Mr. Lidington: As I understand it, employees of a private sector company, whether it is British-owned, German-owned or American-owned, would be subject to the same process of law and to the same contractual obligations. Given the increasingly international nature of the publishing business, those are constraints of which the management of any company that sought business the Government and Parliament might offer would be well aware.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to reassure me on the points that I have raised. The principle of privatisation seems to be sensible. We are discussing a business with a considerable turnover, and the arguments adduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for giving it the freedom and opportunity of the private sector are sensible, but we must ensure that we get the detail right, so that we can carry the measure forward with the full support that it deserves.

9.20 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Many hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall ask the Minister just two questions. First, a factual question. With whom has he discussed the matter in relation to the staff? I am told that it was not discussed with the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union; the Graphical, Paper and Media Union; or the GMB. I am told that he had one somewhat cursory meeting with the Civil and Public Services Association; the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists; and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, but that, other than that, there has been no contact. When the Minister replies, can we have the factual truth—or untruth—of that situation?

Secondly, I return to vetting. We are talking about some of the most sensitive documents that our country handles. Huge amounts of money could be made. Are we entirely, as the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) suggested, to rely on contract law? What will happen about the vetting of individual employees? With the Budget statement and equally sensitive documents, it is not sufficient for the firm to give a general blanket assurance. There must be very clear track records of employees who are to handle such matters.

I should like answers to those two questions.

9.21 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Much attention has been paid today to the interests of employees of HMSO and of this House and the other place. That is quite right, but I want to say a few words about the interests of the ultimate customer—the user of official information—and the dissemination of that information using electronic means. I have no doubt that, in future, it will become common for such information to be conveyed in that way, for it to be manipulated and for added-value services to be applied to it.

The Information Committee of the House, of which I am Chairman, has already given some attention to the matter of parliamentary copyright, not specifically because the matter of privatisation has arisen but because we recognise that copyright is in many ways the key to the way in which information is used. It must be a key to open doors, not lock them. I know that some publishers are concerned that it is being used to lock doors rather than open them.

I shall speak about Crown copyright this evening, because I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is planning—early in February, I believe—to complete a review of the matter and that his views will then be published. Leading firms of legal publishers such as Butterworth, Sweet and Maxwell and Longman, and specialist electronic publishers such as Context, with whom the House has an agreement for the electronic dissemination of POLIS, are concerned about what they describe as

> "the limitations that HMSO has been attempting to impose on our freedom to reproduce materials which state what the law is and how it is administered."

Few matters are as important as freedom of information in relation to the law. Ignorance of the law is no excuse and it is vital that there should be no barrier to access legal information.

I have one or two questions for my hon. Friend the Minister, who is to wind up. If the privatised stationery office is required to obtain a licence to exploit Crown copyright from that part of HMSO which remains in the public sector—I assume that it will—will that licence be offered to the stationery office on the same terms as those on offer to competing private sector publishers? Will the stationery office be in a different position from others who add value to official information? What, if any, exclusive access will the stationery office have to Crown copyright materials? Will it operate in the same way as any other publisher of information in this area or will it have a special, privileged position?

I have a specific question about the statute law database project. Work has been continuing on that database for some time and I understand that the project will be completed next year. Will the stationery office have an exclusive right to offer services from that project to the public or will an open licence be available to any suitably qualified private sector publisher? I hope that all those important matters will be addressed.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has already said in evidence to the Select Committee on Finance and Services and in his helpful comments to the House that his instinct is for open government. That is encouraging, and I hope that, when he makes his decision about the use that will be made of copyright, he will demonstrate in a tangible way that he is determined to put his words into practice.

9.27 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I have been connected with the print industry for 51 years. I started in the industry as a boy of 14, and I am rightly proud of the fact that I am a sponsored member of the Graphical, Paper and Media Union. My prime allegiance is to the workers who are affected by the privatisation policy.

The question that goes begging is, "Why privatisation at all?" The Minister repeatedly recognised the quality of service and the efficiency of HMSO's workers and paid tribute to the management and staff for their commercial success in recent years. Why the big hurry? Why are we discussing a deadline of the summer of 1996?

From the Minister's speech and from his statement last week, it appears that the arguments are excuse rather than good reason. It all boils down to the Government's policy of privatising public concerns however successful they may be. Their dogmatic approach is that HMSO must be privatised although, as hon. Members in all parts of the House have said, it is working and providing a good service.

A great deal of money has gone into the streamlining of this successful enterprise and I query the investment. Is it another example of the fattening-up process that takes place before every privatisation? HMSO is a free-standing organisation that has never had any history of leaks of highly sensitive details and that should be allowed to compete in the outside market and has the capability to do so—but to this Government that would be heresy.

What is dismaying—hon. Members have called for it tonight—and needs extra debate and questioning is the Minister's inability to give complete assurances on whether future private owners will sell on after purchase. He cannot give an assurance on what workers' pensions will be, whether they will be secure and whether all the terms and conditions, such as pay, holidays, health and safety, will be met. Can he give an assurance that a future owner—my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned it—could not be a foreign printer, perhaps a powerful German printer?

What about the most precious commodity of all: the workers. What will they make of the Minister's remarks? Will the proposal be to their benefit in the long run? I and, I am sure, they come to the conclusion, "Not a lot". They are not fools, Minister. They have witnessed the redundancies following the privatisation of gas, water and electricity.

The fattening up may be good for the fat cats, but it will be disastrous for many workers. What a prospect that is to offer workers just before Christmas, when they will sit with their families and ponder what next year will bring and what predicament they will be in. As has been said, the results of a ballot gave workers' views loud and clear: 95 per cent. voted against privatisation.

From the Speaker of the House down to the shop floor, concern is being expressed. The letter from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to Madam Speaker states:

> "I recognise, and am sympathetic to, the concerns which you raise about the service which HMSO provides to the House and how to safeguard it for the future."

[Mr. Robert Litherland]

I shall not give a long quotation, but it continues:

> "No supplier would want to be associated with a failure to deliver the services required by such a noteworthy customer. Done well, the Parliamentary business would be the best possible advertisement for the company. Done badly, other potential customers would take flight."

To me, that reply does not reek with confidence. What would happen if the new owners could not meet their obligations? Perhaps, in his winding-up speech, the Minister will explain who would be accountable.

As has been recognised, there is cross-party concern for HMSO's future. We wonder where privatisation will end when, now, it is on our very Parliament's doorstep.

I am getting the nod to end my speech, but I for one, unlike the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, do not believe that a relationship with the private sector can be stronger or better than what we have now. I agree with the argument that there should be further debates and that the matter should go to a free vote.

9.33 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): This debate has been useful. It has revealed the paucity of the Government's argument on the privatisation of HMSO and exposed some serious and justified concerns among not just Opposition Members but Conservative Members. It has focused attention on employees' understandable anxieties. I hope that the Minister will respond in particular to the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

The debate has left unanswered a host of legitimate questions about the future course of our parliamentary proceedings and work if privatisation goes ahead. I perfectly understand why the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) has, as he said, decided to quit the House at the next election. He had some very strong things to say about the Conservative party.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I ask the hon. Gentleman not to put a spin on what I may have said, and I hope that he will not misquote me further.

Mr. Mandelson: I do not want to count my turkeys or my chickens, but the hon. Gentleman had some harsh words to say about the Government's attitude toward public service. I share his views entirely. I will only say in addition that if he felt reassured by what the Minister had to say to him about job losses, he is very easily satisfied indeed.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) made clear at the outset, the Opposition do not agree with this privatisation. We take that view not because we are opposed to all private sector involvement in the delivery of public services—I can reassure the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on that point—but because privatisation for its own sake, regardless of economy, efficiency or effectiveness, simply cannot be justified.

The privatisation of HMSO is unwarranted on those three grounds. It is a needless rigamarole that involves great risks to the service that Parliament receives from HMSO. In all probability, it will leave everyone worse off or, at the least, dissatisfied—including, as I shall argue, quite possibly the private sector purchasers too. In our view, the privatisation is a recipe for huge tensions, if not chaos, between the prospective private purchaser and its chief clients—Parliament and the Crown—as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) made very clear, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) spelled out in his detailed and comprehensive speech.

This is of course the latest in a series of unjustified privatisations which have been pushed forward by the Government. One wonders where the Government's next lurch to the right will lead. Perhaps Madam Speaker herself will be next in the firing line. Perhaps she will be sponsored, rather as the speaking clock that says, "The time as sponsored by Accurist." We might hear, "Order—as sponsored by Securicor." That may be a joke, but then the Government are proceeding with the privatisation of the railways. If they can do that, anything might follow.

I come directly to what the Minister has described—he placed great stress on this in his original statement to the House last week—as the "point of substance" and the "nub of the issue". He maintains that, to safeguard jobs and expand job opportunities, HMSO should become a private sector company so that it can enjoy the freedoms of the private marketplace and avail itself of the opportunities that are provided by free competition, unshackled, unconstrained and uninhibited by the burdens at present placed on it by its public service and Parliament-related obligations.

I agree that that is the nub of the issue. On the surface of it—certainly as presented by the Minister—what he is setting out has some attractions to it, in his terms. In making his case, however, the Minister is being thoroughly disingenuous because the realities of the marketplace could turn out to be very different. As one hon. Member after another has made clear, we are not dealing with the privatisation of any ordinary business. If anyone had any doubt about that, Madam Speaker's letter to the Leader of the House and the 12 conditions which she set out make it absolutely clear that we are dealing not with an ordinary business but with an essential and highly complicated public service.

Let us examine the case that the Minister made last week and again tonight. He seeks to create the impression of a wonderful free market nirvana, which is set to liberate the imprisoned business of HMSO. In the next minute, he is anxious to spell out and emphasise that, in its work for Parliament and for the Crown, nothing will change and therefore the handcuffs will stay on; every protection, every peculiar standard and idiosyncrasy that we demand in this place, every vagary, every pressure, every timetable, every ebb and flow of parliamentary business will be met faithfully and on time by the newly privatised business.

That does not sound like commercial freedom to me in its accepted sense. It sounds like the sort of framework and conditions that are not linked to the costs, competition or considerations of profit, which are the basis of private business, but are instead fundamental to the provision of public service.

Of course there will be attractions to the private sector. The Minister has previously described HMSO as a valuable asset with substantial recent investment in plant and machinery. Who could gainsay the rich pickings there? But how long will that attraction last and how long will the new owners' interest be sustained if the business is maintained in its present state, as the Minister has claimed and promised repeatedly tonight?

The Minister said in his original statement that the new owners will organise their business as they are told to do in order to safeguard HMSO's unique parliamentary and public service obligations. What other self-respecting private business is told by its customer which specific "nature and structure" its company will have, not only now but for all time? The Minister used that description.

According to the Minister, Parliament will even be entitled to lay down

"the location of the press and the staff and the way in which the business is structured and organised."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 993.]

He says that the business will not be broken up. The parliamentary press will be integral to the rest of the business and it will all stay as it is at the moment, so the Minister insists. According to him, the customer will be calling the shots about the supply of products in every respect. Some commercial freedom that. I do not call that an ordinary commercial freedom. I find it a very exotic definition of commercial freedom—if the Minister is to be believed. Of course we are entitled to wonder how far that will be the case and how his promises will be fulfilled in practice.

Let us not get on to the practice; let us dwell a little longer on the principle that the Minister enunciated in his speech. In relation to their official printing and publishing work, the new private owners—apparently—will be bound hand and foot by a Draconian, far-reaching all-embracing contract, the Minister claims, imposed by its core customers: ourselves and the Crown. Will these conditions, dictated by public service and Parliament's needs, really offer the privatised stationery office the full opportunities to roam, compete in the marketplace on an equal footing with its rivals, and pick up business as and when and where it wishes, as the tender document implies? I rather doubt it.

If something has to give in this arrangement, I think that I know what it will be. Will it be the company's commercial freedom or our publishing needs? I think that market forces will have their way and no slap on the wrist from us or attempted enforcement of our contract is likely to have any sway at all in the face of those overwhelming market forces, which the Minister has said—and advocates—as the proper conditions in which this new privatised business should operate.

The whole complicated and unnecessary exercise is a thoroughly misconceived and botched job from start to finish. It has been dreamed up by the peddlers of right-wing dogma who infest the modern Tory party. They change the name, change the status, introduce private shareholders, and clothe the whole thing in reassuring rhetoric, all as long as the private sector can be substituted in form and appearance for what is at the moment an extremely successful public enterprise.

That is the nub of the issue. The privatisation is not about safeguarding jobs and expanding job opportunities, as the Minister has claimed, but about protecting Tory dogma and advancing ministerial careers. The idea is to get one more privatisation scalp on the Government's belt, and, incidentally, many thousands of pounds more in the pockets of Coopers and Lybrand in the process, and then to sit back as the whole thing proceeds to fall apart. Of course it will not be those on the Conservative Front Bench who will clear up the mess; it will be us.

I am not surprised that the Government have fixed the debate so that no vote can take place at the end of it. Too many of their own Back Benchers—we have heard from many of them tonight—know that the privatisation is a needless, pointless, wasteful exercise, which, in its haste and clumsiness, will result in Parliament, its authorities and staff having to spend more time, more energy and more money on getting the same or worse service than they get from the current arrangements. What on earth is the point?

On behalf of the Opposition, I welcome the Parliamentary Secretary to his new position. I hope that he will be able to give a darn sight better explanation of this crack-brained scheme and a much better justification of it than we have heard to date. I hope that the assurances that have been called for on timing and other considerations will be given, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland requested. Better still, the Minister could do us all an enormous favour and announce to general relief all round that the Government have had second thoughts in the Tea Room and called the exercise off. If they cannot do that, let us test the opinion of Parliament and put the issue to a proper vote in the new year.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): This debate has been a welcome opportunity for hon. Members on both sides of the House to express their views about the effect of the proposed privatisation of HMSO on services provided to Parliament.

The debate has arisen from a series of concerns which Madam Speaker herself expressed in her letter of 28 November, and to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave a full reply in his letter of 12 December.

It appears that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) is not familiar with the fundamental points that my right hon. Friend made in his letter. It has been made clear before, and I am pleased to take this opportunity to repeat the point, that, for example, no supplier taking on the responsibility of a privatised HMSO would possibly want to be associated with the failure to deliver the services required by such a noteworthy customer as ourselves. There is an enormous potential for the House to ensure that it gets the services which it is rightly entitled to expect through a clear, enforceable and legally binding legal contract.

Mr. Mandelson: Where are the sanctions?

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand the power of a legal contract in terms of the quality and the enforceability of service that it can bring. The sanctions would be available through law rather than through arrangements within the public sector. The sanctions would be explicit, legally enforceable, contractual arrangements.

[Mr. Willetts]

We have already made it clear that it is ultimately for the House to set that contract. We will work with officials of the House to ensure that it reflects the issues that have been legitimately raised in the debate.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: It is all very well for the Minister to talk about a contract; but it is not a contract to deliver 20 pints of milk to the door of the House of Commons but one to deliver the record of the parliamentary proceedings. If that is held up even by a day, it can cause havoc and represents a great deal of work wasted by the dedicated *Hansard* staff.

Mr. Willetts: That is why the contract could make it clear, for example, that local overnight production facilities should be available close to the House. These matters should be made explicit in a contract. Although this is a matter for the House rather than for the Government, I would suggest that there is potential for the House to set out clearly and enforce more rigorously the standards that it is rightly expecting.

Mr. Garrett: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that the House would have a hand in the selection of the company to take over HMSO. How will that be done?

Mr. Willetts: Through Madam Speaker, we have invited officials of the House to become involved in all stages of privatisation, including the selection of the final winning tender.

Mr. Dalyell: Have they agreed?

Mr. Willetts: Perhaps I might carry on.

Mr. Channon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Willetts: I give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon).

Mr. Channon: I may be interrupting the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). When dealing with the position of members of staff of the House, would it not be wrong for them to take part in that sort of decision? Surely they will be observers of, rather than active participants in, any such Committee.

Mr. Willetts: This is ultimately a matter for the House—it is not a matter for the Government. I can only say that the Government have invited, through Madam Speaker, the officials of the House to become involved in the process. It is not for the Government ultimately to decide.

Mr. Derek Foster *rose—*

Mr. Dalyell: Have they agreed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) must control himself. *[Interruption.]* Is the Minister giving way?

Mr. Willetts: I give way to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster).

Mr. Foster: I am sorry to intervene, as I know that the Minister's time is short. However, this is a crucial point. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow is asking whether the officials of the House have agreed to take part in such a privatisation procedure—yes or no.

Mr. Willetts: It is not for me to speak for the officials of the House. I have made clear on behalf of the Government that an invitation has been offered, but it is not for me to speak on behalf of the House. It would be impertinent for me to try to do that. That is why we have exchanged some important correspondence with Madam Speaker on this subject, but I am not going to try to tell the House how it should conduct its own affairs.

Mr. Beith: May I make it clear on behalf of the House of Commons Commission that the invitation that the Commission received was for officials to take part in a process by which a contract would be prepared? The Commission would be willing to allow the officials to attend such a meeting as observers only, to make clear what the interests of the House are, and not as participants. The Commission has not yet considered the invitation—because it is entirely new—to officials to be involved in the selection of a company that might be entrusted with such a contract. That matter has not yet been considered.

Mr. Willetts: It is very important that the House should be satisfied at all stages that the winning company meets the requirements that the House wishes to specify for the contract. That is ultimately a matter for the House, rather than for the Government. We, for our part, will do everything possible to ensure—

Mr. Garrett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Willetts: I am afraid that I must make some progress. There are a lot of other points that I wish to cover, and I have only eight minutes remaining.

One of the other matters raised was the question of TUPE, and the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) asked questions on that subject. I can assure him that TUPE applies at the moment of transfer, and TUPE will apply in this case. There is no period of time attached to TUPE as it takes place at a specific moment. The reason why people reflect on a 90-day rule is that if any employer wishes to change the terms of employment of his or her employees, it is normally thought reasonable by the courts to offer that sort of period of notice. That is a separate matter from TUPE.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised the issue of security vetting. If a Government Department contracting with HMSO has an important security concern, it will be perfectly free to specify exactly what security vetting of individual employees is necessary for it to publish such documents, as it does at the moment. The hon. Gentleman also asked about consultation with the trade unions. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has already had one meeting with trade union representatives and he hopes to have further meetings with them in the new year.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) and my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) asked me about the arrangements for ensuring that the quality of public debate was encouraged—something about which both sides of the House care—by continuing the current arrangements whereby public libraries received government documents at a discount. I am pleased to be able to give my hon. Friend the assurance that those arrangements will continue.

Underneath the variety of specific points raised in the debate, perfectly legitimately, there was a deeper problem. The problem is that, for the past 15 years, every time we have explained the merits of privatisation, the Opposition have steadfastly refused to understand them. The fears voiced by the Opposition have been proved false by events. Yet again, we had today the threadbare arguments that we have heard before every privatisation. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland implied that private business men were sleazy and could not be trusted with money. We were told that the security requirements were such that it would be impossible for the requisite standards to be met by a private contractor. I must tell hon. Members that we can be proud that many of the world's banknotes are printed by private security printers in this country.

There is an assumption that only public ownership will do. There is an assumption that if one has a public policy objective, one has to own the means of production, distribution and supply and that, otherwise, one has no means of meeting those public policy objectives. That is our fundamental disagreement with the Labour party and it remains as clear now as it was when we embarked on privatisation 15 years ago.

Labour Members now ask why HMSO cannot enjoy greater market freedom to compete with the private sector while remaining within the public sector. That argument at least reflects a recognition that things cannot carry on as they are. Anyone who looks at the figures for HMSO over the past few years can understand why. In 1990, its turnover was £389 million. In 1994, its turnover was £351 million. In 1990, it had 3,400 employees; it now has 2,900. As currently constituted, subject to all the inevitable constraints of the public sector, the business will not be able to thrive. We offer the best prospect for the employees of HMSO to be part of a growing and expanding business.

It would simply not be acceptable to allow a public sector trading organisation, which borrows from the national loans fund—it has, incidentally, £30 million of public sector borrowing outstanding at present—to go out and compete with private sector printers or publishers. It would not be reasonable for a body that would not pay corporation tax to compete in the private sector. It would not be reasonable to expect Ministers, who are accountable to the House, to allow HMSO to take on commercial risks when those risks would ultimately be borne by the taxpayer.

The only way in which HMSO can enjoy the freedom that the Opposition now say they wish it to enjoy is for it to be part of the private sector. That is the only credible way forward. At the moment, HMSO faces increasing competitive pressure in its public sector marketplace. We have heard claims that the Ministry of Defence is now looking to market-test its publishing and printing requirements. I am not aware of that taking place as a result of the prospective privatisation of HMSO. It is what is going on throughout the public sector. The public sector is free to choose where it goes to purchase its printing and publishing services.

HMSO is competing with private bodies for public sector work. As currently constituted, it has no reciprocal freedom to go out and compete with private sector providers for business in the private sector. I do not believe that any hon. Member, on careful consideration of the arguments, could possibly imagine that HMSO could remain in the public sector and have such freedoms. All the Opposition Members who have said that they wish it to have greater freedom while remaining in the public sector have made as clear a case as one could possibly imagine for the privatisation of HMSO as the only way forward.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is the tradition of the House that the Department of the Clerk of the House is not brought into controversy. May I suggest that you bring to Madam Speaker's attention what has been said tonight and that she might take a statement on the position?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can help the hon. Gentleman. The Speaker has already ruled on the matter. I thought that the hon. Gentleman might have been aware of that.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BROADCASTING

Ordered,

That Mr. Patrick McLoughlin be discharged from the Select Committee on Broadcasting and Mr. Derek Conway be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

PUBLIC SERVICE

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Ainsworth, Mr. Hartley Booth, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Jim Cousins, Mr. Nigel Evans, Mr. John Gunnell, Mr. David Hanson, Mr. David Hunt, Sir Peter Lloyd, Mr. Giles Radice and Dr. Tony Wright be members of the Select Committee on Public Service.—*[Mr. MacKay, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Nursery Schools (Rochdale)

10 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I beg to ask leave to present a petition which reads:

To the House of Commons.

The Petition of the residents of Rochdale Borough and other places

Declares that the Government's proposals for funding the education of under five year olds by a system of vouchers exchangeable for a sum payable to an institution would have a negative effect on the provision of education for the five year olds in the Rochdale Borough and would put at risk the existing eight nursery schools.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education to reconsider the proposals for funding nursery education via the system of vouchers with a view to establishing a fairer and more efficient way of providing children under five with the best possible education in their early years.

And the Petitioners remain.

There were 2,550 petitioners, and the petition was signed by Colin Lambert and others.

To lie upon the Table.

The Lizzards, West Drayton

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.2 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a matter of great importance to my constituents who live in Yiewsley and West Drayton—the unauthorised and non-conforming industrial activity taking place on a 22-acre site in the metropolitan green belt.

I wish to declare an outside interest in that I am president of the London Green Belt Council, a voluntary association of residents' associations around London. My position is honorary and unpaid.

The site to which I refer is known locally as The Lizzards. Access to it is via Tavistock road and Trout road, Yiewsley. The activity about which my constituents have complained is the reprocessing of waste materials and the crushing of concrete. I am advised on good authority that much of the waste material is being imported from other contractors by a company known as Towerway Ltd.

The waste apparently includes earth, blocks of concrete reinforced with steel and similar material which is thought to come from motorway construction works. My information is that Towerway Ltd. makes a charge for receiving this material and is engaged in its resale. I am advised that Towerway claims to occupy the land under licence from a company known as Guinea Enterprises Ltd., which is registered in the Isle of Man. The directors are Isle of Man residents and are not known to the local planning authority.

The use of The Lizzards for this industrial activity came to my attention in the spring. A number of my constituents living in Tavistock road became aware of an unusually large number of heavy lorries using their road. The lorries were loaded with soil and concrete and entering the site by means of a makeshift road, which had been bulldozed across open land and given a temporary tarmac surface to enable entry. People living in Trout road also reported increased heavy lorry traffic. They have complained to me about a misuse of green belt land and an intolerable increase in heavy traffic along a residential road.

I immediately raised the matter with officers of Hillingdon council planning department, the local planning authority, who confirmed that they had informed Towerway Ltd. that its activity was non-conforming. As a result, on 24 April this year, the company applied for retrospective planning permission. Although, on 4 July, Hillingdon council rejected the application, the company disregarded the planning control and continued its activities. As a result, during the long hot summer that followed, my constituents continued to suffer from the noise of an unending procession of heavy lorries thundering past their homes from as early as 6.30 am, with an accompanying spillage of soil and other material on the public highway.

My constituents also suffered the loss of the amenity constituted by the green belt land, which is part of the Colne Valley park and intended for the public's general enjoyment. I inspected the site several times during the summer months and was saddened to see how large piles of soil had formed a large bank adjoining the bridleway, trees had been crushed, and an amenity that has been enjoyed for many years by local people who like to walk their dogs and enjoy the open landscape had been spoilt.

In spite of local planning officers' efforts, that company continues an unauthorised and objectionable activity in defiance of our planning laws. May I tell the House about the traffic volume? On Friday 15 December, no fewer than 107 vehicles travelled up and down Tavistock road between 6.30 am and 5 pm. On Saturday, the traffic started at 6.40 am and continued until just after 3 pm. Today, the traffic started at 6.40 am and, by mid morning, 23 lorries had gone up and down the road. How are my constituents to sleep, given the noise from those heavy lorries? It is an intolerable level of traffic on a quiet, mainly residential street.

The reprocessing activity is unlicensed and does not conform to regulations made by the London Waste Regulation Authority in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which deal with transporting and recycling waste. I am advised that the authority has threatened prosecution. As a result of my interest in the matter, I received a letter from the planning and property consultants acting for Towerway Ltd. It claims that the company is engaged in a major restoration job by restoring the land to agricultural use without recourse to public funds and that residents should acknowledge that they live on historically commercial access roads and that lawful traffic and commercial activities share their right to be there.

From the inquiries that I have made, I can demonstrate that that is not a lawful activity and that Towerway Ltd. has no right to be there. The site in question was originally owned by the Henry Boyer trust. It was transferred to Guinea Enterprises Ltd. in the recent past but no transfer has been registered at the Land Registry. Before 1947, part of the site was filled or overfilled with a variety of types of refuse, including tyres, concrete and scrap metal. In 1947, the former Middlesex county council gave permission for gravel winning and excavation. There was also a requirement for the treatment of the filled land, not all of which may have been carried out.

In 1964, there was a consent by the Middlesex county council for the clearance of tip refuse, and that material has been extracted since then for road construction. I am advised that Towerway is not removing tipped refuse alone, but is engaged in reprocessing and tipping, for which planning permission is required. As I have mentioned, no such planning permission has been granted, so now we have an unauthorised activity on land that, until earlier this year, was valuable open space, acting as an important lung in the green belt.

Many of the activities of Towerway are, I am told, not new to the local planning authority, which has already had to cope with similar activity on green belt land at several sites, including Bungalow farm off the Bath road at Longford in the south of the borough. As a result of that case, there was a public inquiry and an appeal by the company was dismissed. Enforcement proceedings are now in progress. Hillingdon council is taking appropriate enforcement action in the case of Towerway's use of The Lizzards. However, that is a lengthy process and meanwhile the non-conforming use continues, to the detriment of local residents.

I have suggested to my hon. Friend the Minister—this is one of my principal reasons for mentioning the matter in the House—that the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are inadequate to solve the problem of non-conforming users who completely disregard the established planning controls. It is difficult for planning authorities to cope with well-informed operators who know how to play the system. If they are registered offshore, they can attempt to avoid control by simply changing their name when action is taken. They are what I can only describe as "chameleon companies".

I shall explain to the House the way in which those companies avoid control. When an enforcement notice is issued, there is a right of appeal, which takes 12 months or more to be heard. Meanwhile, the offending activity continues. The stop notice procedure was intended to be an effective emergency remedy in such circumstances, but is inadequate because a local planning officer cannot effectively enforce the notice on the operator, who usually keeps a low profile and is not easy to identify or to find on the site.

It is no use trying to enforce a notice against a lorry driver entering or leaving the site. The stop notice must be effective against the operator in person. Such people make it their business not to be available for that purpose. It can be difficult to demonstrate in a criminal court that they have acted in breach of a notice if they control activities off site.

If the operator is on site, how does the enforcement officer tackle him? He is armed with little more than his pen and his personality. He has no power of arrest. He would have to be accompanied by a police officer. As we all know, police time is valuable; an officer is not always easily available for that purpose.

At Bungalow farm, Longford, where a stop notice was served at 7 am, another lorry entered the site shortly afterwards. The driver was cautioned, but then he vanished and the unauthorised activity continued. If the driver could have been arrested by a police officer, it would have been a huge deterrent. He might have been subject to a fine of £20,000 in a magistrates court and an unlimited fine in the Crown court. However, the offence was not an arrestable offence.

I wonder, therefore, whether my hon. Friend the Minister will consider discussing with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary the possibility of making such persistent and flagrant disregard of a stop notice subject to a custodial sentence. Another possibility might be to give a local authority power to take physical steps to stop the breach, perhaps by confiscating equipment or preventing access to the site in question by installing structures or barriers to the site off the public highway.

Knowing my hon. Friend the Minister as I do, I hope that he will give his careful consideration to the difficulties that are being experienced by my constituents, and which I have described tonight. I hope that he will use all of his influence to support the local authority and, if he can, help to bring relief to my beleaguered constituents in Yiewsley and West Drayton.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) for raising this particular difficulty. I understand from his description the difficulties experienced by his constituents who live anywhere near the sites. They are inevitably affected by the heavy lorry movements, the noise, dust and disturbance. It is particularly annoying for them when they believe that those activities are not within the law, as no planning permission was applied for.

My hon. Friend will know that I cannot comment on the merits of the allegedly unauthorised activities that are taking place on the sites, or on the planning enforcement action that the council is taking now or may take in the future. It is possible that the matters may be the subject of some form of appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Nevertheless, there are lessons to be learnt. We suspect that so-called cowboys have set out to ride roughshod over the planning control regime. In 1989, the planning enforcement regime was reviewed thoroughly. That review was quickly followed up by the Government, and the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 was enacted as a result.

Authorities have a versatile and effective tool kit for dealing with the whole range of unauthorised development and I encourage local authorities—particularly this one—to utilise that to the full. I suspect that the local authorities may be able to go a little further in certain areas.

One of the most important provisions in the 1991 Act is that enabling authorities to counter a particularly harmful breach of control. They may seek an enforcement injunction in the High Court or the county court. If the courts grant an injunction, it will be directed at named individuals, or at companies, who will be required to stop the activity involved in the alleged breach of control. An injunction can also be sought if an authority anticipates that a breach of control is about to take place. Anyone named in an injunction who does not observe its requirements will usually be in contempt of the court. Continuing contempt may result in a term of imprisonment.

To make it easier to obtain that type of injunction, a special procedure enables an authority to obtain an injunction against someone whose identity is unknown. That can assist authorities greatly if they are dealing with a fly-by-night operator who presents a false identity or who is adept at changing his or his company's name. I can remember a local authority resorting to long-range camera photography in order to nail certain individuals.

An authority may issue an enforcement notice and reinforce its effect with a stop notice. There is no right of appeal to the Secretary of State against a stop notice, so it can effectively prohibit an unauthorised activity almost immediately. The maximum summary penalty on conviction of not complying with the prohibition in the notice was increased from £2,000 to £20,000 by the 1991 Act.

We sometimes hear criticism that planning authorities are reluctant to use a stop notice because it may result in their having to pay financial compensation to the person whose activities are prohibited by the stop notice if that person succeeds in an accompanying enforcement appeal to the Secretary of State. In fact, compensation would not be payable if the enforcement appeal succeeded on the grounds that planning permission

[Sir Paul Beresford]

should be granted. If the appeal succeeds on one of the other legal grounds in section 174(2) of the 1990 Act, some compensation may be payable, depending on the particular circumstances.

I believe that planning authorities do not need to fear having to pay compensation if they draft their enforcement notices correctly in relation to planning law and the facts of the alleged breach. We know that enacting planning legislation is not enough. The Government's policy and procedural guidance to planning authorities also play a part. My Department's planning policy guidance note 18, entitled "Enforcing Planning Control", emphasises that the Government do not condone any wilful breach of planning control and that they encourage vigorous enforcement action to stop or remedy unacceptable unauthorised development.

Earlier this year, consultants appointed by my Department completed a review of the effectiveness of the enforcement amendments in the 1991 Act and a copy of their report is in the Library of the House. The consultants concluded:

> "This review of the use and effectiveness of the enforcement system indicates that the new and amended provisions introduced by the 1990/1991 Planning Acts are largely working well and that significant legislative change is not required".

That is generally reassuring. In the first instance, perhaps my hon. Friend should look to his local authority to take some of the hints and suggestions that have been made and be a little more forward in attacking the problem.

Nevertheless, my hon. Friend has related such a tale of horror that I shall look again at the matter to see whether we can learn anything from it. We shall keep the enforcement procedure under close review. I have considerable sympathy with my hon. Friend and I wish him well in his bid to rid his constituents of the difficulties that he has related to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 19 December 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Housing

1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage more local authorities to transfer their housing stock to alternative landlords. [4875]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): To facilitate the transfer of council estates in poor condition, I announced on 28 November a new deprived estates challenge fund worth more than £300 million over the next three years.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that large-scale voluntary transfers of housing stock have several benefits, including the diversification of housing stock, better management and faster repairs for tenants while providing capital receipts for local authorities which can be put back into social housing, used to pay off debts or used to reduce the council tax burden on council tax payers?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I am pleased to see that authorities such as Manchester are now seeking to use LSVT to ensure that they can tap the capital that is tied up in housing estates and use it for the benefit of tenants.

Area Cost Adjustment

2. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the inquiry into the area cost adjustment to be concluded; and if he will make a statement. [4876]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): It is our intention that the review team should report in June 1996. Professor Robert Elliott of the University of Aberdeen has agreed to chair the review of the area cost adjustment. He is an expert on labour markets and earnings in the public sector. The local authority associations have nominated Roy MacIver, until recently the Secretary-General of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. My right hon. Friend has nominated David McDonald, a former under-secretary in my Department.

Draft terms of reference for the review are being discussed by members of the review team and local authorities' representatives. When these are settled, a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Fabricant: That sounds encouraging. Does my hon. Friend agree that there must be something intrinsically wrong with a system whereby a school in Staffordshire with 900 students receives more than £250,000 less than a similar school in Surrey which has similar costs? Is not it even more wrong that Labour-controlled Staffordshire council is sitting on huge reserves which it does not use? Is it not about time that we funded schools centrally from the Department for Education and Employment? Let us have central funding, but local control.

Mr. Curry: I do not agree that something is intrinsically wrong with a system in which there are differences in funding. The fact is that there are schools in different areas, and the purpose of the review is to find out what the total additional costs are. On that matter, my hon. Friend and I will have to agree to disagree.

As far as Staffordshire is concerned, a 3.1 per cent. permitted increase in budget and a 5 per cent. per capita increase in education funding should be fully adequate to fund increased demography and any reasonable teachers' pay award.

Mr. Tipping: The Minister said that the report would be available in June next year. Will he now give a commitment that a new and fair system will be in place for the financial year 1997-98? Does he appreciate that local authorities want action and not words? The present system discriminates against Nottinghamshire and the east midlands, which just want a fair deal.

Mr. Curry: Everyone wants a fair deal, but everyone disagrees as to what that fair deal is. There is a very good case for taking into account total employment costs around the country. In the review, we are trying to bring up to date this indicator, as we do with other indicators on a regular cycle. If the review team is able to come up with an agreed outcome which is robust and gives better answers than we have at the moment, we will seek to employ that at the earliest opportunity.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the present system prescribes that a person who takes one step across the border of Cambridgeshire into Bedfordshire is suddenly deemed to be in a very expensive area? Is this not a crazy system which has gone on for far too long? I appreciate my hon. Friend's efforts in this matter, but will he make sure that there is no undue delay in the review? Will he consider using the travel-to-work area system, rather than the arbitrary county boundaries?

Mr. Curry: We examined carefully the travel-to-work area system in the past year, and it did not prove sufficiently robust. The county councils tried to make their scheme of actual costs work, and that did not work either. That is why we have introduced an independent review, and we have appointed as chairman somebody who is an expert in labour market economics, because this is about costs in the labour market. I hope that the review will be able to produce a robust outcome that all the parties will agree produces the best system. That is perhaps the most optimistic part of my expectations.

Mr. Dobson: Can the Minister confirm that, according to Government figures, if Staffordshire county council were to receive the same grant allocation for education per pupil as the Tory borough of Westminster, it would be able to recruit 4,895 extra teachers next year?

Mr. Curry: Would the hon. Gentleman like to make the same calculation for Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Camden and Lambeth? What benefits Westminster benefits all the other inner London authorities, and it is about time that the hon. Gentleman realised it.

Local Government Finance

3. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effects of the decision to raise capping limits on local authority expenditure. [4877]

Mr. Gummer: The flexibility is to enable local authorities to meet priorities in education, and has been given in response to local authorities' requests and assurances that they will act responsibly.

Mr. Spring: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the proposed capping limits for Suffolk county council should prevent it from wasting taxpayers' money? Does he share my outrage at the squandering of council tax payers' money in the form of the council leader's Christmas card, which bears the red rose insignia of the Labour party? Does my right hon. Friend agree that such an utterly tasteless display of Labour propaganda at Christmas is an absolute disgrace?

Mr. Gummer: I was surprised, as my hon. Friend was, to receive such a Christmas card from the Labour leader of Suffolk county council. I believe that the Opposition would be extremely annoyed if the Department of the Environment sent out Christmas cards with the Tory torch—even though that would be justified, as only the Government have an environment policy.

Ms Eagle: As the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has admitted that the settlement for schools will be used up by increased numbers of pupils, salaries and inflation, and as the Treasury has also admitted that council taxes are expected to go up by 8 per cent., is not it therefore true that council tax payers will be paying more and getting less under the new settlement?

Mr. Gummer: No, I do not think that it is. The hon. Lady would know that, if she looked at the facts and at councils that are properly run and that seek to make savings when unnecessary spending takes place. We have just heard about a small example in Suffolk. More than £2 million has been spent on signs for roads in Suffolk, and £250,000 on a road that will never be built. That is only in one county, and if that money were applied to education, much more could be done.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the removal of capping restrictions, together with the 5.5 per cent. increase in the education budget for Lancashire, means that there is no excuse whatever for the county council not to pass on that money in full to schools; and that no justification from the controlling Labour group will be accepted as an excuse if parents, Members of Parliament and others see that that does not happen?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that everybody in Lancashire, as in every county in the country, now knows precisely how much extra money is available for schools. If it does not get through to the schools, it will be the Labour-controlled county council's fault.

Empty Houses

4. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many empty houses there are in the United Kingdom. [4878]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): There are 845,000 empty houses in England.

Mr. Cunningham: When will the Minister stop being complacent about the large numbers of homeless people? Specifically, what will he do about the Department of Trade and Industry's void properties and the Ministry of Defence's void properties?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman should know of the importance that we attach to reducing the number of empty Government-owned homes. We made that a priority in our White Paper; and the announcement of the privatisation of married quarters will also assist the process. The hon. Gentleman should also realise that, included in the total that I have given him, there are a large number of empty private properties, many of which have been brought into use in the private rented sector during the past few years as a result of our deregulation proposals. The Labour party always wants more regulation—that is the party's instinct—which would reduce the supply and reduce the amount of private rented accommodation available for homeless people.

Mr. Dunn: Although I accept that a large number of empty homes are owned by local authorities, will the Minister confirm that 18 of the 20 worst local authorities in terms of empty homes are Labour-controlled?

Mr. Clappison: Certainly. It is a shame that some local authorities with high numbers of vacant properties cannot reach the standards of those with low numbers. Hackney, Labour-controlled, has the highest number of empty properties—5 per cent. It is a shame that it cannot match the standards of Wandsworth, fewer than 1 per cent. of whose properties are vacant.

Mr. Raynsford: Why will not Ministers acknowledge their failure to tackle the scandal of empty properties, instead of attacking local authorities? Incidentally, local authorities are the only organisations to have reduced the number of their empty properties in the past few years. Will the Minister recognise that the Government's record is the worst of all? The number of empty Government properties has increased scandalously, in fact. The Ministry of Defence has the worst record; its homes should now be offered to people in need instead of being privatised under the disgraceful deal which the Secretary of State for Defence is doing with his adviser.

Mr. Clappison: It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman cannot join me in maintaining that the worst performing local authorities should try to reach the standards of the best. It is also a shame that he had to ride to the rescue of the beleaguered Labour-controlled Hackney council.

We have attached great importance to bringing empty Government homes back into use, as the hon. Gentleman knows. The White Paper gives great priority to that, and to our proposal to auction surplus empty homes after they have been vacant for six months.

The hon. Gentleman must decide, with the hostility to privatisation that he has just displayed and his commitment to more regulation, whether he is part of new or old Labour. At the moment he is certainly pitching his tent with old Labour.

Planning Permission

5. **Mr. Michael Spicer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will reconsider the powers of county councils and district councils to give themselves planning permission on their own land. [4879]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): The procedures governing local authority development were revised in 1992. We have no plans for a further review at present.

Mr. Spicer: Is my hon. Friend aware that that is almost exactly the same answer as I had to give when I was the Minister responsible for planning? It has not worn well with the passage of time. Does he accept that, in the interests of natural justice, the gamekeeper should in this context be separated from the poacher?

Mr. Jones: I am glad that my hon. Friend accepts that the right answer should be given by successive Ministers. Of course we have looked at the matter; the last thing we want is abuse by local authorities. If my hon. Friend has any evidence of that and draws it to my attention, I shall certainly look at it closely.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that these circumstances could be dealt with by a more general change? There could be a right of appeal against planning permission that is granted, just as there is now a right to appeal against a refusal. There is a pressing case for such a balance generally, not just in relation to local authorities.

Mr. Jones: The Environment Select Committee rejected that when it looked into the issue. It took a lot of evidence showing a conflict of interest, which is why the Government reviewed procedures at the time, in 1992.

Sir Irvine Patnick: A couple of weeks ago I initiated a debate on this very matter to which the Minister responded. The practice is becoming more and more prevalent: in order to raise cash, local authorities with land are capitalising on it and then giving themselves planning permission. But because this is not a national issue, it has not been called in by the Minister. Something must be done about this bad practice.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend has to recognise that the key thing is whether the proposals are in line with the local plan. If they are contrary to the local plan, they are referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and can be judged on their merits. On the other hand, if they are in accordance with the plan, the proper place to object to them is in the inquiry into the plan.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Minister accept that his answer to his hon. Friend camouflages the crisis that affects our planning system? What is he going to do about the large backlog of cases at the planning inspectorate, the huge delays in processing appeals and the enormous cost of the planning appeals system? When are we going to have a planning policy that is coherent, consistent and cost-effective?

Mr. Jones: I believe that we have exactly that. The point is that when we have all the plans in place for each local authority throughout the country, the situation will be much clearer and that will result in far fewer people having to test their planning applications at appeal because they will be able to judge them against the plan developed for that particular area.

North Downs

6. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to meet the Secretary of State for Transport to discuss safeguarding the area of outstanding natural beauty of the north downs. [4880]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to do so. However, officials from our two Departments work closely together, particularly within the Government office for the south-east.

Mr. Rowe: Is my hon. Friend aware that in the area of outstanding natural beauty of the north downs there is a motorway construction site which is surplus to Department of Transport requirements? If Government rules prevent the Department from allowing Maidstone borough council to use that site for park and ride, there is a serious risk that it will be sold and, eventually, planning permission sought for a use totally inappropriate to an area of outstanding natural beauty. It will be his Department that will have to make that decision. Will he give an undertaking to discuss this difficult situation with the Department of Transport before it becomes very much more difficult to resolve?

Sir Paul Beresford: As my hon. Friend is aware, I do not know the details of this matter. If they are as he describes, I would have thought that there would be some enormous planning hurdles to be overcome before planning permission could be given. Of course, if he is concerned, we will certainly discuss and look into the matter.

Water Companies

7. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the procedure for regulation of the water companies; and if he will make a statement. [4881]

Mr. Gummer: I have no plans to review the water industry's efficient regulatory system.

Mr. Purchase: Consumers will be thrilled by that scintillating answer. Is the Secretary of State aware that the second Cadbury review of corporate governance is considering seriously the question of supervisory boards? Would it not be sensible for the Secretary of State to consider how best we might proceed, given the abject failure of the present regulatory system, so that local people could once again sit on the supervisory boards and have a proper say about and input into the way in which the industry is regulated?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has forgotten the whole history of the water industry. We have problems there at the moment because of the lack of investment under the Labour Government. I know that that is true because I read carefully the words of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who said that the Government had said that investment in the water industry had been cut under Labour. She said:

> "That is not true. The plans that we hoped to implement were not entirely fulfilled."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1385.]

The fact is that they were cut, cut and cut again. Now, the investment is continuing and it is properly regulated.

Mr. Barry Field: May I recommend to Mrs. Gummer that Father Christmas places in the Christmas stocking of my right hon. Friend a little pamphlet from Conservative central office which I wrote on this very subject to give my right hon. Friend a little light reading over Christmas? Does he agree that it is remarkable that no matter how much the Almighty allows it not to rain, the Opposition cannot bring themselves to agree that water metering is the best way forward for charging for water?

Mr. Gummer: I shall look forward to the pamphlet, but it is interesting that the Labour party is in favour of all environmental things in general but none of them in particular. The truth is that unless resources are properly looked after, we cannot have sustainable development. That is why the Labour party has no environment policy whatsoever.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Can the Minister confirm whether he has had reports that there are likely to be considerable water shortages next year, given the lack of rain last summer and the relatively dry weather this Christmas? If so, what is he doing in negotiation with the water regulator and others to tackle that?

Mr. Gummer: Those reports have one thing in common: they say that the shortage of water arises because of a shortage of rain. Unless the hon. Gentleman has a special way of delivering rain, discussions with the water regulator will make no difference. The water companies have an extensive programme of further investment and already spend extremely large sums. The retained profits and £3.5 billion of borrowing by the industry have financed that unprecedented investment. Much of it makes up for the lack of investment when the industry was nationalised, which is what the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) wants to return to. I assure the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) that I am looking at the position in the south-west, which is one of the areas most affected.

Mr. Nicholls: The fact that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission recently upheld Ofwat's decision to peg water charges in the south-west shows that regulation is working in terms of that aspect of the industry. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that the water company in the south-west cannot even deliver water to every house in my constituency and cryptosporidium affects water supplies, further regulation of the quality as opposed to the cost of the service should not be ruled out at this stage? Will he comment on that?

Mr. Gummer: The drinking water inspectorate and the environment agency deal in their respective ways with quality. I am happy to point out to them, as I have in the past, my hon. Friend's views on those matters. I am glad that my hon. Friend points the House to the fact that the mixture of the water regulator and the opportunity to appeal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission show the toughness of the regulation, the affect on South West Water and the insistence that South West Water meets higher standards immediately.

Low-cost Housing

8. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to allow local authorities to build more low-cost rented housing. [4882]

Mr. Clappison: Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing. We expect around 70,000 additional lettings to be provided in 1995-96 through a mixture of public and private funding.

Mr. Miller: How many new starts will there be in 1996 in the low-cost rented sector?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman would do better to concentrate on the fact that housing associations provide 27,000 new starts out of a total of 70,000, which does not take account of the value of new social lettings through tenants going on to buy their own homes and the refurbishment of properties. He would do well to look at the value of the housing associations' contribution to providing high-quality property through the involvement of the private financial sector.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that, where social housing is provided, it should be of the highest possible quality? Will he convey to the Government the thanks of my constituents who have just received a 47 per cent. increase in the housing investment programme, which should be spent on improving the quality of existing council houses in Castle Point, which is currently substandard?

Mr. Clappison: I am happy to convey my hon. Friend's message. He is right to say that we seek to provide high-quality accommodation to meet social need.

Ministry of Defence Housing

9. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representation he has made to the Secretary of State for Defence over the planned privatisation of the Ministry of Defence's married quarters estate. [4883]

10. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has made to the Secretary of State for Defence over the planned Ministry of Defence's married quarters estate. [4884]

Mr. Curry: We have made it clear that we wish to see genuinely surplus property used to provide homes for people. It will help to create sustainable and mixed communities if homes are available for both purchase and rent.

Mr. O'Hara: Does the Minister share my concern that those perfectly good homes are being sold off like so much Army surplus stock when social housing, which is his Department's responsibility, is desperately needed?

Mr. Curry: The important thing is to ensure that people live in the surplus houses that are available. There are about 70,000 MOD homes, of which 14,000 are empty. That is 14,000 too many. We must ensure that people can live in them. Whether that goes for social housing or for low-cost starter homes appears to me to be much less important. What matters is that they are used.

Mr. Jamieson: Does the Minister recall that in July 1994, his Department's task force report described the MOD policy of having thousands of homes standing empty as short-sighted and anti-[illegible]? Is not it clear to the Minister that Defence Ministers have totally ignored the advice of his Department by having 14,098 empty properties—552 of them in the Prime Minister's constituency? When will he take firm action to ensure that the MOD releases those properties for social housing, as he has said repeatedly that it should?

Mr. Curry: That is precisely what the MOD now proposes. It is manifestly the case that the programme of disposal has not proceeded quickly enough in the past few years. The MOD has had to cope with "Options for Change", which has meant much shifting of personnel and many changes in personnel in the armed forces, so it needs to ensure that houses are available. What matters now is that we ensure that those houses are used. Regardless of whether those houses are made available for rent, the eventual purchaser will have no interest in holding on to empty stock. He will want to dispose. It is immaterial whether he disposes into the private rented sector or the home ownership sector. What matters is that those houses are used.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that tomorrow—I am sorry, on Friday—on Thursday—*[Laughter]*—I shall present the keys to some MOD homes to new tenants from Magna housing association in my constituency. Many of those MOD properties will be sold to the private sector. However, where housing associations exist in districts where an enormous number of homes become vacant as a result of MOD changes in constituencies such as mine, will he ensure that they have the funds to recycle those homes into super housing association homes, and to get the very many people on the waiting list into them?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend has always been a stickler for terminological exactitude. *[Interruption.]* In other words, he knows what day of the week it is. He will know that some housing associations have already shown considerable interest in acquiring that stock and some of them, such as the North housing association, can do so with their own funds and do not need to apply for funding.

I am sure that the purchaser of the properties from the MOD will have no interest in holding on to the stock but will want to dispose of it, some of it to housing associations, who are natural purchasers.

Contaminated Land

11. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding contaminated land. [4885]

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman is among those who have made representations, and I am sure that the whole House appreciates the campaign that he has mounted on behalf of those people affected by the asbestos tragedy in Armley. I hope that, for his part, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate what the Environment Protection Act 1995 has done in pressing home again the important principle that the polluter should pay.

Mr. Battle: I am grateful for the Minister's comments at the start of his answer. When will the Government publish the contaminated land guidance to the Environment Protection Act? In Leeds, there are about 929 hectares of derelict land, about a quarter of which is believed to be contaminated. Would not it be a wise investment now to give the resources to the local authorities to allow them to survey that land and bring it into productive use for homes and jobs?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman knows of the statutory guidance that must be issued, and that consultation must take place before it is issued. We are expecting that consultation to be carried out early next year. In the meantime, those people in Leeds who have an interest in the tragedy of the contamination by asbestos, especially Leeds city council, would do well to reflect on the important principle that the polluter should pay, and the relevance to that principle of recent legal findings on other areas of liability affecting the asbestos tragedy.

Mr. Ashby *rose—*

Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."

Mr. Ashby: I thank the House. Does my hon. Friend realise that there are many pieces of contaminated land in inner-city areas, which are an eyesore? We cannot really wait for land values to catch up with the cost of dealing with the contaminated land. Does not he realise that there must be some public input in order to remove such eyesores in inner cities?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is aware that we have stuck firmly to the principle that the polluter should pay. He will realise the importance of the definitions that we established in the Environment Act 1995 and the regulatory machinery that we put in place to enforce that. I share the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend: we should deal effectively with the problem of contaminated land in inner city areas and develop those areas.

Mr. Barnes: Does the Minister agree that opencast mining is not the natural way to deal with contaminated land with coal reserves beneath it? Avenue coke works in my constituency has been closed and the land is highly contaminated—British Coal Property should be aware of the principle that the polluter should pay and should clean the area without inconveniencing local people by introducing opencast mining provisions.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman will realise that we have issued much tougher planning provisions to deal with that issue. Every case will be considered strictly on its merits in the context of those tough provisions.

Anti-social Tenants

12. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his proposals to help local authorities deal more effectively with anti-social tenants. [4886]

Mr. Curry: On 18 July and 18 October I announced a substantial package of measures to help local authorities to deal more effectively with anti-social tenants. After discussions with the housing association movement, I intend to extend that package to housing associations.

Mrs. Lait: Many of my constituents, who have been badly affected by the behaviour of anti-social tenants, welcome the measures. Is my hon. Friend aware, however, that many of the victims of anti-social tenants feel unable to give evidence because they are intimidated? Can he give the House an idea of how the victims will be protected by the package?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend. Something that I hear repeatedly as I travel around the country is that people know who cause the problems on estates—it may be just one or two families or their kids—but cannot find a way of dealing with them. Those involved may be taken to court and put on probation or their case may be deferred and they return to the estate and cause problems again. We intend to introduce new powers involving injunctions associated with arrest so that people can take action without fear of intimidation. We also intend to make it possible to use professional witnesses, as some local authorities—mainly Labour authorities—are already doing, to try to remove the element of intimidation so that people can enjoy the right to live peaceably in their own homes.

Ms Ruddock: While the Government's proposals are welcome as far as they go, is it not a scandal that it has taken a decade of rising complaints and 17 deaths in noise disputes to get the Government to act? Does the Minister accept that every citizen has the right to enforcement of the law on noise? If so, when he gives responsibilities to local authorities why does he say that the level of service will depend on local conditions and resources? Where is the money to come from?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Lady confuses noise nuisance with anti-social behaviour. The latter is by far the more serious problem as no one has been materially injured by noise in the way that people have been injured by some anti-social behaviour. Both problems affect the quality of life on housing estates and both must be tackled and I hope that both sets of measures will receive a wide welcome. It is distressing that a number of Labour local authorities appear not to want even to implement the package on anti-social behaviour that we shall make available to them, although sensible authorities such as Manchester will implement it. I hope that the laggards will learn from the winners.

Mr. Hawkins: Following the point that my hon. Friend has rightly made, does he agree that in many of our seaside resorts Labour councillors and Labour activists are themselves unscrupulous landlords? They encourage people from outside the area, who become extremely anti-social tenants when they move in, and cause many of the social problems. Is that not the reality of Labour local government and does it not show, once again, that Labour is unfit to govern?

Mr. Curry: I am conscious of the problems in seaside resorts around the country caused by the changing nature of activities in those areas and by the people who settle there to collect benefit. We have taken measures under the planning system to resolve those problems and we shall take further measures to deal with houses in multiple occupation. I shall listen to the views of those who believe that additional measures should be taken so that seaside towns can enjoy the prosperity which has been theirs historically and which they deserve for the future.

Energy Efficiency

13. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his most recent estimate of the number of homes to be insulated in the coming year under the home energy efficiency scheme; and if he will make a statement. [4887]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We expect more than 400,000 homes to be insulated under the home energy efficiency scheme in the coming year, bringing the total number of homes insulated under the scheme to more than 2 million.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Minister explain why he has cut the home energy efficiency scheme budget by £31 million in direct breach of a Government and ministerial promise to everyone involved? Is he aware that that will lead to the insulation of 200,000 fewer houses next year, the loss of 1,000 jobs in the small business sector and the loss of £12 million to manufacturing industry? In view of the economic, health and other effects of his decision, will the Minister now reconsider?

Mr. Jones: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Some £30 million was added to the scheme in anticipation of the acceptance of value added tax at 17.5 per cent. As he knows, the House voted against that measure, so the £30 million figure has now been reviewed.

Mr. Gallie: My hon. Friend the Minister has anticipated the point that I intended to make. The home energy efficiency grant for last year was linked to the VAT increase. On that basis, given the uptake of the award, should the Government not be congratulated rather than criticised?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is clearly in favour of that excellent scheme. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) failed to appreciate the fact that we have protected the most vulnerable groups while continuing to offer a substantial discount to those people who do not qualify for the free service.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: How can the Minister justify a 20 per cent. reduction in energy efficiency in homes around the country when, as Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, he recommended increased expenditure on home energy efficiency schemes? Was it not a cynical exercise to increase expenditure for only one year in order to justify the imposition of VAT on home heating, which has hit the poorest and the worst off in our community?

Mr. Jones: That is clearly not the case, as we have protected vulnerable groups and increased the scheme considerably over the years. I remind the hon. Lady that there was no such scheme under the last Labour Government because they did not care about energy efficiency. We are determined to ensure that homes become more energy efficient in the coming year through a variety of measures, not least through the Home Energy Conservation Bill, which will encourage local authorities to make sure that people take up those schemes.

Rented Homes

14. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes for rent were started by local authorities and housing associations in 1978-79; and what is his estimate for 1996-97. [4888]

Mr. Curry: In 1978-79 local authorities started about 62,000 homes for rent and housing associations started about 17,000. This year we estimate that about 49,000 social homes for rent or shared ownership will be started by housing associations, or released through home ownership grant schemes, and about 1,000 will be started by local authorities.

Mrs. Prentice: In view of the statement earlier by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) that only 27,000 homes will be started by housing associations in 1996-97 and the fact that under the last Labour Government 112,000 new homes, on average, were started each year, will the Minister tell us this Christmas time exactly how the Government intend to house the homeless?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Lady is confusing two points. With regard to the general provision of housing, what matters is that properties become available for new lettings. The only thing that concerns a family needing a home is whether a house is available and whether they will have a roof over their heads.

The housing associations are the main flag carriers of new social rented housing in this country. We also have an effective rough sleepers initiative to deal with the homelessness problem. The hon. Lady will know that we are developing that initiative and that we are consulting about how we should take it forward. It is operated by the Government and the housing charities in a unique display of very effective co-operation.

Local Government Finance, London

15. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to discuss the standard spending assessment formula with representatives of the London boroughs. [4889]

Sir Paul Beresford: Standard spending assessments are discussed throughout the year with the local authority associations in the settlement working group and in the standard spending assessment sub-group. Currently, we are also available to meet authorities to hear their representations on our proposals for the 1996-97 settlement, including those for standard spending assessments.

Mr. Dykes: Does the Minister accept that the working of that complex formula can adversely affect outer London boroughs such as Harrow? Its proximity to Heathrow airport and its many ethnic minority communities mean that it has to bear extra costs of social provision, education, housing for the elderly and other services. Will my hon. Friend look again at the formula to see whether Harrow can have a fairer deal?

Sir Paul Beresford: I would dispute any suggestion that it has not had a fair deal. The shift of expenditure under the formula shows that Harrow has had a reasonable deal. I am sure that, with my hon. Friend's assistance, the local authority will be able to meet the demands well. A comparison of local authorities around the country shows a massive variation. Labour authorities, in particular, seem to spend an enormous amount of money for little value. I am sure that my hon. Friend can assist his local authority.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 December. [4905]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Jones: Will the Government rejoin the future large aircraft project urgently? Does the Prime Minister understand that the French and the Germans are increasingly sceptical of our approach to the project and may move to exclude us? Is he also aware that 2,000 Airbus workers in my constituency have lost their jobs and that the remaining 2,000 are desperate for Britain to rejoin the project? Given Britain's pathetic economic growth prospects, surely the Prime Minister wants a strong aerospace industry.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having given me an indication of the subject that he intended to raise and I appreciate his concern to protect jobs in his constituency. On the substantive point, the Government are committed to joining the future large aircraft programme provided that our conditions concerning price, performance and affordability are met. That matter is under discussion with the United Kingdom industries concerned and with our European colleagues.

Q2. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 December. [4907]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shaw: In the next few days I shall be visiting the hospitals, the homes for the elderly and the retired and the nursing homes in my constituency. I shall visit many businesses and voluntary organisations. *[Interruption.]* All those people have benefited from additional resources as a result of the recent Budget. Can my right hon. Friend also give me some words to tell our customs officers in Dover, who are thoroughly against the policies that the Labour party would introduce in terms of the legalisation of cannabis and drugs? *[Interruption.]* Our customs officers have provided a valuable service in keeping Britain free from drugs. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he supports the customs officers in Dover in that action? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will give the hon. Gentleman an Adjournment debate next year.

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend has just had one, Madam Speaker. I very much agree with him about the excellent work carried out by customs officers at

Dover and elsewhere in tackling drug trafficking. My hon. Friend can tell them categorically that we have no intention of legalising cannabis. We do not believe that it is the right way to proceed. As the chief constable of West Yorkshire said in the past,

> "Legalisation or decriminalisation just isn't the answer."

He continued:

> "I've not yet met a heroin, or ecstasy or crack cocaine user that didn't start on cannabis".

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister tell us what he has repeatedly refused to deny, which is that the costs of rail privatisation—the costs of the sale and of the extra subsidy—are set to amount to $1 billion over the next two years? Would not that £1 billion be better spent on improving a public rail service?

The Prime Minister: No. Even with the spirit of Christmas, I must say that the right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. On a like for like basis, overall Government funding for the railways after privatisation is expected to be broadly similar to the levels of recent years. The precise level will depend on the privatisation process and on the outcome of competition for the franchises. Instead of criticising the funding, the Labour leader would be better employed examining the £10 billion worth of investment that Railtrack plans, which would not occur in the public sector. If the right hon. Gentleman is so opposed to privatisation, will he tell us how he would replace the £10 billion worth of investment in British Rail? Which taxes would he increase? By how much would fares have to rise? Or will he at last realise that privatisation will produce a better service for customers?

Mr. Blair: We could start by taking the £1 billion and investing it in the rail service. Let us see whether the Prime Minister can answer one simple question: will he guarantee that the level of service which now obtains will be the same after privatisation in the privatised services—not hope, not wish, but guarantee?

The Prime Minister: I note that the right hon. Gentleman had no response whatever to the £10 billion worth of investment. He talks about £1 billion, but £10 billion is promised. As for future services, he can see what is already beginning to happen. The passenger service requirements provide a guaranteed level of service. That has never existed in the past. Services to the passenger are already improving—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] I will tell Opposition Members where. The operating companies are offering a range of new services. They are responding to their customers more quickly. There are new information services. To give Opposition Members a practical example, completely new train services are being provided—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where"?]. I will tell Opposition Members where. For example, over 100 trains a day have already been added to SouthWest Trains' timetables. When will the Leader of the Opposition realise what is happening and realise also the opportunities for improving a service that has been too bad for too long?

Mr. Blair: We shall realise it when the Prime Minister guarantees that service levels will remain the same—*[Interruption.]* Yes, when he guarantees it. What is more, have we not just—*[Interruption.]* We shall listen to the Government when they guarantee that the service will remain the same, but they are not prepared to do that. Is it not right that at the end of the week—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The barracking is intolerable.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister keeps telling us about his plans for British Rail. Is he not the man who planned no increase in value added tax and then increased it? We are not interested in his plans. Have not his rail plans been overturned by the courts, his chief inspector of prisons walked out of his first prison inspection, members of his party are at each other's throats over Europe and the Government cannot get the national lottery right? Has not the right hon. Gentleman's year ended as it began—in weakness, chaos and incompetence?

The Prime Minister: Whenever the right hon. Gentleman loses the argument, he changes it. He has lost the argument on privatisation. He had no response to the £10 billion and no response to the fact that there has never been a guaranteed minimum service until now. Now the service is being improved and he cannot bear the fact that we are winning the argument in terms of improving services right across the public sector. All that he can do is to run down everything that happens in this country on every conceivable occasion for his own partisan political interests.

Mr. Garnier: As more than 13,000 British troops are deployed to Yugoslavia, will my right hon. Friend send the best wishes of the House to them? Does he agree that, had the Labour party won the last election, we would not have had one tenth of the soldiers to send to that place, given the savage cuts that Labour would have introduced?

The Prime Minister: And would probably try to introduce were it ever given the chance again. We know the Opposition's record on defence and we know their capacity to hide their long-term affiliation to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and we know that the armed forces know and the people of this country know that the armed forces would not be safe in their hands.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister understand why the possibility of a lone British veto tomorrow against a European subvention to help to privatise Irish Steel is regarded by the Irish Prime Minister as inexplicable? Will he explain? Will he assure us, in particular, that he fully understands the damage that could be done by that to British-Irish relations at a crucial moment in the Irish peace process?

The Prime Minister: I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman should examine the whole matter; it is a very complex issue involving the interests of Irish Steel—very important to Ireland—and British Steel, and the matter is under discussion. We are seeking—and I hope that it will be possible to reach—an agreement that safeguards the United Kingdom's interests. That matter is under discussion at the moment. It would not be productive for those discussions for me to pursue the matter now, but there is an interest both in Ireland and in the United Kingdom. We are seeking, and have done for some weeks, to reach an agreement which meets the interests of the steel industry both in the United Kingdom and in Ireland. I hope that we shall be able to reach such an agreement. If we cannot, it will not be for lack of trying on this side of the channel.

Mrs. Gorman: Has my right hon. Friend seen the newspaper report that Labour Members of the European Parliament, in supporting the French strikers, blamed their plight on the fact that the French Government were supporting the single currency? Does he not find it surprising that Labour MEPs should be supporting his own sceptical point of view? Is he not even more surprised that their position differs radically from that of Opposition Front-Benchers, who support the European Parliament and all its works?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the very wide and deep divisions in the Labour party on Europe were clearly apparent in the statement that I delivered to the House yesterday afternoon, when one Labour Back Bencher after another stood up and, in essence, flatly contradicted what the leader of the Labour party has been saying for weeks. As for Labour party policy, my hon. Friend may be interested to know that there was more than one summit in Madrid last week. The summit of socialist leaders, attended by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party, must have been very amusing. The right hon. Gentleman agreed to a significant extension of qualified majority voting, support for a European strategy on immigration, the social chapter, and restrictions on how long people can work. What he did not discuss were the details of fishing policy—and he a Member from Hull.

Q3. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 December. [4908]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pickthall: As the national lottery regulator was warned by the Ministry not to take free air trips on his visit to the USA, but nevertheless did so, and given that the Secretary of State for National Heritage knew about that but refused to comment on it at Question Time yesterday, does the Prime Minister not think that it is time that both of them were sacked?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage is considering the matter and will make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in 1979 only 30 per cent. of people in Scotland were home owners? Is he aware that the figure is now 57 per cent., and a Shelter report published today suggests that 77 per cent. of Scots aspire to home ownership? Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the Conservative party will drive towards that objective?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Surveys show that more than 70 per cent. of Scots aim for owner-occupation, and that is particularly true among younger age groups. Since the right to buy was introduced in 1980, well over 300,000 houses and flats have been sold to their tenants, and owner-occupation has increased from 35 per cent. to 57 per cent. The right to buy has been immensely successful—introduced by a Conservative Government, opposed by gut instinct by the Labour party then, and still, in truth, loathed by it now.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During last night's debate on the preposterous proposal to privatise the Stationery Office, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), was a little naughty—I put it charitably—in his statements about the Clerks Department, as can be seen in column 1317 of *Hansard.* Was that brought to your attention, Madam Speaker, and can you clarify the position of the Clerks Department, which by tradition is neutral and does not become involved in matters of political controversy?

Madam Speaker: There may still be misunderstanding in some quarters about the position of Officers of the House in the process leading to privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made clear yesterday, the House of Commons Commission has authorised Officers of the House to participate in the process of preparing the contract that would be necessary to protect the interests of the House after privatisation, and in that context to attend meetings of the privatisation steering group in an observer capacity.

The choice of the firm whose bid will be accepted is purely one for the Government. That said, Officers of the House will be available to give information to representatives of the Government about the special nature and the special implications of the work that the House requires, and will continue to require to be done by whoever is responsible for its printing services. That information may help the Government to make their choice, but neither the House nor any organ of it will make that choice.

As soon as any name of a firm that is to take over the functions of HMSO is announced, it will be for Officers of the House—acting on behalf of the House of Commons Commission—to negotiate the terms of an appropriate contract. Preparatory work for that eventuality is already under way. It will be for the Commission itself, at the end of the process, to approve the terms of any contract that is drawn up. I hope that I have made that abundantly clear.

BILL PRESENTED

EMPLOYMENT (HOMEWORKERS)

Mr. Dafydd Wigley, supported by Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Andrew Welsh, Mr. Alex Salmond, Mrs. Margaret Ewing and Ms Roseanna Cunningham, presented a Bill to provide safeguards for homeworkers and for associated workers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 January and to be printed. [Bill 36.]

Fisheries

[Relevant documents: European Community Documents Nos. 10409/95, on the annual report by the Commission on the multi-annual guidance programme, 10862/95 relating to guide prices for fishery products in 1996, the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 27th November 1995 relating to the EC/Morocco Fisheries Agreement, on 12th December 1995 relating to the Community observer scheme in North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO) waters, on 12th December 1995 relating to joint international inspection in NAFO waters, on 12th December 1995 relating to control measures in NAFO waters, on 12th December 1995 on a pilot satellite tracking project in NAFO waters, on 12th December 1995 relating to Community catch possibilities in NAFO waters for 1996, on 12th December 1995 relating to reciprocal access and 1996 quotas with Norway, and on 12th December 1995 on amendments to the criteria for the decommissioning of fishing vessels.]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

There is great pressure to speak in the debate, so I have imposed a 10-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches. I plead with Front Benchers to keep in mind the number of hon. Members who I know wish to speak.

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum, submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8th December 1995, relating to the fixing of total allowable catches for 1996 and certain conditions under which they may be fished; and supports the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen consistent with scientific advice and the need to sustain the stocks for the benefit of future generations of fishermen.

On Thursday the Fisheries Ministers of the European Union will meet to decide the 1996 quotas for fish stocks. Today's debate allows the House to consider these matters and to scrutinise the relevant documents, which are set out in the Order Paper. Already this year the House has had a number of debates on fisheries. Earlier in the year and again in October, it considered proposals for limiting fishing effort in waters west of the United Kingdom. More recently my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) succeeded in raising his concerns about the common fisheries policy in an Adjournment debate.

The main focus for today's debate are the proposals which the Council of Fisheries Ministers will consider later this week in Brussels to determine the fishing opportunities for the various fleets of the Community next year. I am delighted to have this opportunity to open the debate. As I made plain when I attended the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers in October when the final critical decisions were taken on the arrangements for western waters, I attach great importance to the prospects for the industry which is so important to remote communities, not just in Scotland but around the whole coastline of the United Kingdom.

I was brought up in Arbroath on the north-east coast of Scotland and I well recall the vibrancy of the harbour and the fish market, and the community spirit that was encapsulated in the local fishing fleet. It is a great sadness to me personally to see how the industry has changed over the past 20 years. Looking back only 10 or 15 years, one sees that the volume of the main white fish landings in the United Kingdom was little short of twice the volume that we can expect next year.

If there is to be a single measure of the success of the European common fisheries policy it should be the health of our fish stocks. On that, plainly, the jury is still out. Some 60 per cent. of those stocks are considered by the scientists to be at risk biologically. That means that the stocks are below or at about the lowest level which has been seen over the 30 years during which they have been subject to close scientific monitoring. That statistic tells its own story about the performance of the common fisheries policy.

Some hon. Members may argue that the state of the stocks is not as bad as the scientists advise. There may be some truth in that because fishery science is not an exact science. At the Council we shall certainly take into account the views of the fishermen in pressing for changes to the Commission's proposals, but I do not think that anyone can dispute the overall conclusion that our stocks are not in the same healthy state as they were 10 or 15 years ago.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the fundamental problem with the common fisheries policy is the principle of equal access to the common resource? Does he agree that that works very much to the detriment of the British fishing industry? Will he assure the House that the Government will go to the intergovernmental conference next year determined to see this written out of the regulations? Will they serve notice now on our European partners that that is our bottom line?

Mr. Forsyth: I have considerable sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. I think his point is that the idea of equal access to a common resource is more of an aspiration than a reality. In practice the principle of relative stability, for example, has been contrary to that. I assure my hon. Friend that the Minister of State will fight hard for British interests at the Council meeting, as he has always done in the past.

Mr. Gill: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way again. I listened with interest to his answer but I should like to press him on the point. Will he serve notice now on our European partners that we will accept nothing less than a writing out of the fisheries regulations all the references to equal access to a common resource?

Mr. Forsyth: We have never had equal access and we have no intention of accepting that principle. I hope that that helps my hon. Friend to some degree.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way—he has been most courteous as usual. Is not the fundamental problem that fisheries policy is subject to qualified majority voting? For the British, who have maritime interests just like the Icelanders and Norwegians, of paramount national importance is the fact that land-locked countries such as Luxembourg and Austria, and Mediterranean countries too, can have a vote on our Atlantic fisheries, which is clearly preposterous.

Mr. Forsyth: I read with interest my hon. Friend's comments in the Adjournment debate that he secured some weeks ago. I can say to him only that there are, of course, deficiencies in the common fisheries policy, but that, at the end of the day, we simply must find a means whereby we can meet the requirements to conserve stocks. Whatever the system, whether we are out of the CFP or not, we will have to proceed by negotiation and agreement. There is the opportunity for my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to achieve a good deal for Britain's fishermen. I am sure that he will take that opportunity when it comes.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): While my right hon. Friend is giving way, it is probably helpful if he gets interventions out of the way at the same time. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) talked about the intergovernmental conference. I do not think that anyone in the House finds the common fisheries policy satisfactory. Will my right hon. Friend give the House an undertaking that the Government will consider putting the problems of that policy before the IGC?

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure what my hon. Friend is seeking to get me to do. If he is suggesting that we should seek to amend the treaty, with his own knowledge of these matters, he will know how difficult that would be to achieve, and I will deal with that later. Of course, there is the opportunity by regulation—which, as has been pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood, requires agreement by qualified majority voting—for us to achieve the forms and changes. I hope that I will take those opportunities, as will my hon. Friend the Minister of State as the negotiations proceed.

There is only one answer to our predicament: the need for more effective conservation. Fishing activity is the single biggest factor in deciding the fish mortality level. We must collectively face up to the need to reduce fishing's impact on fish stocks. The need to limit fishing activity's scope was recognised many years ago, long before the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community, and well before the common fisheries policy was agreed. In the 1960s, the establishment of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission brought together the countries in this part of the world to co-operate on fish stocks conservation. That commission, not the European Commission, brought together Fisheries Ministers, with the benefit of scientific advice, to decide total allowable catches for the main stocks of interest to the commercial fishing fleets.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): If the Secretary of State is not going to campaign for radical common fisheries policy reform by way, for example, of greater emphasis on regional and national management of local fisheries stocks, will he give the House an assurance that he will campaign for far tougher policing on fishing grounds? What discussions has he had recently with Norwegian authorities in terms of tougher policing, the doubling of fines, the confiscation of licences and the banning sine die of vessels caught fishing illegally?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we have effective enforcement. We are spending some £26 million on that and my hon. Friend the Minister is anxious to improve our performance in that matter. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the scientific aspects of the matter, what will be done to induce Poland, Japan and Korea to become signatories to the United Nations conference on straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, an important resolution that we have agreed and that they have not?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is raising a slightly different issue from that which we are discussing this afternoon, but he makes a crucial point: the importance of international co-operation in dealing with fish stocks and of recognising in this debate that fish do not recognise international boundaries. Despite that fact, I am sure that—with your indulgence, Madam Speaker—my hon. Friend the Minister of State will address the hon. Gentleman's question when he winds up the debate.

The proposals that Fisheries Ministers—

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I shall give way, but for the last time.

Mr. Salmond: Many observers would accept the fact that Spain, from within the European Union, and Norway, negotiating from outside, seem to be remarkably more successful in achieving their fisheries objectives than are Her Majesty's Government. Can the Secretary of State explain why, and tell us what he intends to do about it?

Mr. Forsyth: As on so many subjects, such as the Scottish budget, I refute the hon. Gentleman's analysis. He lives in a world in which he believes what he wants to believe; he does not seem to take account of the facts.

The proposals—

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles) *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I said that I was giving way for the last time, but as it is the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) who wishes to intervene, I shall make an exception. But this really is the last time.

Mr. Macdonald: With regard to the imbalance in enforcement between Spain and the United Kingdom, why is it justifiable and acceptable to the British Government that Spain has only 12 fisheries officers to police its regime, whereas we have more than 200?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is not right about that.

Dr. Godman: He is.

Mr. Forsyth: He is not. The Spanish have been increasing the number of their fisheries officers—[HON. MEMBERS: "How many are there?"] However, I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's concern that that should be done, and my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* I do not know what Opposition Members are shouting about. They were the first to come forward and argue for Spanish accession, and I do not recall any of them saying anything about fishing during those debates.

The proposals that Fisheries Ministers will consider this week—

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): If what the Secretary of State says is true, why does the European Community's own document inform us that the annual number of surveillance hours by Spain is 50, whereas for our country the figure is 4,800 hours?

Mr. Forsyth: Well—*[Interruption.]* Any advance on 50? I said that the numbers were increasing and I entirely agree about the importance of that development. Opposition Members' concern for the policing of fisheries interests is somewhat belated—I shall deal with that subject later.

The proposals that Fisheries Ministers will consider this week are, and have to be, based on the scientific advice received by the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management. The United Kingdom plays a full part in contributing to that international scientific advice.

The advice that we received this year points to the need for major new restrictions on catches of herring and mackerel, and on the plaice fisheries in the North sea. The scientists have also advised that we should continue to restrict catches of the main round fish stocks—cod, haddock and whiting—throughout the seas around the United Kingdom.

The Commission has had to take account of that advice in developing its own proposals. For stocks that the Community manages jointly with Norway, there has been a series of bilateral negotiations, which were conducted toughly on both sides. The agreement reached in the early morning of 9 December provides for a two-year programme of phased cuts in the total allowable catch for herring, mackerel and plaice. The cuts in quota for those species next year will be about 30 per cent. The agreement also provides for broadly stable TACs for cod, haddock and saithe, but for a significant cut in the North sea whiting catch.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I said that I would not give way again. I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but this really must be the last time, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Townend: I have some sympathy with my right hon. Friend; he cannot be blamed for the betrayal of the British fishing industry by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). Does my right hon. Friend accept that the common fisheries policy, as based on the representations of the scientists, proves that the fisheries policy has been an unmitigated disaster?

If the system had worked, we would have seen quotas increasing year on year. But when it dictates that tens of thousands of good fish be discarded back into the sea to die, there is something wrong with it. Surely the final nail must be when the House legislates to protect the British fishing industry, and is then taken to court and asked to pay £30 million in damages. That is surely the end.

Mr. Forsyth: It is not within the power of this House to legislate to put more fish in the sea. Our basic problem is that we are having to deal with too many people chasing too few fish. I do not think that the sort of comments which my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) has made about my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) add to the debate or get us further forward in seeking to address the difficult problems. Whether we were in the CFP or not, the issue of stocks would have to be addressed, and I hope that we can turn our attention to that matter this afternoon.

The other fishing opportunities which the Community has negotiated with third countries, such as Iceland, the Faroes, Greenland, in the north-west Atlantic and north Norway offer our fishermen broadly the same opportunities as applied this year. Fisheries Ministers in the United Kingdom have maintained a close dialogue with the fishing industry throughout the run-up to the negotiations in the Council, and the Government will have regard to the advice that we have received from the industry.

We recognise that the cuts implied by the Commission's proposals entail sharp and large reductions in quotas and, in the short term, such swings must undermine confidence. We recognise that these cuts in quotas will have serious implications for fishermen's incomes, and all of us are sympathetic to their position. Some of the cuts will be offset by increases in prices, and that is apparent in the mackerel market at least.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State will be fighting hard to get the best deal possible for our fishermen, consistent with the need to protect the longer-term interests of the industry. I am also aware that hon. Members have a number of specific concerns on matters of particular interest to the fishermen in East Anglia, in the south-west of England and in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend will of course address these.

The Government share the values of the British fishermen. We respect their qualities of independence, enterprise and self-reliance. We believe in minimising the burden of regulation by the state, and allowing fishermen as much freedom as possible within the constraints necessary to conserve fish stocks. We demonstrated that only days ago when we withdrew the obligation on fishermen to report in as they crossed the 4 deg. west line in the north of Scotland.

I am well aware that many fishermen do not believe that they have been well served by the Community's common fisheries policy. Most of them recognise that the CFP has not been successful in conserving fish stocks. They point to the burden of regulation under which they now work. They do not believe that that burden is being applied fairly throughout the Community. They feel that their fishing rights are increasingly insecure because they believe that the CFP is founded on a principle of equal access by all Community fishermen to fish stocks throughout the Community waters. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) made that point.

I understand fishermen's fears, but we should not underestimate our success in maintaining relative stability, in limiting access to our territorial waters and in applying effective controls on Spanish access and fishing efforts in western waters. These are successes which we have achieved within the Community, and which cut across the principle of equal access.

Those who argue that we could deal with these threats to the rights of our fishermen by abandoning the CFP need to consider carefully the practicalities and the costs of that course. I am sure that my hon. Friends who advocate this do not want the UK to act in breach of treaty obligations entered into with the approval of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh yes we do."] My hon. Friends are the first to argue for the rule of law.

Renegotiating the treaty to exclude fisheries from the scope of Community competence would be a monumental and probably impossible task. It would require unanimity and ratification by all member states, and that could be bought only at a huge price. We cannot assume that we would be successful in such a high-risk strategy. Reforming the CFP only requires changes in regulations by qualified majority voting. We also need to recognise the practical needs of managing fish stocks that we share with our neighbours, which means that some sort of common fisheries policy will still be needed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I have been generous in giving way, and Madam Speaker is keen that we make progress. I know that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) does not share the view of Opposition Front-Bench Members on these matters.

It would be far more realistic and effective to work for improvements within the CFP, and that is our strategy. Those who argue that we should seek to co-operate behind the barriers of 200-mile fisheries limits must have forgotten the lessons learnt painfully during the early years of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. The common fisheries policy offers us a substantial improvement on the voluntary and ineffective system epitomised by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. Those who think that Norway offers us a model for managing our fisheries should study that model more closely before they assume that it could be easily or costlessly replicated here.

The fishing industry does not need bogus options. What is needed is the courage to face up to the real issues, and to recognise the practical realities and the real opportunities to improve the working of the common fisheries policy. That is why Fisheries Ministers have initiated a review of the CFP. This is a review not by the Commission, but by an independent British group. It has been drawn from the fishing industry, the processors, the scientists and the environmental interests. I understand that members of that independent group expect to report early next year. I look forward to seeing their findings, because there will be opportunities to carry forward changes to the CFP without waiting till the next major review, in 2002.

That is also why the Government have committed substantial sums—£53 million over five years—to decommissioning older fishing vessels, and reducing fishing capacity towards the targets which we have accepted in the multi-annual guidance programme. It is also why the Government have led the fight to resist the cumbersome and bureaucratic proposals that the Commission advances for fisheries management, most recently for regulating fishing efforts in western waters. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to talk about some of those initiatives and opportunities later in the debate.

Underpinning all that work is a fundamental need to ensure that the fishermen and their representatives are drawn more closely into the process of managing their fisheries. That is something to which Fisheries Ministers in the United Kingdom are firmly committed.

I despair of the Opposition amendments. This month the Liberals are suggesting that we advance the next review of the CFP. Only last month, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) saw no need for that in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he said:

> "The common fisheries policy should comprise a host of other detailed matters. I welcome the review group and look forward with interest to the outcome. The year 2002 will come upon us sooner than we think, and we must begin to put in place the measures that we want to see by then."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 585.]

As for Labour, whose members pose as the fishermen's friend, what has it understood about fisheries policy? Nothing that I can see in the amendment. What has it to contribute to the reform of the CFP? Does not it recall its acquiescence in the 1986 Iberian Treaty of Accession? The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said:

> "We welcome the accession of Spain and Portugal. It is the right move for the Community and for Spain and Portugal. We welcome it because we recognise the merits of those two new democracies joining the rest of Europe and facing Europe's problems with us."

He continued:

> "The Opposition do not welcome accession blindly, ignorantly or oblivious of the difficulties and anxieties."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 883.]

The Opposition seem all too keen to gainsay what the hon. Gentleman said then. That treaty provided for the special protection of the Irish box to end at the end of this year. If the Government had done nothing, the Spanish boats would have been free to enter the whole of the Irish box outside territorial waters. Do not the Opposition understand that the deal that we negotiated last year maintains some protection for these sensitive waters; that it maintains the exclusion of the Spanish from the North sea; that it caps Spanish fishing effort in the west at the levels provided for in their Act of Accession? There is no Spanish armada, and that is a measure of our success: not walking away from the CFP but improving it from within.

What of conservation? I do not recall much about that in the Labour party's last manifesto—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) knows that there was nothing in it. Nor was there anything in the manifesto for the European Parliament, or in Labour's actions when in office during the 1970s. Indeed, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was a Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at the time. I do not recall that he or his colleagues did much to assist the fishing industry then.

Of course we recognise the need for effective conservation. We have committed £53 million to decommissioning. We have pursued the difficult agenda of limiting fishing effort.

There is a difference between the amendments tabled by my hon. Friends and the Opposition Front-Bench amendment. My hon. Friends are motivated by conviction and a passionate concern to ensure that the Government fight for British interests. I am prepared to accept that some Labour Members are similarly motivated; but the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition is in another league altogether. It seeks to criticise the Government for not getting a good enough deal for our fishermen, yet every time the Government put the UK's interests first and fight for them, Labour leaders are to be found lining up with their socialist friends on the continent to denounce Britain for standing alone. When the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and his colleagues were in office, so afraid were they of standing up to our partners that they allowed Brussels to filch massive sums from the pockets of UK taxpayers. Only when Baroness Thatcher took office was a substantial rebate secured.

To be fair, a handful of Opposition Members could, in all sincerity, have put their names to the amendment—but they are not among those whose names appear on the Order Paper. The amendment has not been framed to keep the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on side—far from it. It is simply a squalid exercise in synthetic patriotism by those whose sole objective is to try to entice some of my hon. Friends to withhold their support from the Government, so that the Opposition can hasten the day when they obtain power to deliver these islands, lock, stock and barrel, to the forces of federalism.

It is nauseating to see the party which for decades has clothed itself in the red flag now seeking to wrap itself in the Union flag; whereas in reality Labour would sail under a white flag and be forced to abandon our fishermen to the party's vision of an ever more integrated Europe.

I am the first to acknowledge the degree of concern among my hon. Friends. I must tell them and the communities they represent that we understand their anxieties, and that we have fought, and will always fight, for their right to fish the waters around our shores—consistent with maintaining adequate fish stocks. My hon. Friends' determination will command respect among the fishing communities of Britain, but I appeal to them not to risk compromising that respect by associating themselves with a bunch of sell-out merchants whose earlier crimes have already resulted in a sentence of 16 years on the Opposition Benches. Nothing in their behaviour suggests that they deserve any remission; indeed an extension of the sentence would seem to be the only answer.

The Minister of State will speak for the United Kingdom's fishermen. He will fight for their interests and for those of the United Kingdom generally. Let this House send out the clearest signal that we are united in our determination not just to get the best deal on quotas but to achieve a long-term solution which offers this vital industry the security that it deserves.

4.3 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

> "believes that the agreements of the Council of Fisheries Ministers, allowing Spanish fishing vessels into the Irish Box and allowing increased access for Spanish fishing vessels to the waters of the west of the United Kingdom, present an unacceptable threat to the long-term economic viability of fishing communities in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and place unsustainable pressure upon the fish stocks in these already sensitive waters; recognises the failure of the United Kingdom Government to implement a decommissioning policy until 1993, and notes that Ministers only abandoned their unfair, unpopular and unworkable days-at-sea proposal after the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations challenged the Government in the European Court of Justice; concludes that the United Kingdom Government has not effectively represented in Europe the interests of the United Kingdom fishing industry, and has failed to implement in the United Kingdom a fisheries policy that is in the interests of the United Kingdom fishing industry; recognises that the over-riding priority of the Common Fisheries Policy must be the conservation of fish stocks, for only through healthy stocks can the fishing industry survive; believes that the Common Fisheries Policy in its present

form does not adequately meet this priority; and calls on the United Kingdom Government to work in Europe to secure reforms of the Common Fisheries Policy to ensure the conservation and fair allocation of fish stocks throughout the European Union, with effective enforcement by all member states."

The House will be aware that this is the major annual fisheries debate of the parliamentary year. It precedes the important December meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers, which is to agree total allowable catches, quotas and other changes to the workings of the common fisheries policy.

I welcome the Secretary of State for Scotland to our debate. I hope that there is nothing to be read into the fact that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food left halfway through the Secretary of State's remarks. We shall assume that he had another engagement.

The Secretary of State referred to the 1992 Labour party manifesto. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who will wind up for the Opposition, may refer to the fisheries document we issued, but I do not think that we should spend much time arguing about the 1992 manifestos. *[Interruption.]* There is a difference between a Government who win on their manifesto, and a party that loses on its manifesto. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps Conservative Members do not know the constitutional position. Oppositions are not bound by their manifestos; Governments are.

The Conservative party manifesto for 1992 states:

> "We are determined to see that the renegotiation of the Common Fisheries Policy protects the interest of UK fishermen and retains our share of the Community's fishing opportunities."

Who in the House believes that the Government have delivered on that? Not a single fisherman in the country does. I have spoken to fishermen's leaders from Plymouth to Lerwick today, and they support the amendment standing in the name of Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I do not believe that fishermen's federations, certainly in Scotland, support the Opposition's amendment, for one reason in particular. The debate is about total allowable catches. There is not one mention of them in the Opposition amendment. Would the hon. Gentleman like to explain that?

Dr. Strang: Yes, I will come to the issue of total allowable catches and quotas. I know that the Government would like the debate to be only about the quotas which are set every year, but it is not just about them. Everyone who knows about the protracted arguments and discussions that have taken place since the agreement last Christmas knows perfectly well that the arrangements which will come into force on 1 January 1996 are of crucial historic importance to our fishing industry, as I shall explain.

Right hon. and hon. Members who represent fishing constituencies will be well aware that the stocks in those waters are already under immense pressure and are crucial to our fishing industry. The priority must be to conserve our stocks. There should be less, not more, fishing effort in those areas.

As this is the right hon. Gentleman's first UK fisheries debate as Secretary of State for Scotland, may I draw his attention to the words of the then Minister of State, who is now Financial Secretary to the Treasury, on going into the negotiations in October 1993 on the question of additional Spanish access to the waters around our islands?

Far from saying that increased access and effort was inevitable, the hon. Gentleman said that Spanish and Portuguese fishing activities should be confined as closely as possible to their historic patterns, and that there should be no access to the Irish box. He was quite right. Access to those waters should have been based on historic fishing activity. The fact is that the deal was a reflection of the Government's failure to represent the UK national interest in Europe.

The Government had had since 1985, when the Spanish terms of accession were agreed, to secure support in Europe for a just deal. In the event, the then Minister of State was not able to persuade a single other member state to refrain from voting in favour of the deal. It is true that, under the Spanish accession treaty, it was necessary to renegotiate the Irish box by the end of 1995, but we did not have to make arrangements for additional Spanish access to other waters around the UK by that deadline. Under the accession treaty, those arrangements did not have to be in place until 2002.

Ministers have still not adequately explained why the Government accepted that additional Spanish access should be effective from 1996 as opposed to 2002— *[Interruption.]*

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I heard the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) make a sedentary intervention, but, as the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) is on his feet, I shall give way to him.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I do not wish to be unkind, because I like the hon. Gentleman very much—[Hon. Members: "Oh."]—I mean that sincerely. As no British Government, irrespective of which party is in power, have the right now to make decisions of that sort and say what will happen with regard to Spanish access, would it not be wiser to try to help the fishing industry out of this absurd constitutional mess rather than engage in political games? Does the hon. Gentleman realise that no fishermen, whether in Scotland or England, will be happy seeing their politicians slinging mud at each other when there is little that any British Government can now do?

Dr. Strang: I do not accept that there is little that any British Government can do, and nor will the fishermen's leaders. However, the hon. Gentleman's point has some merit. I agree that the fishermen's leaders, and fishermen who are watching this debate, do not want to see mud slinging, and I do not intend to sling mud, but I must explain what has happened in recent years.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Dr. Strang: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Nicholls: How on earth can the hon. Gentleman expect the fishermen or anyone in the House to take seriously his suggestion that something radical should be done, when, during the five years that he was a Fisheries Minister, at a time when we were not crippled by qualified majority voting, he achieved precisely nothing?

Dr. Strang: I was never a Fisheries Minister, but I accept collective responsibility for all the decisions of that Government.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: What were you, then?

Dr. Strang: I shall tell the Minister where I was. I was in the Department of Energy and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I do not want to spend much time discussing history, because, as the hon. Member for Southend, East rightly reminded the House, the fishermen are not looking for mud slinging. I remind the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) that that Labour Government did not take the crucial decisions on the common fisheries policy. Indeed, previous Ministers of Agriculture have criticised the Labour Government for not settling. The House will understand that the settlement came after the Conservative party came to power.

I wish to be fair. The decisions implicit in our entry into the European Community under the leadership of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) were important in relation to setting the stage for the common fisheries policy. But let us stick to the historical facts. The Government have not represented the interests of our fishing industry in Europe, and their record at home is just as bad.

In the past three years, four Ministers of Agriculture have each made their mark on our fishing industry without dealing with any of the problems facing the industry. First, the present Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), was the mastermind of the unfair, unpopular and unworkable tie-up regime. The Government's tie-up regime was so iniquitous that the High Court referred it to the European Court of Justice. So this year, we had the demeaning spectacle of the UK Government fighting the UK fishing industry in the European courts.

On 17 October, the Minister of State, who is in his place, finally announced that the Government would not, after all, implement the tie-up regime. We welcomed that announcement. The Secretary of State for the Environment also deprived our industry of a decommissioning scheme for many years while other industries in Europe had that option. Five years ago, he said:

> "decommissioning is not the way to reduce the pressure on fish stocks".—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 1171.]

The right hon. Gentleman was running scared, following the appalling mismanagement of the Government's previous scheme.

Finally, the Minister bowed to pressure—from the industry, from Members of Parliament representing fishing constituencies and from the official Opposition—and introduced a decommissioning scheme in 1993. Unfortunately, that scheme was so small that the Agriculture Select Committee concluded that the cuts achieved would

> "be more than offset by efficiency gains in the remainder of the fleet".

Then we had the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and her bright new dawn. She was going to listen to the industry. In July 1993, the Government invited the industry to submit conservation proposals for technical conservation measures. The industry co-operated, and submitted detailed proposals. Two and a half years later, not a word in response has been heard from the Government.

Then we had the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave). It was he who negotiated the deal on Spanish access—and abstained on it, and came back and told the House what a great deal it was.

To the right hon. Gentleman's credit, however, he made one commendable commitment. In January 1995, as hon. Members will recall, the Labour party forced a debate to condemn the deal on Spanish access. To prevent a Government defeat in the House of Commons, the right hon. Gentleman announced that £28 million would be added to the £25 million that had already been allocated for decommissioning.

Decommissioning is not a panacea. It has an important part to play in reducing fishing effort to help conserve our fish stocks, but surely the Secretary of State for Scotland and his ministerial colleagues understand that it is unacceptable that we should be decommissioning vessels to facilitate additional fishing opportunities in waters around the UK for the fishing industry of one of our European partners—in this case, Spain.

I guess that that additional money provided for decommissioning made the vote in the House of Commons on 18 January 1995 one of the most expensive votes that the Government have ever had in the House of Commons.

Of course, the Government give with one hand and take away with the other. Our new Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), slipped into this year's Budget the announcement that the Government are to refuse to launch in England the European Union grant schemes for fisheries processing and marketing, port facilities and aquaculture production. The Minister also scrapped the national fishing harbour grant scheme.

That is the Government's record. They have imposed unfair and unworkable regulations on our fishing industry. They have failed effectively to represent the industry in Europe. The real problems and issues that have confronted our fishing industry for many years remain unaddressed by the Government.

One outstanding matter is an obligation to cut our fleet. Like all other EU member states, the UK must cut its fleet capacity under the multi-annual guidance programme. The present round began in 1992 and must be completed in 1996. As a result of the Government's past failures, we are expected to cut our fleet by 19 per cent. from 1991 levels by the end of next year.

The European Commission estimates that, by the end of last year, we had reduced our fleet by only 5 per cent. The latest figures show that, by the end of next year, we shall have reduced our fleet by about 10 per cent. in total.

That leaves 9 per cent. of the fleet that the Minister is supposed to get rid of between now and the end of 1996. I address my remarks to the Minister of State, who will reply to the debate, although I can understand that he has slipped back a row or two. Will the Minister describe to us the way in which he proposes to find the extra 9 per cent. fleet reductions? Is he just waiting for our fishermen to go bankrupt? I hope that, when he winds up, the Minister of State will set out what he expects the consequences to be if the Government fail to meet the UK's requirement under the multi-annual guidance programme.

It is becoming clear that the current common fisheries policy is fundamentally flawed. Its priority must be the conservation of fish stocks, but that is not the priority. Across Europe, too many boats still chase too few fish—that is not controversial.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay) *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I did say that I had given way for the last time, but I will give way to the hon. Lady, so that she can make an intervention rather than interrupt me from a sedentary position.

Mrs. Gorman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, where there is a common resource such as the fishing territory, there will always be exploitation? If he genuinely wants to prevent our fishing fleet from being cut still further, he should support the amendment tabled in my name and that of 17 of my colleagues. It calls for a 200-mile exclusive fishing zone around our coast where adequate, or to the median line, which would give our fishermen the equivalent of private territory in which to continue to ply their trade.

Dr. Strang: I think that the hon. Lady understands that the Opposition do not support the policy that I believe she espouses: withdrawal from the common fisheries policy, and possibly, withdrawal from the European Union itself. I should have thought that there was common ground on the subject of the additional Spanish access, and perhaps on other aspects of which I have been speaking this afternoon.

All member states have recognised the overcapacity, as has the UK fishing industry. As the Minister of State advised the House last month, nearly 60 per cent. of the main stocks in the waters we fish are at risk of biological collapse. The contentious issue is how to tackle the problem. The UK Government must take their share of the blame. Their recalcitrance over decommissioning, and the consequent failure to reduce pressure on stocks, will further hinder the chances of matching fishing effort to fish stocks.

Tonight we are debating proposals for next year's total allowable catches, which contain some heavy cuts which will be felt hard in various sectors of the UK fishing industry. There is particular concern at the effect of the cuts in North sea sole and plaice total allowable catches on our east coast industry. That is one problem that Ministers will face in the Fisheries Council later this week. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe will address those matters in greater detail. It is not enough for the fishing industry across Europe to be hit by short-term annual attempts to rectify a long-term and worsening problem.

The common fisheries policy needs to be reformed, to make conservation the priority. There is clearly a need for a review of quota management.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No, I will not.

The problem of discards has to be addressed; the need for conservation cannot be squared with the throwing back of dead fish. There is also a scientific aspect: total allowable catches and quotas should be based on scientific advice, and tempered by a political assessment of socio-economic needs. With that in mind, it makes no sense to cut the resources available to our scientists responsible for assessing the health of fish stocks.

As the fiasco over the Government's tie-up regime made clear, fisheries policy cannot be reformed in the face of united opposition from the fishing industry. As I have said before of the common fisheries policy, the priority of conservation is far too often overridden by the drive to eliminate any preferential treatment of the various national fleets. Fishing industries in all member states must have absolute confidence that the management of their fisheries is carried out in their interests. The Labour party has been arguing for some time that there is a powerful case for greater national control for each member state within the framework of a reformed common fisheries policy.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): Will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House what he means by the phrase "the whole of national management"?

Dr. Strang: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that there is no prospect for reform of the common fisheries policy. I shall tell him what the phrase means, and in time I shall develop it further. It means that, in practice, we must move towards a system of management that is closer to our coastal waters and to our fishing communities. We suggest that that will mean greater involvement by national Governments. The hon. Gentleman may not understand what the phrase means, but the fishermen understand that we cannot go further down the same road.

The amendment is designed to advance the case of the fishing industry and the fishing communities throughout the United Kingdom. I appeal to all right hon. and hon. Members to support it.

4.24 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Once again, the Government have devoted inadequate time to a debate on a very important subject. As a result, Madam Speaker, you are compelled to limit all speeches to 10 minutes until the wind-up. That gives those hon. Members who wish to do so little opportunity to discuss the subject seriously.

However, in my brief contribution I propose to deal with the abusive remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who ought to be ashamed of the way in which he degraded himself with his interruption. His comments follow the maniacal article by Christopher Booker, which appeared in yesterday's edition of the *Daily Mail*. The article's assertions are entirely false, and I shall deal with them now—although I shall have to go back in history further than other hon. Members have done so far in the debate.

Mr. Booker begins his article by referring to components of the "great fisheries disaster" of which he says:

"the first, of course, being Sir Edward Heath, in 1972, signing away all the fish in Britain's waters as 'a common European resource'".

There is no truth whatever in that statement. The principle was laid down by Act of Parliament, as were all principles. However, the policies to be followed were not laid down, and there was no common fisheries policy at that time—nor was one being discussed. That did not occur until 1983—10 years after I left office and my Government left power.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose—*

Sir Edward Heath: There is no time to allow interventions.

That is an entirely false statement about what happened at that time. Mr. Booker continues:

> "So secretively was this done (the House of Commons was kept in the dark) that Britain's desperate fishermen now openly accuse him of 'treason'".

I make two points in response to that. First, my actions were not secretive; I have a record in my own papers. The principle was published, and it was open for debate in the House. We debated our proposed entry into the Community day after day in both Houses of Parliament. Anybody who knew about the principle and who wished to discuss it had an opportunity to do so. As the records show, the issue was not discussed by anyone because no one regarded it as objectionable. Therefore, it is a lie to say that we were secretive and held back information from the House.

Mr. Booker refers to fishermen now openly accusing me of treason. I take that assertion with a grain of salt. I was born by a fishing port. On my way to school, I would watch the fishermen coming into port, and I would stop to talk to them. There were no fishermen after the war; that had all finished. I then spent 15 years ocean racing, and for most of that time I captained British teams. [*Laughter*] It is no laughing matter; I had close contact with fishermen at that time. We could owe our lives to fishermen in certain circumstance; we knew that, and we maintained good relations with them. I am not a traitor to my country, although the hon. Member for Bridlington may think I am.

The policy formulation followed. We retained the 12-mile rule: six miles entirely for us and six miles for other fishermen. Under the negotiations, the latter six miles were limited to fishermen who were already fishing in those waters. So the countries with fishermen already there could keep them there. It was a perfectly workable arrangement that everyone accepted.

At the time, it suited us to keep the six-mile rule for other countries because our fishermen were getting a large amount of their catch in Icelandic waters, not in local waters. The bitter war over Icelandic fishing when we were in Government led to the stretch of Iceland and the matter was finally dealt with in 1976—after we left office—by the Hague agreement in which the stretch was extended to 200 miles for every country.

Now we are hearing glib suggestions that we should all go back to a 200-mile limit. Anyone can see that it is not workable today, as any fisherman will agree. The waters covering the European Union, the Mediterranean and the North sea overlap to such a large extent that we have to have an arrangement and the way to reach an arrange is through the European Union. That is what we are doing. The Government are quite right to pursue that endeavour and it can be achieved successfully.

The other argument concerns the amount of fishing that is possible. Any dispute between fishermen and those responsible should be sorted out by mutual discussion. The scientific adviser says that there ought to be some limitation. I heard fishermen say on television yesterday that there are masses of fish wherever they go. That can be sorted out without having an open row and suggestions that the fisheries policy should be abandoned. It is so unnecessary.

After the Hague agreement in 1976, the first common fisheries policy was established in 1983 and has continued. People talk about the losses experienced by our fishermen as a result of the Government policy in 1970-73, but I have the figures that show the changes.

In 1970, the total catch by British vessels was 963,000 tonnes; in 1971 it was 964,000 tonnes; in 1972 it was 942,000 tonnes; in 1973 it was 998,000 tonnes and in 1974 it was 954,000 tonnes. Those figures are very similar and my Government were responsible for that power. It is why the article is false and the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington were abusive and I strongly object to them.

When we listen to the views of some of my hon. Friends today, we should note that there is a complete difference between the fishermen and the Euro-sceptics. Earlier today, a spokesman for the fishermen said that they wanted nothing whatever to do with Euro-sceptics. The fishermen value the European Union, and want a satisfactory arrangement within the European Union. The last thing they want to do is damage it.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): My right hon. Friend has been speaking to the Spanish fishermen.

Sir Edward Heath: I quite realise that some of my hon. Friends want to damage it. They can laugh all over their faces, because they do not have to think responsibly about the effect on other people.

I want to say something to my hon. Friends who represent the fishing industry. There is an important vote tonight. It may be quite important, not because it will change the position, but because of its political effect on the Conservative party. That is quite plain.

Of course my hon. Friends must take notice of the fishermen in their constituencies, but I also remind them of the remark by Burke so many centuries ago that is often repeated in the House. The purpose and responsibility of a representative is to look after the interests of his constituents, but he must also consider the interests of the country and the community. That is the basis of our work here.

Every hon. Member owes his constituents not only his energy "but his judgment". Those were Burke's words. We can offer our fishermen our energy, but my hon. Friends have to make a judgment tonight as to whether it is an event and a matter that justifies their defeating the Government. That is the crucial question to be answered. I do not think that many of our constituents, other than fishermen, would agree with that course of action. Indeed, I do not think that fishermen want to destroy the Government. Therefore, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to give careful thought to what they will do at the end of the debate.

4.34 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Minister said that the key element is conservation, the key problem being too many boats and too many fishermen chasing too few fish. There is agreement on both sides of the House about the importance of conservation, and the key to successful conservation is enforcement.

If there is to be successful enforcement, there must be the perception of a level playing field, as it were, on which all the Community's fishing fleets operate. That is not the current perception. British fishermen feel that they are bearing the brunt of enforcement in achieving conservation. They feel that other fleets and other fishermen are escaping their fair share of responsibility. As a result, there is growing demand for withdrawal from the common fisheries rather than reform. I agree that withdrawal from the CFP is not practicable. It is not possible without withdrawal from the European Union. It is not, therefore, a serious option to be considered. But no one should underestimate the anger that is felt in fishing communities and which leads them to opt for withdrawal.

The Minister seemed to be asking for details to flesh out a package of reform. Most importantly, we need allies. It is striking that the Government seem to be isolated on fisheries policy year after year. They seem to be consistently outvoted when they argue their case with the other fisheries Ministers. It is not difficult to understand why the Government are consistently isolated. They are out of step on almost every other issue within the European Community. For example, they are out of step on the social chapter. As we have seen over the past couple of days, they are out of step on economic and monetary union. They are out of step also in discussions on foreign and security policies and moving them forward. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the Government find themselves isolated on fisheries policy and unable to acquire the allies that are necessary if we are to defend British interests and obtain a fair deal for British fishermen.

The secretary of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, which covers the Western Isles fleet, visited Madrid last week with a BBC television crew. He went to the big fish market there and found small, immature fish openly available for sale. He saw juvenile fish that should not have been landed. They should not have been for sale in any EU state. Apparently he saw hake only 4 in long. Whatever rules and regulations we write, they will mean nothing unless there is fair enforcement overall. If they mean nothing, the confidence of our fishing community will be undermined and eroded. As I said to the Secretary of State, the latest figures that I have show that there are only 12 fisheries officers in the whole of Spain.

Mr. Baldry *rose*—

Mr. Macdonald: Perhaps the Minister has the latest figures.

Mr. Baldry: In fact, there are 30 fisheries inspectors working for the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture; in addition, some 240 fisheries inspectors work for the autonomous Spanish regions, and 300 civil guard personnel devote part of their duties to fisheries enforcement work. Spain has 31 patrol vessels of the Spanish naval marine unit. Some 106 vessels are operated by regional Governments and the marine civil guard—all on fisheries protection work—and there are six aerial surveillance helicopters, so that is quite a substantial input by the Spanish Government in enforcing their fisheries regulations.

Mr. Macdonald: In that case, how can such a vast force fail to notice four-inch long fish being sold in the main market of the capital city of Spain? The Minister cannot simply recite figures and say that the number of fisheries officers in Spain has increased from 14 to 30, compared with 200 in the UK, without also acknowledging that there is a real problem: the perceived lack of a level playing field, whereby British fishermen have to work within the rules, because of the very tight and efficient enforcement of the rules in the United Kingdom, while Spanish fishermen get away with landing juvenile fish and breaking the rules time and again. That reality underlies the fear in relation to Spanish access. The Minister must address that point, and he must get allies—this is the key point—in the Council of Fisheries Ministers to help him to do that if he is to satisfy British fishermen.

Another aspect which plagues, troubles and depresses British fishermen is the existence of the Spanish flagships, which are counted against the British register, and their impact on the whole decommissioning process. Some 28 per cent. of the UK-registered fleet of more than 10 metres are now Spanish owned; they are crewed by Spaniards and land their catches in Spain. That exceeds the amount by which Britain is supposed to reduce its overall fleet to meet the EC guidelines. The UK is required to decommission 19 per cent. to meet EC targets. Unless we do that, our fishermen cannot get any aid to help to rebuild and renew their fleet. Yet the Spanish-flagged element counting against the British fleet is far in excess of what we have to decommission.

Worse than that, hardly any of the Spanish-flagged vessels are decommissioning. They make a massive contribution to our perceived overcapacity and yet make no contribution whatever to the solution of decommissioning. Where is the level playing field? A disaster is looming, of which the Minister must be aware. If it is not causing him sleepless nights, we fear for the future of the British fishing industry. If the decommissioning target of 19 per cent. is met exclusively by the real British boats within the British fleet, by the end of the decommissioning process, almost half the British-registered fleet will be Spanish owned. I fear what the reaction in British fishing communities will be if that were to happen.

I ask the Minister, when he replies, to address himself specifically to that question, because those vessels are making a mockery of the common fisheries policy, the British Government and their protections. It is still going on. Spanish boats are still being added against the British register. I appreciate that the British Government tried to find a solution. They were warned at the time that it would fail and it did, because it went against EC guidelines. It is vital that the British Government address that problem and find a solution. I suggest that one possible solution would be to have a real linkage between boats that are registered in Britain and which have to operate economically in Britain—that is, establish some kind of economic linkage. For example, boats would have to make a proportion of their landings, say three quarters—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

4.45 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I sometimes think back with nostalgia to the rather cosy debates that we used to have a number of years ago, when only Members who represented fishing industries, like myself, took part. On the other hand, I warmly welcome the wider focus now given to the fishing industry, because we will begin to find a solution to the plight—that is the only word to

[Mr. David Harris]

describe it—of our fishermen and the difficulties that they face only through the concern of many hon. Members or, indeed, people in the country.

I do not suppose that there has ever been a debate on this subject in the history of the House in which a former Prime Minister has spoken, and I very much welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has done so. I shall say a few words about his concluding remarks, because for all I know, they may have been aimed at me or, indeed, my colleagues who have the honour to represent fishing communities, and he was right to point out the precise dilemma that we face.

I do not want to vote against my Government tonight. I do not want to see my Government defeated. That would not be in the interests of my country or of the fishing industry. However, it is incumbent on people like myself to speak up for the industry and to fight for it, and in my years in the House that is what I have sought to do. One television interviewer said tonight, "Surely you want to be popular with your fishermen." I would like to be popular, but if one goes into politics one cannot always be popular, and at the end of the day one has to do what is right. What makes me despair is what has happened in recent years to our fishing industry and to the fishing industries of other countries.

That brings me to the amendment tabled by a number of my hon. Friends who are usually known as "Euro-sceptics". I welcome their interest in the fishing industry because it focuses attention on the difficulties of that industry. Having said that, I think that their amendment is misguided, particularly in the context of today's debate, because what the debate should be about is, of course, what will be before the Fisheries Ministers when they meet in Brussels on Thursday and Friday in relation to the setting of quotas for the coming year. That will affect in the immediate term the livelihood of fishermen in my constituency, because some pretty massive cuts are proposed for individual quotas and total allowable catches.

I refer to one of the reductions that the Commission proposes on species that are of direct concern to the fishermen of the south-west of England, and Cornwall in particular. I will not go into the precise details, but in the English channel a reduction of 41 per cent. is proposed for the allowable catch of sole. In the Bristol channel, a reduction of 27 per cent. is proposed. For plaice, a reduction of 34 per cent. is proposed. Those reductions follow on from reductions in previous years. What we are seeing, therefore, is cheating on a massive scale, because fishermen have to cheat to survive. They do not do it willingly; they loathe cheating, but that is the system that we now have. The problem is, what on earth can we do to change that system?

In their amendment, the Liberal Democrats ask for the review of the common fisheries policy to be brought forward. That may sound attractive, but unless the voting system is altered there will be a repetition of what happened on 23 December last year, when the United Kingdom was outvoted and the rest of the Community voted—under qualified majority voting—to allow 40 Spanish boats to fish in the waters of the former Irish box, where stocks were already under pressure. Where is the conservation in that? My friend—I regard him as my friend—the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), the Liberal Democrats' agriculture and fisheries spokesman, is a sensible man. His party wants to abolish the veto altogether. I want to restore it, however, for the purposes of the review of the CFP.

For the past three days, people have been asking me, "How are you going to vote?" I am not sure how we are going to vote. I must face up to the dilemma posed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup: the balance between what I regard as in the national interest—maintaining the Government—against the importance of speaking up for the fishermen in my constituency. I make no secret of the fact that, together with my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks)—who, I am sure, shares my views entirely—and my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), I have spent a good deal of time talking to Ministers. We have presented them with a number of proposals, in particular on the central issue that should be debated here tonight—the reductions in quotas. I have received certain assurances, which I value very much, on what I believe will be the negotiating position of Her Majesty's Government when the Fisheries Council meets at the end of the week. I am fairly confident that, just before Christmas, we shall not be faced with reductions such as those that I mentioned earlier.

In my amendment—which, of course, has not been selected—I have asked my hon. Friends in the Government to negotiate changes upwards in the case of quotas which are not based on hard scientific evidence. The fishermen's organisations reckon that there is scope for that. I accept that in some instances cuts will have to be made, because the scientific evidence points irrefutably in that direction. I accept the conservation argument.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) mentioned fairness, and that is at the root of the fishermen's anger: they do not think that the system is fair. Let me give an example. I am glad to see that the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is present. In the wake of the Budget, the Ministry decided to abolish harbour grants in England, but not in Scotland nor, I believe, in Wales. That is not fair.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is right. I have listened carefully to colleagues' views over the past few days, and my hon. Friend—along with my hon. Friends the Members for South Hams (Mr. Steen), for South-East Cornwall, for Falmouth and Camborne and for Wyre (Mr. Mans)—has made the importance of the harbour, marketing and processing grants to local fishing industry. I see the force of their case, especially their arguments that expectations had been raised about the giving of those grants earlier in the year. In the light of their representations, we have decided to reinstate the grants.

Mr. Harris: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. The decision will be particularly welcome in Newlyn, where an application of long standing was being rejected because of the cuts.

All hon. Members on both sides of the House must find a way forward so that we can restore real confidence to the fishing industry. I wish that we could put aside party politics, and politics involving the future of Europe, and concentrate on achieving a solution. That is what our fishermen need and deserve.

4.54 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I share many of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), whom it is my privilege and pleasure to follow in so many fisheries debates.

This debate has attracted a wider audience than usual. Despite all the media speculation, we would do the fishing industry a gross disservice if we did not spend some time focusing on issues of particular interest to that industry at the Council meeting that will take place on Thursday and Friday this week. As the hon. Member for St. Ives pointed out, there are to be considerable reductions in total allowable catches of a range of species, and that will have serious consequences for the industry as it plans for 1996 and the future.

As has been said, there is growing concern—there has always been concern, but it seems to be increasing annually—about the scientific basis on which some of the TACs are decided. Only a few years ago, the fishing industry was being told that the North sea whiting was a predatory fish, and that it would therefore be helpful to catch as many as possible. Dangled before the industry was the possibility of smaller mesh sizes and lower minimum landing sizes—which, in fairness to it, it resisted. In 1990, the TAC for whiting was 135,000 tonnes; although the fishermen were told to fish as much whiting as they could, the TAC has now been reduced to 67,000 tonnes. There is something wrong with that.

The Minister will be aware that the Scottish industry in particular would like the Hague preference to be invoked in respect of North sea whiting. Is that on the Government's agenda for Thursday's negotiations?

Mr. Baldry: Yes.

Mr. Wallace: I welcome that news. Let me add that, when the Hague preference has been invoked in the past, there has been a tendency to average it out rather than bringing it up to the full amount; the industry will be looking for the full amount.

Western mackerel is an important species in my constituency. In terms of quota allocation, tonnage and horsepower, 30 per cent. of the United Kingdom's pelagic fleet is based in Shetland, but what has happened to the TACs for western mackerel? In 1992, they were increased by 15 per cent., in 1993 by 10 per cent. and in 1994 by eight per cent. On the basis of those growing TACs, over the past two or three years and into next year, constituents of mine will have invested some £50 million in new vessels. That is an important business decision.

If a Japanese company had invested that amount in microchips, no doubt there would have been a press conference at the Scottish Office, with the Secretary of State cutting the first sod for the factory. It is a substantial investment, which has been made on the basis of what were originally growing TACs. However, they were reduced by 20 per cent. this year, and it is predicted that they will be reduced by 33 per cent. next year. That is no long-term basis for stability on which the industry can make serious investments.

It appears that this year Norway has gone forward by the lowest common denominator, on the basis that it sees opportunities in the Atlanto-Scandian herring negotiations. If he has time, will the Minister confirm that the United Kingdom—the European Union, indeed, but with the United Kingdom receiving a share—will seek a share-out of the winter herring, now known as the Atlanto-Scandian herring, in the waters to the north of Shetland? A premature allocation would be regrettable; it would be better if UK vessels were allowed to fish the stock as they have in the past.

We may well find that a substantial part of that stock can be caught in European Union waters, which would entitle the European Union and, in turn, the United Kingdom to a substantial share in the future. That would help to offset some of the disappointments and lost fishing opportunities that have resulted from the cuts in mackerel and herring TACs.

The hon. Member for St. Ives mentioned plaice. The reduction in plaice TACs has had a serious effect on the east coast, and there has been a knock-on effect because of the fewer opportunities for swaps. That applies not only to the east coast, but all around the channel ports and into the south-west. Those in the south-west fear that, if opportunities in regard to quota stocks of Bristol channel and North sea plaice are cut, many of the non-quota stocks fished by fishermen in the south-west will be under ever greater pressure. It is important to take that dimension into account.

I could go into many details, but I shall deal finally with the west coast nephrops precautionary total allowable catch, which was originally set at 16,000 tonnes. That TAC was based on very little scientific evidence. My understanding is that the scientists do not know when prawns spawn or how long they live: it is an inadequate science. Over the years the TAC was reduced to 12,600 tonnes on no more detailed or sophisticated scientific evidence than that for some time that was what was being landed. It appears that that amount was fished out early this year and it is thought that returning to 16,000 tonnes, which was satisfactory in the past, would give adequate fishing opportunity to those who fish the west coast nephrops. I ask the Minister to consider that in his negotiations later this week.

Underlying all these problems is the unsatisfactory nature of the TAC arrangements. There is no proper mechanism to channel into the decision-making process the fishermen's experience of stocks and the change in behaviour. I understand that there were substantial quantities of cod in the Humber in the latter part of this year when boats were tied up and the fishermen could not go after it.

In the 1992 changes to the common fisheries policy there is reference to a scientific, technical and economic committee. But economic and social consequences seldom seem to be taken into account. As I have said, the roller-coaster approach is damaging not just the catching sector but the processing and marketing sectors. If we could take forward the multi-annual strategic approach that was agreed in 1992 it would encourage scientists to look to the longer term when considering TACs and not base their conclusions on just one year's findings. That could lead to greater stability in the industry.

I reject the idea that a 200-mile limit within which Britain would have complete sovereignty would be a solution to our problems. As I said in the debate on 22 November, a 200-mile limit off Canada has not stopped the collapse of the cod industry on the Atlantic seaboard nor has it stopped the overfishing of pollock on the Russian pacific coast. A limit is no panacea.

[Mr. Wallace]

I regret, although it is no reflection on the Chair, that we cannot vote on the amendment that was tabled by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and his hon. Friends because it would have been bombed out of court. By a long way there is no majority in the House for Britain to renege on its international obligations and withdraw from the common fisheries policy. The policy requires a thoroughgoing reform along the lines that I suggested in the debate on 22 November, and there must be proper enforcement.

During the Secretary of State's speech the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) intervened and spoke about the hours of enforcement. That was one of the most telling points in the debate because if the fisheries policy is common its enforcement must be common as well. That has been missing and the fishermen perceive gross injustice and unfairness. We need to address that as efficiently, effectively and vigorously as possible.

My hon. Friends and I will vote against the Government. There are a good number of reasons for doing that and many of them have been set out in the amendment. The Government had a late conversion on decommissioning although hon. Members in all parts of the House mentioned it time and again in fisheries debates. European taxpayers' money is funding the modernisation of the Spanish fishing fleet, but we are not allowed to have access to funds to modernise the British fishing fleet. The days-at-sea legislation had a damaging effect and it was abandoned only after recourse to the European Court of Justice.

I went through the Division lists and it would be interesting for other hon. Members to do that to see how many of the 17 hon. Members who signed one of the amendments on the Order Paper voted in favour of restrictions on the amount of time that fishermen could spend at sea. There is also the whole question of Spanish access and the issue of a secret deal. The Secretary of State referred again to the fact that the House agreed to Spanish and Portuguese accession in 1986, but he failed to mention that the terms of that agreement were secretly changed. The House has never been properly told why that happened. The fact that there was no support for Britain last year on the detail of Spanish access shows how we have lost friends, and that in turn damages our ability to support our fishing industry.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said that from outside the Community Norway seems to have a better deal for its fishermen. Within the Community, Spain seems to do well for its fishermen. The Government invite the House to back them and say that they will support the best interests of British fishermen, but many of us long ago gave up on the Government knowing what are the best interests of British fishermen.

5.4 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): There is no doubt that the dictated common fisheries policy is driving the fishing community in Northern Ireland and in other parts of the United Kingdom into severe decline. Fishing in Northern Ireland is worth more than £20 million a year and offers employment to more than 2,000 people, 1,200 of whom are actively engaged on trawlers. It is an important industry but every year it receives further body blows that are forcing fishermen out of the industry altogether.

The main concern of Ulster fishermen is the allocation of quotas in the Irish sea. In past years Northern Ireland's fishermen have witnessed those allocations being greatly reduced. For instance, since 1990 the total allowable catch in the Irish sea has been reduced by 40 per cent. The whiting allocation has been cut by 44 per cent. and the TAC for prawns, which are the foundation of the Ulster fleet, has been cut by 25 per cent. Government policies in alliance with the European Union mean that Northern Ireland fishermen cannot build vessels that are capable of fishing the deep waters to the west of Ireland and Scotland. It is ridiculous that Northern Ireland fishermen have to sit idly by while fishermen from other parts of the European Union are able to exploit those resources.

The strong feeling among many fishermen is that they are forced into quotas which bear no relation to the fish that are to be found in the fishing grounds. On top of that, the depleted quotas are further hit by the detrimental effect of the Hague preference on United Kingdom allocations. That preference, which is part of the common fisheries policy, awards fishermen in the Irish Republic extra fish at the expense of their northern colleagues.

In 1995 British fishermen in the Irish sea lost 805 tonnes of cod to the Irish Republic, which annually fails to catch its own allocation. That example is repeated in other stocks. Consequently, the United Kingdom has to swap away some of its other quota allocations so as to regain some of the fish without which vessels would be tied up at the quays. Despite the return of cod quota British fishermen are still 290 tonnes short of the previous year's allocation of Irish sea cod. The Hague preference along with drastic quota cuts mean that Ulster's fishermen are being driven from their traditional fishing grounds.

A major factor complicating matters this year is the uncertainty surrounding the future of international swaps. It is important that those swaps should proceed because by means of them fishermen are at least able to gain access to a quota that would not otherwise be available. The nettle of the iniquitous Hague preference system, which acts to the detriment of Northern Ireland fishermen, must be grasped. Additionally, we have the prospect, from 1 January next year, of the entry of up to 40 Spanish fishing vessels into the Irish box, while restrictions are placed on people who have fished in the Irish box for generations. Spanish fishing vessels, renowned for disregarding fishing controls and regulations, are being allowed in.

In relation to 1996 total allowable catches and quotas, it is the same depressing story of more cuts. Something needs to be done about the haddock TAC for the Irish sea. The ridiculously small quota allocated for haddock means that fishermen are not able to take advantage of the tremendous haddock fishery. There is a proposal to have further cuts in cod to the tune of 6.9 per cent. Cuts are also proposed for plaice and sole. Those are unacceptable to Ulster fishermen.

Although Northern Ireland and United Kingdom fishermen are having quotas cut and are being rigidly regulated and policed by the authorities under European Union regulations, the same cannot be said of other EU countries, which makes fishermen very angry. A recent comparison of member state enforcement resources, undertaken by the EU itself, showed that the United Kingdom was devoting far more resources than any other member to enforce the fishing regulations.

I refer to a paper issued by the EU on the European Commission's estimate of existing resources and their utilisation. I find that, annually, Belgium puts in 15 surveillance hours, Denmark none, Germany none, Spain 50, France 500, Ireland 700, the Netherlands none, Portugal 100 and our own nation 4,800. Those are not my figures, but EU figures. That must alarm everyone in the fishing industry. It is a pity that there are not a few Nelsons back in the fishing industry to put a telescope to a blind eye and to let the fishermen get a proper quota. We are told that we should not say those things, but if the law is unfair, it must be dealt with, and this law is unfair. No wonder our fishermen are angry and frustrated, not only at the EU laws that have created the framework for their industry's destruction, but at the zeal with which these regulations are policed by our own authorities.

On a separate, but not entirely unrelated, issue, 1995 saw the European Court judgment on the fishing industry's judicial review of Her Majesty's Government's proposed days-at-sea legislation. Although the court's decision came down on the Government's side, it was clear to many people that the industry won a moral victory through the withdrawal of the proposals. The industry, however, incurred the legal costs. Why will not the Government say that they will not demand that money from the fishing industry? Today, one concession has been given. That on the legal costs would be a good concession to give to the fishing industry.

That is another difficult burden for the industry to bear at a time when it is coming under increasing pressure. The Minister should consider waiving the Ministry's legal costs associated with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations' legal challenge to the Government on this issue. It is all right for a former Prime Minister to tell us that all fishermen are for the European Community. He should come on some of the ships that I have been on and he would hear a different story altogether. Many fishing industry members are outraged at what is happening. I agree with a colleague sitting along this Bench, the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). As we have handed away power after power to Europe, we are not now going to be in a position to remedy this situation.

5.14 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): In the course of a largely knockabout speech, the Secretary of State for Scotland aimed a sideswipe at the Euro-sceptics by saying that much of their interest in the fish industry was "belated"—I think that was the word he used. Of course that is correct—it is belated. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) for answering the question asked by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and pointing out that, of the 17 hon. Members on the Euro-sceptic amendment this evening, 13 voted with the Government on fishing industry tie-ups on 9 December 1992.

Many of us, including the Secretary of State, may not have records that we would like to remember in relation to the fishing industry. I remember a debate in 1991 on tie-ups, when, as a junior Scottish Office Minister, he sat with his feet on that Dispatch Box, sniggering, while many of us tried to argue a case about fishing safety and safety at sea in the fishing industry. Unfortunately for him, that debate has not been forgotten around the communities of Scotland.

There has been some entertainment this evening for those of us who have observed the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food touring the Back Benches, speaking to the potential rebels in the vote tonight. Now we know that the inducement that is being offered is to restore the financial instrument for fisheries guidance, which was cancelled only last month in England. I am not sure whether the fishing harbour grant scheme, which was cancelled last month in both Scotland and England, is to be restored as well, but the night is still young.

My advice to the potential rebels on the Tory Back Benches tonight is, "For goodness' sake, do not be bought cheaply, as so many of your predecessors have been in fishing debates." I remember a previous Minister of Agriculture standing at that Dispatch Box, saying that he gave his word to the House that under no circumstances would the regulations elsewhere in Europe be any different from those pertaining on United Kingdom fishermen. How many of us believe that that commitment has been kept and honoured in the past few years?

Therefore, my advice to Conservative Members thinking of rebellion is, "Watch your votes," because what is said in honeyed words now might be different from what is said once the danger of the vote has passed.

I want to ask the Minister three specific questions, and I hope that he will deal with them in summing up. Earlier, in an intervention, I made the point that it seemed evident that Spain, from within the common fisheries policy, and Norway from outwith the CFP, have secured a better deal for their fishermen than the UK has in the past few years.

The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), reminded us of the Hague preference, which is another example that is worth remembering. That preference, which has been so useful to our fishermen, was achieved because of the intervention of Garrett Fitzgerald when he was Irish Foreign Minister in 1976. It was the Irish who secured the Hague preference, which has been so useful to fishermen north of Bridlington in the past few years. Substantial evidence exists, therefore, of the point that was made earlier in the debate.

One reason why the Norwegians have been dictating the pace of the negotiations is that they, in relation to the pelagic side, have the comfort of the new 1 million tonne revived stock of Atlanto-Scandian herring. I want to ask the specific question: as that is an international stock, what percentage of it does the Minister believe the UK and the Scottish pelagic fleet will be entitled to when it comes back on stream in the coming year?

Mr. Baldry: On the part of the stock that is in international waters, those negotiations will start in the new year, and obviously, we will seek to obtain the largest possible quota for the UK industry—it is as straightforward and as simple as that. One must remember, however, that a sizeable part of that stock is in Norwegian waters.

Mr. Salmond: I will take that as an indication that the Minister appreciates the importance of that stock in a circumstance where the pelagic fleet will face tough times as a result of the Norwegian negotiations.

[Mr. Salmond]

The second precise point is on cod and haddock. From scientific evidence, it seemed to fishermen representatives that there was room for an increase in cod and haddock total allowable catches, but the TAC was restricted for cod, and there has been no increase for haddock. There is an important point here. Many of us believe that a relaxation in the TACs would result in fewer fish being caught and being discarded. Will the Minister return to that point, given that the scientific evidence does not seem to support the tough stance that the Norwegians successfully forced on the European Commission two weeks ago?

Thirdly, I want to emphasise the point about whiting made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. It is impossible to fathom the Commission's thinking on the whiting stock. A few years ago, it was defined as a predatory species that had to be fished down, and the minimum landing size had to be reduced so as to cut its numbers, so why is its TAC now being sharply reduced? Does the Minister intend to invoke the Hague preference to try to ensure that there will be at least some fishing opportunities in the coming year for that important stock for the Scottish industry?

I am greatly concerned about structural support for the fishing industry. In a memorable phrase, Cecil Finn of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation said that the industry was

"still wallowing in the broken water of the do nothing years".

He was talking about the years between 1987 and 1993, when—because of the obduracy of the then Minister of Agriculture, who set his face against decommissioning schemes because of his personal experience as a Minister in previous years—although the United Kingdom industry had 12 to 15 per cent. of the overall European fleet, it received only about 2 per cent. of the structural funding.

That put our industry and our communities at a huge competitive disadvantage. It now looks as though, in both objective 1 areas, and certainly in my area of Grampian, the PESCA scheme, which was introduced to try to compensate fishing-dependent communities for the effects of the difficulties that the industry has faced over the past few years, is also being jeopardised. That is happening because of the Scottish Office's refusal to allow local authorities the additional cash required to qualify for European funding. I hope that the Minister will pick up that point, too, in his summing up.

My third key point about structural support is that it would be helpful to clarify whether the harbour scheme is back on for this year. That was not clear from the exchange between the Minister and the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris).

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening, because the rest of the House heard, and clearly understood, that I have heard and carefully considered the representations by some of my hon. Friends, and that the harbour scheme has been reinstated.

Mr. Salmond: For Scotland too?

Mr. Michael Forsyth *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: Just a nod will do.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman will give way, I shall happily answer the question.

Mr. Salmond *indicated assent.*

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Scottish position was that we did not follow the English on FIFG—the financial instrument of fisheries grant. But yes, the harbour scheme will be open.

Mr. Salmond: We know about the FIFG. That is why I asked about the harbour scheme, and I thank the Minister for confirming the position there.

The question marks over structural support at this difficult time for the fishing industry, and the track record on decommissioning, represent one of the Government's great failures over the industry. But the Government have had many other failures, too. The failure on flag of convenience vessels was a policy failure, which caused the industry huge difficulties and totally wrecked any hope of reaching the multi-annual guidance programme targets. The Government's entire strategy floundered because of that decision. I served on the Committee on the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, and the Government were warned that the use of nationality as a basis might flounder in the European Court, but they went ahead just the same.

There was also a failure concerning accelerated access for the Spanish. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) gave way to the wrong Euro-sceptic, when, earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) was about to tell us of the secret deal that resulted in the Spanish being allowed, almost unilaterally, to revise their own treaty of accession, and thus to secure accelerated access to western waters. The hon. Lady was about to reveal to the House what the Government had had in mind, and whether there had been any concession by Spain on qualified majority voting. She should have been encouraged to continue.

The Government's biggest failure has been their failure to bring about a coherent fisheries policy. Today we have heard that a review group is to meet, and is expected to report early next year. However, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is still awaiting the formal reply to its submission of September 1993, which contained a series of suggested ways of approaching the problems of the industry.

Time and time again, the fishing industry has offered the Government a strategy, and time and time again, the people at the Dispatch Box have greeted it with deaf ears. That is why, when fishing communities all around the coast have been sold down the river so many times by Ministers, if the Government are defeated on their fisheries policy tonight, there will be rejoicing in every fishing port the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

5.24 pm

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government can be assured that they will have a majority tonight, because members of the Labour party intend to demonstrate their support for the fishing industry by staying at home—preferring, I regret to say, a rather longer Christmas holiday than they would otherwise have.

Of course, there are some notable exceptions, such as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). The hon. Gentleman and I can remember when fishing was an important industry for Lincolnshire; no one can claim that it is now. Fishing is in serious decline. I believe that fewer than 20 boats now go out of Grimsby, and in Boston we have only 40 boats in all, only a fraction of which go out at any one time.

Those who argue on behalf of the fishing industry have said again and again that the common fisheries policy will cause the total allowable catch to go down and down, because it contains no effective conservation measures. I shall draw attention to two main factors. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has been considering them, and I hope that he will argue them effectively on Thursday.

The first problem is the size of nets. We are now catching immature little fish that have had too little opportunity to grow. Most of the cod we now catch are half the size that they should be. From a conservation standpoint, that is woeful.

Secondly, there are the discards; I am sure that you know all about them, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Discards are the fish that are thrown back dead into the sea, because we are not allowed to catch them. If those were only a few fish, no one would much mind, but various estimates have been made of their numbers, and the best is that discards probably account for about 1,000 million fish a year. Surely that is a crime against conservation. I hope that the Minister of State will raise that matter vigorously on Thursday, and press instead for a levy on excess catches.

Hon. Members with some part of the inshore fishing industry in their constituencies know that, as matters now stand, despite what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said—I do not know where my right hon. Friend has met fishermen, but I suspect that it cannot have been in this country—no fisherman has any confidence in the future of the industry after the year 2002.

Fishermen know that, when that day comes, their existing rights will have to be renegotiated, and they have no idea where they will stand then. That has created appalling uncertainty in the fishing industry. Fishing has been largely a father-to-son affair. No father in the fishing industry with a teenage son will encourage his son to join him as he will have joined his own father years before.

Moreover, even with the old dilapidated boats that we have in Boston and elsewhere, no fisherman is going to replace his boat—partly because, in the present uncertainty, no bank will lend him the many thousands of pounds that that would cost. Indeed, hardly any fishermen I know are willing to spend large sums on maintaining their boats as they should be maintained if they are to continue fishing for a few more years.

Many inshore fishermen in their forties ask me whether it is not time to get out of fishing now, rather than wait for 2002, when they will be in their fifties and it will be far more difficult for them to find another occupation. The year 2002 may seem far away to many of us, but for people concerned with inshore fishing, it is drawing close.

My hon. Friend the Minister knows that last year, at a representative gathering of fishermen in Lowestoft, I said that the common fisheries policies was so absurd, and acted so unjustly against our fishermen, that I was convinced that the Government would renegotiate it. I was pressed about that, and I said that I felt so certain about the matter that I would not reapply for the Whip until the Government renegotiated. I only hope that, on Thursday, my hon. Friend the Minister will enable me to put that matter right.

5.29 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): It is somewhat ironic that, at a time of year when most of commerce and industry is looking forward to the festive season, we are debating an industry that is in a state of depression and is wondering what fate will befall it after this week's EU conference. It has been a momentous year in fishing, with traumas, successes and legal victories.

Decommissioning, which is a reflection of the depression in the fishing industry, should not be taken as a victory. It has certainly helped in trying to eradicate some of the hardships in the industry, but it is not a victory in itself. Northern Ireland's fishermen are worse off than most other UK fishermen.

My constituency has three of the four fishing ports in Northern Ireland, and they depend very much on the fisheries in the Irish sea area VIIa. Local fishermen must cope with quotas—which, they say, bear no relation to the fish to be found in the area—but the depleted quotas will be further hit by the detrimental effect of the Hague preference allocations. Unfortunately, this year new complications have crept into the equation in the shape of the uncertainty surrounding international swaps. It is vital that the swaps proceed. They provide a much-needed lifeline that sustains viable fisheries in area VII, and their importance in the wider western waters area is crucial.

My constituency is unique as it has a water border with the Republic of Ireland. Fishermen from my constituency, who are restricted by quotas, can see their colleagues just a couple of miles away in the Irish Republic merrily fishing. They are not catching the quotas allocated to them under the Hague preference. It is important that the international swaps are negotiated in such a way that Northern Ireland fishermen get the better part of their traditional access to the Irish sea fisheries in area VIIa. The swaps must not be used as a back door for additional Spanish or other European fishing fleets to gain access to protected waters.

I understand that evidence given by the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management at a recent meeting seemed to be based on fairly weak foundations. The ACFM seems to contend that if a TAC is not caught, the fish do not exist. That is nonsense and it has no scientific base whatsoever. The vast majority of countries annually fail to catch their TAC, and sometimes only 50 per cent. or 60 per cent. of the catch is taken up. On that basis, scientists propose to make further cuts, which seems to be totally unscientific and illogical. The cuts will have little or no impact on nations that do not catch their TAC, but a very substantial impact on those countries whose TAC is so restricted as to be minimal.

Northern Ireland's fishermen have been crying out for some time for something to be done with the area VII haddock TAC. Fishermen tell me, and I have no reason to doubt them, that there is a very substantial haddock fishery, but as the United Kingdom quota is so small—it is only some 600 tonnes—they have been unable to take advantage of the abundance of stock. Despite all their efforts, they have been told that the stock merits only a brief mention in this year's report by fisheries' scientists, despite the fact that the scientists agree that the fish are there. What are fishermen supposed to do? Why is the scientific community not as quick to advise on increases in quotas as it is to advise on cuts?

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

The second matter to which I should like to refer is cod area VIIa. The ACFM advised that there should be almost 7 per cent. of further cuts in this TAC. The cut is not as severe as in previous years, but fishermen in Northern Ireland have no confidence in the ACFM's proposals. Catches during 1995 in the species and sector have been as good as, if not better than, in previous years, so how distinct to area VIIa is the cod stock?

Has any calculation been made of the consequences of decommissioning? One of the consequences is that there will be a reduction in the effort put into fishing. Have these points been taken into consideration? I contend that if they had, the proposed 6.9 per cent. reduction in cod for area VIIa would not have been proposed.

Fishermen have little confidence in the ACFM's proposals for plaice and sole because, again, it appears that an unscientific approach has been taken to the problem. There is substantial evidence of well-recovered stocks of haddock, cod, plaice and sole in the sector.

I hope that in their negotiations towards the end of the week, Ministers will take the matter on board and challenge the evidence that has been given. It seems that our European partners do not take proper cognisance of the scientific evidence, which is freely available, and they seem panic-stricken as they go for further and further quota cuts.

I referred earlier to the relationship between the fishermen of Northern Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland. We have heard from other hon. Members that some of the quotas are simply not caught in the Republic of Ireland. Each year, the Department of Agriculture at the Northern Ireland Office enters into negotiations with its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to arrange for local swaps of those parts of the quota that will not be caught.

Could not the Government enter into a more meaningful and long-term agreement with the fisheries department in the Republic of Ireland, whereby there could be an exchange of unfished quotas between the two fishing fleets? After all, until a few decades ago, the fleets had a common approach and common fishing areas, and they still have the same interests. Could not the Government make this a more meaningful and permanent arrangement, so that the element of uncertainty between the north and south of Ireland could be eliminated?

I hope that there will be an increase in quotas for cod and whiting in area VII, and that the quota arrangements for haddock in area VIIa will be enhanced to take cognisance of the scientific evidence, which seems to show that fishing shoals have returned there. Finally, there is a need for more permanent swap arrangements with the Republic of Ireland.

5.39 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I have no interest to declare in the debate, other than that as a practical butcher and farmer, I have enormous sympathy with the plight of that other group of intensely practical people—British fishermen—as a result of the machinations of the common fisheries policy. I have not hidden my ambition to see this country leave the CFP, which is also the object of the Save Britain's Fish campaign, to which I and several of my colleagues have pledged our support.

Some in the Chamber will seek to question my motives for supporting the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). I do not impugn the motives of the integrationists on these Benches, and I trust that they will desist from impugning mine. Some people recognise the danger that the renegotiation of the CFP by 2002 would, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris),

> "mean the end of the fishing industry as we know it".—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 581.]

However, if those people, perversely, do not support amendment (b), suffice to say that the ballot box will be the final arbiter.

I have spent some time reading and re-reading the *Official Report* of the debates that took place on 23 October and 22 November to refresh my memory of the arguments deployed by the Minister of State in defence of the CFP. I accept that his basic position is as set out in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter), when he stated:

> "Withdrawal from the common fisheries policy is not an option, either legally or practically."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. *969*.]

I will deal with those points in due course.

My hon. Friend's case against withdrawal from the CFP seems to hang on three points: first, the time that it would take the Government to negotiate satisfactory bilateral agreements with other countries; secondly, the absence of any especially strong or co-ordinated objections to the CFP in the past; and, thirdly, the legal problems associated with disengagement.

I trust that the House will recognise that none of those arguments is sufficient in itself to justify the perpetuation of a regime that is so obviously defective in that it is precipitating the demise of British fishing industry, failing to protect fishing stocks, encouraging short-term exploitation at the expense of genuine conservation, making criminals of otherwise honest people alienating public opinion and perpetuating the situation in which a vital British interest is compromised by the process of qualified majority voting.

On the point about negotiating satisfactory bilateral agreements, it is a fact that the Government are concluding such agreements with all sorts of countries on all sorts of issues as a matter of routine. Does my hon. Friend the Minister of State accept that, in the calendar year to date, the Government have concluded no fewer than 81 bilateral treaties and 28 multilateral treaties? The time that Ministers and civil servants expend in the process has never previously deterred Governments from pursuing their objectives. That is an entirely spurious argument to advance as a reason for doing nothing about the common fisheries policy.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has asserted that there have been no protests in the past about the CFP. In 1971, however, the fishing industry was assured by the Government that its interests would be protected. Indeed, I have a photocopy of a letter dated 4 October 1971, signed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), in which he said:

> "For our part, as the White Paper said, we are determined to secure arrangements which will safeguard the interests of British fishermen."

When the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, no less, gave such a categorical assurance, the whole industry was entitled to believe that there was no cause for concern.

Fishermen at that time, and subsequently, were entitled to believe that their interests really would be protected. It is only now that the realisation is dawning that this never was—and under the terms of the CFP never could be—the case. The fact that it has taken 20 years or more for the duplicity of a previous generation of politicians to manifest itself cannot in any way justify my hon. Friend's determination to preserve the present arrangements.

I also submit that any person looking dispassionately at the present unsatisfactory situation would recognise that the reason why there were no strong objections about fisheries, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State avers, at the time of the Spanish and Portuguese accession is in good measure because the Spanish and the Portuguese were not scheduled to gain full access to the CFP until 2002. It is the bringing forward of their full membership of the CFP to 1 January 1996 that has precipitated the present outcry.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, we are limited to 10-minute speeches and I am anxious to make several points. I hope that he will have an opportunity to make his contribution to the debate.

Whatever the Government may say about the Spanish accession, a deal was done at the time of the later accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden to the European Community whereby full membership of the CFP for the Spanish and Portuguese was accelerated by six years. At no stage were right hon. and hon. Members informed that that was being done, nor the reasons for doing it.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State's assertion that Members of Parliament were fully aware of the ramifications of the United Kingdom's entry into the CFP is questionable. Furthermore, I question whether hon. Members were able to follow the Government's more recent footwork in accelerating the full entry of Spain and Portugal into the CFP. I wonder how many parliamentarians, even today, are aware that the CFP is not spelt out in treaty form, but exists only by dint of EC regulations.

I turn now to the Minister's statement that it is not practically possible to withdraw from the CFP. Indeed, he addressed that problem in an earlier debate. He is on record as saying:

> "It is politically unrealistic to imagine that a new deal can be done that will result in other countries in the European Union giving away fishing opportunities to the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 591.]

Precisely. It is inconceivable that any other member of the European Union would vote for any substantial change in the present arrangements, under which the majority of European Union countries get a bargain at the expense of the United Kingdom.

We get what can only be described as a raw deal, notwithstanding the fact that this country contributes more than 60 per cent. of the European Union's fishing stocks. My hon. Friend the Minister recognises that, under qualified majority voting, it is practically impossible to obtain any redress for Great Britain. Those who believe that the application of a veto will alter that situation are deluding themselves and misleading the people whom they represent.

On the subject of the legal obstacles to withdrawal from the CFP, I remind my hon. Friend that the political reality is that, at the next general election, the electorate will not stop to consider the legal niceties, but will simply vote in accordance with their perception of what is right or wrong.

I conclude my remarks by reminding my hon. Friend the Minister that Cicero's maxim

> "salus populi suprema est lex"—

the good of the people is the chief law—is, in the context of his present difficulties, the overriding political imperative in the run-up to the next general election. This fisheries policy is not the will of the people: it is the diktat of bureaucrats and their political apparatchiks.

5.48 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): An interesting paradox of these debates is the fact that the stronger the opposition in the fishing industry to the common fisheries policy grows, the more vigorously Ministers come here to defend it—inadequately and disingenuously—and the less they can deliver. They busily defend it in the Chamber while obtaining little that will benefit the fishing industry in the United Kingdom.

Today the Government are putting the squeeze on their supporters and telling them not to rock the boat or damage relations with Europe. Their line is that if we rock the boat on the common fisheries policy it could endanger our whole relationship with Europe. Meanwhile the Conservatives' leader, the Prime Minister, goes to European Councils, rocks the boat and damages our relations with Europe. In other words, the Government are telling their Back Benchers not to behave like the Prime Minister.

Instead of coming here to deliver their laboured defences of the common fisheries policy—as witness the Minister's opening speech—Ministers would be better employed getting some achievements for the British fishing industry. They should be as virile in Europe in obtaining something for our fishermen as they are in the House when defending the CFP to their own Back Benchers. I do not want to pursue that path today, but most of the debate has centred on it.

Our fishing industry is in crisis, and nowhere more so than in Grimsby, whose fleet, as the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) suggested, has shrunk below the limits of viability. The same is happening all over the country. As British vessels go out of business, their track records are bought up by quota hoppers. Most of the fishing done in excess of our targets is done by foreign companies which arrive and buy up British quotas because they are over target in their own countries. So they escape their targets by buying up the British quotas, and if flagship vessels went out of business we would find ourselves below target.

Ministers are imposing a double whammy on the industry. First, it is hit by the common fisheries policy. That is inevitable; our fishing grounds are the richest in the world, so we shall face intense competition if we turn a larger European fishing effort loose on them. If the CFP

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

were effective in terms of conservation, we would not be holding today's debate because the industry would not be facing the problems of over-fishing and shrinking stocks.

Ministers have not defended British interests at all. When it comes to negotiations, something else is always more important so they give way on fishing—on Spanish access to our fishing grounds, for instance, to get Norway into the European Community. Always the higher aim results in fishing being sacrificed. To that extent, Ministers do not defend British fishing interests in Europe.

At the same time as the CFP is damaging our industry, Ministers are failing to provide it with the sort of backing and support which our competitor countries give their industries. They are our competitors, not our partners. The French fishing industry still gets the fuel subsidy to which Ministers have been objecting. That subsidy helps with the fuel costs of French fishing boats which come to fish in our fishing grounds—and it comes from the French Government. No such support is forthcoming from our Government.

Other industries such as the Spanish receive Government support for modernising their fleets, which then compete with our aging fleet which receives no Government support of that kind. Nor does our industry have the benefit of ports of landing facilities, which are provided as a local government service to the Danish and Dutch fleets. We pay heavy landing charges for which there is no Government help.

The industry might be able to put up with one or other—with the depredations of the CFP on the one hand or the lack of Government support on the other. The ports of landing in Europe are inadequately policed, so that there is no real control over the catches taken from our waters. The fishing industry might be able to cope with the slow anorexia that the Government are imposing on it, but it cannot cope with both problems at once.

It is wrong for Ministers to come here and vigorously defend the CFP when that defence is no more than a cloak for their inactivity and inadequate support for the industry. The industry cannot support the double whammy being imposed on it. When we lament the coming cuts in quotas, Ministers always tell us in these debates that they intend to go to Europe and get a good deal for our interests. They then come back after Christmas and apologise, saying that they were outvoted and could not get their way—they could not get the deal that we had been led to expect. The same will happen again this time.

We are being asked to accept substantial reductions in the total allowable catch of plaice; that will be disastrous for Grimsby, which relies mainly on cod but also on plaice. The problem would be compounded if the Minister engaged in the yearly swap agreed with the Dutch on plaice quotas. If plaice quotas are to be reduced, we cannot agree to any further such swaps with the Dutch. I hope that the Minister will tell us that he will not go ahead with it this year.

What is needed is greater stability. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations is asking that year on year swings be moderated to 15 per cent. The industry needs that certainty to be able to plan ahead. We should not enforce sudden, massive quota cuts on the industry, sometimes based on scientific advice which is not good at year-by-year predictions but which is very good at predicting long-term fluctuations in stocks. The problem with year-on-year predictions is that they do not take into account the perceptions of the industry. Many skippers complain to me about scientific advice which is not borne out in the fishing grounds, where stocks are much greater or smaller than scientists say. Hence scientific predictions need to be combined with the knowledge of the industry in a process of consultation before being enforced.

I hope, therefore, that the Minister will commit himself to moderating year by year swings and to ensuring that scientists consult the industry before quota cuts are based on advice that may be wrong. In its pathetic and shrunken condition, the industry needs Government support of the kind provided for the competing industries in Europe. It also needs stability and certainty so that it can survive to inherit the better years which must lie ahead.

5.57 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): A proportion of those who still work in what survives of the fishing industry in the south-west live in my constituency and work out of Brixham. They tell me that there are more MAFF inspectors than police officers there. That is a sad indictment of what has gone so terribly wrong in our industry.

There is an overwhelming recognition by everyone in the industry of the need for conservation. People understand it because it represents their future and their children's future. At any rate, that is what they believed. There is no fisherman in the country who does not understand the need for conservation. Despite the gloom cast over the House by the Secretary of State's predictions of likely future quota cuts, the fishermen to whom I have spoken are all perfectly willing to accept those cuts—if they are limited to what they would refer to as the British fishing fleet. That is where the real problem lies, because around 28 per cent. of the tonnage of the British fishing fleet is not British at all, but Spanish. If we could get over that problem, many of our difficulties would disappear.

Two quite separate problems face the Government. The first is conservation and the need to reduce our fishing effort. Everyone accepts and understands the arguments for that all too well. We can do something about that, perhaps, in a common fisheries policy.

The second problem exposes the impotence of the Government. Following the judgment in the European Court of Justice, the Government cannot insist that British vessels are precisely that: British owned, British registered and with British flags. The real problem is that 30 per cent. of those vessels are owned by foreigners who are quota hoppers and who are living off the backs of our fishermen and destroying our industry.

The first problem is one with which my hon. Friend the Minister is well qualified to deal. I wish him well on Thursday when he goes to Europe. He has a difficult task, but, like his predecessors, he has done a good job for the industry in fighting our corner. The real problem lies with the quota hoppers.

As I voted with the Opposition on the last occasion when the matter was before the House, I listened carefully to the Labour party's proposals. It seemed to me that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) proposed, first, that total allowable catches should be based entirely on scientific evidence. The second plank of his argument was that scientists should be given more resources so that they can understand precisely what the problems are and make accurate assessments. The third part of the argument was that we should ignore the scientists on socio-economic grounds.

Many Conservative Members wanted to understand what firm proposals the Opposition had to get us out of the dilemma, but there was nothing there. For those of us who in the past had tried to get some comfort from Opposition proposals on this difficult issue, there was none to be had.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech could be summarised as, "Brace yourself because there is bad news to come." He tempered this with the slightly good news that harbour improvement grants would be restored. I welcome that, but I would like my hon. Friend the Minister of State in his winding-up speech to say that he will take another look at the way in which the Spanish and the Dutch in the North sea have been exploiting our quotas. That is the key to the problem.

I accept that the lawyers say that we lost last time and that the law is against us. Fine—but I do not believe that it is beyond the wit of man to find a way around that conundrum. I judge that the compromises that have been made in the past, to the detriment of the industry, were made by the Foreign Office because it does not regard the industry as significant or important. Invariably, compromises have been reached and the industry handicapped because the Foreign Office has decided that other issues are more important. When it comes to qualified majority voting, it believes that the fishing industry is dead and buried and insignificant, so we abstain on fishing to get Spanish support on some more important topic. That is unacceptable.

I urge hon. Members who do not have fishermen in their constituencies to accept that there can be nothing more distressing than to see a fishermen having to go down to his boat, not with a net and a lifejacket but with a chainsaw, to destroy it. That is what the Spanish and Dutch are forcing our industry to do. It is distressing, wrong and short-termist. That is why my hon. Friends and I have tabled an amendment.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Can my hon. Friend say whether there is any other country in the European Union whose fishing industry has been dealt with in such a devastating and damaging way as has the UK fishing industry?

Mr. Allason: My hon. Friend puts his finger on the point. Not only have we been handicapped in that way, but it appears that it is our money that has been spent on improving the Spanish fleets. There is nothing more upsetting for our fishermen than to know that funds paid by them through their taxes have gone to our competitors. They may be our partners in the European Union, but they are competitors and they are putting us out of business with our own taxpayer's money.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister of State to give an undertaking to take another look at the abuse of flags of convenience. In those circumstances, I would reconsider the way I voted last time the issue came before the House. I wish my hon. Friend the Minister well on Thursday, but I urge and beg him to fight for British interests because if he does not, no one else will—certainly not the Foreign Office.

6.5 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said that this was the most important fishing debate of the year. If the Labour party thinks so much of the subject, why on earth did it not get a full day's debate out of the Government, rather than a half-day? That does not say much for its negotiating skills. I am sorry to have to start on that note, because there was much in what the hon. Gentleman said with which I agreed. If the matter is important, let us have a full day's debate next time.

If it were possible that the Government might be cajoled into following the course of action suggested in the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), I would urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support them. That is no secret. However, that will not happen—or at least, not yet. Our fallback position will be that set out by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris)—with, of course, particular reference to the interests of Northern Ireland.

Every year on this issue, there is nothing more or less than a further instalment of crisis management. Far too much catch capacity is chasing too few fish. Allied to that is a lack of accurate information about the quantity of fish present in the sea. We have to expect that the efficiency of the vessels will continue to increase. There will be fewer and fewer vessels chasing the same number of fish.

If I have a quibble with what the hon. Member for St. Ives said, it is on his comment about firm scientific advice. Experience has shown that scientists' assessments can be wildly astray. It may well be that a large margin of error is always involved, but if, on top of that, the sort of, cheating to which the hon. Gentleman referred is added in, it is no wonder that the assessments go astray. In fact, it would be a miracle if the scientists got it right. Unless everybody is prepared to play by the rules of the game, there is no chance whatsoever of coming up with firm estimates of the numbers of a species in an area at a given time.

For instance, last year, the advice was that cod and whiting in the Irish sea were in a parlous state. This year, the advice is optimistic, but only the status quo for catches is being allowed. I hope that my remarks will be read in conjunction with those of the hon. Members for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and for North Antrim, (Dr. Paisley), who touched on aspects of what I am trying to put across to the House.

We need to be willing to reassess the situation as fishing returns demonstrate the abundance or scarcity of a particular species in a given fishery.

As the United Kingdom Minister can argue for only three species at a time, although there are 18, his ability to debate the entire range is somewhat limited. Is the information that has been given in that respect correct? For instance, we are told that this year the Irish sea contains a huge amount of haddock. The hon. Member for South Down referred to that matter in detail. We know from the returns that the fish are there, but we are not allowed to catch them. The figure mentioned is 600 tonnes, but the scientists say, "Well, perhaps we could catch up to 2,000." So why should not Northern Ireland fishermen catch them?

[Mr. William Ross]

So long as we proceed with short-term, ad hoc, arrangements, we shall get nowhere. Short-term changes must be measured against the general framework of total allowable catches and quotas, which are out of tune with the real position in the Irish sea.

Despite what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said, much of the United Kingdom's problem stems from its failure to defend its interests when we entered the EEC. I listened to the right hon. Gentleman rejecting that argument, which was put rather brutally by one of his right hon. Friends. I have been told that, although the principle was agreed, embodied within the principle was the whole concept of qualified majority voting. If that is so, whatever case the United Kingdom put forward, it would never have been accepted. It had not a snowball's chance of getting anywhere.

Whenever we return to the position in the Irish sea, we find that the Irish Republic never catches the high quotas that it is allowed for cod and whiting, for instance. The reason for that is simple: it was given twice its true entitlement on historic fishing returns. That seems to me and the fishermen in Northern Ireland to be mad, and something needs to be done about it. If we do not catch the quota, the uncaught fish will act as a magnet to other nations looking for fish. That is unavoidable. We must have sufficient swaps to ensure that those quota are caught.

Will the Minister assure us that the promise made by Earl Howe in the other place on 26 October 1992, that the Government will continue to reduce any disadvantages to Northern Ireland and Wales—by, for example, utilising the system of quota exchanges with other member states, which traditionally enabled the United Kingdom to obtain additional quantities of fish in the Irish sea—will be carried into effect? Has that promise been buried? If so, it is regrettable, because it was a firm promise, and the Government should give an undertaking this evening to honour it.

I hope that, when the Minister goes off later this week to argue the case for the United Kingdom, he will persuade the Irish Minister to co-operate with Her Majesty's Government this year, so that the maximum number of available fish can be harvested from the Irish sea by those who earn their livelihoods there. As the Government of the Irish Republic failed to support Her Majesty's Government last year when we were trying to defend the Irish box, they owe us one. The problem that my hon. Friends and I face this evening is how we can best strengthen the Government's hand in their negotiations later this week.

6.12 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I always find it sad when a Minister with a fine mind deploys his cerebral skills and undoubted rhetorical talents in an intellectually unsustainable argument. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland fulfilled that unenviable task with great courtesy, and I listened with rapt attention to what he said.

It may help the House if I subject the amendment tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friends to textual analysis. It

> "requires Her Majesty's Government to issue at the forthcoming Inter-Governmental Conference a statement of its intention to declare an exclusive fishing zone out to 200 miles or to the median line and of its decision in principle to withdraw from the Common Fisheries Policy to be endorsed by the British people at the next general election."

The intention behind the use of the verb "requires" is to assert the primacy of this Parliament. This Parliament must be sovereign if we are to recover the proper relationship between our country and the European Union. We must utilise any opportunities for genuine dialogue with our Community partners to our advantage.

The intergovernmental conference, which begins on 29 March, is a classic case in point. It is an opportunity not to be missed. Many people will allege that fishing is not on the agenda, but I am sure that the conference, which is likely to continue for several months, will have some "any other business", and that, in the course of the proceedings, we can make it known that the United Kingdom Government intend to declare an exclusive fishing zone up to 200 miles—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be aware that his amendment has not been selected for debate. Therefore, while an allusion to his amendment is in order, a detailed analysis of what is written on the Order Paper is not.

Mr. Wilkinson: In that case, I shall seek to deploy arguments which are germane to the whole debate.

Our country must make it clear to our European Union partners what we intend to do, so that they may make appropriate representations to us to secure the necessary bilateral fishing agreements in traditional fishing areas within our waters.

The Icelanders and Norwegians have found that a 200-mile limit is essential to safeguard their fishing interests. At the time of the cod war, I went to Iceland with the North Atlantic Assembly military tour. I was struck by the fact that relations between peoples were not adversely affected, as both sides recognised that vital interests were at stake.

With the benefit of hindsight, no one can reasonably suggest that what the Icelanders bravely did was wrong. I believe that they were right. Others will say that the Canadian example—Canada has a 200-mile limit—proves that a 200-mile limit does not necessarily secure the conservation of stocks. That is true, but if, having asserted a 200-mile limit, we fail to conserve, the fault will be entirely ours. We shall pursue a conservation policy that is manifestly in Britain's interests, so it should have the support of fishing communities, because they will understand that they benefit.

Mr. Marlow: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a note that I have received, prepared by the Library for my Whip? This sentence is headed:

> "The Argument against the CFP",

and the statement made in the note is:

> "The problem is, rather, that it has a poor record on conserving fish."

That is the Library's objective view.

Mr. Wilkinson: It is also the objective view of my extremely honest right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who expressed it loud and clear in his opening remarks. That is why we say quite candidly that the common fisheries policy is a busted flush, and we should be no further part of it.

However, if we are to take such an important step, we must inform our Community partners, and we need the support of the British electorate. In the process of European construction, the last people to be consulted, and the last people who are carried along with the policy, are the voters, which is why the issue should be put to them in the Conservative party manifesto. They will then know that, if they vote Conservative, we shall pull out, we shall have a 200-mile limit, and British fishing communities will be protected.

That is not Labour party policy, which rests on reform of the CFP, a hopeless undertaking. The Liberal Democrat party's policy will do exactly the same. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) said, we need to look to 2002, to the renegotiation of the common fisheries policy and the enlargement of the Community. When Poland and the Baltic states join, their fishermen will, by treaty, be entitled to access to the common resource of our fisheries. This will cause further depredation of stock. It will lead to diminished quotas for our fishermen, and less chance of a sustainable livelihood for them.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland averred that it would be impossible for us to withdraw, and that we were bound by treaty to stay in. I challenge that argument. If the British electorate have clearly demonstrated that they wish our country to withdraw from the CFP, our sovereign Parliament should instruct our Government so to do.

If there were retaliation, what form would it take? It might take the form of action in the area of trade or other areas of mutual interest, but what would be our counter-retaliation? Perhaps it would be not to pay so much money to the European Union. We are the second biggest net contributor, and much of our net contribution goes to subsidising Spanish fishermen and others who are putting British fishermen out of work. We must confront the challenge head on.

Hon. and right hon. Members will have noticed British fishermen going to sea with the Canadian flag at the masthead. Something is seriously wrong if British fishermen go to sea with a foreign flag flying from the masts of their vessels. It demonstrates a degree of alienation, at the least, which I find horrifying.

Such displays have their good side. In my office, I have a Canadian flag proudly displayed, which was presented to me and some hon. Friends by our counterparts in the Canadian Parliament for the support we gave them when their Government challenged the European Union about fishing rights off the Newfoundland banks. I shall not go into the legalities of who was right and who was wrong; all I know is that the British people were wholeheartedly behind our Canadian friends. To be candid, they were affronted that we appeared initially to take the side of the Spaniards.

On matters of this kind, emotions are important. We need to take account of the heartfelt feelings of our constituents and the fishing communities, and do what we know in our hearts to be right.

We are a maritime nation. It is appropriate that we should be responsible for the conservation of our own stocks. We should have an exclusive fishing zone out to 200 miles. We should inform our Community partners that that is what we intend to do, and we should seek the endorsement of the British people for the policy. If we do that, we shall gain the political initiative, and be rewarded for it.

6.22 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I shall be brief, because I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) wants to start his speech at 6.30.

Those of us who represent fishing constituencies know that the industry is in crisis. Unfortunately, some of the contributions by hon. Members who do not represent fishing constituencies did not present practical solutions to the immediate, short-term and medium-term problems that confront the industry.

The withdrawal from the common fisheries policy and the establishment of a 200-mile limit will not solve the problems of people living in my constituency or many other fishing constituencies in the next few years, because it cannot be achieved.

We need to do what the Government have failed to do, at least during my time in the present Parliament, since April 1992—tackle the serious problem of effort versus stocks. It began with the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992, which tried to bring in the days-at-sea limitation, to limit effort that way, which was finally thrown out, not too long ago, by the European Court. The Government failed to accept what all the Opposition parties and the industry were saying at the time—that the only solution was a decommissioning programme that worked, which would reduce effort and compensate fishermen who decided to leave the industry.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said that the French and Spanish had been able to invest in their industry, in their equipment and in their boats. The reason for that is that they have been meeting their multi-annual guidance programmes and have been able to qualify for grant aid, which the Government have failed to do in each of the multi-annual guidance programmes. Therefore, British fishermen and the British industry have been unable to benefit from grant aid, and to upgrade and improve their equipment.

One reason why the quota-hoppers and flagships have been able to come in and pick up British licences is that British fishermen have not had the wherewithal and the support from the Government and the financial institutions to enable them to invest in new plant and equipment. We end up in the crazy position where we artificially try to control the amount of fish that is caught, rather than tackling the effort problem. We end up with the farce that the TACs and the quotas have become. We have that huge roller-coaster—the term that the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations used—of quotas and TACs.

Last year, the TAC for western hake was reduced by about 45 per cent., and it was understood and hoped that that would solve the problem in relation to that stock. Now we find that the proposal for next year is, not the status quo, not an increase, but yet another cut, of about 29 per cent. How can any industry that depends on one product, plan and invest in such circumstances? We have substantial evidence from the fishermen on landings of

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

cod in the Irish Sea, where, apparently, there is an abundance of cod and of haddock, yet there is no change in the TAC.

I hope that the Minister will consider the issue relating to the Irish sea, in relation to both the failure on occasions of the Irish Republic fishermen to meet their TACs, and the fact that English, Welsh and Northern Irish fishermen are constantly up against the ceiling of the TAC that has been set.

Unless we tackle the problem of the other effort, we shall repeatedly have this debate, as we do every year, just before the Minister goes off to Europe to try to argue a case that we all know will fail. Unless we tackle that problem, we shall have the same debate yet again, and the arguments will be made yet again, the following year.

One reason why we have that serious problem in relation to conservation is that we constantly speak about total allowable catches when they are not that, as the Minister knows; they are total allowable landings. There is a massive difference between what is taken out of the sea and what is landed in the ports. I have been told that discards may be at least 40 per cent. of TAC; 40 per cent. that will have no benefit to the market or to the fishermen, fish that are dead and returned to the sea. Unless that issue is tackled, I am afraid that TACs will never work.

We need to tackle the problem of the flagships. I accept that many attempts have been made by the Government to consider that, but I seek from the Minister of State an assurance that the fishermen of Wales and of south-west England will not suffer any reduction in their quota as a result of the 40 Spanish vessels coming into that part of the Irish box that they will be able to enter from 1 January 1996.

We want an assurance that no British fisherman, whether Welsh or English, will suffer reductions in the quota for any species as a result of that measure. The Minister was asked to give that assurance the last time we debated the issue, but I am afraid that the answer we received was, to say the least, non-committal. The matter is vital for the south-west and the Welsh fishing ports.

I hope—I fear that it is a hollow hope—that the next time we have a debate, we shall be able to say that fishing effort has been reduced sensibly in co-operation with the industry. I hope that we shall at last be able to say that we are starting to match our conservation measures with effort and stocks. I hope that there will be a partnership between Government, Europe, industry and the scientists. It may be a forlorn hope, but unless we start tackling the problem soon, our industry is doomed.

6.30 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): This has been an important debate and there have been many useful contributions. I agree with the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) that it is an annual debate for which we should have more time. He will appreciate that the business timetable is in the Government's hands. But when we are in government he can be assured that we will listen sympathetically to his representations.

The Secretary of State for Scotland mentioned the 1992 manifesto: in 1992 the Labour party made suggestions for amending the common fisheries policy, working with the fishing community on conservation measures and campaigning throughout the fishing constituencies. The moves were covered in the fishing press. The Government are only now—three years later—considering many of those ideas in the review committee. We do not need lessons from the Government about what we have been doing.

In some ways today's debate is a re-run of previous debates. In the past, when the Government felt that they were under pressure, they suddenly came up with more money for the decommissioning scheme, which was welcome at the time. Now, when they are under pressure, we suddenly find that the harbour grant scheme has been reinstated—it is a more modest contribution than the decommissioning scheme, but it is welcome for all that. We shall not be churlish about it.

Much attention has been focused on the debate for many reasons. There is no doubt that the debate provides an opportunity to discuss European Union policy as it affects our country. It is completely legitimate to question the mechanics of the European Union, particularly how it applies in terms of the common fisheries policy—many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), have done so. But we must not forget the importance of the debate to the British fishing industry, and I shall touch on some of the serious concerns.

I shall first discuss the quotas set for individual species which the Minister will have to discuss at the Fisheries Council. Concern has been voiced in tonight's debate about the way in which the quotas seem to fluctuate wildly from year to year. That not only makes it difficult for the fishing industry in terms of applying effort and using opportunities, it does not help the credibility of science. I accept that there are difficulties in calculating fish stocks at sea. It seems strange that some stocks have increased dramatically over recent years, while others have been dramatically cut. It does not help when the Government make cuts in sectors of vital fisheries research, such as they have done recently on research into the impact of the industrial fishing of sand eels in Shetland. The Government also made research and development cuts across the board in the Budget, including cuts in fisheries research.

The Minister will be discussing species quotas. We certainly welcome the fact that there will be an 8 per cent. increase in the cod quota, but it is thought within the industry that the increase could be greater given the evidence of large numbers of cod presently in the North sea. It is strange that there is to be no increase for channel cod although it is accepted that the stocks of channel cod and North sea cod are linked to some extent.

A big issue for our fleets involves North sea sole and plaice. There is great concern about the 29 per cent. cut in that quota, which will hit our eastern, Northern Ireland, south-western and Irish sea fleets. The problem of swaps with Holland has been mentioned. If no swaps are to take place, I hope that the Minister will look at the total allowable catch for the western waters for those fish that we would normally obtain from a swap with the Dutch. My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) made a clear case for western hake for his local fishing fleet. It would be helpful if the Minister would say whether such a swap would take place at the current projected total of 78,000 tonnes for North sea plaice or whether the total would have to be increased for the swap to go ahead.

There is a severe cut of 22 per cent. in the whiting quota. It seems strange that in recent years it has been argued that the quota should be increased because whiting are predatory fish and affect the white fish stocks. But the present cut is so large that it could invoke the Hague preference. I hope that in his negotiations the Minister will ensure that the quota limits are set at a level that does not do so because of the problems involved in the Hague preference. That preference provides benefits for this country north of Bridlington, but also applies to the Republic of Ireland and therefore has implications for our Northern Ireland fleet and the fleet that fishes in area VII. The Irish Republic is trying to invoke the Hague preference on Irish sea cod and haddock, which has implications for our area VII fleet.

Throughout the debate we have discussed the common fisheries policy; we cannot talk about quotas and fisheries management without discussing how the common fisheries policy operates. The subject cannot be avoided as it is the framework for the fisheries management scheme. Our amendment recognises that there are severe problems with the CFP and that we need a radical approach to reform.

Much attention has focused on whether there will be a rebellion tonight and the reason for it in terms of the political agenda, particularly for those with Eurosceptic views. There is no doubt that the policy of voting against the Government on various European issues has been successful for the Eurosceptics. The debate has provoked the Foreign Secretary into taking to the airways to appeal to the dissidents. The Prime Minister has written articles in *The Daily Telegraph* that have been slanted towards the dissidents. Tonight, a former Prime Minister and the current Secretary of State for Scotland have spoken in the debate. There is no doubt that the Eurosceptics' tactics have been successful and are moving the Government towards their agenda, whether for good or ill.

The debate, however, is about the dire state of our fishing industry. To be fair, those who have spoken have had a genuine interest in the subject—they include hon. Members from Northern Ireland, from the nationalist and Liberal Democrat parties, and hon. Members from both sides of the House who represent fishing constituencies. Even those with Eurosceptic views have taken an interest in the problems of our fishing fleet. The hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) feels passionately about the subject and knows the effect of the policy on his local fishermen.

Problems with the common fisheries policy include those involving the Western waters and Spanish accession; the fact that Spanish and Portuguese vessels are to be allowed in from 1 January, six years ahead of schedule. There are also problems involving control measures on our south-western and Northern Ireland fleet; problems of bureaucracy; the flagships issue; the need to qualify properly the principle of a common fisheries resource—a key issue; problems of meeting the multi-annual guidance programme and effort control; problems of having an ageing fleet compared with those of other countries; enforcement problems, particularly with other countries; problems of implementing a conservation scheme that is tailored to our waters; and the problem of discards. There is a need for associated socio-economic measures and a need to consider the operation of the decommissioning scheme. Increasing pressure is being placed on many of the white fish in the North sea which fall within the two to three-year-old age group, which means that the potential of the larger species is never realised.

The Labour party calls for reform of the CAP and recognises that we must seek co-operation to achieve that; no one country can achieve it alone. We firmly believe that, even within the framework of the CAP, we can achieve greater national autonomy. We also believe that there is scope for greater involvement of fishermen in the management of stocks through their associations and producer organisations. There are structural conservation packages, many of which were put forward by organisations such as the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation to deal with the practical problems of conservation. We need to gather allies and support for those packages and we must talk to the Commission. The Labour party has already begun that process.

Conservative Members must ask why other fishing countries such as Norway and Spain are so successful at negotiating good deals for their fishery sectors. The answer must be the pressure that is applied to their Governments in their respective Parliaments. A vote tonight for Labour's amendment would send a clear signal to the European Commission that neither the British Parliament nor the British fishing industry are satisfied with the present common fisheries policy or the current state of the industry. That is a perfectly respectable position for any Member of Parliament to take on the issue.

In that respect, a vote for our amendment is vital as a demonstration of the House's support for our fishing communities. Members of Parliament who represent fishing communities know that their fishermen want and expect them to support the amendment. For far too long, the British fishing industry has been isolated in terms of the support that it believes it should receive from Government. Tonight we have an opportunity to rectify the matter.

Mr. Gallie: Earlier this afternoon I asked the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) whether he had considered inserting some reference to total allowable catches in his amendment. I cannot understand why that has not been included in the amendment. In attempting to persuade Conservative Members, perhaps the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe could refer to that very important issue.

Mr. Morley: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present for the beginning of my speech, but I discussed in detail the quotas issue and the problems that the industry faces in that regard. I outlined how those problems could be dealt with. The quotas issue is open for negotiation. The Minister has some scope in that area and we hope that he will move the negotiations in the directions that I have outlined in some detail.

Members of Parliament who want to see reform of the common fisheries policy and European institutions—they are our objectives, although we may disagree about the detail—represent a strand of opinion in this country that expects them to support the amendment. The vote tonight should not be seen simply as a vote for a Labour amendment, an Opposition amendment or even a particular Government position. It should be seen as a statement of intent to the European Commission that change is needed. We must adopt a clear policy position that will reinforce the

[Mr. Morley]

Government's position in the negotiations in Europe. Above all, it is a vote for an amendment which promotes the British fishing industry. In that respect, it is worthy of the support of all hon. Members.

6.42 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): As the United Kingdom Fisheries Minister, I have only one ambition: to represent the best interests of the United Kingdom fishing industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), my noble Friend Baroness Denton of Wakefield and I shall attend the Fisheries Council meeting this week. I doubt whether any other member state will have in attendance so many Ministers who are committed to defending and promoting the interests of their industry.

Hon. Members must recognise that it is not foreigners that we should fear, but the straightforward fact that at present too many fishing vessels are chasing too few fish. There is no escaping the fact that the failure to conserve fish stocks poses the greatest threat to the fishing industry. We must have regard to the scientific evidence which suggests that a considerable number of our most important fish stocks could collapse within a matter of years without tough conservation measures. Some 60 per cent. of fish stocks are already below minimum biological levels.

I must ensure not only that our fishing industry has the maximum catch next year but that there are sustainable levels of fish in the seas for our fishermen to catch the year after next and in every year as we move into the next century. Co-operation with our European partners is essential in view of the overcapacity of fishing fleets and the fact that fish do not respect national boundaries. We fish in the waters of other countries and they fish in ours, so it is essential that there is collaboration and co-operation throughout Europe.

A number of hon. Members raised questions about specific fish stocks. I suspect that they have raised those questions at the behest of fishing organisations such as the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. My ministerial colleagues and regularly I meet those two organisations. We have lengthy detailed discussions with them.

I make it clear to the House that their priorities are my priorities; their concerns and goals in the Fisheries Council are mine also. The detail that they give me about individual fish stocks is the detail that I hope to take forward and argue for in Brussels this week. In some instances, that will mean moderating the reduction in quotas that the Commission has suggested, and in other instances the quotas may be increased. I shall go to Brussels—I hope in co-operation and collaboration with the industry—to seek to address what the industry sees as its most important priorities.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will my hon. Friend confirm the remarks that he made by way of intervention to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) in relation to marketing grants? He said that grants will be available to those at Fleetwood who have already applied for them and that they will be available to people in other ports who may apply for them in the future.

Mr. Baldry: As I told the House earlier, since my appointment as Fisheries Minister in July I have travelled around the country from Newlyn to Newcastle and from Hastings to Hull meeting industry representatives and with hon. Members who take a close interest in the fishing industries in their constituencies. I have been very impressed by the arguments advanced by my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans), for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), for South Hams (Mr. Steen), for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and others. They have argued strongly that at a time when quotas are being reduced—with good reason—we must continue to support the industry through harbour grants and marketing and processing grants. I understand their concerns and we have looked carefully for new funds for a number of grants schemes. I am pleased to announce that the national harbour grants scheme and the European Union structural measures for port facilities and marketing and processing will apply.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I can anticipate the hon. Gentleman's intervention: they will apply throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: I do not need to give way as I have confirmed that the grants will apply throughout the United Kingdom.

Returning to the quotas issue, I shall be arguing in the Council for quotas to be set at realistic levels that will do the least possible damage to the industry's prospects next year. I understand the argument that a number of hon. Members have made: of course we cannot expect the industry to cope with wildly varying quotas year upon year. After all, people have invested in their vessels and in their future; they cannot be expected to deal with wildly fluctuating quotas.

We should not try to remedy the damage caused by overfishing by cutting particular fish stocks severely in any one year. If stocks must be protected by reducing the fishing effort, I hope that that can be achieved over a period of years rather than by introducing severe yearly cuts. Badly depleted stocks must be rebuilt if we are to maintain a viable industry in the long term.

Mr. Gallie: A year or two ago there was a quota of 16,000 tonnes for prawns on the west coast of Scotland. The quota has been reduced in recent years, but the quality and the volume of the prawn catch has increased. Some have suggested that there are many prawns to be taken, although scientific evidence seems to refute that claim. Will my hon. Friend re-examine that issue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) has already done this year?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes a good point. He will know that, because of the wishes of the Scottish fishing industry, we revisited that issue this year and achieved an increase in the quota for prawns. I hope that that increase will be reflected in the negotiations later this week.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful for the way in which my hon. Friend responded to the points that I and other Members have raised and assured the House that he would press for the priorities put forward by the industry. Can he give the House any information on another matter of concern to the industry on which representations have been made? Is there any progress on the long-standing claims for compensation from Spain to fishermen from the south-west for the damage caused to their nets in the tuna war?

Mr. Baldry: In an earlier debate in the House, I promised to try to resolve the issue by Christmas. I am glad to inform the House that the Spanish Minister responsible for fishing has confirmed that United Kingdom fishermen will be offered compensation of £100,000 to be paid by the end of this year or early next year, so I hope that the House will feel that I have fulfilled my promise.

Mr. Salmond: May we return to tonight's inducement? If the Minister believed that the financial instrument for fisheries grant and the harbour grant scheme were so important, why did he agree three weeks ago to their cancellation?

Mr. Baldry: I never cease to be amazed at how ungrateful some Members can be. Here I am, the week before Christmas, restoring marketing, processing and harbour grants, and such an ingrate individual quibbles about it. The only person who is more ingrate than the hon. Gentleman is the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who comes to the House complaining that not enough is done for fishing ports *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman never listens. I know of no more ungrateful Member than him. He complains to the House that not enough is spent on fishing ports when Grimsby is awash with money that the Government have invested in the port. Nearly £969,000 in Government fisheries grants will have been made available to Grimsby in two and a half years. That is the largest such allocation to any port in the United Kingdom. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman cannot recognise that.

Later this week I shall seek to ensure the best possible quotas and the best possible deal for the United Kingdom fishing industry, but consistent with the scientific advice which demonstrates that some of our fish stocks, such as North sea herring and mackerel, are in serious danger of collapse, which would be disastrous for the fishing industry, the processing industry and the consumer.

Mr. Allason: When my hon. Friend goes to the Fisheries Council on Thursday, will he raise the issue of quota hoppers and the abuse of the flags that is so obvious in the British registry?

Mr. Baldry: I certainly will not forget that. My hon. Friend quite rightly reminds the House of the problem of quota hoppers. We all share that concern. The Factortame judgment has nothing to do with the common fisheries policy—it is based on that principle of European law which allows the free association of individuals in different member states—but it is a matter of real and legitimate concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, who takes a close interest in promoting the interests of the fishing industry in the south-west, rightly continues to draw the issue to the attention of Ministers. He asked me to consult lawyers as to whether anything could be done about that judgment. I shall gladly draw together the lawyers in the fishing industry.

As I went round the ports of the United Kingdom, I issued a simple challenge. If any fishing industry representative has any sensible suggestions on how we can get around the Factortame judgment, I shall gladly take them on board and willingly support my hon. Friend's suggestion that we take yet a further look at the issue.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I thank my hon. Friend most warmly for his visits to my constituency and the port of Brixham, where he has always been very welcome. Is it the Government's policy to try to reform the common fisheries policy?

Mr. Baldry: Yes. All hon. Members recognise that the common fisheries policy has a number of defects. However, we shall not support the totally meaningless garbage put forward in the Labour amendment. When the Opposition Front Bench spokesman was asked to explain what it meant, he was clearly incapable of giving any such explanation. No one in the House is satisfied with the existing common fisheries policy; it clearly needs to be reformed.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does the Minister recognise that many good Conservatives here tonight do not wish to give any comfort to the Labour party, but are deeply worried about the state of the fishing industry? Can the Minister say anything more about the robust stance that he will take at the Fisheries Council and British action that might be taken after the Council so that we stand up for British fishermen, not Spanish ones?

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend can rest assured that my primary duty to the House is to represent and stand up for the interests of the British fishing industry. If at any time any Member can point to an occasion when I failed to stand up for the British fishing industry, I shall gladly vacate this place.

Mr. Tyler: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: I should make some progress. I am determined that there should be an on-going dialogue between the fishing industry and scientists on the specific issue of quotas and I recognise there are real concerns that the industry is not being heard.

It is important that the fishing industry becomes more involved in what we are doing. Many in the fishing industry see the year-on-year debate on quotas as a somewhat blunt instrument for ensuring control of the fishing effort and believe that more can be done by way of technical conservation measures. For that reason, I am setting up a fisheries conservation group that will bring together Government scientists and other academics with representatives of the industry to examine issues on which there are concerns, such as industrial fishing and the level of discards and to find out what more can be achieved by improving fishing gear.

Not only do I intend that we should do that here in the United Kingdom, but one of my other objectives at the Fisheries Council meeting later this week is to ensure a clear commitment to technical conservation measures in respect of fishing gear. Progress also has to be made towards addressing widespread concerns about industrial fishing, discards and by-catching.

I assure hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies that I shall be pressing the Fisheries Council for increases in the quotas proposed for the Irish sea. I fully appreciate the concerns of the Northern Irish industry about the Hague preference and of course we

[Mr. Baldry]

shall continue to seek to reduce the disadvantages to Northern Ireland resulting from the Hague preference, for example by carrying out international quota swaps.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) asked whether the quota is still Government policy. It is and will continue to be Government policy. Members have been concerned that there should be equal and strict enforcement of EC fishery measures throughout the Community and we determined to ensure that.

Two concerns have run through this evening's debate. One is the common fisheries policy, where the Government need reforms. It would be disingenuous, however, to suggest that we could leave the common fisheries policy. We should concentrate instead on reforming it in ways that would benefit the industry.

I find the Opposition amendment disingenuous in the extreme. Opposition Members play on the worst aspects of xenophobia. They criticise the Spanish, but forget that not a single Labour voice was raised against the accession of Spain or Portugal to the European Union. They criticised the Government for the deal that was achieved and clearly failed to read the Spanish treaty of accession, which stated that 300 vessels may be authorised to fish in western waters from the date of accession until 31 December this year. The result of the agreement that we achieved in December 1994 is that the number of Spanish vessels with access to the Irish box from 1 January will be not 300 but 40. That is a considerable deal on behalf of the United Kingdom fishing industry.

We do not need the Labour party to give us lessons on representing British interests. Anyone who is concerned about British interests should have regard to what the Labour party and other socialist parties signed up to this week in Madrid—a significant extension of qualified majority voting and restrictions on how long people can work. If those policies were implemented, we would be unable to represent best fishing interests.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 305.

Division No. 16] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'Dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'I)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*

Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul

Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*

Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew

Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain

Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek

Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 299.

Division No. 17] **[7.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*

Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*

Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*

Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*

Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn

Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles

Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

7.29 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I have listened carefully to the opinions that have been expressed, often with great vigour, in the debate. The Government will give due weight to what has been said. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will represent the United Kingdom at the Fisheries Council beginning on 21 December. He will, as always, vigorously represent the interests of the United Kingdom and its fishermen. In particular, he will fight for effective conservation of fish stocks, a fair allocation of fishing opportunities, and rigorous enforcement of the controls that are in place.

Dr. Strang: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. That is just not good enough. The House of Commons has taken an historic decision. It has passed a motion rejecting—*[Interruption.]* It has failed. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will not allow further debate on this matter. If the hon. Gentleman has a point of order, I must of course hear it.

Dr. Strang: The Government have been defeated. That is the important point. It is all very well for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to say that Ministers will pay due attention. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House listened to the Minister and what he said was not precisely a point of order. Hon. Members will be tolerant and will listen to the hon. Gentleman for a moment.

Dr. Strang: The House has rejected the Government's position on fisheries policy. The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not take part in the debate and he cannot just jump up to the Dispatch Box and tell us that the Government will pay due attention. They have to address the issues in the debate, and they relate to the additional access of Spanish fishing vessels to our western waters. There has been a repudiation of the Government's policy and the Government are answerable to the House. They have lost the confidence of the House in relation to representing our interests in the European Union in fisheries and also in relation to their whole approach to fisheries policy. It is not good enough for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to talk about what will happen in the Fisheries Council.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman and the Minister are experienced parliamentarians. Proper points of order are not being put to me and I cannot allow the debate to continue in this way. I propose to move to the next item of business.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it a genuine point of order?

Mr. Beith: It is. I hope that you will confirm that a Government motion setting out the Government's negotiating position has been defeated and that when a Minister goes to Brussels to take part in negotiations he cannot represent the position that is set out in that motion as being the position that was approved by the House. He will have to convey to the meeting the fact that the House rejects the Government's position and wants a stronger stand, and he will have to make clear to the meeting that he has lost the confidence of the House, as have his Government.

Mr. Salmond: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Should not we ask for a Government statement tomorrow? The Government have failed to carry their position on a vital industry. The Minister told us that that does not matter and that the Government will carry on as before. Does that not represent contempt for the House in the same way as contempt for the fishing communities has been the Government's undoing?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The House also rejected the Labour-Liberal amendment.

Madam Speaker: Order. The debate has taken place and the House has made its views known in a Division. It is now up to the Government to determine their position. I now propose to move to other business. *[Interruption.]* Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quietly.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund (No.2) Act 1995

Church of Scotland (Property and Endowment) Amendment Order Confirmation Act 1995

Scottish Business

7.35 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94A (Scottish Grand Committee (composition and business)) be amended, as follows:

line 17, after 'consideration', insert 'or further consideration';

line 30, leave out from 'committee,' to 'Standing' in line 32 and insert 'made under paragraph (6) of';

line 33, at the end, add—

'(3) Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum.';

(2) Standing Order No. 94C (Scottish Grand Committee (short debates)) be amended, as follows:

line 8, leave out from 'to' to the end of line 9 and insert 'Scotland';

line 19, leave out from 'No' to 'replying' in line 20 and insert 'Member except the Minister of the Crown';

line 24, leave out 'minister or law officer' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 25, leave out 'members of the committee' and insert 'Members';

line 27, leave out 'member of the committee' and insert 'Member';

(3) Standing Order No. 94D (Scottish Grand Committee (ministerial statements)) be amended, as follows:

line 2, leave out 'Scottish Office minister or a Scottish law officer' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 3, leave out 'member of the committee' and insert 'Member of the House';

line 10, leave out 'minister or law officer, as the case may be,' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 12, after 'responsibilities', insert 'so far as they relate to Scotland, which, in the case of a Scottish law officer, shall be';

line 13, leave out 'thirteenth' and insert 'relevant';

line 17, after 'conclusion', insert 'either at an hour appointed by an order of the committee, for which a motion may be made without notice by a member of the government immediately before the commencement of such proceedings, on which motion the question shall be put forthwith, or, if no such motion is made,';

line 31, leave out 'minister or law officer' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 32, leave out 'member of the committee' and insert 'Member of the House';

line 34, leave out 'such a minister or law officer';

(4) Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)) be amended in line 52, at the end, by adding the following paragraphs:

'(7) At the conclusion of proceedings on consideration on report of a bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (3) above, or on the order being read for the third reading of such a bill, a motion may be made by a member of the government (or in the case of a private Member's bill, by the Member in charge of the bill), "That the Bill be referred again to the Scottish Grand Committee"; and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that such a motion may be made by a private Member only with the leave of the House.

(8) A bill so referred again to the Scottish Grand Committee shall be considered on a motion, "That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle"; and, when the committee has considered that question for a total of one and a half hours (whether on one or more than one day), the chairman shall put the question necessary to dispose of the motion, and shall then report accordingly to the House (or shall report that the committee has come to no resolution), without any further question being put thereon:

Provided that a member of the government may, immediately before the motion "That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle" is made, make without notice a motion to extend the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(9) A bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (8) above shall be ordered to be read the third time on a future day.

(10) When a motion shall have been made for the third reading of a bill to which paragraph (9) above applies, the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.';

(5) Standing Order No. 94H (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)) be amended, as follows:

line 43, after 'proceedings', insert '(other than on a motion made under paragraph (6) below)';

line 55, after 'proceedings', insert 'or on the completion of the business appointed for consideration at that sitting, whichever is the earlier,';

(6) Standing Order No. 87 (Attendance of law officers and ministers in standing committees) be amended, in line 7, after 'than', by inserting 'a motion in the Scottish Grand Committee under Standing Order No. 94A (Scottish Grand Committee (composition and business)) or'; and

(7) Standing Order No. 91 (Special standing committees) be amended, as follows:

line 18, leave out 'morning sittings' and insert 'sittings at which oral evidence may be given';

line 19, after 'Scotland', insert 'in which case those sittings need not be held in the morning'.

The motion gives effect to two of the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced in the House on the eve of St. Andrew's day for strengthening the role of the Scottish Grand Committee in considering Scottish legislation and in calling Ministers to account. There is little that I need to add to the full explanation that my right hon. Friend gave on that occasion. I shall deal first with the two principal amendments to the Standing Orders.

The new paragraph that is to be added to Standing Order No. 94A will allow any Minister, and not just Ministers representing Scottish constituencies, to attend meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland as well as at Westminster, to take part in the Committee's proceedings and move motions but not to vote or to be counted in the quorum. Consequential amendments will enable the Committee to hear ministerial statements and transact other business relating to the Scottish aspects of the work of other Departments as well as the Scottish Office.

As my right hon. Friend said, both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer intend to take part in the Committee's debates in Scotland next year, and I am sure that other Ministers who have responsibility for significant areas of policy will be keen to follow suit.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I have no objection to Ministers attending meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee, which is taking on some of the appurtenances of a travelling circus. When visiting other cities and towns, Back Benchers should have access to the normal office facilities that are readily available in this place and in Edinburgh. The record so far is not good and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and Ministers in the Scottish Office will take that on board. In terms of access to telephones and other facilities, that complaint needs to be examined by the Leader of the House and his colleagues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind hon. Members that this is a one-and-a-half-hour debate and that long interventions do not help.

Mr. Newton: Despite your wise advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to say that the hon. Gentleman knows me well enough to know that that is the sort of issue that I always undertake to consider, and I know that my right hon. Friends will also consider it. We have imposed quite a demanding task on the House authorities who have to arrange these meetings and the facilities that are required. To that extent, I am sure that they are feeling their way, but no one would want to dismiss out of hand the hon. Gentleman's point, especially about telephone access. It is obviously difficult to see how full-scale office facilities can be organised on quite the basis that he suggested.

The new paragraph to be added to Standing Order No. 94E will allow the Scottish Grand Committee to debate the principle of a Scottish Bill at Third Reading as well as at Second Reading. The procedure to be followed is broadly similar to that for Second Reading, with which the Committee is familiar. What is envisaged is that, after its Report stage, a Bill will be referred again to the Committee for a debate of up to one and a half hours, which, again, may take place in Scotland. A longer debate can be arranged if that is thought desirable. The Question on Third Reading would then be decided by the House without further debate, as a "forthwith".

The Government are taking the opportunity afforded by this debate to propose three other minor and sensible amendments to the Standing Orders. Standing Order No. 94D allows a maximum of 45 minutes for a ministerial statement that is made to facilitate the questioning of a Minister about some aspect of his responsibilities. We are proposing to provide additional flexibility by giving the Committee power to fix a different time limit if the circumstances of a Committee sitting make that appropriate. That could, for example, allow the Lord Advocate, or my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland who is responsible for agriculture, forestry and the environment, to make a short statement and be questioned for, say, 15 minutes immediately after the normal Question Time. That would usefully extend the "flexibility", to use that word again, of the ways in which the Committee can operate.

We propose to amend Standing Order No. 94H to make it clear that the half-hour Adjournment debate, which normally starts at 1 o'clock, can begin earlier than that if the other business to be taken at that sitting has already been completed. *[Interruption.]* I am not pretending that these proposals are earth shattering—they are tidying-up proposals. In that case, the Adjournment debate will not be interrupted at 1 o'clock and will be concluded

30 minutes after it has begun. That reflects the clear intention of the Standing Order and is, I think in everyone's view, obviously sensible.

Finally, we propose to amend Standing Order No. 91 on Special Standing Committees, which provides for three morning sittings for taking oral evidence, so that a Scottish Special Standing Committee that is taking evidence in Scotland is not restricted to holding morning sittings only. That allows the Special Standing Committee to make more efficient use of its time by, for example, meeting in the morning and the afternoon of the same day. The Special Standing Committee that considered last Session's Children (Scotland) Bill was given that flexibility on an ad hoc basis and found it useful. We are now trying to incorporate that in the Standing Order.

The remaining amendments are consequential. The whole package is overwhelmingly sensible. I know that it has been widely welcomed in Scotland and I commend it to the House.

7.42 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) has just said, the procedural motions that the Leader of the House has moved are as welcome as the Government's fisheries policies, which have just been defeated. The Leader of the House drew the short straw this evening because, far from having the support that he suggested, the procedural changes please, I think, no one. Certainly, they do not satisfy the official Opposition or find favour with the minority parties.

I am not sure about the Government's Back Benchers, but the people of Scotland are not impressed by the changes. In many ways, that is not surprising, given the way in which those changes have come about. The way in which they saw the light of day and were launched is completely contrary to the way in which the Leader of the House believes that we should proceed when we consider constitutional changes. Clearly, he adopts a different style from that of the Secretary of State for Scotland, because the Leader of the House likes to consult, to discuss issues and to find a common basis for a way forward. That has simply not been the case in relation to these changes.

The reason for that is clear: the procedural changes are a product of panic on the part of Ministers. The reason for that is also clear. For 16 years, Conservative Ministers have derided Opposition Members for saying that constitutional change was needed in relation to Scotland. Ministers have been telling us that all was well and that the present arrangements were satisfactory. At the last election, we all, I think, remember the Prime Minister and others issuing alarmist warnings about the consequences of devolution and telling us how good the constitutional position was then—and now—yet we are now going to have some change.

As everyone knows, in November, the Prime Minister gave what was considered to be an important, exclusive interview to *The Independent*. That was another of those occasions where we had to wonder who had been in government for the past 16 years. These days, it is increasingly a feature of Ministers that, when a problem arises, they say that something should be done: recently, we have been told that something should be done about crime, knives and education standards. They say that something should be done about a problem as if they were in opposition, and have suddenly discovered the problem and a rod with which to beat the Government. They talk like that rather than like Ministers who have been in government for 16 years, because they want the public to forget that they have run out of excuses. That is the style at present and that was the Prime Minister's style when he gave that interview reported in *The Independent*.

Suddenly, the Prime Minister seemed to have discovered a problem in relation to the Scots. In the article, he said:

> "People in Scotland, who often feel cut off from parliamentary debate in London want better access to government."

That does not quite sound like what he was saying at the last election. He went on:

> "the Scots feel that Westminster is a long way off".

His comments in that interview were made not because he had discovered a new problem but because, at last, he was acknowledging a problem that everyone, apart from Ministers, knew existed and that he had denied existed, even during the last election.

That about-turn by the Prime Minister in acknowledging that the problem exists might be welcomed if he had shown any understanding of what the democratic deficit amounts to. Unfortunately, if one continues reading the article in *The Independent*, one begins to wonder if he understands anything at all about that problem. He claims in the interview:

> "We"—

the Government—

> "have made quite significant moves on Scotland . . . I have changed the basis on which the honours list is determined".

If that is a signal of what fundamental, significant change means to the Prime Minister, it illustrates simply how far his education is lacking with regard to the problems that Scottish people face.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Does the hon. Lady agree with the proposition that a majority in the Scottish Grand Committee should determine legislation in it, and would she extend that proposition to the English Grand Committee, for which, as will be familiar to her, there are provisions in Standing Orders?

Mrs. Taylor: There is no future in the Government's proposal because it does not deal with basic needs. The solution to what the Secretary of State wants and to the problem that exists is to have a properly devolved Scottish Parliament. We make no bones, and have been utterly consistent, about that. We said it at the last election and we will say it at the next one.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Is the hon. Lady saying that if there were an incoming Labour Government, they would immediately reverse the proposals now before the House?

Mrs. Taylor: If there were an incoming Labour Government, which there will be, we shall have a Scottish Parliament—and I am glad to have the chance to repeat that statement from the Dispatch Box. Instead, we have before us some half-baked suggestions by Ministers who have been trying to cobble together at the last minute a smokescreen to suggest that they are actually doing something. But the Government are not fooling anyone.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Lady referred to comments supposedly made by the Prime Minister before

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

the general election, but, at that time, was she herself not saying that there would be a Labour Government after that election?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman speaks as a member of a party that stands at something like 13 per cent. in the opinion polls in Scotland, and that did about as well as that in the most recent local elections there. I do not think that we should take too many lectures about what is likely to happen from people with that amount of support in Scotland. Moreover, I quoted not what the Prime Minister allegedly said but from his interview in *The Independent*. If the hon. Gentleman has not seen the article, I shall be happy to send him a copy later.

Against that background—the panic action and the sudden acceptance of a problem, the about-turn by the Prime Minister—a statement was made to the House on 29 November. It was strong on hype but weak on substance. We were told beforehand that the statement would be very significant, and would be what the Scottish people wanted, but when it came to the point it all fell flat. The fact that this evening the Leader of the House has been able to summarise in so few words the changes being introduced shows that there is not much substance in them.

As the Leader of the House explained, any House of Commons Minister will be allowed to go to the Scottish Grand Committee—the "awayday feature", as my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) called it. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to clarify two matters arising from that fact.

First, I understand that the Government Scottish Whip has not invariably been a Scottish Member. In that case, would such a Whip be allowed on the Floor of the Committee? Secondly, and more important, the right hon. Gentleman says that Ministers "may" attend the Scottish Grand Committee, but who will decide whether they do attend? Will the Committee have the power to summon a Minister and insist that he appear before it, or can the Minister decide to delegate the appearance to a junior? For example, if a deregulation issue is on the agenda, will the Deputy Prime Minister attend, or will he say that someone else will attend in his stead?

There are more outstanding questions. The Leader of the House has mentioned only non-controversial Bills; he has not covered controversial legislation. The Government are not creating something dramatically different but simply extending the talking-shop facility of the Scottish Grand Committee. They are not by any means opening the way for Scottish people to have more control over the decisions now made by Scottish Office Ministers.

I am sure that the Leader of the House is not really comfortable with the proposals that he has had to make, any more than he is happy with the way in which those decisions were reached. I should have thought that he might be worried about the precedent of introducing procedural change into the House without consultation. It certainly goes against the grain of all that he has told us on other issues.

If the Government were serious about tackling the problems with which the procedural motions are supposed to deal, Ministers should have been considering the remarkable achievement of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which achieved a consensus on a way forward, and which involved different political parties, elected members from Westminster and from local authorities, and people from outside politics. Surely that is the way forward, and Ministers should have thought about it before trying to bounce ideas on to the House.

The approach of the Scottish Constitutional Convention provides a good example of the necessary pre-legislative consultation that I think we should all be considering if we want to improve the quality of legislation in general. If the Government were serious about recognising the constitutional problems that Scotland and the rest of Britain face, Ministers would have followed the line laid out by the constitutional convention, and would not have bounced their half-baked ideas on to this Parliament or the Scottish people.

7.55 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I suppose that we expected a pretty churlish response from the Opposition spokesmen to this important evolution of the procedures of the House, involving the Scottish Grand Committee. The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) could not even bring herself to welcome something that is already getting a mounting press in Scotland. Representatives of the press and the other media are now coming to the meetings, and are beginning to understand that what the Secretary of State has proposed is really a major step forward in bringing Government to the people of Scotland.

The media are also beginning to understand that the panic is in the ranks of the Opposition—the panic that we have got it right. The Lady mentioned the Scottish Constitutional Convention, but that is made up of only two parties, and it seemed to spend most of the weeks in which it met squabbling. It has never answered the questions that really matter. That is why the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is becoming more tetchy and rattled week by week, as his plans for an Assembly are being rumbled.

The hon. Gentleman will not receive any confidence from the Scottish people until he is prepared to stand at the Dispatch Box, or anywhere else, and answer the West Lothian question: how many Members of Parliament would the Labour party have in Scotland, and how would they arrange voting on measures for which not the Scottish Assembly but the Westminster Parliament is responsible? In recent weeks the hon. Gentleman has made no effort to answer the question that has been asked not only by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but by many other members of the Conservative party in Scotland. He must wake up—

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman must answer the question.

Mr. Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Hector Monro: I shall give way only if the hon. Gentleman promises to answer the question. Will he do so? I see that he will not, so I shall not give way. That is too bad. He may have the chance to speak later, when he winds up for the Opposition.

Really good ideas are coming forward, with the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Scotland and carrying out many useful tasks, so that the people can see us and can meet Ministers, including English Ministers, who come to address the Committee.

I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Minister one or two practical questions that he may be prepared to think about. He is right to say that the House authorities have moved heaven and earth to ease any difficulties, whether we meet in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness or anywhere else—which I am glad to do. I know that the usual channels have used their best endeavours to ensure that there is light voting on days when the Committee meets far from the central belt. If we meet in Inverness—as we shall, and I shall be glad to do so—Back Benchers, and indeed Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, may have to go there on Sunday night. We cannot guarantee to be on parade at 10.30 on Monday morning unless we do that, especially in winter when the weather in Scotland can be bad.

I should therefore like my right hon. Friend to consider integrating the work of the House of Commons more closely with that of the Scottish Grand Committee so that, if possible, we meet on a Monday on which there is light business in Westminster so that we can return with our motor cars or whatever to our home bases and start out again. This is an important practical point which we must try to work at if we are to improve the logistics of meeting in various venues in Scotland, which I believe is an excellent idea. Another minor but important point is that we should be able to simplify our travelling, hotel and incidental expenses, for which we currently have to apply to different parts of the House of Commons for completion.

I have been a member of the Scottish Grand Committee for many years, including the days when we had to make up the numbers to have a majority. The steps we have now taken to deal with non-controversial legislation are quite excellent. More importantly, we shall be able to get more business through the House via the Scottish Grand Committee than if we had to go through the full procedure of Second Reading on the Floor of the House, Standing Committee, and so on. All in all, Scotland can look forward to additional constructive legislation, particularly legislation relating to some of the Law Commission reports which often have to be put aside because there is no time to debate them in the House of Commons.

I believe that we are right to bring forward these amendments to the Standing Orders, and I warmly support them. I would ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to consider the practical ways in which he can assist Members of Parliament to attend the Scottish Grand Committee with greater facility than is possible at present.

8.8 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) made an important point about the facilities—or lack of them—that we shall have when we move around the country. The lack of facilities is not the fault of the local authorities, each and every one of which has given excellent hospitality. It is not always easy for a local authority or a town hall to rearrange its facilities to suit 72 Members of Parliament and other staff.

Lord Provost Thomas Dingwall should be congratulated, as every officer at the city chambers gave us every facility. The Lord Provost laid on lunch at his expense, not only for hon. Members but for all the back-up staff, including the *Hansard* staff and the badge messengers. That was appreciated. Nonetheless, if we have to travel the length and breadth of the country—I have no objection to that—it must be recognised that we also have to look after our constituents. The phone often rings on a Sunday night and hon. Members are asked to chase up urgent matters on the Monday, and I had that experience before I went to Edinburgh. In those circumstances, an hon. Member must be able to get to a phone or a fax while he is at the Scottish Grand Committee if he is to assist in an immigration problem or to help during an eviction.

Dr. Godman: The council officials—including the Lord Provost—were very kind and hospitable, but precisely the problem that my hon. Friend is now outlining prompted my complaint. I, too, was dealing with an urgent constituency matter and I had to wait eight minutes for a Scottish Office official to finish using the telephone.

Mr. Martin: My hon. Friend again makes an important point. If Scottish Members are to be tied up in the Committee until 1.30 pm on a Monday, we must have the back-up facilities to allow us to get on with the work that our constituents expect us to do. Parking facilities are also important, and I hope that the Leader of the House will consider these matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), the shadow Leader of the House, raised a very important point. The amendment to the Standing Orders states:

> "Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum."

I am not trying to put obstacles in the way of the Leader of the House, but the House is saying that we, as Scottish Members, have the Grand Committee exclusively for us. However, the amendment states that the Conservative Whip will be allowed to sit in the body of the hall. I do not think that that should be the case. I take the view that, as there are a few Scottish Tory Back-Bench Members left, they should pick their Whip for the Grand Committee.

We have a Member from the Scottish National party in the Chamber now, and I have stated my views about nationalism. I despise the terms English and Scottish and, while I am proud of my culture, I hope that I would never express that in a way that discriminates against people. I do not want to have a go at English Members of Parliament, but my complaint does not relate to a person's nationality.

Members representing Scottish seats should be in the Scottish Grand Committee, while Members representing English, Welsh or Irish seats should not. I do not think that the Conservative Whip should be within the body of the hall because his job is different from that of a Government Minister. The Whip's job is to rustle up votes and to tell people to stop speaking.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Martin: The Secretary of State shakes his head, and suggests that that is not the Whip's purpose. It does not matter whether the Secretary of State has good intentions and I accept that in this case his intentions are

[Mr. Martin]

good as he wants to improve the facility. But once we put the matter into black and white, someone will be able to come along later and see it as an abuse.

What happens when we leave the House and some other people take our places? If there are no Tory Back-Bench Members left in Scotland at that time, somebody may suggest that half a dozen Tory Whips—who will have nothing else to do with their time—should join the Committee debates, make speeches and put down motions. I know that the intention of the amendment is to get Ministers of the Crown to come along to the Committee and make statements so that we can scrutinise the work that they are doing. But the amendment is open to abuse. I mean no disrespect to the present Whip, but he does not represent a Scottish seat and I would hope that the amendment will not allow him into the body of the hall.

The Leader of the House should consider the provision which allows a Minister of the Crown who is not a Minister of this House but of the other place to make statements. I must ask that once those Ministers and Ministers of the Crown who are not members of the Scottish Grand Committee have finished their business in the Committee, they should take no further part in the proceedings. A Minister can come along and take part in the proceedings of the Committee, but we know that Ministers normally say or do nothing other than deal with the matter for which they are responsible. May we have an assurance that once a Minister has finished that part of his business—for example, ministerial questions—he will take no further part in the proceedings of the Grand Committee?

8.9 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), whose leading and valued role as Chairman of the Scottish Grand Committee is, in the main, much appreciated.

In welcoming these changes to our Standing Orders, I draw attention to comments that I and other Scottish Conservative and Unionist candidates made at the time of the last general election, when we suggested that a new Conservative Government should increase the importance and activities of the Grand Committee. Furthermore, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) might like to know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave us a commitment to that effect at the time. He had clearly looked ahead even before the general election.

We also considered the role of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee; I and other colleagues offered a commitment to its reinstatement—and that is what has taken place since 1992. Under the able chairmanship of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) it has played a valuable role in the affairs of Scotland, as evidenced by some of the excellent reports it has drawn up on drugs, enterprise companies and other subjects.

I welcome the fact, too, that the Committee will move around the country. It is important to let people throughout Scotland witness the Government's activities. I have noted that meetings held in Edinburgh and Glasgow are usually quite well attended, but I was disappointed to find that Labour Members did not turn up in large numbers in Aberdeen. It seems to me that Labour Members tend to concentrate on central belt issues instead of recognising Scotland's wider needs. If we stick with the policy of moving around, perhaps we shall eventually get the point through to them.

I agree with the hon. Members for Springburn and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about facilities. We really must have telephones and faxes at the various venues.

The amendments to Standing Orders refer also to the Grand Committee dealing with Bills. Last year, Second Reading of the Children (Scotland) Bill was taken in the Committee, whereupon a Special Standing Committee was set up to examine the details. These proposals follow on from that and open the door to further progress; Third Readings will be taken in the Scottish Grand Committee—that will be most welcome to all hon. Members.

On 29 November the Secretary of State said that a timetable of our sittings would be established, and one has since been drawn up for eight meetings to consider Government business. I understand that a timetable for four Opposition motions is being prepared as well. That, too, is welcome. It is important to set dates in advance so as to allow hon. Members to make arrangements around them. I can see no reference in the motions to this aspect of the matter, however. Perhaps the Minister will give it some consideration in winding up the debate.

The Special Standing Committee procedure is to be used again for the Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. That is most welcome. The Committee is due to come to Ayr not long hence to discuss raves and drug misuse.

Above all, I welcome the intention to invite United Kingdom Ministers whose departmental remits include responsibilities for Scottish affairs. I agree with the hon. Member for Springburn that such Ministers should have no voting rights in the Grand Committee, as is well established under our rules, but it will be beneficial to invite Ministers from the Department of Transport, the Department of Social Security and—given that so many people work for the defence industry in Scotland—from the Ministry of Defence. That will boost Scottish involvement in our national affairs. It will be particularly pleasing to see the Prime Minister in the Committee. That will be a reminder that he is Prime Minister not just of the United Kingdom but of each of its nation states.

On a more generous note, perhaps we should recognise that the Leader of the Opposition might have an important part to play. We should open up the doors to him on future occasions if he can come in his role as Leader of the Opposition—a role I hope he will continue to play for many years to come.

Mr. Newton: Does my hon. Friend envisage, in the world picture that he is painting, that the Leader of the Opposition would have to answer some questions?

Mr. Gallie: No, but it would only be fair to allow him to ask questions. I believe that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is rather uninformed about Scottish matters, and it would do him the world of good to spend some time in the Scottish Grand Committee. I understand, in fact, that the right hon. Gentleman recently attended a dinner—Opposition Members might have called it an elitist dinner—addressed also by the hon. Member for

Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). The right hon. Member for Sedgefield made a speech at the dinner; its major sponsors, Global Video, placed an advertisement in the programme containing the words:

"Wouldn't you rather be at home watching a video?"

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will take that message to heart when he considers some of the Opposition's madcap ideas for imposing a tax-raising Assembly on Scotland. The people of Scotland certainly do not want a tartan tax. The idea is being pushed by the hon. Member for Hamilton, but the right hon. Member for Sedgefield should travel up to Scotland a bit more to learn that the Scottish people do not want the option that he is attempting to force on them.

8.17 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I was interested to hear the views of the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), but I really do hope that we will not start head counting at Monday morning meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee. That might bring the whole process into some disrepute. To that extent I disagreed with the hon. Gentleman, and I disagreed with all his other suggestions as well.

I welcome these changes—as far as they go. It is certainly an improvement to be given notice of the dates for well into the new year. This has always been a difficulty for the minority parties. Discussions are held through the usual channels, but latterly they have become rather clogged up. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has cut through all that. He has set a timetable up to the summer, which everyone will welcome. Of course there are difficulties in travelling, but as long as the logistics can be sorted out there will be benefits. The Committee's deliberations will be taken to different parts of Scotland, which I welcome. The changes will give us more time and opportunity to consider some of the questions that are to the fore of public life north of the border.

The Leader of the House is a reasonable and enlightened man.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I was just saying the same about the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is the end of both our careers.

The Leader of the House has not been in charge of the Government's programme throughout their term of office but, after 16 years, to introduce these changes as the answer to the constitutional deficit north of the border is inadequate. To describe them as inadequate is an understatement of some proportion. They do not measure up to what needs to be done.

If there is one thing that illustrates my point better than any other, it is the way in which the Government treat the different but very real problems of the Province of Northern Ireland. There is no suggestion that they will tinker with Standing Orders or that a Grand Committee will meet in Enniskillen, Derry or other parts of Northern Ireland. That is in stark contrast to the way in which they are coping with the situation in Scotland.

Mr. George Robertson: Standing Order No. 99 states that there should be a Northern Ireland Grand Committee. It has two subsections. However, the Government's response to the situation in Northern Ireland, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, is not to beef up that Committee up with another five pages of amendments and the possibility of UK or Scottish Ministers going over there but to create a legislative assembly for Northern Ireland with 90 members and full legislative powers. People understand that distinction and the contrast and hypocrisy in the Government's position.

Mr. Kirkwood: I hope that whoever will reply to the debate will address that point.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Kirkwood: I am pleased that the Secretary of State will deal with that point, which is in many people's minds and deserves an answer.

Are these changes all that we will get? Is this the beginning of a continuing process? If it is, my hon. Friends and I are interested in engaging in it; but if this is all that we are to get for all time, it is completely inadequate and does not begin to measure up to the possibilities for constitutional reform north of the border.

There are other questions about the detail of the changes that need to be addressed. Will this end the difficult process, which we have experienced more and more in recent years, of small Scottish sections being added to principally English Bills? As a legal practitioner in a previous incarnation, I know that the situation was becoming impossible even before 1983 when I was elected. It has worsened since. Will the Secretary of State comment on that matter of continuing concern? Will the changes provide more time for effective scrutiny and deal with the important question asked by the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who hoped, as I do, that the proposals of the Scottish Law Commission will get a better hearing under this process than previously? If that proves to be so, it will be a significant advantage.

It is not clear who will control the access of UK and English Ministers, Prime Ministers and Chancellors who will come to give us the benefit of their views. Will that be entirely under the control of the Government or will we be able to negotiate it through the usual channels? Will the Committee be able to vote to require or request—or, indeed, reject—the attendance of a UK Minister? The process and the arrangements that will have to be made for that are not clear.

I welcome the fact that we will be able to return to questions of principle on Third Reading of Bills. Does that mean that we will be able to discuss things that are not in the Bill, as amended, at that stage? At present, we would not be in order if we discussed something that was not in the Bill on Third Reading. If we will now be able to discuss matters of principle, that gives us the opportunity to consider things that are not in the Bill, as amended, on Third Reading in a way that we cannot at the moment. I would value some advice on that.

Mr. Newton: It may help if I say a brief, off-the-cuff word about that. As always, it is up to the occupant of the Chair to decide what is in or out of order in a speech. That is the basic point. I would not envisage anything being in order in a Third Reading debate in the Scottish Grand Committee that would be out of order in such a debate in the House. I guess that a passing reference to regretting that something was not in the Bill might be in

[Mr. Newton]

order but that an attempt to have an elaborate discussion on it would not be. Those are the normal rules of the House.

Mr. Kirkwood: I hope that the Leader of the House will give that further and better consideration. If the suggestion enshrined in the proposals is to mean anything and we are to have discussion in principle of the contents of the Bill on Third Reading, I do not understand how the situation that he has described could obtain.

Mr. Newton: I do not wish to make a huge issue of this, but we are talking about a Third Reading debate and the opportunity to have it in the Scottish Grand Committee rather than on the Floor of the House. Apart from that, it is no different.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Third Reading of the Children (Scotland) Bill, for example, took 20 minutes. If we are to take proper advantage of the new procedure we should be able to discuss things in principle on Third Reading. Obviously, this is a matter for the occupant of the Chair in any particular circumstance, but I believe that it is out of order to discuss things that are not in the Bill, as amended, on Third Reading. If we are to discuss things in principle, we should be able to do precisely that. There is confusion about that in my mind, if in no one else's. Perhaps the Leader of the House could give the matter further consideration.

The initiative, if that is not an overstatement of the amendments to Standing Orders, is a recognition by the Government that things need to change north of the border. If the Secretary of State is saying that the proposals are a first step to trying to do things better—to improve the quality of Scottish legislation, to provide more time, to have more effective scrutiny, better public access and more publicity for what we are doing north of the border—then we are signed up for it and we support it. If he does not take the initiative forward and it is not the start of a process of change, then what is before us tonight is not, by itself, worth having.

8.28 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) made some general points with which he would not expect me to agree, but he has asked some interesting questions about how the proposed procedures would work.

This is a short and largely technical debate. I take the view already expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) that these are sensible, practical changes. They are changes within the framework of the Union.

I say to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) that to defend the Union—at the last general election, or, for that matter, at previous ones—is not to say that the Union is cast permanently in stone in respect of its institutions. That is an absurd position to take.

Conservative Governments introduced the Scottish Office and the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. At some stage, the hon. Member for Dewsbury or her colleagues must answer the key question about their attitude to the proposals: what could a Labour Government do with their Scottish Parliament that they could not do with these proposals, given a Labour majority in this House, except increase taxes in Scotland? Under Labour's proposals, the advantage of directly questioning major Ministers such as the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Defence would be lost.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Gentleman's argument has often been deployed by the Secretary of State in defence of these proposals. The hon. Gentleman seems to accept that the proposals are inadequate under a Conservative Government because, although the Committee may vote in one way, the House can overturn that vote. Curiously, he seems to argue that the proposals can work only if we have a Labour Government. Is that the best argument that a Conservative Back Bencher can advance in support of these proposals?

Mr. Stewart: I am not arguing that for a moment. Assuming that a Labour Government would want to introduce a Scottish Parliament, I asked the hon. Member for Dewsbury what a Labour Government would do in the several years between an election and introducing a Scottish Parliament, but I received no answer whatever. The proposals are entirely workable under a Conservative or Labour Government, but what would a Labour Government achieve with a Scottish Parliament that they could not achieve with these proposals if they had a majority in this House? At some stage, Opposition Front Benchers must answer that question.

I emphasise the importance of extra question periods, which would have an inherently greater advantage than set-piece debates. Set-piece debates tend to be predictable—

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): This is one of them.

Mr. Stewart: Except when I am speaking, but I shall not go down that path. Moreover, they do not provide much opportunity for Back Benchers because such a high proportion of time is inevitably taken up by the two Front Bench spokesmen at the beginning and end of such debates. The key feature of the new proposals is the increase in the proportion of time devoted to questions.

Will my right hon. Friend answer three points of detail? First, do the proposals increase Scottish Members' opportunities to enact private Members' Bills, which, on the Floor of the House, could be stopped for reasons unrelated to the merits of the Bill? I hope that he can reassure all Back Benchers that he will consider that matter positively.

Secondly, may I support the point about facilities made by the hon. Members for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). If the proposals are to work, it must be accepted that facilities such as telephones and fax machines are not for the personal convenience of Members but because our constituents, who might normally expect to find us in our constituencies on a Monday morning, may want to be in touch with us urgently about the kind of important issue to which the hon. Member for Springburn referred.

Thirdly, on the timing of Committee meetings, my right hon. Friend should not regard 10.30 am as a sacrosanct starting time as the Committee now travels to different parts of Scotland. It would be sensible to have a different starting time depending on precisely where the Committee meets.

Dr. Godman: Another problem that the Leader of the House has not examined is that, when we attend meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland, we cannot be here when Ministers make important statements. That happened on Monday, when a number of us wanted to be here to ask questions of the Prime Minister about the Madrid debacle. We were denied that opportunity because we were in Glasgow.

Mr. Stewart: That is undoubtedly a potential problem. It is less of a problem if the Committee meets in Glasgow, which has a regular air service, but if we meet in other areas of Scotland where the air service is less frequent, those problems can arise and the authorities should deal with them in a practical way.

I welcome these sensible and practical proposals. However, the debate has revealed that a number of detailed questions from hon. Members on both sides of the House need to be answered to ensure that the proposals are made as practicable and workable as possible.

8.35 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am grateful to note that the amendments to the Standing Orders have at least restored the confidence of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), which I thought was rather strange. He then had the common sense to add "only a little".

I find them so sadly lacking in imagination and divergent thinking that I wonder whether they come from the pen of the Secretary of State for Scotland at all. He was the Minister who gave us "Reservicing Britain", which led to compulsory competitive tendering, and has caused great harm to local government services. He was also the Minister who gave us the poll tax. At least that was inspired—mad, but inspired—whereas these proposals are not at all inspired.

As I go round the line of route with some of my guests, I show them the Magna Carta and explain that, at that time, the people of the country—at least, the lords—had to be consulted by the king before he passed vital Acts of Parliament. I also point out that, although they were consulted, they could rarely persuade the king not to do his own will at bidding.

Those are the kind of Standing Orders that we have before us. The Government wheel Scottish Members around to the Scottish Grand Committee at various locations, where they are consulted, but then pay no attention to what they say. I have heard much criticism of members of local government for not consulting in that way. The Standing Orders are not intended to change the fundamental flaw in the United Kingdom's democratic system, which is that the majority of Scottish people reject the Government's policies, but they will be put through through either the present ritual in the Scottish Grand Committee or the extended ritual set down in the Standing Orders.

A former Prime Minister talked about his preference for "talk, talk" rather than "war, war". [HON. MEMBERS: "Jaw, jaw."] "Jaw, jaw" is a different phrase, but it has the same meaning: better to talk, therefore to avoid conflict. The Standing Orders will show the people of Scotland again and again the pointlessness of the Scottish Grand Committee and therefore underline the fact that they must go to war with the United Kingdom's constitutional arrangements if they are to achieve real progress and democracy for Scotland.

On that basis, I welcome the fact that the more people see the flaws in the Standing Orders and how the Scottish Grand Committee operates, even with the extended changes, the more they will see how pointless it is to have a Scottish Grand Committee in a United Kingdom Parliament that then uses the voting power of English Members to deny the views put forward by the majority of hon. Members representing Scotland.

All parties, apart from the Conservative party, will normally speak against the Government's position but, ultimately, the Government will bring the matter down to the House of Commons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that a majority in the Scottish Grand Committee should determine legislation in Scotland? The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) refused to answer the question; will the hon. Gentleman answer it?

Mr. Connarty: My argument is that any process of democratic arrangement should be one where the majority of the people, in a position where there is subsidiarity and devolved government, make the decision on those items that relate to the Scottish—*[Interruption.]* I do not believe that the Scottish Grand Committee is the right place to make that type of decision. We wish to see a Scottish devolved Parliament with the proper devolution of subsidiary powers—in the Scottish context, of those things that the Scottish people wish to be controlled by that Parliament.

There will be consultation, but we shall not have the right to persuade the Government to change their route. The argument made again and again is that the Committee may discuss non-controversial Bills—we have probably set out along that road—such as the health and safety at raves Act or the Licensing Scotland (Amendment) Bill. However, let us consider what the effect would be if a Bill were controversial.

We would be able to have a Second Reading debate in the Scottish Grand Committee. It would then be sent to a Scottish Standing Committee, with an inbuilt majority for the Government. If it went back to the later stage, as was explained to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire points of principle could not be raised again on Third Reading.

Obviously, the measure is a sham. It is a way of taking us to various venues, and I welcome any chance to debate with the Government at any time anywhere, but it will not prevent the Scottish people from concluding that the majority of the people of Scotland, through their representatives in the House, cannot influence the Government's decisions on what they would call controversial issues.

That is what is wrong with the measure. There is no acceptance in any of the Standing Orders that the majority of the Scottish people reject the Conservative Government's policies on what they call controversial matters. Controversial matters cannot be voted down; nor, at any Committee stage in a Scottish Standing Committee, can controversial amendments be passed on the basis of the majority of the Scottish people's wishes.

[Mr. Connarty]

We witnessed that, although we tried our best, during the passage of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which has been cited as an Act that did everything. It had a Special Standing Committee, which took evidence, but when the Government did not wish to accept controversial amendments in Committee, they voted them down. Then they brought the Bill to the Floor of the House, and voted down any further amendments. When they did not like amendments that were passed in the House of Lords, they brought the Bill back again, and used their majority in the Chamber to vote down those amendments.

That is why I think it is important to realise that the Standing Orders will do one thing, and only one thing, for Scottish democracy. It will be exhibited again and again, through the use of those procedures, that the Secretary of State for Scotland is trying to sell the people of Scotland an insufficient change to the constitutional arrangements for Scotland within the United Kingdom. I welcome the measures on that basis. The more they expose the Government's flaws and lack of democracy, the more people will demand a Scottish devolved Parliament under the Labour Government after the general election.

8.42 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Madam Deputy Speaker, I feel like Banquo's ghost who has just arrived at the feast. Forgive me if I do not join in the very modest celebration that is going on.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) spoke about those measures representing evolution. It is evolution of a gey shilpit cratur. I noticed that the Leader of the House believed that the measures would be widely welcomed in Scotland, but he means that they will be widely ignored in Scotland. There is no big deal in any of that.

It is typical of the Westminster system that the debate was opened by two Members of Parliament representing English constituencies, and the measures have about that much relevance to Scotland. I have heard more in the Chamber offered to the south sea island of Tuvalu than I have heard offered to Scotland. At least Tuvalu will get independence; we only have the load of old rubbish presented to us tonight.

There is a proposition that England and Wales Ministers can come and attend the Scottish Grand Committee. It probably serves them right, but it may be important, because English Ministers have a habit of overruling the wishes of the Scottish Office. I have seen that all too often in agriculture and fishing—if I can mention fishing to the Minister, who will be rather sensitive about that subject.

I ask the Minister: what budgets have been given for those meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland? Who will pay for the security of all those bigwigs who arrive on an awayday ticket to Scotland every so often? Will that be a burden on local authorities? Who will pay for that?

The changes are minor changes to the Scottish Grand Committee. If they had been made at any time in the past 30 years, no one would have noticed. To my mind, it is simply deckchair shuffling time on The Titanic, while the orchestra plays "Land of Hope and Glory", but I am happy to tell the Secretary of State that, as a ruse, it will not work.

The changes will allow the Prime Minister or other bigwigs to join the Scottish Grand Committee travelling circus, and that is no big deal for Scotland. They might persuade the Prime Minister or some of the other England and Wales Ministers to concentrate on Scottish affairs for a morning, and perhaps that would be some limited good.

In reality, the Scottish Grand Committee has no powers. It is simply a talking shop, based on a technicality. It can merely decide that it has or has not decided that it has decided that it has met, and it is about that much use to the whole of Scotland. It is no substitute for a Parliament, or for the real return of decision-making power to the Scottish people.

I will agree this far with what I heard in some of the speeches. When the Scottish people see exactly what worth and what good the Westminster system is to them, we shall obtain the result that is the only true future for our nation, which is true independence, when the Scottish people can decide their own future through their own democratically elected Parliament. The measures are trivial, betraying a trivial approach to Scotland's needs. They will pass, but they will not do.

All I can say is, if this is the union—

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): We have got all night right now, laddie.

Mr. Welsh: Not really. It does not take long to reply to this load of old rubbish, which the hon. Gentleman accepts is good enough for his country, but I certainly do not and will not.

If this is the union at its sparkling best, I am indeed happy for the future of Scotland.

8.46 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I promise that I shall be very brief.

Mr. Galbraith: Ten minutes: it is getting good and depressing here.

Dr. Godman: I begin by asking a question. *[Interruption.]* It is a serious question. Has Greenock been ruled out for the staging of a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee? I should like the Trade and Industry Minister to be there, answering questions concerning the shipbuilding industry and other maritime industries. I should also like to hear from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), tonight about the placing of a certain contract for the construction of a fisheries research vessel, but that does not fall within the framework of the amendments.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): It should be a Scottish shipyard.

Dr. Godman: I am happy to know that Fergusons will build that ship. It is a Scottish fisheries research vessel, and it should be built in a premier yard in Scotland—Fergusons of Port Glasgow.

I also draw attention to the fact that, if we are to attend those frequent meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in different towns and cities, that prevents us from coming to this place to hear important statements from the Dispatch Box. I for one wanted to be here yesterday to hear the Prime Minister speak, and I got here as quickly as I could, just in time for the tail end of that statement. That simply is not good enough for Scots Members.

I ask the Secretary of State, a serious question. Where there is a clash, would it be possible to consider a ministerial statement being made later in the day, or postponed until the following day?

The lack of facilities has been mentioned. In that regard, I offer my compliments to the councils of Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow for the fine hospitality that they extended to us. It was interesting to see my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) finally making it to the lord provost's chair. I do not believe that he ever sat in that chair when he was a councillor in Glasgow, although he deserved to sit in it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

I for one would welcome the opportunity to cross-examine our premier Law Officer on Lockerbie, and just what the heck is happening to the pursuit of the people alleged to have committed the murders on that terrible day in December 1988. We also need to challenge him on other issues, such as the operation of Acts of Parliament that seek to give greater protection to children when they give evidence in our courts of law. When Ministers attend meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee, they should come by invitation of the members of the Committee. Its meetings should not be used as a travelling press conference, as one was recently by the Secretary of State, when about 16 journalists were present to hear his less than informative speech on spending.

Speaking as a federalist, I believe that the only answer in the long run is to have a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Parliament, an English Parliament and a Northern Ireland Parliament. The Scottish Grand Committee is a talking shop; it has taken on the characteristics of a travelling talking shop. Some of us will be lucky—or unlucky—and it will come to our constituencies; owing to the size of our majorities, some of us will, I suspect, be excluded from that privilege.

8.50 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): It is appropriate for the Scottish team to have a few words at the end of the debate. I know that we are not allowed to mention the people in the Galleries this evening, but if I were allowed to do so, I would be able to say that on a rainy, wet night in London, the Strangers Gallery contained three people—exactly the same number as are present in the Press Gallery.

What does that say for the argument that the measure will bring Scottish affairs back to the nation? My hon. Friends the Members for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) say that they have been so captivated by our brief debate that they intend to make at least a couple of visits to the Scottish Grand Committee—in Stornoway, Ayr, Stirling, Eyemouth, Unst and who knows where. If the Scottish Whip gets his way, it may even go to Dalkeith.

I should make it clear for the purpose of certain hon. Members who do not seem to have noticed what is happening that we do not intend to vote against the provisions this evening. Any extra debates in Scotland are to be welcomed. The opportunity to cross-examine some Ministers north of the border may be useful. I can imagine no better way of reducing Tory party support in Scotland from 13 per cent. to single figures than to bring up the Secretary of State for Defence to go around and defend his policies.

We were told only a few weeks ago that the measure was the big rabbit that the Secretary of State was going to pull out of his hat to try to grab some headlines from the Scottish Constitutional Convention launch. The big white rabbit was to be the big white Prime Minister appearing in an unknown location in Scotland.

As people across Scotland have seen, the reality is an admission that the Government have got their policy on Scotland and the constitution wrong for 16 years. I know that behind the Secretary of State for Scotland are diehard Unionists who have held to that line for 16 years and who must be deeply worried about the way in which the argument has been thrown away; in its place, in the vacuum that the right hon. Gentleman has created, is a pathetic substitute for what the Scottish people want.

The Prime Minister admits that there is a fault and a flaw. The Prime Minister admits failure on the constitution; all we have is some pretty tawdry window dressing. The Secretary of State for Scotland comes to the Scottish Office in a blaze of glory; he discards the ideas of his predecessors, and tells us that he has the answer. But with exactly the same arrogant contempt for public opinion in Scotland, he tells the Scottish people that he has made up his mind, and that this is his choice, and his alone.

That will never be acceptable to the Scottish people, 87 per cent. of whom reject the Conservative party, leaving the party in splendid—and now mobile—isolation. The people of Scotland will not be fobbed off by a few Cabinet Ministers who choose to wander around Scotland, making a case that has, until now, persuaded nobody.

As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has said, the Scottish people are intelligent enough, and aware enough, to see the Government's argument in all its stark hypocrisy. In Northern Ireland and for Northern Ireland, the Government say in the framework document that what is required is not to beef up clause 99 of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons or to beef up the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, but a full-scale, legislative Assembly for Northern Ireland. Some 90 members are to be suggested for that legislative Assembly. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the Secretary of State for Scotland is telling the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) to shut up and stop his endless prattling. The Under-Secretary of State may gain some glory in his brief parliamentary career for making more sedentary interventions than anyone else.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is it my hon. Friend's understanding that the Northern Ireland Assembly is to be funded by an orange tax?

Mr. Robertson: I shall not rise to that bait.

On a serious point, the framework document makes it clear that the sources of funding for the Northern Ireland Assembly are open to negotiation. Nothing has been ruled out by Her Majesty's Government for Northern Ireland, although they have ruled out everything for Scotland.

[Mr. Robertson]

A party of government that is down to 13 per cent. in Scotland—to the bottom of the barrel—should act with a little humility. There may have come a time, even for this Secretary of State for Scotland—who foisted the poll tax on Scotland, whence it went to the rest of the country—to listen to the Scottish people who so decisively reject him. Instead of coming up with wheezes and public relations gimmicks that he is willing to parade in the streets of Scotland without any dignity, he should take heed of the work being done in the consensus-based forum of the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

We cannot vote for what the Scottish people want, because the Scottish Parliament is not on offer tonight, but in the next 15 months there will be an election and the Scottish people will be able to choose what they want. They will be able to vote for the Scottish Parliament for which they have asked for all these years; we shall deliver it, and Scotland will be the better for it.

8.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The Scottish people will certainly not want to have anything to do with the tartan tax proposed by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)—just as the Leader of the Opposition wanted nothing to do with it. If the hon. Gentleman is correct that the proposals are such a bad idea, is it not significant that he and his colleagues will once again sit on their hands and decline to vote against them tonight? Labour Members decried the tax cuts in much the same way, but when it comes to the crunch they cannot vote against the proposals, because they knew that they are popular.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) at least had the good grace to recognise that this is an opportunity for us to perform our work in Scotland more effectively and to improve legislation for Scotland. This week's meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Glasgow was a marvellous example of how it is possible for hon. Members from different political parties to put their differences aside and discuss serious issues, such as drugs, and take forward the debate. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman could not recognise that.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) talked about panic. If she wants panic, she should have seen her leader on his day trip to Scotland. He started the day by assuring us that there would be no tartan tax unless it were in the Labour manifesto—and he gave an assurance that it would not be. By the end of the day—after some fancy footwork on the part of the hon. Member for Hamilton—the Leader of the Opposition supported the hon. Gentleman in his call for a tartan tax. At least, I think that was the Leader of the Opposition's position. The Scottish people will have nothing to do with a tax-raising Parliament.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire asked me if this is the end. No, it is not. When I made my statement to the House, I said that I was open to positive suggestions. At least the hon. Gentleman has the intellectual honesty to acknowledge that the Constitutional Convention's proposals would mean the end of the office of Secretary of State and a reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is still living in cloud cuckoo land, where he thinks he can have his cake and eat it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) welcomed the proposals, and I am grateful for his support. The hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) emphasised the importance of proper facilities. I am relieved to learn that not everyone in the Labour party has sharp suits and mobile telephones—although I must admit that the hon. Member for Springburn has a sharp suit. But it is a serious point, as my right hon. Friend acknowledged.

The hon. Member for Springburn also referred to the presence of the Whip. Far be it from me to make a plea on behalf of the Whips, but the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) intervened during the Scottish Grand Committee hearing in Edinburgh to complain about his inability to talk to the usual channels. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Springburn remembers that, but perhaps he should have a word with his hon. Friend, who does not seem to have the right line from the Whips Office.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire welcomed the changes. He asked me whether there would be more opportunities to deal with Scottish legislation in the Grand Committee. I hope there will, and that measures that would otherwise have to wait their turn as private Members' business can be considered in the Grand Committee. That would demand some restraint, and co-operation through the usual channels, but there is a real chance that we could achieve that goal. The hon. Gentleman has recognised that opportunity, and I welcome his support.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about Ministers from Departments other than the Scottish Office appearing before the Scottish Grand Committee. It is obviously for the Government to decide who should answer particular debates. However, the nature of the subjects chosen for debate should select which Minister will respond.

For example, my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for railways and roads appeared before the Scottish Grand Committee during its consideration of the Fort William sleeper service. That is an obvious example of a Minister from the relevant Department appearing before the Committee. I am sure that Department of Transport officials found it very useful briefing the Minister for that debate.

I welcome the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). He asked a key question which the hon. Member for Hamilton has not yet answered: if we are able to take legislation through the Grand Committee and hold members of the Executive to account in Scotland, what could a Scottish Parliament with a majority of Labour Members do under a Labour Government that could not be done in the Scottish Grand Committee?

Mrs. Ann Taylor: It could make decisions.

Mr. Forsyth: I appreciate that any Labour Government would find making decisions very difficult. However, a Scottish Grand Committee with a Labour majority under a Labour Government would be able to do everything that a Scottish Parliament could do, except one thing: raise a tartan tax, and make the Scots pay more income tax than the English. A Scottish Parliament would not be able to hold the Prime Minister and Ministers to account in the way that the Scottish Grand Committee can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood is absolutely correct to make that point, and to draw attention to the fact that hon. Members will be able to ask more questions in the Committee. I take his point about times, and that matter will be settled through the usual channels. I appreciate his comments about private Members' business, but I ask him to take on board the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. I think that we will have a real chance to take through uncontroversial measures, which would not otherwise not be available to us, as Government measures.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) talked about my unpopular policies in Scotland. They were so unpopular that I twice defeated the hon. Gentleman at the ballot box in Stirling before he ran off to Falkirk.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) brought the pantomime scene to our proceedings a little early, by giving us the analogy of the Titanic. If he was comparing our position to that, he must have been the iceberg. I can only assume that there is a lot more below the surface than was apparent from his contribution to the debate.

Mr. Welsh: I remind the Minister that I also used the analogy of Banquo's ghost, who led to the denouement of the play by reminding the criminals of their crime.

Mr. Forsyth: I am delighted that, after all his rude comments about the English, the hon. Gentleman still acknowledges the importance of Shakespeare as a good English poet and playwright.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow asked whether the Scottish Grand Committee would be able to come to Greenock. Obviously, it is a matter for the House authorities to consider possible venues, but I understand that the Opposition have suggested Ayr. As there may be a particular problem with the date in Ayr, if the hon. Gentleman has a word with his hon. Friend, that might be a possibility. As to the choice of subjects, the Opposition have their allotted days.

The measure is a positive step forward. It gives Scottish Members the opportunity to demonstrate to their electors their commitment to good government in Scotland. It provides an opportunity for the Opposition to hold the Government to account for their policies—I shall not place too much emphasis on that. Although the Opposition have a ragbag of confused people proposing a tartan tax on the people of Scotland, they clearly have to sort out their own act before holding the Government to account. The proposals represent an opportunity, and I commend them to the House.

It being one and a half hours after the motion was entered upon, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order* [*14 December*].

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 94A (Scottish Grand Committee (composition and business)) be amended, as follows:

line 17, after 'consideration', insert 'or further consideration';

line 30, leave out from 'committee,' to 'Standing' in line 32 and insert 'made under paragraph (6) of';

line 33, at the end, add—

'(3) Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum.';

(2) Standing Order No. 94C (Scottish Grand Committee (short debates)) be amended, as follows:

line 8, leave out from 'to' to the end of line 9 and insert 'Scotland';

line 19, leave out from 'No' to 'replying' in line 20 and insert 'Member except the Minister of the Crown';

line 24, leave out 'minister or law officer' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 25, leave out 'members of the committee' and insert 'Members';

line 27, leave out 'member of the committee' and insert 'Member';

(3) Standing Order No. 94D (Scottish Grand Committee (ministerial statements)) be amended, as follows:

line 2, leave out 'Scottish Office minister or a Scottish law officer' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 3, leave out 'member of the committee' and insert 'Member of the House';

line 10, leave out 'minister or law officer, as the case may be,' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 12, after 'responsibilities', insert 'so far as they relate to Scotland, which, in the case of a Scottish law officer, shall be';

line 13, leave out 'thirteenth' and insert 'relevant';

line 17, after 'conclusion', insert 'either at an hour appointed by an order of the committee, for which a motion may be made without notice by a member of the government immediately before the commencement of such proceedings, on which motion the question shall be put forthwith, or, if no such motion is made,';

line 31, leave out 'minister or law officer' and insert 'Minister of the Crown';

line 32, leave out 'member of the committee' and insert 'Member of the House';

line 34, leave out 'such a minister or law officer';

(4) Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)) be amended in line 52, at the end, by adding the following paragraphs:

'(7) At the conclusion of proceedings on consideration on report of a bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (3) above, or on the order being read for the third reading of such a bill, a motion may be made by a member of the government (or in the case of a private Member's bill, by the Member in charge of the bill), "That the Bill be referred again to the Scottish Grand Committee"; and the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that such a motion may be made by a private Member only with the leave of the House.

(8) A bill so referred again to the Scottish Grand Committee shall be considered on a motion, "That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle"; and, when the committee has considered that question for a total of one and a half hours (whether on one or more than one day), the chairman shall put the question necessary to dispose of the motion, and shall then report accordingly to the House (or shall report that the committee has come to no resolution), without any further question being put thereon:

Provided that a member of the government may, immediately before the motion "That the Committee has further considered the bill in relation to its principle" is made, make without notice a motion to extend the time-limit specified in this paragraph; and the question on such motion shall be put forthwith.

(9) A bill in respect of which a report has been made under paragraph (8) above shall be ordered to be read the third time on a future day.

(10) When a motion shall have been made for the third reading of a bill to which paragraph (9) above applies, the question thereon shall be put forthwith and may be decided at any hour, though opposed.';

(5) Standing Order No. 94H (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)) be amended, as follows:

line 43, after 'proceedings', insert '(other than on a motion made under paragraph (6) below)';

line 55, after 'proceedings', insert 'or on the completion of the business appointed for consideration at that sitting, whichever is the earlier,';

(6) Standing Order No. 87 (Attendance of law officers and ministers in standing committees) be amended, in line 7, after 'than', by inserting 'a motion in the Scottish Grand Committee under Standing Order No. 94A (Scottish Grand Committee (composition and business)) or'; and

(7) Standing Order No. 91 (Special standing committees) be amended, as follows:

line 18, leave out 'morning sittings' and insert 'sittings at which oral evidence may be given';

line 19, after 'Scotland', insert 'in which case those sittings need not be held in the morning'.

HUMBER BRIDGE (DEBTS) BILL

Ordered,

That, if the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed; and that, as soon as the proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill [*Money*] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

PETITION

College Premises (Gloucester)

9.6 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I have the honour to present a petition with 3,450 signatures, the majority of which are those of people who live in the Oxstalls area in my constituency of Gloucester.

The petition seeks to save from sale, destruction and redevelopment the Oxstalls site, a purpose-built educational building which was a thriving part of higher education in Gloucester before the formation of the Cheltenham and Gloucester college of higher education and before the attempt by the college's governing body in Cheltenham to dispose of its premises in Gloucester altogether in order to spend the proceeds on its facilities in Cheltenham.

The petition states:

The humble Petition of the people of Gloucester sheweth

That Government intervention is necessary to prevent the sale of the college site at Oxstalls, Gloucester.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House require all necessary measures be speedily taken to ensure that the publicly funded college premises at Oxstalls, Gloucester are saved from demolition and reopened for the provision of vocational and technical courses, which otherwise are not available in this area, where unemployment has increased substantially.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Caribbean (Voluntary Resettlement)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.8 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I am pleased that my Adjournment subject was chosen for this evening, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is a subject that has stirred quite a lot of debate among sections of the community, particularly among black and minority ethnic people. It is time that the House heard and understood what is being said. I welcome the opportunity of putting my case for resettlement of people in the Caribbean.

In principle, there is nothing new about the British Government providing financial assistance to people, including British citizens, who wish to resettle abroad. There have been various schemes for many years. For example, until 1988 the old supplementary benefits system provided the full cost of fares for applicants and their dependants who wished to resettle abroad. From August 1984, the scheme was restricted so that only British citizens were entitled to come within it. The maximum allowed per person was two years' worth of benefit.

According to information provided in a written answer, between 1972 and 1986 about 1,208 people were assisted under the supplementary benefits system, at a cost of £216,654.

Since 1988, when supplementary benefit was abolished and replaced by the social fund, no equivalent provision has been available. Since 1971, however, there has been limited provision available under the Immigration Act 1971. I refer to the scheme that has been run on behalf of the Government by International Social Services, which is located in Brixton. I wonder why the Government chose that location?

The scheme provides for those who are not British citizens to obtain the cost of fares for themselves and their families plus a small sum for the transportation of their effects. Between 1971 and 1975 about 2,545 people took advantage of the scheme, the overwhelming majority of them to return to the Caribbean region. The level of interest in the scheme, however, is far higher, with the number of initial inquiries reaching more than 900 in one particular year. I know from my constituency case work that many of those who inquire are turned down because they are British citizens. Clearly there is a gap in provision.

There are other schemes at a European level run by the International Organisation for Migration, the IOM. The IOM facilitates return to the country of origin. Its excellent programme for the return and reintegration of qualified African nationals began in 1983, and more than 1,250 people have been assisted, about half of them coming from the United Kingdom.

The project is now paid for by the European Union and thus, in part, by the British Government, who support the project. The IOM has a major centre that is located in London. Phase 3 of the project began in January 1995. It will assist a further 999 professionals to return to targeted jobs in targeted countries or regions. It will pay for their travel costs, the cost of professional equipment and various reintegration allowances.

Interestingly, the IOM also ran a programme last year to assist 40 professionals to return to Jamaica. Eleven places were filled by United Kingdom applicants. A larger scheme involving 50 places is likely to be run in 1996. It is hoped to expand the scheme to embrace the entire Caribbean in due course. I repeat that the Government fully support the scheme.

Today, the IOM's co-ordinator told me:

> "This programme has aroused a great deal of interest, and from our conversations with applicants we know that there are many who wish to return to Jamaica".

She continued:

> "We fully support your initiative"—

meaning my initiative—

> "in raising this issue, and we would be prepared to run a larger return programme if funding was available."

It is now time, I believe, for a thorough review of existing provision in this area and for a more realistic scheme to facilitate resettlement. It is my considered view that that would be in the interests of Britain, the Caribbean and most certainly of those who wish to resettle. There are, in other words, coinciding interests that would make such a scheme a logical development. I also believe that a suitable scheme could be developed at no additional cost to the public purse.

There is no doubt that there is increased interest in resettlement. People have already left for the Caribbean in considerable numbers; there is a sizeable drift of thousands of people back to the region. The Jamaican Government estimate that some 2,000 people returned from the UK to Jamaica in 1994. Barbados, Dominica, Antigua and Guyana are also popular destinations for returning residents. Organisations have been set up in Britain to assist those wishing to return, such as the Organisation of Returning Jamaicans and Associates, which is flourishing. It is interesting that the person who heads that organisation, Mark Le Ban, said to me only yesterday that its management committee is made up of Jamaican people aged between 30 and 45, so it is not only elderly people who wish to return.

Those who have already resettled—including those who were born in the region as well as those who were born in Britain—are the more prosperous, the retired or professionals with marketable skills, and entrepreneurs who can afford the travel and settlement costs involved. Many of us would dearly wish to resettle but do not have the means to do so. I have had a huge number of letters from such people from all over the country, including my constituents, who are desperately seeking help to return home. Many of the letters come from those in the caring professions, seeking my help for their clients in that regard. They include the elderly, many of whom came here in the 1950s and 1960s, at the specific request of the British Government, and never intended to remain here for long. However, the streets of Britain turned out not to be paved with gold and they were never in a position to return.

There are others who are chronically ill and never likely to work again in Britain who would prefer to return home to the Caribbean. Like the retired, they are frequently trapped by a benefit system that would cut them off from the benefits that they have earned if they were to go back. One of my constituents, for example, is now retired and longs to return to the Caribbean. If she did so, however, her state pension would be frozen at its current level and

[Mr. Bernie Grant]

all benefits for her dependent disabled daughter would be curtailed, because they are payable only in Britain. Does anyone really give a hoot whether in such a case that young lady's benefit is paid in Britain or in the Caribbean?

The social security system is similarly inflexible so far as the long-term unemployed are concerned. I include here many single parents. These people know that they could advance themselves by returning to the Caribbean. However, they would find it hard to raise even the fare and would lose all benefits immediately if they left the United Kingdom. Given the high proportion of unemployed black workers who are long-term unemployed—some 60 per cent. as opposed to 44 per cent. in the white population—it makes little sense for the social security system to close off the option of return. It would not be so outrageous for such people, properly supervised, to be allowed benefit-equivalent sums for a few months to enable them to explore that option. Far higher sums are already spent on "make work" schemes here in Britain.

Another group frequently approaches me. It comprises people who are in work—often skilled or professional people—and who would like, at least for a time, to use their skills to assist in the development of countries with which they have a connection, such as those in the Caribbean, with a view to resettlement. There is currently no structure to channel the aspirations of that group, and there are many practical and financial obstacles.

As I have said, Caribbean and, possibly, other interested countries in the region would welcome a resettlement programme. For many years, the region has been the subject of a brain drain: its brightest and best sons and daughters have migrated, mostly to Britain, the United States or Canada. The absence of those groups has a destabilising effect on the countries concerned, and is now a major obstacle to economic development in the region.

Several Caribbean Governments—including Guyana, Jamaica and Barbados—are encouraging people to return by making special arrangements to assist returnees. They have set up units in their foreign Ministries to assist the smooth return of their citizens; they have also made tax changes that are favourable to returning residents, and issued calls for nationals to return to their countries. They know that there are major economic spin-offs resulting from resettlement.

As I have said, a suitable scheme to assist in resettlement could be developed if the will existed. Clearly, it would need to be the subject of detailed work, but it is possible to state the principles on which such a scheme would be organised. First, any scheme would of course be entirely voluntary: there can be no question of compulsion, or of rescinding anyone's British citizenship. Secondly, it must be a responsible scheme, properly managed on a case-by-case basis, to ensure that those who return do so with the best possible advice and support. Thirdly, the scheme must be adequate, ensuring that those who take advantage of it are properly provided for. I personally would not support any scheme that left people worse off than they are in the United Kingdom in terms of living standards, health care and housing in particular. Fourthly, the ultimate veto over eligibility to the scheme must rest with the designation countries themselves. In fact, they could well be given responsibility for administering the scheme. I have had discussions with most of the Governments involved, and they are willing to take that responsibility.

The scheme would have to be developed in full consultation with the black community here—particularly the Caribbean community—and with the designation countries. The advantages to Britain of such a scheme would be numerous. First, it is not generally in the interests of any country to have a substantial number of people in its midst who honestly do not want to be in that country. Secondly, even with the most generous scheme, there would be substantial financial advantages.

Those who approach me are all too often those who are most dependent on social benefits and health and welfare services—and, indeed, are most likely to be subsidised in various ways for their housing costs. They are also likely to be tenants of local authority housing. It would not take too much imagination to calculate a social-benefits equivalent sum for a given number of people each year that could be used as a basis for a budget for a resettlement scheme. Given the lower costs of living in the Caribbean—even after weekly benefit equivalent payments—substantial sums would be available for investment in housing, social care and health insurance. Many variations are possible.

The existing IOM scheme could well be developed substantially to cater for more of those in work who wish to return. If the costs of this part of the scheme came from the existing Overseas Development Administration budget, that would not be a bad thing: it would certainly be a more effective means of helping the countries concerned than the current practice of sending them highly paid consultants to perform key jobs there.

An enhanced resettlement programme would be in the interests of Britain, not least because it would be a recognition of the huge damage that Britain has inflicted on the Caribbean both now and in the past. Having created and exploited those countries through slavery and colonisation, Britain is abandoning them now that its economic interests lie elsewhere. Having stolen so much it would be more than fitting at this time in history for Britain to at least facilitate the return of those who wish to go back to those countries.

Some people have said that even to mention this matter is to cause damage to race relations in this country, and that to argue for a resettlement scheme is to give in to racism. I have even been accused of adopting the agenda of fascists and racists. Even the Secretary of State for the Home Department told me recently that he feared that an enhanced resettlement scheme would make black people feel unwelcome here. That is rich, coming from someone who has set back race relations by at least 20 years in the relatively short time that he has been in office. I am not convinced by these arguments. This is about creating positive choices for black people, about setting our own agenda for once, and about remembering where we came from.

Some black people will want to stay in Britain, and the fight for racial equality will continue. I shall continue to play my part in that struggle. It is true that some people want to leave because they are sick and tired of the racism that they face in this country. They are fed up with fighting racism, and I see no reason why they should be forced to do so. Others do not feel at home in Britain and some people despair of the predominant values and culture of this society and fear for their children growing up in such a climate. Others simply wish to return to live with their families and, of course, that feeling is more common nowadays because of the absurdity of current immigration rules which keep families apart. I hope that the Minister will address that point when he tries to sum up at the end of the debate.

Against the background of all that has been done to black people historically, the House has no right to deny those people a choice about their future. We know what is happening to black people at the moment. We know about the tragic events less than a week ago in Brixton where there was a tragic death, the second in six months, of a young black person at the hands of the police. I understand that that young man was cornered in a park. He had a knife and he threw it away. The police then descended on that young person and beat him very badly. That was witnessed by several people, and I understand that the Police Complaints Authority is investigating. That was a tragic event by any stretch of the imagination. It is similar to what happened to Rodney King, and I am sure that the Minister and some of the police officers who were around would say, "What happened to Rodney King was terrible". It is my understanding, and witnesses will eventually come forward to prove it, that that is precisely what happened to young Wayne Douglas in Brixton. What concerns a number of people is that the police refuse to learn from their mistakes in the past. They should automatically have suspended the officers concerned on full pay and had an immediate inquiry into the matter.

The media played a part in this notorious affair because they should have given some prominence to yet another death within six months at the hands of the same police force and through the use of side-handled batons. Those two young black males are the first people to die as a result of the introduction of the side-handled batons that were imported from the United States of America—the same batons that killed Rodney King.

We have heard no one mention anything about that at all. I asked the Home Secretary a question on the occasion of the first death. He gave me an answer to the effect that it cost too much to find out how many people had died as a result of the introduction of the side-handled batons law. We now know—and I will tell the House—that two young black men have died as a result of such batons. They are the first to die. That in itself should require some statement from the Home Secretary. Perhaps the Minister replying to this debate will deal with that point, but I doubt it as he is involved as part of the race card that the Government are playing in relation to all these matters.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): On that point, does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most deplorable aspects of events in Brixton is that, far from the mainstream media considering issues such as the deaths in custody or the use of side-handled batons, they have sought scapegoats such as Rudy Narayan, *The Voice* or the *Caribbean Times* newspapers? The mainstream press is criticising the ethnic press simply for printing the facts when the mainstream press would not. Would it not be more appropriate if those same papers exposed some of the issues that my hon. Friend has talked about in relation to police brutality?

Mr. Grant: I am indebted to my hon. Friend for that intervention because I had missed that point. I am glad that she reminded me of it. She is absolutely right. Far from looking for the culprits who caused this position to occur, the mainstream press has looked for a number of scapegoats, including Rudy Narayan, who represents no one except himself and who is not a voice that people in Brixton follow. Poor Rudy will probably end up in the courts and be charged for inciting riots when, if the truth were known, he could not incite himself to riot on any occasion. Such scapegoating, and the attempts of the Government and their cohorts to scapegoat people who are trying just to bring to the public's attention a serious situation in the black community, are deplorable.

As I was saying, the House has no right to deny people a choice about their future. Against the background of all that is happening and has been done to black people historically, the House owes it to them to allow them to exercise that choice. In raising this matter, I speak on behalf of many people in Britain. I hope that the Minister will carefully consider what I have said and agree at least to commission a study of how the current very limited resettlement arrangements could be suitably expanded.

I had a meeting with the Home Secretary and the Minister on this point. The Home Secretary felt that he could not support the scheme because, to put it in his words, if he were to do so, it might encourage elements to believe that black people were not welcome in this country. The Home Secretary went on to say that black people were welcome here, that they were worthy people and that they have had made a substantial contribution to Britain. That was the first time that I had heard that particular Home Secretary make such remarks. I am pleased and indebted that he found it necessary to make them. I wish that he would make them more often.

Ms Abbott: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Grant: Most certainly.

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Lady launches off, may I remind her that she is addressing me and should face the Chair?

Ms Abbott: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker. Does my hon. Friend agree that, welcome though it is to hear the Home Secretary say those positive things about race relations, they come ill from someone who is promoting the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is profoundly racist and aims to criminalise, not just immigrants and asylum seekers, but black African people as a whole, especially in relation to its provisions for passport checks on employees? Someone, although not myself, might accuse him of hypocrisy in that regard.

Mr. Grant: Yes, again my hon. Friend is right on the mark—absolutely correct.

Only this morning the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and myself were all at the first sitting of the Standing Committee on the Asylum and Immigration Bill. Any independent observer, anyone who had not been nobbled by the Home Secretary and his people, would look at that Bill and see that the motivation behind it was clearly racist.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the general burden of

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

his Adjournment debate is about people leaving this country, not people coming to it. I think that he should return to that.

Mr. Grant: I am always willing to take guidance from you, Madam Deputy Speaker. But for some people, in order to leave the country they first have to come into it. I am concerned both with people coming in and with people going out; some people cannot do one without the other. However, I accept your general point, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I mention the Bill because it has a clear bearing on black and minority ethnic communities here. That is because the Home Secretary will require employers to ask people to provide documents to establish their right to be in this country—and we know from experience that the people who are asked for the documents will be black people.

That happens all the time. It happens when black people go to Europe. It even happens with groups of schoolchildren. The immigration officers in France, Germany and Belgium allow all the white children to go through, but they stop the black kids and ask them for special explanations about why they should be able to walk through like everyone else.

The Minister may pooh-pooh that idea, but if he does so, it shows that he is totally ignorant about the effects of his and the European Union's policies on black British citizens. If he adopts the attitude that that is a load of nonsense, and that everything is rosy in Britain, it simply exposes his personal racism in that connection. I will listen carefully to what he says, because a reasoned argument has been put forward, and I want him to address the points that have been raised.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not mean to do so, but he rather gave the impression that he was accusing another hon. Member of racism, which would definitely be unparliamentary.

Mr. Grant: I withdraw any such remark, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course the Minister is not a racist. He may act as though he were one, but I know that he is not. On that basis, I withdraw the remark.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I think that the whole House is following my hon. Friend's arguments carefully. Does he agree that, bearing in mind all the matters that have been raised during today's lobby on the Asylum and Immigration Bill, and also by himself in this important debate, even at this late stage the Government could refer the Bill to a Special Standing Committee, where all those points could be raised?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but this is going way beyond the subject of the Adjournment debate. I must ask the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), the Front-Bench spokesman, not to lead his hon. Friend astray in that way.

Mr. Grant: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for getting us back on the rails.

We shall of course fight the Asylum and Immigration Bill thoroughly in Committee. If the Minister thinks that he is in for an easy ride he had better think again, because there will be substantial opposition both inside and outside the Committee. For the various reasons that I have outlined, there is a need for people to be given the option of returning to the Caribbean. I have also stated that the Caribbean Governments would welcome a scheme that encourages people to return. In fact, the president of Guyana recently told me that he wrote to the Prime Minister and asked him to let Guyana have Britain's unemployed skilled workers, because there was plenty of work for them in Guyana. I understand that the Prime Minister replied that because of the social security regulations, it would not be possible to do that.

I believe that imaginative schemes could be developed to give people hope and to assist young people, graduates and skilled and qualified workers who feel that there is a glass ceiling through which they cannot break. Those people could be given an opportunity of a life—or part of a life—in another area of the world. They could benefit that area, and also benefit themselves.

I have proved this evening that there are already two schemes running. The first is run by the Government, and contains within it the principle of return from this country to the Caribbean and to other countries of the world. The other scheme is run by the IOM, which has a centre here in Queen Anne's Gate in London, and is supported and financed by the Government. There are no reasons why the Government should not extend the existing schemes along the lines that I have suggested.

If the Minister dares to ask me why the British taxpayer should pay for this scheme, I will remind him that a Conservative Government in the 1950s and 1960s sent people to the Caribbean and used British taxpayers' money to recruit bus drivers, London Transport workers, nurses and others. The Minister of Labour at that time was Enoch Powell, who I am sure the Minister has heard of. The Government at that time paid for people to come here, and now some of those people wish to return. For various reasons, they might not have the means to do so. We are suggesting that the Government should use taxpayers' money to do that. Such a scheme would result in savings to the Treasury and, for no other reason, the Government should support it.

9.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I very much regret the fact that the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) has again decided to raise the question of voluntary repatriation. I noted his speech this evening, and the contributions which came from the Opposition Front Bench from the hon. Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott).

The only saving grace of the debate is that it gives me an opportunity to restate the Government's total opposition to any scheme which actively encourages people who are lawfully settled here to return to their country of origin. Nobody who has a legal right to live in this country should be under any pressure to leave. The Government are not in the business of advocating that our own citizens emigrate to the country where their parents, grandparents or ancestors were born. I deeply resent the remarks of the hon. Member for Tottenham about my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who has done so much work to improve race relations.

[Interruption.] Regardless of what the hon. Gentleman may say from a sedentary position, Britain has greatly improved race relations, and I am proud of that fact and want it to continue.

I am also saddened by the hon. Gentleman's determination to try to use tonight's debate to provide his own conclusions about the recent disturbances in Brixton before an inquiry has been completed. The Government condemn what they see as a violent minority who attack police officers and property and who attempt to besmirch the good name of the vast majority of the people of Brixton, who are decent, caring and law-abiding citizens and want to remain that way.

I firmly believe that any measure designed to encourage repatriation or emigration by members of the ethnic community would do untold damage to race relations. It is the persistent taunt of thugs and racists that black or Asian people should "go home". If the Government set up a scheme actively promoting repatriation or immigration of ethnic minorities as a good thing, that would be to endorse the racists' odious views. I do not believe that the House would want that.

The Government are committed to creating a fair and integrated society. We are working hard to reduce racial discrimination.

Mr. Bernie Grant: Rubbish.

Mr. Kirkhope: I repeat: we are working hard to reduce racial discrimination, to tackle racial violence and to ensure that everyone, irrespective of the colour of his skin, enjoys the same opportunities in this country. Good race relations need to be constantly worked at; we all, including the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, know that. Any Government-sponsored measure that implied to ethnic minorities that they were unwelcome could only have a detrimental effect on race relations. There is absolutely no place for such proposals in our work.

I know that the hon. Member for Tottenham has a number of proposals. He raised them with the Home Secretary in my presence on 6 December. As he has said, the Home Secretary was certainly not persuaded that the hon. Gentleman's proposals deserved further consideration. He does not intend to change the present arrangements. As the hon. Gentleman has also said, the Government fund a small humanitarian scheme under which people with few savings—not British citizens—can be given basic financial assistance to return overseas, when it is in their best interests to do so and they wish to go. The assistance is limited to the travel fare and the cost of transporting a small number of personal possessions.

About 60 people a year benefit from the scheme. They are mainly elderly people, often without close family ties here; and most of them return to Jamaica. The important point is that only those with very low savings of less than £3,000 are eligible for full assistance. The scheme is low key and the assistance is limited. That of course is deliberate. The scheme does not set out to persuade people to leave Britain. It seeks to help those whose hearts are set on returning home, where they have satisfactory future arrangements and the only significant obstacle is the cost of the travel. We see no reason to change these arrangements, and we have recently agreed to extend the current scheme for a further five years.

I turn now to some of the suggestions that the hon. Member for Tottenham has made. He has said that he thinks that British citizens should be eligible for help. Our objection to that is straightforward: we do not think it appropriate for the Government to pay for the removal of British citizens to a foreign country. There would in any event be numerous practical problems in administering such a scheme, which would be wide open to abuse and which would attract all sorts of opportunists to apply. Effective administration would be difficult and expensive and the Government can see no good purpose in pursuing such ideas further.

Another of the hon. Member's ideas is that young unemployed people of Afro-Caribbean descent but who were born in the United Kingdom should be encouraged to emigrate to Africa and the Caribbean. He appears seriously to think that the Government should pay for such young people to leave our country. We value our young people in this country. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member may laugh but we value our young people. I find his idea not only outlandish but offensive. I cannot believe that sending young people to a country of which they probably have little no or experience would help them in the least.

We take the problem of unemployed people seriously. That is why we are committed to having a dynamic economy in which jobs are created for them, not destroyed. The Labour party would, as we all know, destroy jobs through its schemes and ideas. The way to help unemployed young people is to train and educate them so that they can find jobs. We are trying to do that more and more. The answer is not to send them back to the country from which their ancestors came. A Government-funded emigration programme is emphatically not the answer.

Mr. Grant: The Minister says fine words about how the Government want to do things about unemployment. Among black young people aged between 15 and 25 in Tottenham, unemployment is 65 per cent. What are the Government doing to get those people jobs?

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Member is well aware of the schemes that the Government employ to try to give jobs to, and provide training for, young people. There are schemes operating in his area that he surely must be aware of. He should give credit to the people involved with that. Some of those people are paid directly by the Government, some are indirectly paid and some are voluntary workers. He knows well of the schemes. I will be delighted to discuss the matter further with him at another time. The Government are concerned that young people should have jobs in this country and not be encouraged to leave the country.

What would the receiving country think of us if we sought to export young people in that way? We have no information to suggest that those countries would be keen on that.

Mr. Grant: I have.

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no evidence of that. I would be extremely surprised if they were as keen as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

The BBC "Newsnight" coverage of the issue on 6 December made a helpful contribution to rational debate. What I found especially striking were the stories of old people who had visited their countries of origin in the West Indies after decades away and their bewilderment at how much things, and they themselves,

DAMAGED ORIGINAL

[Mr. Kirkhope]

had changed. Many saw their lives clearly now as being firmly based in Britain. They did not want to return. If that is the case for people of their generation, who were born abroad, how much more true would it be for people born in the United Kingdom who have British attitudes and presumptions about life? Life in the West Indies could come as a cultural shock—and not inevitably a pleasant one—for them.

The hon. Member referred to a number of other schemes that involve financial assistance with the travel and other costs of movements between one country and another. I acknowledge the presence of those schemes. There is, for instance, a European scheme under the Lomé convention, to which I think the hon. Gentleman alluded, that encourages, as a form of overseas aid to Jamaica, young Jamaican professionals to take up posts which would otherwise be filled by foreign experts. That scheme aims to boost the Jamaican economy.

Similarly, the International Organisation for Migration assists refugee and asylum seeker movements, usually under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I must emphasise again the limited nature of such schemes and the Government's belief that they should and must remain limited.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary told the hon. Member for Tottenham when we met him on 6 December, the Government are totally opposed to encouraging voluntary repatriation, let alone emigration. To do so would send out all the wrong messages to ethnic minority communities and, worse still, play into the hands of racists. That is well recognised by many influential sections within those communities and I am pleased that they have not been slow to criticise the hon. Member for doing so. I emphasise that the Government's view is that everybody in Britain, regardless of race or creed, should have a fair chance. They do not think that there should be measures that discriminate between races, as the hon. Member's suggestions seem to.

The hon. Member has long been interested in this subject, but I simply do not agree that the extension to the current very limited arrangements that he has in mind would provide a solution to race relations problems or necessarily help the individuals with whom he says he is concerned. The way to improve race relations is positive participation by all ethnic minority groups in British society, so that they are not socially excluded or disadvantaged in any aspect of life here. This country is greatly strengthened by the different ethnic groups that make up our population. We have all gained from their commitment to Britain's success in every field: economic; social; artistic; and sporting. I totally reject the suggestion that the Government should actively encourage members of those communities to leave this country because they would be better off elsewhere.

Ms Abbott: As my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) is aware, I do not support his scheme for repatriation in the shape that he proposes. However, the Minister fails to understand that my hon. Friend's proposals have struck a tremendous chord in the black community. That is a symptom of the deep alienation, disaffection and unhappiness that many black people of all ages feel about their lives in this country. I have listened carefully to the Minister but much of what he has said reeks of hypocrisy. Moreover, he clearly fails to understand the reality of life for many black people in this country.

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Lady is entitled to her point of view. She says that the hon. Gentleman's proposals have struck a chord with the black community, but they have been received with great unhappiness in many sections of the ethnic minority community in this country. I believe that the Government's view on this matter reflects the majority's view. It also reflects the view that race relations are important to the Government and the country as a whole.

Mr. Grant: I am aware that a group representing the Asian community, and one or two people from the West Indian community, went to see the Home Secretary recently. The West Indian Standing Conference voted almost to a person in support of my scheme. My scheme has nothing to do with the Indian sub-continent, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka; it concerns the Caribbean. Which Caribbean groups support the Government against my proposals?

Mr. Kirkhope: I shall not get into a contest with the hon. Gentleman on which groups support his proposal. As far as I know, he has been unable to persuade the Opposition Front Bench, although the presence tonight of the Opposition spokesman for the inner cities seems to show some support from the Labour party for his ideas. The Government do not support his ideas and have no intention of doing so. I have no idea whether his proposals might become Labour party policy. He must discuss that with his Front Bench spokesmen.

Tonight, I invite the hon. Gentleman to join me in pursuing policies that promote good race relations rather than those that he put forward, which might jeopardise them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 December 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House, at its rising today, do adjourn till Tuesday 9 January.—[*Mr. Brandreth.*]

9.34 am

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): On this last day before the Christmas recess, may I wish you, Madam Speaker, a very happy Christmas? Some of us believe that you do an excellent job in the Chair.

The Leader of the House may recall that, during the Prime Minister's speech on the Loyal Address, I raised the issue of the amount of money and effort that Labour and Liberal Democrat local authorities were expending to put forward arguments, when votes are taken at schools, against their opting for grant-maintained status. The Prime Minister said that the matter would be looked at. What steps are being taken? In the county of Devon, there is constant proof that the local education authority and county council employees are making a considerable effort to urge and support those who wish to resist grant-maintained status. Examples in Devon of the great success that grant-maintained status has brought about include Colyton grammar school. It is not right that ratepayers' money should be used for the political purpose of resisting grant-maintained status.

Will the Leader of the House discuss with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment whether the Government have considered the possibility that, where sums have been expended for that purpose, they should be surcharged against the councillors for unnecessary expenditure that does not form part of a local authority's normal expenditure? The matter is of considerable importance. I need not spend more time on it, and I should be pleased if, in the period before the House reassembles, it could be looked at much more fully.

9.37 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In the spirit of Christmas, may I too wish you, Madam Speaker, a happy Christmas and new year? If next year I sometimes feel that I am not catching your eye, I shall bear in mind the fact that I wished you a happy Christmas at the appropriate time.

I wish only briefly to mention what occurred last night: once again, the Government were defeated and humiliated. It is important, however, and it would be useful, to have a proper statement arising from that defeat. So far, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has merely made an inadequate statement on a point of order. The Government must now work on the assumption that the political arithmetic is going against them. They would be wrong to work on any other assumption, as their majority is likely to go down next year, and they will be faced time and again with the same difficulties as last night.

How much better it would be if the Government resolved that matter by going to the country and letting it decide, rather than trying to linger on until the last possible moment, despite all the setbacks and humiliations. It is time for a general election, and I hope that it will come sooner rather than later.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): How many times were the Labour Government of the day, whom the hon. Gentleman supported, defeated in Parliament between October 1974 and 1979? Did they not soldier on as long as they could?

Mr. Winnick: Conservative Members have often told us that that was unfortunate and undignified, and that the Labour Government should have gone to the country. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has said the same. Regardless of what happened in the 1970s, surely it is time for Conservative Members to practise what they preach, given that we have been lectured so often by them. Let the country decide sooner rather than later.

I must raise two other matters before we go into the recess. Not long ago, I applied under Standing Order No. 20 for an emergency debate on cold weather payments, especially for those pensioners on income support. It was not successful.

It is extremely unfortunate that, despite the extremely harsh weather that we have been experiencing, so few pensioners who would have been eligible to receive what is only a modest sum—£8.50 a week—have received it. I checked the latest information with the Library. Out of 55 weather stations—I do not know how the country is divided up and why there are 55, but so be it—the trigger mechanism worked in only seven. What conditions are necessary for it to work?

The Leader of the House will understand all this, because he was involved with the appropriate Department for some time. The weather has to be freezing for seven days and seven nights continuously. If it is intensely cold or freezing for three, four or even six days, as it has been in many parts of the country, but there is then a change in the weather, the payments are not made. It is a daft scheme, which deprives so many elderly people on the lowest incomes of extra money to keep themselves warm.

In the main, it is rare for pensioners to get into fuel debt—that applies as much to other Members' constituents as to mine—simply because they are frightened of receiving a bill that they cannot afford to pay. They do not keep the heating on as much as they should, or as we would do because we have the income to do so. They might heat only one room, or go to the library or some other public place during the day to save fuel. It is a terrible situation, and that is why I applied for an emergency debate and why I have kept on about the subject.

As the Leader of the House is aware, I am sure, percentage-wise more elderly people die here in the winter months than in many other European countries. One can only come to the conclusion that, because elderly people on low incomes suffer so much misery and

[Mr. Winnick]

hardship, they put their health at risk—they risk hypothermia and related conditions. The emergency payment should be made to all those who would otherwise be eligible. As I said, out of the 55 weather stations scattered around the country, the mechanism has worked in only seven.

Finally, the Leader of the House may be aware that, following the terrible tragedy of the headmaster who was knifed to death, I asked at the first opportunity in the House—on the following Monday—whether it would be possible for the Government urgently to consider legislation to toughen up on knives. They have responded in some ways. I am not merely criticising; I am pleased with that response.

A private Member's Bill—the Offensive Weapons Bill—has been tabled, and there is no reason why I, along with my hon. Friends, should not support it. Obviously, we will have to wait until Second Reading and the Committee stage, and I hope that the Bill receives a Second Reading. The Bill and the response of the House are the attitude that the general public want.

In a dignified and courageous statement last weekend, Mrs. Lawrence, the widow of the head who was murdered, gave an interview to the Press Association. She spoke of her family's deep sorrow, for her children and herself. She also said that she would like it to be more difficult for knives to be purchased.

At business questions last Thursday, I asked whether, rather than the Home Secretary taking a confrontational attitude to the Opposition over this—although the Leader of the House denied that that was the case—the Home Secretary could meet my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) before the Second Reading of the Offensive Weapons Bill to find out whether any agreement could be reached on the purchase of knives.

I understand all the counter-arguments—what would happen about bread knives, and would one stop people buying knives for legitimate sporting purposes?—but we should be aware that there is a knife culture among youths in certain areas. It is almost as if a knife is a part of their dress when they go out. Fortunately for the safety of the general public, the knives are not usually used, but their use for criminal purposes is increasing.

At about the time that Philip Lawrence was knifed to death, a security officer at an Asda store in Newcastle was also knifed to death when he courageously went to the aid of two female employees. We should not forget him, either. Those two men exhibited the highest courage. They could have saved their own lives by acting differently; instead, they lost their lives.

The Government must understand that, yes, we want to tighten up on sentencing, for which there is a strong case—hence my support for the private Member's Bill—but that there is scope to make it more difficult for knives to be purchased, despite all the difficulties. Fortunately, unlike the United States, we have pretty tough restrictions on guns. In some respects, I would like them to be tougher. Fortunately, one cannot simply purchase a gun.

I hope that the Home Secretary, with my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, will be able to find out whether there is scope for tightening up the sale of knives, and will take legal advice and so forth, so that one will not be able to buy the most ghastly knives in shops in central London or by mail order. The weapons might not be intended for criminal purposes, but what guarantee do we have of that? I hope that the Leader of the House will pass on my views to the appropriate Ministers.

9.47 am

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May I join colleagues on both sides of the House in wishing you a happy Christmas, Madam Speaker. I hope that you will take my word for it that no analogy is intended in the fact that I intend to begin by mentioning the royal yacht. I often likened my wife, when I married her, to a sleek racing craft. After 26 years of marriage, I now say that the cargo has shifted a bit.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: It has in my hon. Friend's case, too.

Mr. Field: Yes, it has in my case, too, as my hon. Friend so rightly points out.

I have a slight sense of déjà vu, since we began the year with a campaign for the royal yacht—or I certainly did—and I seem to be ending the year with one. Having said our prayers for the royal family, what more appropriate way is there to start?

The BBC is running a programme on that magnificent vessel tonight. As she is a riveted ship, I do not understand why we cannot keep her in commission for many years to come. She is quite capable of being repaired and kept in good order and, although in her present state she requires a large crew, the manning levels could be reduced with modern machinery.

I hope that I may yet win that important battle because, as has been said many times, the yacht is very much part of the fabric of our nation. There could be no finer sight than the Heads of State embarking on that magnificent vessel to celebrate the D-day landings. One Head of State, the President of the United States, chose not to travel on the royal yacht, and went aboard a grey-funnel ship of his own nation—it did not look the part. If Heads of State of the major countries throughout Europe voted with their feet and stayed aboard the royal yacht, that would be a good way of influencing the Government.

I should like to keep with the slightly salty flavour, and mention last night's fishing debate. I was rather surprised to receive a letter from the Liberal Democrat-controlled council of the Isle of Wight asking me to vote against the measure. In the right-hand corner of the council's notepaper, there is a silhouette of the Isle of Wight, over which it says that it is a "region of Europe".

The Liberal Democrat Members seem to have gone off to Christmas rather early. I wonder if some of the Opposition Members who are present could search behind the Benches to see if there are any Liberal Democrat Members in the Chamber—it seems rather bereft of their presence. Perhaps Liberal Democrat Members have decided that the United Kingdom has become a region of Europe; they are so Brussels-barmy that they have probably gone there for the day.

It is extraordinary for the Liberal Democrat-controlled council on the Isle of Wight to tell everyone that the Isle of Wight is a region of Europe. It even went to the extent of minting its own coins, on the back of which it said that the Isle of Wight ecu would be introduced in 1996. That same council says that we should vote against the fisheries policy of the EC.

I went to the trouble of telephoning the chairman and secretary of the Isle of Wight fishermen's association, who also approached me about last night's debate. I asked them what had changed since I last voted on the issue in the House. Fisheries policy is, of course, a contentious matter, particularly for Members of Parliament who represent fishermen who fish in the western approaches. The chairman and secretary could not tell me what had changed in terms of the Isle of Wight, but they suggested that I contact a fisherman named Ray Hayles.

I telephoned Ray Hayles, and asked him what had happened. He said, "It is the general conservation view—we are concerned that there are more Frenchmen and Spaniards, and fewer fish." I told him that I understood that, but that the Government had reduced the number of fishermen who can come from the rest of the EC into British waters. I said that I wanted to know what had changed in relation to the Isle of Wight.

I took the trouble to ask staff in the House of Commons Library what had changed, and they more or less confirmed that nothing had changed. There is an incredible perception that hon. Members were voting to determine a policy, but the vote was taken on the motion to "take note", and had little influence. The vote was not, as many fishermen thought, on a motion to take Britain out of the EC fisheries policy. The vote did not make one ha'p'orth of difference to the fishermen of the Isle of Wight. As all hon. Members have long since realised, reality and fiction in the House are certainly not bedfellows.

One of my favourite subjects, which I first raised when I entered the House in 1987, involves light dues. The Government have done remarkably well in abolishing the dock labour scheme. There has been a fantastic increase in the amount of trade to our ports, which were privatised under the trust port legislation. The one remaining problem is the considerable cost of light dues when bringing a ship to Great Britain.

Even more pernicious, all constituents pay tax to the Treasury, but my constituents in some parts of the Solent also have to pay a tax to Trinity house for travelling backwards and forwards to the Isle of Wight. The position is anomalous: in the eastern Solent, the buoyage is controlled by the Queen's habourmaster—the Royal Navy—and no light dues are charged, but in the western Solent, Trinity house controls the buoyage, and has to charge light dues on the ferries coming to and from the Isle of Wight. Just outside Cowes harbour are two buoys which do not contribute to safe navigation in and out of the harbour, but their presence means that the red-funnel service to Southampton from Cowes has to pay light dues for the buoys, as do all day-trip vessel operators, both on the island and travelling from the mainland.

There was a recent inquiry in the western Solent, because Associated British Ports wanted to take over that section of the Solent, the channel up from the Needles, which is unregulated—there is no authority for it, which is extraordinary. ABP proposed that it should become the navigation authority, and I thought that, with some qualifications, that would be an ideal way of easing Trinity house out of the Solent.

Associated British Ports has offered to take over the buoyage in the Solent from Trinity house, but the proposal has been rejected for a variety of reasons. I find it difficult to understand why my constituents should be placed at a disadvantage compared with those of the rest of the United Kingdom by having to pay an additional form of taxation just because they live on an offshore island.

We have also encountered problems over the years with dredging for aggregate in the Solent. I am pleased that both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Crown estate have given me a guarantee that in future there will be no renewal or extension of licences for the dredging of aggregate in the Solent.

It is remarkable that one of the objections to ABP's proposal, which included maintenance dredging in the Needles channel, was that it should not be allowed to dredge. That objection came from the Isle of Wight council—the same council that refused to support me against New Forest district council dredging the shingle bank to replenish Hurst spit. That is an extraordinary example of environmental double standards, which seem to infect not only Isle of Wight council policy but some of its councillors.

There have been difficulties in Solent waters in recent years due to sewage pollution. One oyster bed has been closed in the western Solent this year. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has kindly agreed that we should meet the fish experts at Weymouth, which we shall do in the new year. When we have done that, we shall go to see the Environment Minister to discuss the problem of sewer outfalls. Southern Water tried hard to get the Solent waters redesignated; I am pleased to say that Her Majesty's Government resisted that proposal.

All the requirements of the urban waste water directives will have to be met. That will involve building a new sewerage plant with a long sea outfall at Sandown. Local fishermen and the tourist board are rightly concerned that there should be a cast-iron guarantee that the effluent will not wash up on the beaches to create the problems that have occurred in other parts of the country. It is proposed that the sewerage plant and outfall system should serve the whole of the Isle of Wight—or at least a great proportion of it. I hope that the Lord President will take note of my remarks, as it is a tortuous problem; we have suffered for many years from the inadequate Victorian sewerage system around the coast of the United Kingdom.

As a result of water privatisation and EC directives, there has been a massive investment and clean-up. We won some blue flags for our beaches on the Isle of Wight. However, one problem is that the scheme for Ventnor has been delayed; Ventnor has a serious problem, because it has an inadequate system. It was to have a new system, but that has been scrapped because of the redesignation of the seas off the north side of the island, the Solent. I hope that ministerial pressure will be exerted on Southern Water to ensure that it gets on with the scheme, and to guarantee that it is effective.

I now turn to the subject of education on the Isle of Wight and our standard spending assessments. The capping limits for the Isle of Wight council have been raised, and in March a whole series of bids will come in for various functions of the new unitary council. However, a substantial body of opinion on the island is encouraged to believe that the Government have not properly funded education on the Isle of Wight. I take great exception to that, because the settlement we have just had is more than adequate, taken with the savings made by having a unitary authority that we expect from—indeed, were promised by—the Isle of Wight council.

[Mr. Field]

The settlement should be more than adequate to ensure that we have a quality education service on the island. We understand that it is more expensive than most other education authorities, because it is a three-tier system. Given the small size of our population, education will always be more expensive per capita.

I support, and align myself with, the chairman of the education committee on the council. The council should spend all the money available on education in the island, which is mostly good. Obviously, education is our future, not just for the Isle of Wight, but for our nation, too.

On the island, we have had a serious problem with the British Medical Association. It has, on three occasions, run some serious scare stories about the island's health service. The most recent was last week—the suggestion in a television programme that St. Mary's hospital was to become a cottage hospital, and that the single-handed specialties were to be removed from the Isle of Wight.

The story suggested that, in future, we would have to travel to the mainland to have those surgical operations that have hitherto been available on the Isle of Wight. In fact, those operations have been available on the Isle of Wight only since the funding improvements and the general expansion of the health service by the Government.

On Sunday, with my wife, the chairman of the Isle of Wight council and the high sheriff, I toured St. Mary's hospital. We started at 9 am, and my wife and I finished our tour just after 6 pm. I was told by the chief executive that there was absolutely no truth in the programme on the BBC that emanated from the BMA. The chairman has written to the single-handed specialists in ophthalmology, oral surgery, and ear, nose and throat to say that the suggestion in the programme is not true, and that he is awaiting the results of an advertisement for a cardiac consultant on the island.

We have had problems, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will know, with community care and its funding on the Isle of Wight. I was shocked to be told on my rounds on Sunday that there was a proposal for the closure of the Totland ward. That ward is operated by the Isle of Wight Community Healthcare NHS trust, and a little lady there told me how much it meant to her for respite care.

The Leader of the House is ideally qualified, because of his previous ministerial offices, to understand the great conundrums one faces in trying to deliver community care. For example, Margaret Condon, who was a patient in that ward and is a great supporter of mine, was worried that she would no longer receive assistance from that facility. The hospital is trying to contract out the service to private nursing homes, because of the numbers involved and the staff ratios. The next person I spoke to, whom I had never met before, was Alfred Chapman, who is 91 and blind. His wife is blind as well. He told me that he thought the time was coming when he and his wife might need a little assistance at home from social services.

Those two examples show the diversity in people's needs and requirements of the health service. That chap of 91, blind and living with his wife, has hitherto been completely independent at home, and has come in for respite care because he had a problem with his chest and was feeling down. On the other hand, Margaret Condon, who is considerably younger, relies on that type of care all the time.

We will have a unitary authority, and we have some sense of realism about the delivery of community care on the island. We also expect the decision—which I have long campaigned for—on the amalgamation of the Isle of Wight Community Healthcare NHS trust with St. Mary's Hospital (Isle of Wight) trust. We are told that that will save nearly £500,000 per annum.

I hope that the council will not continue to insist on running an entirely separate organisation, but will join in one mutual organisation with shared services, so that we can ensure the greatest efficiency and the most money for patient care. In the meantime, I hope that the Leader of the House will support the staff and the rest of us to ensure that Totland ward does not close.

There is concern about the target formula from the Department of Health—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is not the House suffering a selfish abuse of the procedure? The understanding is that these Adjournment debates are limited to three hours and that each of us should show some kind of restraint. Parading constituency problem after constituency problem is not a proper use of a Wednesday morning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that the hon. Member who is speaking is entirely in order, in relation to the subject before us.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Tedious repetition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There has been no repetition. If there had been, I would have intervened.

Mr. Banks: Well, it has been very tedious.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would have intervened had there been repetition. I imagine that the hon. Member who is speaking will notice how many other hon. Members wish to contribute.

Mr. Field: If the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) had had the courtesy to intervene, I would have given way to him. I hope that he would have accepted—because he is reasonable—that I have a cogent explanation for my speech this morning.

Since I came to the House in 1987, I have never made an entire speech about the Isle of Wight. I am the only Member who represents an entire county in its own right, and we have a number of problems. Not least, I am the only Member who represents more than 100,000 constituents, and this is the first occasion on which I have endeavoured, and am endeavouring, to make a comprehensive speech about the Isle of Wight. I am sorry if Opposition Members find it tedious: I am sure that my constituents do not. I can tell the hon. Member for Linlithgow that I do not intend to have a similar marathon in the future, having made this speech.

However, I have a number of other, separate points that I intend to raise this morning.

Mr. Banks: Tut-tut.

Mr. Field: The tut-tutting from Opposition Members would be more reasonable if they understood the considerable pressure and work load that having more than 100,000 constituents brings.

I shall continue. Sadly, this week, a policeman was stabbed on the Isle of Wight. I am pleased to say that his injuries will not cause him to be off work for long, but I am sure that we wish him a speedy recovery. I am pleased that the House is addressing the subject of the carrying of knives in public places. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has already—and rightly—raised that subject this morning.

There is considerable frustration on the Isle of Wight that we cannot get our local authority to take seriously the installation of closed circuit television cameras in public places. I am not suggesting that the island needs to be blanketed by them—fortunately, we have a considerably lower crime rate than the rest of the United Kingdom—but many people on the island believe, and I am sure it is a universal opinion, that CCTV can make a major contribution to reducing crime, particularly petty vandalism in public places.

I am pleased that the Chancellor made provision for that in the Budget. We do not seem to be making much progress on its installation on the island, although I believe that the council, in conjunction with the police, will submit a bid for CCTV shortly.

We have the highest level of seasonal unemployment in the United Kingdom, which is another reason why I feel fully justified in taking up the time of the House this morning. In the past few days, however, we have benefited from the single regeneration budget.

There is a feeling on the island that glad tidings are about to come to us from the Government in the form of the assistance that they will give us. The business link has been established, and it is beginning to extend its tentacles throughout the island to draw together all the agencies of Government. I am sure that it will grapple with the intractable problem of seasonal unemployment, from which the island has suffered for so many years.

I still wonder why the Department for Education and Employment, the Isle of Wight council or business link has not conducted a survey of the number of people who commute to work from the mainland to the Isle of Wight. My constituency has one of the highest unemployment rates of all Conservative constituencies, and it seems extraordinary that a contingent of people commute to the Isle of Wight to work. We should endeavour to address that mismatch.

This week, the island's citizens advice bureau received the largest grant of those given throughout the south of England—more than £300,000—to assist its work on the island. I am particularly pleased about that, because our CAB has had problems in obtaining funding locally in the past. I am sure that that funding will ensure that it gives an efficient service to all my constituents throughout the island, and not just those in Newport, as it did hitherto.

The Isle of Wight's roads are notorious. When one drives off the car ferry, there is, for some reason, a large sign, erected courtesy of the council, which says, "Island roads are different", and indeed they are. They are rather corrugated. One former Transport Minister, who knows the Isle of Wight extremely well, said that the island's geological formation is a road maker's nightmare.

We have some serious traffic problems on the island. We have conducted some experiments, such as removing double yellow lines, to try to improve the lot of local traders who have suffered from the arrival of large supermarkets on the island, which have absorbed a considerable amount of the traders' business.

Like other hon. Members, I am concerned that my council continues to pursue traders who operate on the pavements. Given that the Isle of Wight is a holiday resort, I think such trading is perfectly reasonable and acceptable, and adds to the holiday atmosphere. I am sad that that trading practice is frowned upon where the pavement is wide enough to allow it.

The island recently received a substantial grant from lottery funds for its housing advice centre. I backed that bid, and I am pleased that the Department of the Environment has also given the centre money. My right hon. Friend might like to know that the Liberal Democrats opposed the allocation of that money, on the ground that the centre was also receiving income from Shelter.

That centre has made a considerable improvement to the advice that young people and those threatened with homelessness receive. It has also assisted them in finding accommodation. The centre is greatly trusted by all parties on the island, because of the excellence and professionalism of its advice. It has made great strides, and its professional, specialist advice has helped to lessen the work load of the CAB. I should like my right hon. Friend to pass on my thanks to Ministers at the Department of the Environment for their support in the early stages of establishing the centre.

The Isle of Wight has a number of bids in for the millennium fund. My own proposal, which I hope will be accepted, is for the establishment of a national civil war museum on the island. As everyone in the House is aware, at the other end of the building lies the arrest warrant for King Charles I, which was served at Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight.

Although it is understandable that no nation would wish to celebrate a civil war, sufficient years have now passed, and we should try to draw together all the artefacts and historic memorabilia from around the country in one national museum. People could visit it to learn about the incarceration of King Charles I, and how that affected the island. In due course, I hope that that museum could become a national centre of excellence, as well as an archive of that remarkable period of history.

Mr. Winnick: I do not want to antagonise the hon. Gentleman, because I hope that he will support my private Member's Bill. I have already spoken, so I have no personal motive in asking the hon. Gentleman to bear in mind the fact that this is a time-restricted debate. He has spoken for half an hour, and if he continues to speak he will deprive many other hon. Members, Conservative and Labour, of the opportunity of speaking. I have no motive in saying that, other than that I think he is being extremely unfair. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that criticism in the spirit in which it is intended.

Mr. Field: It is Christmas, so I will. I also think that it is extremely unfair that Opposition Members get the same allowance for office costs as I do, when, after the next election I shall have almost half as many constituents again as the rest of them. I make no complaint about that, however, because it is a great privilege to be here. I must repeat that I have never been selfish since I was elected in 1987, and I am coming to a conclusion, but I have just two more points to make.

[Mr. Field]

Under the Budget, the relief on capital gains tax was not extended. The yield from CGT has been considerably reduced because of the roll-over reinvestment available on unquoted shares. To combat that low yield, I suggest to the Treasury that, if the relief was extended to allow for investment in housing associations and external loans for investment in private housing schemes for renting—a Budget proposal—the yield from CGT would not alter, but it would be targeted at the private housing market and give it the oomph it needs.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the *Evening Standard* has recently run an effective campaign about the problems of long leaseholds and landlords who take advantage of them. We have a lot of Victorian property on the island which has been converted into multiple-occupation housing and sold on long leases, so we have had problems with leases in the past. I was interested to note that the *Evening Standard* mentioned companies that were in a similar location to some that had caused me and my constituents considerable problems.

The cry for more legislation goes up yet again. If the Department of the Environment were to join with the Department of Trade and Industry, their combined weight against a company which is sailing very close to the wind would prove a very effective force. They could apply pressure to the directors of the company, and perhaps make public the organisation's activities. That would be much more effective than again opting for primary legislation, and it might well prove a more speedy solution.

That brings me, finally, to the question of deregulation. As hon. Members know, I am the Chairman of the Deregulation Committee, and it is a matter of personal regret to me that we shall not be able to dance on new year's eve—which falls on a Sunday this year—as dancing is prohibited in this country on a Sunday. I had hoped that the deregulation order would be passed to allow people to celebrate the new year, but the other place decided that that was an inappropriate use of a deregulation order. Therefore, I know that this year our constituents throughout the United Kingdom will sit at home cuddling a cup of Bovril instead of dancing. That is very sad.

In the new year, we should examine deregulation proposals and consider giving local authorities the discretion to exercise some of the powers they used to have. In my keenness to vote in the House for a unitary authority on the Isle of Wight and the Local Government Commission, I was surprised to learn that we were also voting for the commission to consider the issue of parish and town councils. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the old days, if a proportion of the local population—I think that the figure was two thirds, but I may be wrong—declared that they required a parish council, the local authority would put that proposal to the Secretary of State, who could then allow it.

I am now told that that is impossible without a complete review by the Local Government Commission. That band of wandering minstrels rumbles around the country while local communities, that would desperately like to have a parish council are no longer afforded that option. A deregulation order could be brought before the House to deal with that situation, and return that power to local authorities.

If that cannot be done, my noble Friend Lord Mottistone in the other place is in the early stages of producing a Bill with the Government that will allow East Cowes to have a parish council. The Local Government Commission envisaged in its report that the Isle of Wight should have a unitary authority. In his capacity as Lord President of the Council, I hope that my right hon. Friend will ensure that all Government Departments give full force to my noble Friend's proposals, if that is the only alternative open to the people of the Isle of Wight.

10.22 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have wished Madam Speaker a pleasant Christmas and a happy new year, so I think that it is appropriate to extend the same sentiments to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the many people who serve Members of Parliament in the House. I refer especially to those in the Refreshment Department and in the tearooms, who provide a valuable service and who are never fully appreciated for the work they do.

St. George's hospital, Tooting—one of the major hospitals in south London—is located in my parliamentary constituency. It serves Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton, and no doubt people from other areas attend the hospital for health care and other services. I do not question that it is an excellent hospital which offers good health services and employs a very dedicated team of doctors, nurses and other health service workers.

However, like so many other hospitals in London and in other parts of the country, St. George's faces more and more difficulties in its service provision. I am sure that all hon. Members have read in today's press, and have heard on this morning's radio broadcasts, reports about the problems that many hospitals in the United Kingdom have providing accident and emergency care. That is certainly the case at St. George's hospital.

I visited the St. George's accident and emergency department some months ago at the request of senior doctors, and both doctors and nurses told me about the problems they face. The hospital does not have the provision to meet patients' needs. While St. George's has difficulty finding beds for patients, whole hospital wards are closed. The difficulty of providing home care services in adjoining boroughs for patients who are about to be discharged adds to those problems. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved since my visit—and, in the case of elderly people and those who are most at risk, it has worsened.

John Millard, the consultant physician at St. George's hospital, sent me a letter shortly after my visit to the hospital. In the letter, dated 21 September, he says:

> "Many thanks for your letter of 15th September. I am so glad that you were able to come to St. George's and see both junior and senior staff who have to work in the system. I will certainly pass your message on to them."

My message was to express my appreciation to the staff for the services they provide in the community. Mr. Millard continued:

> "I hope your discussions with both Lambeth and Merton are fruitful. Getting elderly patients home, when they no longer need high-tech medical care is a major problem".

I think that that comment clearly outlines the problems at the hospital. However, it is only one aspect of the difficulties that it faces.

Week after week, the Prime Minister and other Ministers cite figures to justify what they believe is happening in the national health service. I do not doubt that money is being spent, but doctors, nurses, local people and Members of Parliament with hospitals in their constituencies know that many Government changes have created a two-tier health service. I put it to the House that London has suffered far more than other parts of the country. Year after year, successive Secretaries of State have told us that there are too many hospital beds in London. In recent years, 2,500 beds have been closed in the Greater London area.

Hospital admissions in the Wandsworth area are much higher than the national average. The number of admissions for elderly people in Wandsworth is in the highest 10 per cent. of the national figures. Against the background that I have outlined, we have seen funding taken from St. George's and allocated to areas far away from London, which is having a disastrous effect on our health services. That is not only my view, but is the view of senior doctors and administrators at the hospital. The Wandsworth health authority loses money every year. Since 1993, our budget has been cut by some 24 per cent. The continuing reduction in expenditure cannot continue without the serious effects that we are now experiencing. I have discussed the matter with the chief executive, senior administrative officers, doctors and nurses at the hospital. They all accept that this is happening, and it will continue, as will their complaints to me and to the Secretary of State for Health.

Regrettably, a major hospital in south London that provides hospital care for in-patients and out-patients has closed wards, and nurses are about to be made redundant. We all know that it will lead to the cancellation of operations and cuts in services for out-patients. Senior doctors rightly complain to me, and we should give them credit for voicing their complaints about those matters, which ultimately will affect patients.

I sought this morning's short debate because the hospital is still set to have its funding cut in the coming years. Where is the sense in following such a policy, when it is roundly and repeatedly condemned by the very people who are seeking to run the services in that hospital?

My speech is not about the national health service in the United Kingdom; it relates solely to one hospital—a very important hospital that meets the needs not only of my constituents but of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Local people share the deep concern of the hospital administrators, the chief executive and senior doctors at the hospital that there is no sense whatsoever in closing hospital wards that are needed and making loyal members of staff redundant because, sadly, insufficient funding is available to that hospital.

It is no good for the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Health to come to the House, as they do week after week, to say how marvellous everything is in the national health service. One only wishes that was true. Sadly, it is not. It is now time for change. That is what people really want, not some time in the future, but with an urgency to face the need to change policies which are having such a regrettable, indeed disastrous, effect on the standards of that hospital—especially for the people in that part of south London who go there for their health provision.

10.32 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I welcome these Adjournment debates, as they give us the opportunity to raise matters of specific concern to our constituents. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Lord President would address two points when he replies to the debate, as my constituents are interested in them.

The first concerns the incident involving the chief inspector of prisons at HM prison Holloway. There has been much talk about the conditions in that prison, and I would be interested to know what my right hon. Friend has to say on the subject. I hope that he will bear it in mind that my constituents have scant sympathy for those serving prison sentences, as they have clearly offended against society. While we should ensure that our prisons are sanitary, they should be spartan, and not have conditions which are not available in our youth clubs and elsewhere.

Secondly, I should like to raise the vexed subject of Mr. Peter Davis, the national lottery regulator. As I understand it, he used free flights in the United States which otherwise would have been paid for by the taxpayer. He has a reputation as a dry accountant but a person of the utmost probity. Having been in business, I know that there is always pressure to save on one's expenses. If that is the context, it is to be commended, but I should like some assurance from my right hon. Friend on those points.

The debate was opened by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who was concerned about the pernicious campaign against parents when they are asked to decide whether they wish to back the decision of the board of governors for a school to become grant-maintained. It struck a strong chord with me, as I represent a Kent constituency.

Only yesterday, Gravesend received a magnificent Christmas present. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced her approval of the application for grant-maintained status from the Gravesend grammar school for girls. We have been dismayed at the delay in that approval, as the parents voted for that change by an overwhelming majority last July.

Eight out of nine secondary schools, and three of the primary schools, in Gravesham are now grant-maintained. The process has been a remarkable success. St. George's Church of England comprehensive school, the first school in the borough to become grant-maintained, has achieved wonderful results by redeploying 100 per cent. of the resources, balancing the staff against other spending, and getting value for money.

I commend to the House the comments of the chairman of the governors, the Rev. Joe King, who is a well-known Labour party supporter. He makes it clear that he values the school's new freedom and has considerable scorn for so-called specialist support supply by Kent county council.

Meopham school in my constituency, a rural secondary school that was under threat of closure from the county council, is now absolutely thriving. Those involved have used great imagination to make the school the core of the community campus in the village.

Only a few years ago, Southfields school in my constituency had the unenviable status of being bottom of the league of schools in Kent. It is now moving steadily away from the bottom as the school rallies round, using all the discretions available to grant-maintained schools.

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

It is all most encouraging. The grant-maintained schools system is so successful that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Opposition spokesman on education, is already well on the way to implying that it was all their own idea in the first place. We know that the Leader of the Opposition scorns his council schools in Islington, and has taken his young son right across London to a leading grant-maintained school. It is all positive. We want parental choice, and other schools to follow the great achievements of schools in Gravesham and in so many boroughs throughout the country.

We should consider the action taken by the Labour party in respect of grant-maintained schools. There have been 12 ballots in Gravesham, and in every one the parents voted by an overwhelming majority in favour. However, they have done so against a background of rumours, falsehoods and the spending of £100,000 of council tax payers' money by Labour-Liberal-controlled Kent county council. It is really dreadful.

There has been a great deal of messing about by the county council. There have been land grabs and disputes over land on campuses and equipment. There have even been problems over the delivery of pay slips and P45s to the teachers in the schools concerned.

The Labour party fought and won the county council elections two years ago on the basis that the borough of Gravesham needed more nursery schools. To date, not a single new one has been provided. When there was one such proposal from a grant-maintained school—the Holy Trinity Church of England school—the Labour-controlled county council opposed it. Having said that Gravesham needed more nursery units, it voted down one such proposal because it came from a grant-maintained school. Thanks only to the action of my hon. Friend the Minister, we now have a new unit serving youngsters in Gravesend.

Gravesend grammar school for girls is now going ahead with grant-maintained status. The delays have been caused by the bogus objections of Kent county council, under the inspiration of the Labour party. One of the objections was that the governors arrived at their decision in only 15 minutes. On investigation, we found that they had held two lengthy meetings to discuss the whole matter, and had deferred the second meeting only so as to allow the KCC area education officer time to confirm the exact details of his offer of an admissions policy for the north-west Kent area.

Another bogus objection which was particularly patronising and insulting to my Sikh constituents was the allegation contained in the following KCC letter:

> "The ballot documentation supplied by the Electoral Reform Society was made available in the English language only. In an area with a substantial Asian languages speaking population, this will have had the effect of disenfranchising a proportion of the electorate on racial lines."

There is only one large minority in Gravesham—Sikhs from the Punjab, who speak the Punjabi language.

Most of the Sikh community are now second or third generation. The school itself already offers parents a translation service for general education matters, and not one parent has ever felt the need to take it up. Furthermore, not a single student in the school, of Sikh or any other origin, needs English language support on the ground that English is their second language. So this was yet another pernicious example of playing the race card.

Another bogus objection came in the form of the suggestion that the public meeting for parents was not balanced. That cannot be true; the co-chairman of the education committee, a Labour county councillor, attended and spoke at the meeting. Is it thought that parents are so stupid that they cannot hear out a Labour councillor and then make their own minds up?

This was all, of course, a fatuous waste of time, but it delayed the process for five months and endangered the 1996 intake of girls to the school, at a time when parents were facing anxious decisions about the future of their daughters' education. The fact is that the Labour party issues soundbites of approval for GM status, but the reality is quite different.

Our schools in Gravesham have to cope not just with this sort of trench warfare but with other ridiculous nonsense to do with school funding. Last year, Kent county council was given another 2.1 per cent. funding in terms of actual cash, but passed on only a 1 per cent. increase to the budgets of schools—after considerable pressure had been exerted. That resulted in a shortfall of £3.4 million across the county. Weeks later, it was found that—possibly owing to mismanagement—the council had underspent for the previous year by £19 million.

The solution that was obvious to parents and anyone else of sound mind was to put £3.4 million from the £19 million into topping up schools' budgets to the amount that they should have had in the first place. Such a proposal was made by Conservative county councillors, but it was voted down by the Lib-Lab pact, whose members wanted to keep up the party political pressure on parents. Speaking as the parent of three youngsters in state schools in Kent, I do not believe that our youngsters' education should be played around with for party political purposes.

This year, the Government increased the funding for Kent county council by 4.38 per cent.—significantly more than inflation. As education is the top Government priority, the percentage applicable to education is even higher. But what is the prospect of that money getting through to the schools?

A meeting has just been held by Kent county council with the chairmen of governors of schools. At the end of the meeting, just as the Conservative leader of the county council opposition left the hall, up jumped the co-chairman of education—this time a Liberal Democrat—to tell the assembled chairmen of governors that there had been no increase whatever in Government funding. That is game playing of the most inaccurate and damaging kind. What on earth will these councillors do with the budget if their starting point is so inaccurate?

I should like to have spoken on Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, but blocking tactics were used to stop me being the last speaker in the debate, organised by the Labour Whip, the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). Hence my sympathy in respect of certain recent comments is somewhat thin. Nevertheless, I want to put on record two points that I was unable to make at the time.

I have some personal experience of immigration racketeers. They charge large fees for smuggling immigrants into this country. In Kent, we see immigrants who cannot speak English wandering around the lay-bys of our motorways, where they have been dumped by these miserable intermediaries. Some immigrants have even been suffocated while hidden in the backs of lorries. It is vital that the problem be dealt with soon.

There are also unscrupulous immigration brokers. Time and again, immigrants have been to my surgery to tell me that they have been led on by so-called advisers who charge huge fees. They take their clients through the mass of regulations, and then try to exploit our generous asylum system.

Worst of all are the immigration marriage brokers. They ruin the lives of young constituents of mine. I give the House the example of a 20-year-old British-born Sikh girl who used to work in a large office. One afternoon, she went to her boss and asked for half an hour off. He asked her why she wanted to go out. She replied that she wished to get married, but would be back in half an hour. The boss wondered what was going on. She said that there was a register office just across the road. So she went off and got married, but she did not much like the look of the man who was to be her husband—and then realised that he was an illegal immigrant.

The girl came to see me: could I do something to prevent her having to go through the religious ceremony? It seems that a marriage broker had arranged the marriage with her father and brother; she alleged that money had changed hands for that purpose. She had only one way out—to flee her home and the borough in which she had been brought up. She had to pack her personal belongings in her suitcase, which she had brought from the office, and flee to London that very weekend—a disgraceful episode.

The marriage broker concerned also happened to be the chief executive of the Gravesend Commission for Racial Equality, formerly the Gravesham community relations council, which had a valuable and long-standing record of service to the borough. The Gravesend CRE branch suddenly closed down. The secretary came to me at my surgery to tell me that she had been dumped with no redundancy money and to ask me whether I could help. I approached the chairman of the defunct CRE, a Labour councillor, who told me that there was nothing he could say. I then approached the one-time honorary president of the CRE, another Labour councillor, who was equally unable to help.

It is odd that this marriage broker and former chief executive of the defunct CRE, a Mr. Gurdev Singh Talwar, was also a Labour councillor at the time. For some months now, the Labour party has been throwing allegations of sleaze and secrecy across this Chamber. It is time that the Opposition cleaned up their act and came up with an explanation of what went on in the cases to which I have referred. I also hope that the press will turn to some investigative journalism to shed light on these scandals.

Another aspect of the Asylum and Immigration Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot talk about a Bill which is already before the House. There will be other occasions when he can talk about it, of course. Meanwhile, he can talk freely about the problems of Gravesham, but not about the Bill.

Mr. Arnold: My Sikh constituents, largely because of their origins in the Punjab, depend for their livelihoods on labouring jobs—they work in construction, on roads, in market gardening and so on. For two or three years, they have been telling me that the pay for their jobs is being undercut by people who will work for very much less. They specifically asked, "What are the Government going to do about it? We know that these people are illegal immigrants and bogus asylum applicants." In fact, the Government are acting, and I support them.

Denton, in my constituency, received a good Christmas present from the Government. It has received nearly £2 million from the challenge fund to support project Denton. Moneys from the single regeneration budget will go to a very old part of the borough. It is an area of small streets, in which a new factory has developed. The factory provides 250 jobs in an area of high unemployment. Comma Oil mixes and bottles lubricants and other fluids for the vehicle industry.

Heavy goods vehicles have rumbled through the old streets of Denton to reach the factory, to the distraction of residents. The clear solution was to build a new highway on the other side of Denton. We have never been able to implement that solution, because the local highway authority, Kent county council, has been resolute in not including it in its programme, despite the fact that the Labour co-chair of the relevant county council committee is the local ward councillor.

As a result of wonderful co-operation between the public and private sectors, a deal has been put together that includes a new road. It also includes training and youth opportunities, as well as anti-crime improvements. The deal is a considerable success. It will ensure that the factory will remain in the area. It was going to go elsewhere. I can now disclose that it would have gone to Huntingdon. I could not admit that earlier, because, if the proposed move to that particular constituency had been known about, there might have been a temptation not to approve our grant! Comma Oil is to stay on the site, and there will be an additional 50 jobs. The opening up of other land will create another 250 jobs.

The remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) stirred a memory for me. He talked about parishes and a local population, virtually without exception, wanting to create a parish council. That is the position at the village of Vigo in my constituency, which is currently part of the parish of Meopham.

All the residents—I know of no exceptions—wish to establish a parish council in their own right. The mechanism is to go through the Local Government Commission for England. Unfortunately, given the vast amount of work that the commission is undertaking, it will not get on with the job. I hope that the matter can be re-examined, with a view to finding a simplified way of allowing populations, if they wish, to establish a parish council. They should be able to do so.

10.52 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) should not be suspicious on every occasion about people who nip out from work to get married. Mrs. Banks and I did precisely that. We married and went back to work the same afternoon. She is not, as far as I am aware, an illegal immigrant.

There seems to be a practice—it has almost become a tradition—of Members presenting the House with compilations of their favourite speeches, or perhaps of speeches that they did not make, during these Adjournment debates. I suggest that letters to Ministers or local press releases might be equally appropriate ways of drawing attention to the points they want to raise.

I do not wish to be churlish, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I join all those who have wished you a happy Christmas. Long may I catch your eye, Sir. You might have a happy

[Mr. Tony Banks]

Christmas, but after the vote last night, I doubt very much whether the Prime Minister will be able to enjoy his Christmas. I am sure that he would like to wake up on Christmas morning to find all the heads of his Euro-sceptics in his Christmas stocking. He would then, of course, find that his parliamentary majority had disappeared. He is not, of course, able to rely on some Conservative Members these days. I endorse the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who said that the country desperately needs a general election. I suspect that parliamentary arithmetic will force one sooner rather than later on the Prime Minister.

I was not going to be here this morning. I had intended to travel to Zurich for a Council of Europe meeting. Unfortunately, being a practised wally, I left my passport at home. When I reached Heathrow, I found that the British immigration service was more than happy to let me leave the country. I do not know whether that tells me something of which I should be aware. British Midland was superb in arranging things. Unfortunately, those at the Zurich end refused to let me into Switzerland. Who would wish to impersonate a British Member of Parliament these days? That would be outrageous. This episode takes up the theme of illegal immigrants that the hon. Member for Gravesham introduced.

I would not fancy the chances of young Master Tell if I were to shoot at the apple on his head this morning. He would end up looking rather like King Harold.

The debate gives me the chance to raise the case of Mr. Mark Votier. He is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), who is a good friend of mine. She knows that I am raising Mr. Votier's case, and supports me in doing so.

Mr. Votier is a freelance journalist. He was commissioned to film a Japanese whaling expedition in the Antarctic. He was so shocked by what he saw aboard Japanese whaling ships that he released the footage of his film to journalists throughout the world. We saw examples of that footage in newspapers such as the *Independent* and *The Guardian* earlier this month. As a result of releasing his film, he is being sued by the Japanese Government's Institute of Cetacean Research for £60,000-worth of damages. Total costs will be another £200,000.

The Japanese are killing minke whales in the southern ocean sanctuary. This year, they will kill no fewer than 440 whales. Mr. Votier went to the area as someone who was not passionately committed to the preservation of whales. If he had been, he probably would not have wanted to go to the area to see what was going on. There are, of course, brave people who are supportive of the anti-whaling movement who are prepared to expose themselves to both dangers and horrors. However, Mr. Votier saw things that appalled him.

Mr. Votier found that 50 per cent. of the minke whales that were caught were only wounded by the harpoon, not killed. The Japanese butchers then put into the minke whale a lance through which they passed an electric force. The force is not sufficient to kill the whale instantly. On average, they took at least eight minutes to die. On one occasion, Mr. Votier saw a minke whale thrashing around for 23 minutes waiting to die while the Japanese put an electric shock through it. That is a whale dying in agony. The Japanese have no right to do this.

We should make a strong protest to the Japanese authorities. The British representatives at the International Whaling Commission met in May. They attempted to use examples of Mr. Votier's film to demonstrate that so-called scientific whaling is butchery by the Japanese. The Japanese vetoed the attempt. They said that the film that the British representatives wished to use—it was shot by Mr. Votier—was illegally obtained.

When Mr. Votier was commissioned, he was told that he must exclude from his film all unsightly tasks—in other words, the sort of things that tell us the truth about what the Japanese are doing to whales in the southern ocean sanctuary. He was told that his film would have to be submitted to the Japanese authorities for censorship.

A spokesman for the agriculture and fisheries division of the Japanese embassy in London denied that whaling was unscientific. He said:

> "We need to gather scientific data on the age, sex and population of the minke whales in the antarctic."

He claimed that 400 whales had to be slaughtered to satisfy statistical best practice.

The United States, using the Pelly amendment, has censured Japan for its so-called scientific whaling, and Japan is now 90 days away from having sanctions imposed on it. Incidentally, the sanctions will not affect electrical equipment or cars exported by the Japanese—I wish that they did, because that might concentrate their warped little minds. The sanctions will relate only to fishing, but they are still worth imposing, which is why I am asking the British Government to do something.

I have tabled an early-day motion that has been signed by 113 hon. Members, asking for the strongest protest to be made to the Japanese authorities. The case in Tokyo, which involves a British citizen, has been adjourned until 23 January. It is likely to be postponed again for procedural reasons until 20 February, when a decision is expected.

I ask the Lord President to pass on, through the Foreign Office, our strong feeling that the case against Mr. Votier should be dropped. He should not be prosecuted; he should be thanked by world opinion, although not, clearly, by the Japanese. I hope that the Lord President will bear in mind my remarks, and ensure that the necessary pressure, in defence of a British citizen who was doing his job and informing world opinion, is put on the Japanese authorities.

11 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess, I wish to raise three issues. However, before doing so, I put it on record that I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on some matters. I share his views on animal welfare and agree that an international railway station should be located at Stratford, but we disagree about football—he supports Chelsea and I support West Ham.

I was reflecting on the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who mentioned the education of the Leader of the Opposition's child. I was flattered when the leader of the Labour party and his deputy chose to mention me in their speeches to the Labour party conference, but my family is still smarting from the Labour party's delightful comments about me and the education of my own son. The attack was led by a former Labour Member of Parliament, supported by my defeated Labour rival in the general election for whom no handkerchief is big enough to blub into. However, I do not intend to go into detail about the conduct of those people. I shall wait until the leader of the Labour party and his deputy are present and then put a number of questions to them.

The first matter that I want to raise relates to the Solicitors Complaints Bureau. A number of my constituents are worried about the speed and effectiveness of the bureau. I have often passed on complaints which then meet inordinate delays. I know that the Law Society's new president believes in self-regulation, but I doubt whether self-regulation is in the best interests of our constituents. I am also concerned that the majority of people who sit on the bureau are solicitors. That seems bizarre; I should have thought it was fairer to have a majority of lay people.

Secondly, I wish to draw attention to the Raoul Wallenberg appeal. Some years ago, I introduced a Bill under the ten-minute rule procedure for him to be declared an honorary British citizen. The Bill was not successful so I introduced another, the object of which was to set aside a piece of land so that a suitable monument could be erected to honour him, even though there is still some dispute as to whether he is alive or dead.

I am delighted to be able to say that great progress has been made by the appeal committee under the chairmanship of Sir Sigmund Sternberg, aided by Mr. Lionel Altman and others. Next year, or certainly by the spring of 1997, a monument will be erected to Raoul Wallenberg.

As I am sure the House knows, Raoul Wallenberg was a brave Swedish diplomat who, in 1944, risked everything and saved the lives of more than 100,000 Hungarian Jews. He designed the Schutzpass, a fake document that effectively entitled the bearer to the same protection as that afforded by a Swedish passport, which the Nazis accepted. He did a very brave thing, and I am delighted that a splendid bronze sculpture, to be done by Philip Jackson, is to be erected in the crescent of Great Cumberland place in front of the Marble Arch synagogue. However, in order for that to happen, £100,000 has to be raised, to pay not only for the sculpture but for its maintenance.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will, through the best endeavours of his office, try to secure from the Department of National Heritage a substantial contribution on the nation's behalf to that magnificent sculpture, which is to be unveiled in the not too distant future.

Finally, I deal with local government. Yesterday, the Local Government Commission announced its findings on unitary status for Basildon, Thurrock and other parts of the country. For my part, I have always believed in unitary authorities and very much regret that we have not set about introducing more across the country. I very much want Basildon to be given unitary status. When we examined the matter in the early days, I should have preferred large unitary authorities. It might surprise the House to learn that, although Basildon was very happy to be joined up with other areas, some parts of Essex were reluctant to join up with Basildon. I very much hope that next year we shall make the firm announcement that Basildon has—perhaps as part of a larger authority—been given unitary status.

In Essex, there is a phenomenon of Liberal and Labour party pacts. The Labour and Liberal parties share a bed on Essex county council, Basildon district council and Southend district council. When the phenomenon first developed, both parties were anxious to see the back of the Conservative party but, since the two socialist parties joined together, they have had something of a falling out.

It is the old story: Opposition parties are adept at articulating problems but they have difficulty in coming up with solutions. When they get power and find that they have difficult decisions to make, there is a falling out.

On Essex county council, Labour and the Liberals have made a complete mess of social services, and care in the community has not been conducted as it would have been under Conservative control. Matters are in such a shambles that the Government have announced an inquiry. On education, Labour and the Liberals have done all that they possibly can to undermine the position of grant-maintained schools in the county. We recently received a letter from the leader of the Liberals on Essex county council, asking the 16 Essex Conservative Members of Parliament to vote against the 1p off income tax announced in the Budget. The Labour party bravely abstained because it worries about votes and about whether such action might make it unpopular and reduce its so-called lead in the opinion polls, but the Liberal Democrats bravely and courageously encouraged us not to go ahead with the penny off income tax.

On extra funding for education, I very much hope that it will be better understood that the Government have put in, as a result of the Budget, a substantial amount of extra money, which will go to education specifically to reduce the size of classrooms. It would be dishonest of any Labour or Liberal politician in Essex to try to deny what the Government have achieved.

What is going on in local government in Basildon at the moment is extraordinary. One is given the impression that the three parties in Basildon are sharing power and agree on everything, but the reality is that Labour and the Liberals vote against the Conservative party on everything. For three years, the Conservatives controlled Basildon district council and sensibly managed our finances so that people's council taxes would not be put up in the future. It has not taken the Labour and Liberal parties long to start wasting that money. Once again, they are setting up area offices. The most extraordinary thing is their handling of local government officers. Everyone in the House believes that local government officers should do their job professionally and not be signed up to any political party. The last time that we had a Labour council in Basildon, the chief executive disappeared, for whatever reason, with no details given of how his removal from office was conducted or, indeed, how much he was given to leave the local authority's employment.

I now find that since the Labour and Liberal parties have controlled Basildon district council, the chief executive, yet again, has disappeared, and his deputy has taken his job—no word of explanation or details about the money that local residents in Basildon were asked to fork out to make that happen. It gets worse. I learnt this week that the previous excellent director of housing in Basildon

[Mr. David Amess]

is no longer employed by the local authority. Instead, someone who I understood was sacked by the local authority has got his job.

I am not prepared to see those matters swept under the carpet. Given that the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats believe in open disclosure, I trust that Members of Parliament will have a word with the local councillors in Basildon to ensure that local residents know precisely what is going on in relation to the conduct of local officers in Basildon.

The country and the world will be celebrating Christmas on 25 December, but I wonder whether there is any profound realisation of what Christmas day is all about. Does it demonstrate that the country and the world believe in God? I hope that the real meaning of Christmas will be better understood by the whole of the population, because if the true spirit of Christmas is understood and followed—not just for one day in the year but for 365—the country and the world will truly be a better place.

11.13 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the House adjourns, I seek clarification on two matters, notice of which I gave to the Lord President's officials, I thought prudently, at a quarter to 10: first, the expulsion from this country of Khalifa Barzelya, the head of the Libyan interests section; and, secondly, the veracity or otherwise of the very remarkable presentation in *The Guardian* of Saturday 16 December by Maggie O'Kane, which relates to the Gulf war. The article forms the foundation of a programme that is to be shown an Channel 4 on 3 January. It raises very important questions of truthfulness or otherwise in relation to the Gulf war.

First, on Khalifa Barzelya: because of Lockerbie, I have come to know him over the past three years relatively well. I really am astonished that he should be considered to warrant expulsion from this country. In the light of the dreadful murder of a Libyan business man, it is the opinion of Scotland yard that Mr. Barzelya was in no way related to that matter.

I must remind the Lord President that, at Heathrow tomorrow evening, a group of relatives will meet in the airport chapel for the seventh anniversary—they meet every year on 21 December—of that dreadful night when the Pan Am Clipper "Maid of the Seas" came down. They are as determined as ever to get to the truth. It is their view, as they know him, too, that Mr. Barzelya has been greatly helpful. My estimate is that he has tried to improve relations between Britain and Libya, and to help the Libyan students that we still have—although not as many as previously—in this country. I ask, therefore, why he is being expelled. When I ask him, he says that he really has no idea; he thinks that it may be because he has been developing associations with a number of academics and, indeed, politicians. I have to say that the politicians are "undesirables" like the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on the Conservative Benches and myself on the Opposition Benches.

If such contact is really creating trouble for the Foreign Office or the security services, it is outrageous that no explanation has been given. Therefore, I make a suggestion to the Lord President. We have a statutory committee on security. Could Mr. Barzelya's case be referred to it? I know better than to ask that I should be given some explanation from the security services, but that presumably is why we set up the committee, which is a non-House of Commons body, as I understand it, under the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King).

I would be quite satisfied if the right hon. Gentleman were to say, "My Committee and I have seen the evidence and, on the basis of the evidence, the Government are quite justified," but, really, one does want some kind of objective assessment, because let us be clear about how damaging it is. Of course, tit-for-tat, David Hawkes has been told to get out of Tripoli. The Government should remember that there are some 5,000 of our citizens earning their bread and butter in one way or another, mostly in the Cyrenaican desert and mostly for firms such as Brown and Root. They want some kind of presence in the British interests section of the Italian embassy in Tripoli.

I could go on and on about the damage to British industry and to one of our traditional markets. The managing director of Babcock made it very clear that he would not have had to pay off some 400 skilled people in Renfrew the other day had we still had the traditional Libyan order.

No doubt I will be contradicted if I am wrong, but I fear that this has something to do with the on-going Lockerbie business, and the feeling that certain elements in the Government want an easy excuse not to hold a trial in The Hague with Scottish rules of evidence and under a Scottish judge. After seven years, any Government who wanted the truth would surely compromise to some extent, and go along with what has been offered. I have to say that I believe that the last thing that the British Government want is any kind of trial that would bring these matters to a head.

The second issue that I wish to raise relates to the article that appeared in *The Guardian* last Saturday. I want to ask three questions. First, are the satellite photographs from the Soyuz Karta genuine? If not, what happened in connection with the massive build-up on the Kuwaiti border about which we had been told? When I did my national service with the Royal Scots Greys, now the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, we were taught to read aerial photographs. I am no great expert, but it appears that the aerial photographs that were so crucial during the Gulf war do not show the build-up that served as the justification for that war.

Secondly, let me refer to specific statements that were made in *The Guardian* about dead babies. According to the article,

> "Dead babies are nothing new. During the German invasion of Belgium in the first world war, stories circulated in Britain and France of Belgian babies being butchered by German soldiers wielding bayonets. There's always a dead baby story. The story of how Iraqi troops, in the first days of the invasion, went into al Adan hospital, tore the sick babies from incubators and left them on the cold floor to die, was graphically told to Congress in November, 1990—before a crucial vote—by Niyirah al Sabah who, unknown to her audience, was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the US. In her tearful testimony, she said she had witnessed the Iraqi troops' brutality when she worked as a volunteer in the maternity ward.
>
> About 100 yards from the front of the al Adan hospital in Kuwait City is a white two-storey building which houses about 50 nurses. Nurse Myra Ancog-Cooke is a Filipino nurse. Six months after the war ended, I found her still working in the hospital. She poured tea and told her story—a story which for me sowed the first seed of suspicion about the tales and half-truths that marked the build-up to

> the Gulf war. A staunch Catholic, she explained that it was her duty and God's will that she stayed to care for the sick. She was assigned to the children's ward and took it in turns with the other Filipino nurse who stayed behind, Freida Contrais-Naig, to sleep in the incubator room with the babies.
>
> 'I remember someone called and said, "Look at CNN, they are talking about us." We watched and it was strange seeing that girl telling them about the Iraqis taking the babies out of the incubators. I said to Freida, "That's funny, we've never seen her. She never worked here." We didn't think very much about it really. We were more excited seeing our hospital on the television.' Later, Amnesty, who had also been duped by the testimony, admitted they'd got it wrong. Andrew Whitley of Middle East Watch described it as a fabrication, but it took months for the truth to come out.
>
> Meanwhile, President Bush mentioned the incubator babies in five speeches and seven senators referred to them in speeches backing a pro-war resolution. Subsequently, Hill and Knowlton were unabashed that the media worldwide, the UN Security Council and the US Congress had been deceived by a 15-year-old girl who had been 'trained' by a public relations firm. Lauri Fitz-Pegado of Hill and Knowlton, who prepared six witnesses who corroborated the incubator story to Congress, told John Macarthur, author of The Second Front, a book on censorship in the Gulf War: 'Come on John, who gives a shit whether there were six babies or two. I believed her.' The invading Iraqi army did rape, kill and torture in Kuwait, and that's what the world wanted to read.
>
> Highly exaggerated reports of thousands of deaths were accepted uncritically, as the PR firm, using Kuwaiti contacts inside the country, smuggled 24 videotapes to hungry and unquestioning mass media. The tone was set, and the tide was running in the Kuwaiti Government/Hill and Knowlton direction—war."

That raises serious issues in relation to the role of public relations firms in general, and Hill and Knowlton in particular. In considering our role in the Gulf war, the British House of Commons is entitled to ask the Government whether what was published last Saturday, and what I understand is to be shown on 3 January, is true or false. I have given the Minister's officials some warning, and I hope that the Minister will give at least a preliminary reaction in his winding-up speech.

Let me ask my final question. According to the logs, the British, French and Soviets also detected chemicals flowing down wind from the Iraqis' chemical and biological stations, which had been bombed. This is not the occasion for me to go into detail about the problems of some of our constituents who may have suffered from the effects of chemical weapons; let me simply ask the Government whether they propose to give a considered response once they have seen the film, which goes to the heart of the truthfulness of the statement that has been made by Maggie O'Kane.

11.27 am

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak. I shall break with tradition—not, I hasten to add, with the protocol or the great traditions of this place. I intend to speak briefly about a subject about which I have not spoken in the House before, although it has been pretty close to my heart for many years: sport.

If the House will indulge me for a few minutes, I shall set the scene. I feel some concern—in fact, "concern" is probably too strong a word; I feel some nervousness—about one aspect of sport that has been highlighted in the past year or so. Governing bodies in sport—and, probably, the House at some stage—may wish to consider it, especially in view of the forthcoming passage of the Broadcasting Bill. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise that sport is important—it matters.

In 1989, just before I left the Sports Council as its vice-chairman to throw my hat into the political arena—obviously, I did not crave job security at that stage—I commissioned some work on its behalf by the Henley research centre, which identified two or three key statistics on the way in which sport was valued in this country. In the late 1980s, about 22 million people identified themselves as being involved in sport regularly at one level or another. I have no reason to believe that that number has decreased; in key sectors, it will have increased. That is getting on for roughly half the population. It is probably one of the most popular activities that could be identified in such statistical terms.

In economic terms, by the end of the 1980s, sport was about the fourth largest employer. It employed more than the car and petrochemical industries and the agricultural sector put together. It accounted for about £3.5 billion-worth of high street retail sales, which had it alongside, and in some areas outstripping, electrical goods and even, for a time, cassettes and other audio equipment.

That is a long-winded way of saying that sport matters and that people recognise that it matters. There is no hon. Member sitting in the House today who does not have sports clubs in his or her constituency. They are either closely attached to such clubs or recognise their work, whether they be in rural areas or in inner cities.

One of the key arguments that has always raged within sport, sports administrations and sports governing bodies—it raged especially during my time at the Sports Council—involved sports funding and whether the funds that were available, through the private or public sectors, should be distributed towards the excellence end of sport or towards its participation end, remembering that the Sports Council's royal charter specifically gave it the remit to increase participation in sport. We recognise that those were and remain key arguments.

Throughout a number of years in sports administration and certainly as a competitor, my belief has been that, in relation to participation and excellence and funding, we cannot have one without the other. We recognise the old pyramid argument that one needs a firm base through which the Daley Thompsons, Steve Ovetts, Steve Crams and Paul Gascoignes emerge. One also needs, however, specifically to target sport at the excellence end, either through our national sports centres or possibly through the development of an academy of sport—a whole range of issues exists here.

We recognise that some countries have targeted specifically and very well. The Swedes produced Bjorn Borg and Stefan Edberg; the Germans, in exactly the same way, identified what I suppose one could describe as a niche market, through which the Steffi Grafs and Boris Beckers emerged. There is, therefore, a gentle and fairly subtle balance in all that.

The landscape of sport in relation to its public face has changed dramatically, even since the time I was serving at the Sports Council. I wish that I had had available to me in the late 1980s the sort of budget that is now available through the mechanisms of the national lottery and the Sports Council grant. At that time, basically, the public face of British sport was run on about £40 million a year, which was significantly less than the Arts Council grant, but I do not wish to revisit old griefs.

"Raising the Game" is probably one of the best pieces of political thought that has gone into sport since 1945 and is something that hon. Members on both sides of the

[Mr. Sebastian Coe]

House agree should be welcomed. In the development of sport, whether with regard to competition in school, the maintenance of school sport, linking clubs—where there is now probably more coaching expertise than in schools—with schools and ensuring that funding is appropriate and resources are available as and where they are genuinely needed, "Raising the Game" was probably the single most important contribution that this place and Government have made for many years.

The general populace's access to top-class sport concerns me. We are not all likely to turn up at Wimbledon and lie in our sleeping bags for three days to obtain tickets for Centre court. We recognise that the majority of people who watch sport at the highest level do so through their television sets. I wish that more people turned up and actively supported sport, but that genie is not likely ever to be put back in the bottle. We must recognise that the main vehicle for sports promotion is television.

One of my concerns is that, if we are to maintain participation levels and excellence, we must maintain people's maximum access to sport on television. That difficult issue must be confronted, given the nature of some of the contracts that are being drawn up between sports governing bodies and television, the balance of terrestrial television and satellite television in particular, and the advent of pay-per-view, which, for the majority of sports fans in the United States of America, remains the most important access that they have to television sport.

Back in the 1950s, we produced a protected list of events. It was ostensibly to ensure that there was no likelihood that one of the key events—the World cup, the Olympic games, the English FA cup final or Scottish FA cup final—was protected from a monopoly broadcast. The protected list was put together to ensure that the majority of people had access to sport at that level. Satellite television is now in the arena, looking to and making hard progress towards the sort of exclusive deal that is likely to cause hon. Members concern in relation to access to some of the more traditional sports.

I was interested to be a bystander—a seated bystander, I hasten to add—at an Adjournment debate some months ago when hon. Members on both sides of the House spoke passionately about the deal that was being struck between Sky television, the Murdoch organisation and rugby league. Your colleague, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Sir G. Lofthouse), is well known for his strong rugby league background. One of my more cherished memories of that debate is of the hon. Gentleman trying to hold back his anger about developments in a sport that hon. Members on both sides of the House, and especially those with northern constituencies, recognise as causing concern.

I hope that we do not deprive the average sports fan of access to top-class television sport. In a few months' time, the Broadcasting Bill is due to be considered by the House and, when it does, perhaps we can visit that issue. Perhaps we could debate it in terms not of strong or tight prescriptive measures on governing bodies or television, but of how they might develop negotiations with satellite or terrestrial television authorities.

One issue that we could visit relates to highlights packages. In a few months the World cricket cup competition will be held in India and Pakistan. The agreement between Sky television and the world cricketing bodies was for exclusive coverage, but the original discussions agreed that the highlights package would be available to the BBC. I understand that that package will not be available and that means that, for large parts of the year, a generation of young cricket fans will have limited television access to their sport. Of course, domestic test matches will remain on the protected list, but we shall have to make sure that highlights packages for overseas tours are available.

In their negotiations with satellite companies, the governing bodies should carefully consider entering into contractual agreements that preclude terrestrial television showing such packages. It is in the interests of the governing bodies to have the maximum number of people wanting to take up their sport, whether that is badminton, cricket, football or track and field. Numbers are their life blood and, if they are limited, the ultimate price to be paid is that people will turn away from sports to which they do not have ready access on television and will find other sports. I gently suggest to governing bodies that might be negotiating at this moment that, if they are not careful, they may slaughter the goose that lays the golden egg.

Sport is important and it should remain accessible to as many people as possible. It has gained a political status in this place that most of us who were working in the vineyard in the 1980s did not think would come about so quickly. I am grateful for that, but I am still nervous about the other issues.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is just under half an hour to the winding-up speeches. Five hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate and I ask for short speeches so that all five may take part.

11.43 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate this opportunity to take part in the debate. This is the season of good will, but on the first Christmas people were too busy with their own interests to care about others, and there was the murder of the innocents. I do not say whether the person who was murdered last evening in my constituency was innocent, but that murder reflects the issue that we must keep before us—there can be a tendency in society to excuse certain events because people might have deserved what happened to them. The House should give a clear signal that lawlessness in any guise is unacceptable in a democratic society. I know that we will sympathise with the widow and children who in this Christmas season have the harrowing experience of such a tragic loss.

Just before the House rose last Christmas I had an Adjournment debate on traffic flows in Belfast. Is the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland serious about dealing with some of the road congestion that remains? One of the blights in my constituency that affects housing and health is the Broadway roundabout for the west link and the Donegall road. Is it the Department's policy not to have flyovers? If it is, it has never been stated publicly. Is the Department concerned about the topography and geology in the area: I understand that there are two underground rivers there? There is also an electrical cable and that causes similar problems. We have constantly been told that the delay in taking action is due to lack of finance. Are there other reasons that the Department is not prepared to reveal?

I should like to speak about the problem of vetting procedures, especially as they affect people from Northern Ireland. One of my constituents went to Edinburgh university and volunteered for the officer training corps and encouraged one of her room mates to join. The room mate was accepted, but because my constituent had a Northern Ireland background she had to be vetted and, despite letters to the Minister about the issue, she has not been cleared.

I understand the need for vetting, but I also understand the deep hurt that is felt by my constituent's father, an Englishman who served in the Royal Navy for 18 years, and by her grandfather, who served in the Royal Ulster Rifles for more than 30 years. They are dismayed that she is so vetted that she cannot take her place with her friends. The same pattern was evident in a London constituency when the granddaughter of a former councillor and high sheriff of Belfast, who never lived there and whose father was an Englishman, was subjected to long vetting procedures simply because of the Northern Ireland connection.

A colleague engaged an aide in his constituency office and sought to get him a pass so that his bona fides were acceptable here. Although that aide had 30 years' service in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, vetting took three months. I am not sure whether it is a matter of job protection or whether some people with cosy jobs, even part-time ones, do not realise the impact of such vetting. Perhaps they do not give the matter the attention that is necessary, although I am convinced that much of the vetting is unnecessary.

I have no intention of delaying the House. I have made my points succinctly but definitely, and I seek clear answers.

11.49 am

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I wish Madam Speaker, her three deputies and all the clerks and servants of the House a very peaceful Christmas and a happy new year.

In the short time available I would like to say a few words about Britain's relations with Europe. Britain is a European country, but it is very different from its continental neighbours. It is a maritime country. Our world interests are far-ranging and go back a very long time. Britain is a pragmatic country. Our common law is built on practical decisions made by judges in actual cases throughout the years, step by step—not for us the grand design, the "code Napoleon".

The exchange rate mechanism was a very good example of European grand design that ended in disaster. Instead of trying, as we would have done step by step on a pragmatic basis to build up a system of aligned currencies firmly based in the economies of the countries concerned, the imposition of an artificial structure from above with deadlines and timetables was attempted, and it collapsed under its own weight, as most of us knew that it would. It was rather like fiddling with the oil pressure gauge on a car instead of attending to the engine. Market rates cannot be rigged, as King Canute would have told us if he had still been here. Perhaps it is not insignificant that King Canute was a Dane.

Britain has had to go to the rescue of Europe three times in recent history—in 1815, 1914 and 1939—and, throughout the ages before 1815, Britain's policy has always been to maintain the balance of power in Europe. We have not been pro-French or anti-German. We have not been pro-German or anti-French. We allied with the French if the Germans began to get too powerful, and with the Germans if the French began to get too powerful. It worries me that such a strong Franco-German alliance is developing in Europe and I worry about the future balance of power in Europe. That ought to worry the French, the Germans and all the other Europeans too.

As for external security, it has not been the European Union that has protected us from war since 1945 but NATO, and the involvement of our American allies. Let no one ever lose sight of that or ever think that the Western European Union could take the place of NATO.

We are good Europeans and, as such, it is our duty to advise, to warn, and, if necessary, to say no. A single currency is a matter of enormous political significance. It is being sold to people on the basis that they will not have to pay exchange costs when they change their money. If they think that the banks will not find another way to extract that amount of money from their pockets, they are very naive.

The single currency would prevent us from setting our own interest rates, tax policy, public borrowing policy and exchange rates. Since the economies of Europe would not be able to move in relation to each other by shifting their exchange rates, massive subsidies would be required. It could all end in tears, just like the ERM.

We fought a civil war in this country 350 years ago to place in the hands of the elected representatives of the people the control of the purse strings, and we should not lightly allow that control to slip into the hands of bankers—who have not covered themselves with glory during the past 20 years—and certainly not foreign bankers.

The opt-out that the Prime Minister negotiated for us at Maastricht was one of his greatest achievements. It may well be that if other countries decide to go ahead and form a single currency, we might be better off outside it—no one can tell at this stage. The City of London is used to dealing with all manner of currencies; it would not matter to the City whether we were in or out of a single currency. What matters to the City is the cost of doing business in London—the cost of regulation.

The questions that the Prime Minister put in Madrid were pertinent, and we need answers to them before we can decide whether to take this momentous step. It would be very foolish to rule in or rule out Britain's membership of a single currency at this stage, as the Prime Minister is often urged to do. Although it seems almost inconceivable that we will join a single currency in the foreseeable future, it is a constitutional principle in this country that no Parliament can bind its successors. Therefore, even if my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wished to rule out Britain's membership of a single currency within the lifetime of the next Parliament, he could not do so.

I am concerned, too, about the activities of the European Court of Justice. It proceeds by virtue of the civil law tradition, not the step-by-step, pragmatic approach of our common law judges. Continental judges adopt what is called a purposive construction. Put simply, it means that, by basing their judgments on general principles, they can make the treaties mean anything they want them to mean,

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

which is very dangerous. It means that we are forced to comply with rules to which we would never have agreed had they been spelled out in the treaties.

For example, we would never have allowed the European Court to interfere in relations between the Ministry of Defence and serving soldiers, whether male or female. The European Court of Justice must be put on the agenda of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference, and some effective way must be found to clip the wings of these judicial legislators.

I am also concerned about the European Court of Human Rights, an organ not of the European Union but of the Council of Europe. We signed the European convention on human rights just after the second world war to protect the peoples of Europe against gross abuses of human rights perpetrated by fascists and communists. We did not sign that convention to allow foreign judges to interfere in every nook and cranny of our national life, so that we could be told whether we could cane schoolboys in our schools. There are hon. Members on both sides of the argument on caning, but it is a matter for this country to decide. This Parliament is perfectly capable of deciding such matters and it is no business of European judges to tell us whether we can cane our schoolboys.

It is also no business of European judges to tell us whether our courts martial system can continue. It has been the basis of our military discipline and, partly as a result of it, we have some of the finest armed forces in the world. Defence is entirely outside the competence of the European Union and I do not know how it could be argued that the European Court of Justice has any right to interfere in defence matters in relation to pregnant service women or anything else.

There is no such prohibition, however, in relation to the European Court of Human Rights and therefore it is entitled, if it so wishes, to tell us what we can and cannot do in relation to courts martial. I believe that we should make it very clear to the judges of the European Court of Human Rights that Britain will not tolerate interference in defence matters. If the European Court of Human Rights will not restrain itself, we may have to exercise the right conferred on us by article 65 and withdraw from the European convention on human rights altogether. I fear that our own courts are also getting into bad habits. They are being led on by the European courts to make much more use of their powers of judicial review than they ever did before.

Democracy depends on a delicate balance between the legislature, the Executive and the judiciary. British and European judges must resist the temptation to trespass too far into the field that the people have entrusted to their elected representatives.

11.58 am

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am delighted to welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to wish you a merry Christmas. I wish a successful new year to all my colleagues who have remained in the Chamber, although I think that we might define success in different ways.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to return to an issue that I first raised when the House resumed after the summer recess on 15 October. It may be fitting, on the day before we break for Christmas, to highlight it again. It is the tragic and fatal mining accident that occurred on 12 October at Thoresby colliery in Nottinghamshire.

We were promised an inquiry into the accident. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), said in written replies and correspondence with me that an inquiry was under way. I have also been in touch with the director general of the Health and Safety Executive, who has confirmed that an inquiry is taking place. So far we have merely had a press statement, which the Health and Safety Executive released at the end of October, confirming what we already knew: that there was an inrush of gas, oil and water and one man lost his life. We have not yet had a detailed report on the causes of the accident.

It is essential that the men who work in the industry and the wider community know the cause of the accident so that precautions can be taken and best practice can be put into operation.

Rumour and speculation abound in Nottinghamshire about the accident. Some say that it was caused by old oil industry boreholes, while others maintain that the evacuation procedures were not properly followed. Men who work down the colliery persistently complain that, before the accident, there were severe smells—worse than normal—in the pit.

On the day of the accident, R.J. Budge (Mining), which now operates the pit, did not contact all the mining unions. I remind the Leader of the House that Sir Bernard Crossland's inquiry into the Bilsthorpe colliery accident stressed the need for all unions to be involved because pit safety is a matter not just for management but for all those who work at a pit; no one should be denied the knowledge about the cause of an accident.

It is now two months since the accident and we are still waiting for a report. It is essential that we have one, but it is equally vital that a wider look is taken at pit safety. This is the first year in which the deep-mine coal industry in Britain is operating under private ownership and the record for major accidents appears to have deteriorated. It is common knowledge in the mining community that the number of major incidents has increased over the year. I am told that, at the end of October, the number of incidents was 64, compared with 42 in the previous period when the industry was controlled by British Coal. It therefore appears that major incidents have risen by 50 per cent.

When I wrote to the director general of the Health and Safety Executive asking whether the figures were correct, he could not confirm them. That gives rise to serious concerns because the HSE was set up to prevent accidents and promote good practice. It is not satisfactory that it should be unable to come clean about those figures. It clearly has the figures but will not release them. That is bad practice because working in the deep-mine coal industry is still a dangerous activity. I am not exaggerating when I say that it is a matter of life and death. Men's lives depend on examining accidents and propagating the knowledge gained so that precautions can be taken to stop them occurring again.

I hope that the Leader of the House has listened carefully to my complaints and will use his best endeavours to ensure that the report that we have been promised, which is now two months overdue, is soon put into the public domain.

Most important, I hope that he will read early-day motion 165, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and others, which states that mining records should be kept on a pit-by-pit and company-by-company basis so that we can identify what is going wrong. Those of us associated with the industry know that accidents will occur in pits, but we are determined to ensure that, when a tragedy occurs, we learn from it.

12.5 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wish to raise the case of a young constituent of mine, Neil Edwards from Creswell, who has suffered a serious accident. I promised that I would draw it to the House's attention in view of the bizarre circumstances that surround it. It is a story about declining safety standards in industry, fraud by an employer, lack of regulation and a dereliction of duty by the Health and Safety Executive.

Neil Edwards found a job advertised in a jobcentre to work at a sawmill in Clumber park, Worksop. He had been a building worker and had been laid off, so he took the job. The sawmill was owned by a fellow called Philip Gray and was run on land owned by the National Trust. Neil Edwards had been working there only since 9 September 1994 when he suffered a serious injury. All kinds of logs were lying on the ground and he slipped on one. As no proper guards protected employees from the machinery, his hand went into a machine and he was lucky to escape with his life. He was given emergency treatment and extensive surgery at hospital but lost part of his hand and fingers.

Neil Edwards' employer did not even report the serious accident under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985. As a result, the Health and Safety Executive was not informed of it and Neil Edwards' mother had to inform the HSE herself. It then examined the accident but did not prosecute, despite the fact that, only a few years previously, another employee, Mr. Ryan, had lost three fingers at the same sawmill.

As Neil's employer had not even paid sickness benefit, Neil Edwards decided to claim compensation from him under common law regulations. His employer told him, "Here's a few quid, kid. Keep your mouth shut," but young Neil refused to take the money. He decided that his employer was acting contrary to the law and took action to try to claim compensation. Despite the fact that wealthy people such as Roger Levitt and the Maxwell brothers were granted legal aid, young Neil Edwards was at first refused it. He would obviously never be able to work in the building industry again so he tried to get a few bob for having lost part of his hand, yet he could not even claim legal aid. I intervened and managed to get legal aid to take up the case.

I attempted to get common law payments. As former miners for a number of years before we came to this House, you and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would simply have taken action through the responsible lawyers and, as a result, the National Coal Board or British Coal would have had to foot the bill. In this case, there was no money because the employer had not even taken out compulsory liability insurance. He did not pay sickness benefit, did not have liability insurance, had not guarded the machinery correctly and had broken the law because he did not even report the case to the Health and Safety Executive.

The HSE was informed that liability insurance had not been taken out. It could have fined the employer, Philip Gray, £1,000 per day. Under this tawdry Government, who seem not to care—they are against regulation and all the rest of it—the Health and Safety Executive did nothing. It did not even rap him over the knuckles. It discovered that Mr. Gray had no assets, or said he had not, although he has been running a business, making a profit and doing so for several years. The legal aid lawyers said that they were unable to discover whether the man had assets that they could claim against so that Neil Edwards could get proper compensation.

The battle is still going on. I call on the Leader of the House to get in touch with the appropriate Government Departments, which are those that control or have some connection with the Health and Safety Executive, to ensure that it does its job correctly, to bear in mind cases like this when they talk about fraud by employees on the Department of Social Security, and to ensure that Philip Gray carries out the duties for which he is responsible.

As we all know, the Health and Safety Executive is just another quango. We have just found out that the medical wing is to be cut by 25 per cent., and that 14 senior HSE posts are to go. The story goes on and on. That may be why employers feel confident about taking risks with workers' safety. Not prosecuting criminals gives a green light to other bosses who are contemplating taking such risks. If the Government are so keen on law and order, they should look no further than the bosses whom they protect. Deregulating health and safety law for employers is a sure way of maiming more people like Neil Edwards.

Postscript: the Worksop jobcentre has just put another advertisement in the window to advertise Neil Edwards' job. The employer is carrying on. Neil Edwards has got no benefits. It is time that the Government did something about it.

12.11 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a powerful case on behalf of his constituent. If we had had a little more time, we might have heard more details. My hon. Friend was the 13th hon. Member to speak this morning. That demonstrates the failure of this debate, which is part of a series of pre-Adjournment debates. Normally, about 20 hon. Members manage to contribute in the three hours. By and large, it has been a tradition for hon. Members to speak briefly and to raise no more than one or two subjects—that has always been my experience. Unfortunately, two speeches ran to 55 minutes, which has prevented all hon. Members who wished to participate from doing so.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): As you realise, Madam Speaker, I am the only hon. Member who has been present throughout the debate and who has been seeking to speak, but has been unable to do so. By taking 55 minutes, the hon. Members for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) have prevented me from speaking on the state of our democracy. It might have been useful if I had been able to make my speech, so that they could respond. Obviously, they do not act within its spirit.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend made the point that I was trying to make, but did so much more clearly. I hope that

[Mr. Rooker]

the Leader of the House will take that on board and that those who organise our business will do so to enable the maximum number of Members to benefit from this brief debate, which occurs only four times a year before a recess.

I cannot refer to all the speeches—I cannot even attempt to answer what amounted to an Adjournment debate about the Isle of Wight. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made a powerful case about the difficulties in his constituency and the creation of a two-tier health service. That case has to be answered and is typical of what is happening throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) referred to the difficulties at Holloway prison.

Mr. Tony Banks: He is not here.

Mr. Rooker: That may be so, but I still intend to raise this point.

The hon. Member for Gravesham made it clear that he had no sympathy for the inmates of Holloway prison. If the reports of the past few days are true and all the problems at Holloway prison were raised with the Minister of State, Home Office in July of this year, the situation at the prison should have come as no surprise when the inspectors walked in. Yesterday, one newspaper reported that a pregnant prisoner at Holloway was shackled to a male officer while undergoing an antenatal examination. Is that report about the situation inside the prison and the overzealousness true? That situation is disgraceful. People have lost their liberty. That is the penalty that we impose on them—we do not impose other penalties. If that report is true, it is unacceptable.

The hon. Member for Gravesham also mentioned—and other hon. Members were planning to do so—the lottery regulator and the astonishing decision taken by the Secretary of State for National Heritage yesterday evening. As a senior Cabinet Minister, will the Leader of the House say whether it is true that senior Cabinet Ministers ganged up on the National Heritage Secretary to keep that discredited regulator in his place, to avoid adverse publicity? Clearly, the man has lost the confidence of those in public affairs, who are concerned with the good name of the lottery. It has been an outstanding success and there is no argument about that, but the fact that he appears to have done nothing to stop Camelot selling the names of winners to junk mail firms adds to disquiet about its regulation. That is unacceptable and I warn the Leader of the House that the problem will not go away by keeping the gentleman in his job just to save some adverse publicity. It will probably rebound on this accident-prone Government early in the new year and it will be their own fault when it does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) made a powerful point about the British citizen who is the subject of the vagaries of Japanese court action over the disclosure of the horrific scenes from Japanese whaling activities. The majority view in the House is that the hypocrisy of the Japanese about whaling is well known. They have always lied about the purpose of experimental whaling. It is well known where the meat ends up. The international community has not taken the matter seriously. I hope that there is no even-handedness or soft-glove treatment on the part of the Government simply because the Secretary of State for Defence is trying to persuade the Japanese to contribute troops to Bosnia. For all we know, it might be, "We'll keep quiet on this, if you help us out on the other."

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Come off it.

Mr. Rooker: It is no good the right hon. Gentleman saying that. That is how things are done—behind closed doors.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No. I ask the Leader of the House to deny that that is true and to give a commitment that the British Government will take a strong and positive stand against what the Japanese are doing and the fact that they are penalising a British citizen for making it known.

Several hon. Members mentioned education. In the brief time available, I want to raise a side issue, but one that is important. In the past few weeks, many of my hon. Friends have mentioned the position of the 400 colleges of further education, which serve 2.5 million students. It is becoming clear that the 5,000 governors of those colleges are in a very uncertain position regarding their financial liabilities. I must declare an interest as I was a governor for more than 20 years. We cannot get an answer from the Department for Education and Employment about the liabilities of such governors. They are not in the same position as directors or trustees, but they are the governors of a statutory, set-up authority.

Due to the effects of the Budget, some of those colleges will probably become insolvent in the forthcoming year. There needs to be a clear statement that, in terms of public service—these are unremunerated positions, by the way—those governors will not be placed at a worse risk than trustees and company directors. The Nolan committee is considering that aspect, although it is not considering protection for those 5,000 governors. If governors are put at risk because of the refusal of the Department for Education and Employment to make a clear statement, it will ruin the tradition of voluntary public service in this country. It is no good saying, as the Department for Education and Employment has more or less said, that one governor will have to take a test case to court. That is quite unacceptable. Many hon. Members have spoken about education issues, but that particular aspect deserves detailed examination by the Government early in the new year.

Before the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) was elected to the House, many of us sat in front of our television sets and cheered him on as he ran for this country. The situation has, of course, changed since he entered the House, and today it was interesting to listen to him talk about sport—some of us thought that he might talk about fishing. I regret that you were not in the Chair at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the hon. Gentleman, who is a powerful source for such comments, spoke about the possible television tyranny of sport—I use my words, not his—and particularly cable television's shackling of rugby league players.

The House, particularly the Government, should listen to the hon. Gentleman's warning, which has also come from other hon. Members. Access to televised sporting events will be denied to millions of people in this country, which is unacceptable. If the Government want to avoid any defeats over the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill, they had better get the Bill and the policy right. There will be support from both sides of the House to ensure that millions of citizens of this country are not denied access to top sporting events, as that would damage future generations.

12.20 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): There has been unanimity on one aspect of the debate: wishing the occupant of the Chair—Madam Speaker or you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—a happy Christmas, but no one has seen fit to wish the Leader of the House a happy Christmas. If I were to seek to respond fully to everything that has been raised with me today, I would still be here at Christmas. I do not think that even my worst opponents in the House would wish that upon me.

All our Christmases have been brightened by the Swiss immigration authorities, to whom we owe the presence of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who made his usual vigorous remarks. I doubt whether the Japanese Government would welcome his presence here today as much as we do, but he has certainly improved the quality of our debate. I am tempted to express the hope that the Swiss immigration authorities might have let him in because, as he did not have a passport, our authorities might not have let him back in. As this is Christmas, however, I do not think that I will pursue that matter any further.

I acknowledge that I shall clearly be unable to comment on all the speeches. Various hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), raised important constituency issues and I shall ensure that those points, as well as any others that I do not cover, are drawn to the attention of the relevant Ministers.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) raised a specific point on whaling and I was slightly surprised that he did not know—I am sure that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West does—that the United Kingdom has been consistently critical of Japanese whaling for research purposes. At meetings of the international whaling conference we have played a major part in the adoption of several resolutions calling on countries to stop lethal research whaling in International Whaling Commission sanctuaries and for research on whales anywhere to be conducted using non-lethal means, except in exceptional circumstances. We have made it clear that we object to the use of the electric lance in that context. There is no doubt about the United Kingdom Government's position—that should be firmly on the record.

I understand that the legal action in Japan involving Mr. Votier is not a criminal prosecution but a civil lawsuit taken out by the Japanese Institute of Cetaceous Research, if I have the title correct. For the British Government to seek to interfere in civil proceedings in another country would not be easy—it would be difficult enough to interfere in criminal proceedings. I hope that that point will be registered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and the hon. Member for Perry Barr raised two important issues: Holloway and the lottery regulator. On the subject of Holloway, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, to whom I was speaking about the issue yesterday, visited Holloway last year, and as a result of that visit action was already being taken. In October more than £300,000 was added to Holloway's budget to provide extra staff and fully trained new staff are due to join next month. Senior management at headquarters are working with the governor to set firm targets for improvements and dates by which the targets should be achieved. Yesterday, arrangements were made to send 16 staff on loan to Holloway from other establishments to help ease the immediate problems. I hope that I have been able to give the hon. Member for Perry Barr some information and some reassurance that the problem is not only recognised but is already being tackled.

On the issue of the lottery regulator, I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham will have read the letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage to the regulator, dated yesterday, in which she made it clear that she expects him to

"maintain a proper distance from the company"—

Camelot—

"and its constituent parts, and be seen to do so, taking all steps to guard against possible misunderstanding"

of his actions.

In her letter my right hon. Friend drew attention to a number of factors, which I hope the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend will, at the very least, bear in mind. The visits to America—the subject of the controversy—took place some months after the award of the main licence to Camelot. I do not think that anyone has suggested otherwise—certainly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accepted that there was no question of the regulator having sought or received personal gain from the visits that he undertook. It is important that that fact should at least be placed on the record.

In the remaining minutes I shall comment on as many issues as possible. My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham made a number of points about local authority spending on what they regard as political campaigning in respect of grant-maintained school ballots. Regulations limit local education authority expenditure on influencing the outcome of ballots. I acknowledge that my right hon. and hon. Friends do not regard those limits as adequate. Shortly after Christmas we expect a further education Bill on grant-maintained schools and my right hon. and hon. Friends may wish to pursue aspects of the argument in that context.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and I had some exchanges about cold-weather payments during, I think, business questions last week and I do not think that I can add to what I said then. I also had some exchanges in the House about knives—I cannot add to what I said then. I shall ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's support for the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and that attention is drawn to the hon. Gentleman's other suggestions.

As usual, I have improved the range of my knowledge during our debate; I am unbelievably well informed about the Isle of Wight. I know the location of every lightship, buoy, sewer outfall, school and hospital and the size of

[Mr. Tony Newton]

the grant to the local citizens advice bureau—I shall be unable to cover all those issues. I now know much more about light dues around the British coast: apparently, they are administered by three general lighthouse authorities, including one called the commissioner of Irish lights, which no doubt operates as close to Belfast as anyone can. Fascinated though I am by the subject, I had better not engage in it any further today.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made a number of points about St. George's hospital—which I believe I visited when I was Minister for Health—and London health services in general. Clearly, I do not have time to rehearse that debate now. As a Member of Parliament who represents part of Essex, I know that the home counties, including Essex, have long felt that the sharing of resources between London and the home counties was not fair. I believe that the Government have been right to tackle that problem and to recognise the need to shift the resources to where the population has moved historically—to the counties around London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), not for the first time in an Adjournment debate, made a number of references to Essex. I recognise his concerns about care in the community, and I am glad that, following the representations that a number of us made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, he has asked the social security inspectorate to consider the provision of community care in Essex.

I have made at least as many comments as I could have been expected to make in such a short time. I think I have done rather well. Even though nobody wished me a happy Christmas, I wish everyone a happy Christmas.

International Station (Stratford)

12.29 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Our most recent full debate on this topic was on the day before the Christmas recess in 1994, although it was at a somewhat less congenial hour—about 4.30 am. This shorter debate today gives us an opportunity to review the progress since then.

The then Secretary of State for Transport announced in 1991 that the channel tunnel rail link would run through east London, because it would bring regeneration to east London. If there were to be no station in east London, however, there would be no regeneration, either. In good faith, the Government should honour the commitment they made in choosing the route for the channel tunnel rail link.

The transport case for the Stratford station is a compelling one. Stratford is a better station location for users of the rail link based in east and much of south London. Given the Jubilee line extension, Stratford is better for users from Westminster, and for users from the City, Essex and East Anglia. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) in his place this morning, and that hon. Members from Essex and East Anglia have signed early-day motion 126.

The Thames Gateway Partnership was launched in the City at the European bank for reconstruction and development on 1 December. The event was extremely well attended, and it was distinguished by the strong support voiced for an international station at Stratford in the speeches of both the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, and Mr. Neil Kinnock, the European Transport Commissioner.

I wish to highlight the developments since the previous debate, because they have powerfully advanced the case for Stratford. I shall concentrate on just two: first, the July report of the Select Committee on Transport; secondly, the publication of the London Pride Partnership's transport action programme.

The Select Committee, after its exhaustive deliberations, gave a ringing endorsement to the Stratford proposal. It identified the national and regional importance of the Stratford proposal and urged that the necessary powers for the station under the transport and works legislation should be obtained as soon as possible. That was a welcome and important decision, which recognised the case for Stratford at national level, which we had not previously achieved. We debated that report last summer.

The second development I wish to highlight is the launch of the London Pride programme last month. That was significant, because of the breadth of support it has achieved from local government and the business sector in London. The transport action programme that London Pride has produced represents a remarkable consensus among all those concerned about the future of London.

In the foreword to the programme, signed by Lord Sheppard and Toby Harris, the leader of Haringey council and chairman of the Association of London Authorities, one of the main priorities of the programme of action is

> "the award of the concession for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link with an international station at Stratford".

All the London boroughs, London First, the Confederation of British Industry and the London chamber of commerce have recognised the Stratford station decision as one of the keys to the future of transport in London. As the Stratford promoter group has shown, the proposal can be achieved at no cost to Government.

One of the benefits of the Stratford station proposal is the excellent onward connections that Stratford can offer to the north. The Minister may be aware that the proposal, in its initial form, for additional tunnelling at Islington—which I support—could jeopardise some of those connections. Newham council, of which I am still a member, is working with the London borough of Islington on a proposal that would give the extra protection in Islington that the Select Committee advocated, without jeopardising Stratford's link to the west coast main line.

When we debated this topic at 4.30 am a year ago, the Minister intimated that a final decision would be announced in spring 1995. We have not yet had that decision, and I understand that there will be a decision in January. I appeal to the Minister to make a real and substantial decision. Some people are saying that the Government will duck the issue, by leaving it to somebody else to make the decision. It is a priority for the capital, as London Pride has demonstrated, and it is important to the national interest, as the Select Committee has shown.

This matter cannot be left to the vagaries of purely commercial decision-making. The Government need to make this decision; they have always suggested that they will; and I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm today that that remains their intention. The Government should now resolve swiftly, clearly and unequivocally in favour of Stratford International.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Unfortunately, I am advised that the procedures of the House mean that, as I have already spoken this morning, I cannot make a separate speech. However, I can intervene.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) understands my personal commitment to Newham. As the House has become tired of hearing, it is the place where I was born, and I still have family there. The case for having the international railway station at Stratford is very strong. There is enormous support from Conservative Members of Parliament in Essex and in East Anglia for having the international railway station at Stratford.

From my point of view, on the Conservative Benches, I am very proud that the Conservative Government built the channel tunnel, and I am very proud of what they did in the London docklands. I believe fundamentally that the case for the international railway station being at Stratford will enhance the success of the docklands. There will be an enormous benefit for constituents in Essex and East Anglia if we have the railway station at Stratford.

Does the hon. Member join me in hoping that my hon. Friend the Minister will give the House a Christmas present by announcing in the new year that the railway station will be at Stratford?

Mr. Timms: I gladly endorse many of the points that the hon. Member has made, especially the last one about the aspiration for a Christmas present from the Minister. I gladly acknowledge and put on the record the long-standing and unwavering support that the hon. Member has given to the interests of Newham and to the case for the international station at Stratford. I agree with his assessment of the importance of this proposal, not just for east London, but for Essex and East Anglia. I have already said that I especially appreciate the support that many Conservative Members have given to the proposals by signing the early-day motion.

The channel tunnel was built by a private sector organisation rather than by the Government, but I agree with the hon. Member for Basildon that it is an important element of our infrastructure. We need to ensure that it brings benefit not just to London, but to Essex and East Anglia. An international station at Stratford would help to make that possible.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Stratford is in my constituency, but I am in favour of the proposed international station not because of a narrow constituency interest, but because, as my hon. Friend has rightly said, the project involves all London. I am glad that the three Members who represent Newham, together with supporters on the Government Benches, have worked together on the campaign for Stratford international station.

Does my hon. Friend agree that that campaign is an example of the public and private sectors working together? Organisations across London of all political persuasions have said that the station should be located at Stratford, as have Conservative Members. Is that not a perfect example of a co-operative venture? Does my hon. Friend agree that that should impress the Government? Given the enormous support across the House and across London and the south-east for the station to be located at Stratford, we cannot understand why it has taken the Government so long to make a decision.

Mr. Timms: I agree. I am particularly pleased that my hon. Friend is with us this morning, and I know that to some extent we owe that to the immigration authorities at Zurich.

A year ago, the Minister acknowledged the impressive nature of the public-private sector partnership which supports the Stratford proposal. I agree with my hon. Friend: I hope that the Minister and the Government will swiftly make the decision for which so many of us have been pressing for such a long time.

12.41 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am glad to join my hon. Friends from Newham, and the support from Basildon of all places, in praising a multi-party, multi-beneficial investment in public transport. I say "public transport" even though there may be a slightly different emphasis on the manner in which it is funded. That is now less important than the principle.

I am also glad to support the Stratford proposal because I can support, surprisingly enough, two aspects of Government policy that are intimately connected with it. That may sound strange, but it is absolutely true.

The first policy with which I agree is the provision of the station works at Stratford without cost to the public purse. That will not come under the various formulae that we have talked about or the private finance initiative, but it will be funded by the Stratford Development Partnership and those in the area who are willing to provide the capital for the station inside the concrete box

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

that is part of the works that have been agreed. That is wholly in line with the Government's policy of private enterprise, and development from private means. On this occasion at least, the Opposition have no objection to that.

The second aspect of Government policy with which I agree is something that I heard the Secretary of State for Transport, no less, express only this morning on "Today"—a programme which often reflects, or perhaps leads, rightly or wrongly, what happens in the Chamber. He said that the Government want more and more people to travel by rail. That is good news, particularly when congestion is caused by cars and other traffic in Greater London. A station at Stratford would contribute not just to international facilities but to traffic flow in Greater London. We all know that people choose to travel by the underground not just because of the time saved, but because of the convenience of it.

Hon. Members will be aware that the Stratford location is truly extraordinary. Whether trains from the channel tunnel rail link will eventually stop there or not, the existing rail network from Stratford is considerable. Fortunately, I have time to spell out the links from Stratford to other parts of Greater London. One can travel around the North London link to Richmond, Cambridge and beyond, to Stansted airport.

Stratford is linked to two branches of the Central line, one to Epping and one to Hainault. It is linked to two, possibly three branches of the Great Eastern line to Southend, Clacton, Chelmsford and Norwich. It is also possible to take a night service from Stratford to Barking and Southend, and indeed to Basildon by another route.

In future, there may be a permanent service operating every half an hour from Stratford to the royal docks, and beyond, under the Thames, to Woolwich and north Kent, should the proposed link be built. At the moment, it is perfectly possible to travel to north Woolwich and the important development and exhibition centres and the university college of East London at the royal docks.

Stratford will also be connected to the Jubilee line, on which it will be possible to travel to London Bridge, Waterloo, Westminster, central London and beyond. Stratford is also on the docklands light railway, which connects to Canary Wharf, which is an important development, whatever one may think of it. It may well be possible, should that line be extended, to travel on to Lewisham.

Stratford is also on the Central line, and is thus linked to central London through the Oxford street access. In addition, if crossrail is built, that would add a through line to Paddington, London airport, Reading and perhaps as far south as Bristol or Exeter. Such is the network to which Stratford has, or is soon likely to have, access.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I do not want to pour cold water on the comments of the hon. Members for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who have said that passengers from south London and Kent would be able to use Stratford station, but may I remind them that Ebbsfleet international station has already been approved for the route? Due to the excellence of the South Eastern Railway Company, it will be able to cater precisely for those people from south London and Kent. That does not detract, however, from the advantages of Stratford to Essex and north London.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Member speaks for north Kent, and Ebbsfleet will be a valuable link on the network. We all know that there are breakdowns on every line for good or bad reasons. If trains have to stop at Ebbsfleet, it may be possible to change to alternative routes. It is to those alternatives that I wish to refer.

The channel tunnel rail link should go to King's Cross and St. Pancras by some means or another. Many visitors to London get taxis from King's Cross or St. Pancras to their hotels or an exhibition centre, so they are the preferable stations to which the rail link should go. A station at Stratford would also offer additional access to the channel tunnel rail link to many people in Greater London through designated trains or routes, and could provide luggage facilities for passengers. If things go wrong—they go wrong in the best regulated circumstances—trains have to be reversed from a station further out—for example, Reading. A station at Stratford would offer an additional facility to cope with such problems.

I believe that the choice of Stratford would add to the returns of traffic on the route. We know that the rail link has been subject to financial difficulties, so I suggest to the Minister that everything points to supporting the works order, and thus creating a station at Stratford.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) for bringing this important matter to the attention of the House again. As he reminded us, we last debated it a year ago, at a less sociable hour. I know that he and many other hon. Members have campaigned long and vigorously for an intermediate station at Stratford. I understand their concern and impatience that a decision should be made without further delay. I therefore welcome the opportunity to inform the House of the current position on the proposal.

On the occasion of our previous debate, I explained the process by which the Government had reached decisions to date about intermediate stations on the rail link. I described the position as it then stood, and how we saw things moving forward to a final decision. I also acknowledged that an international station would assist the regeneration of the Stratford area. I also drew attention, however, to the need to be sure that there was a good economic case for it.

At that time, we were hopeful that we would be able to reach a decision in the early part of this year. In the event, the nature and complexity of the bids received from the consortia bidding to construct and operate the rail link, and their proposals for a possible Stratford station, meant that that decision has had to be delayed. I do not apologise for that, because the Government have to be sure that they make the right decision on the basis of all the necessary information. The important thing is that no time has been wasted in the process of reaching a decision.

The Government and the two short-listed consortia have had the opportunity to address the concerns expressed in the various recommendations of the Select Committee on Transport, which considered the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister said that the Government must ensure that they make the right decision. When reaching a decision about Stratford, will the Minister take into account strategic reasons, or will he look only at the commercial case put by the developers? He said that the Government must make the right decision. What factors will influence the Government?

Mr. Watts: I shall come to that issue in a moment. The Government will be influenced by a broad range of factors, including some of those to which the hon. Gentleman has alluded.

The Stratford promoter group has continued to lobby very hard, and there have been a number of meetings with Ministers. I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) that it is an excellent example of public sector and private sector co-operation, the like of which we are seeing increasingly in London and around the country.

The group made presentations both to the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), and to me in February. I also had the pleasure of accepting an invitation to visit Stratford in March on a very wet day, and I was impressed by the strength of support from the local community. More recently, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), has also met representatives of the group.

The group has argued that patronage of, and therefore revenue from, the CTRL would be increased, that the station could be built at no cost to the Government, and that there would be substantial regeneration benefits. It has argued strongly that the total realised from the sale of development lands in the area would exceed the cost of providing the station, and that the site offers the prospect of a major new public transport interchange of national and international significance. It is accepted that Stratford is now an extremely important public transport interchange, and I can see advantages in expanding that role. I know, too, that a great deal of work has been done in estimating land values and on associated planning issues.

The promoter group's funding proposals rely heavily on income to be derived from the sale of development lands—the Stratford railway lands. The Government have always reserved the right to consider other funding approaches and have invited the CTRL bidders to put forward alternative funding proposals if they so wish.

However, in order to ensure that the approach of the station promoter group remains viable, the Government undertook to ensure that the Stratford railway lands should remain available pending a decision on the future of the station. Concern has been expressed from time to time as to whether that is still the case, and I am happy to confirm the assurances that I and other Ministers have given, that there will be no piecemeal disposals and that the Stratford railway lands will remain fully available until a decision on the station is made.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to the Minister for that assurance. In raising again the decision about Stratford, do the Government intend to decide for or against the Stratford station, or will they allow someone else to make the decision? I urge the Minister to assure the House that the Government will make that decision.

Mr. Watts: I shall come to that issue. We might make a decision in favour of the station, but we shall not make a decision against it. I will explain that comment later. I assure hon. Members that we shall certainly not duck a decision.

The Government will decide shortly whether a Stratford station should be provided now, and, if so, whether it should be a combined international and domestic station or an international station only. The possibility of having a station at some point in the future has already been secured as a result of the Government's acceptance this summer of the recommendations from the Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

The promoter will now be required to construct a long box at Stratford rather than the shorter version envisaged originally, which would have met only the operational requirements of the railway. The long box will be large enough to house the platforms and the other passenger facilities that are needed for a combined international and domestic station. Even if the decision is taken next year not to provide a station immediately, the possibility of adding one at a later stage will remain.

The decision will be either "yes" or "possibly in the future". It will not be "no", because the possibility of a station has been secured by the requirement to build the long box as part of the main construction of the link.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): At the beginning of the CTRL affair, British Rail espoused the wonderful theory that the economics of building a railway meant that, the fewer stops there were, the more money would be made. I am relieved to discover that Ministers have taken a rather different view. Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is easier for passengers to get on and off the train when it stops?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Too many stops may reduce the frequency of services and may diminish revenue, but if the argument that it is better for trains not to stop is pursued to its logical conclusion, it means running trains that stop only at each end of the line—which would probably not maximise revenue.

The Government will decide whether to proceed immediately and, if so, how that would be financed. However, the views of the two short-listed bidders on the costs and benefits of such a station, and particularly the effect that it would have in terms of increasing or reducing the contribution sought from Government for the project, are key factors in that decision.

The bidders have been instructed to treat the long box as a minimum requirement, to price for a fully combined international and domestic station, and then to say how their bids would be adjusted for an international station only or no station at all. In that way, we shall receive the full range of available financial information.

Mr. Spearing: With regard to the comments of the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), does the Minister agree that the existence of some clause of which people are unaware, that traffic and fares are directly related to some formula involving distance and journey time, would be incompatible with the commonly held view? Stopping at a station may add only five minutes to the journey time but prove of inestimable benefit to many people, and thus increase traffic and revenue at the same time.

Mr. Watts: An extra stop might reduce the total number of trains that could be run. Against that, we must balance the extent to which the provision of an extra stop might generate additional passengers and revenue. Those are the sort of judgments that we must take on the basis of the best evidence available. The bidding consortia are

[Mr. Watts]

also considering those matters when submitting their bids to us and indicating whether a scheme with a Stratford station is a better business proposition than a scheme without it.

If a decision is made in favour of a station, it will be promoted by an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992, which will provide the mechanism for the necessary planning consents. The process of securing such an order could begin next year, and, subject to securing the necessary approvals, should be capable of being completed and the station constructed within the same time scale as the completion of construction of the rail link.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Minister give the House an absolute assurance that the final decision will be based on all strategic considerations, including the recognition by his predecessors, such as the present Deputy Prime Minister, that it is not simply a transport project but a vital contribution to the economic infrastructure of the area? Will he assure us that that strategic decision will be taken by the Government, and not by any consortium for commercial reasons?

Mr. Watts: I have already said that the Government will make the decision, and that we shall take into account a wide range of factors, including the strategic considerations to which the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West have referred.

Apart from the CTRL effects and other transport benefits, another key factor in the decision-making process will be the regeneration benefits to be derived from an international station. The hon. Members for Newham, North-West, for Newham, North-East and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) have been persuasive advocates of the contribution that a station would make to the regeneration of the Stratford area. We had substantial correspondence on that point following last year's debate.

I do not accept that east London would derive no economic benefits if there were no station development at Stratford. There is already substantial investment in transport, infrastructure and so on in east London. None the less, I accept—as I did when replying to the debates last year and in March—that a CTRL station at Stratford would prove a significant additional boost to those initiatives, and to the development of the Thames gateway as a whole.

In evaluating bids, the Government will carefully consider the assumptions about the viability of the station, the scope and nature of regeneration benefits, and the possible impact on the CTRL generally of a Stratford station. We shall also take into account other possible developments in transport infrastructure, such as the opening of the Jubilee line extension in 1998, and how traffic patterns and levels of use on existing and proposed transport links might respond to the opening of an international station.

In reaching their views on the costs and benefits of the various options, the two bidders have had the opportunity of extensive discussions with the Stratford promoter group. By deferring a decision until the final bids from the two short-listed consortia have been received, we have sought to give the promoter group and the bidders the maximum opportunity to make their best case for a station.

Mr. Deputy Speaker(Sir Geoffrey Lefthouse): Order. Time is up.

Schools (Broadstairs)

1 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (South Thanet): I am most grateful to have been given the opportunity to raise in an Adjournment debate the subject of schools in Broadstairs.

I shall devote most of my speech to the individual and separate problems of three schools in Broadstairs that have become most inappropriately entangled in a complex dispute and need some help—perhaps even a touch of the wisdom of Solomon—from my hon. Friend the Minister if the dispute is to be sorted out swiftly and satisfactorily to the benefit of several hundred local schoolchildren, their anxious families and their worried teachers.

Before I focus on the dispute and make some suggestions for solving it, I shall make some general comments on the wider subject of school education in Broadstairs because it is, on the whole, a sparkling success story in which our local community rightly takes great pride.

Broadstairs is a charming town on the Kent coast with a residential population of approximately 25,000 and a flourishing education sector consisting of 12 schools. They include at secondary level Holy Cross school and St. George's grant-maintained school, whose GCSE examination results last year were top of the league tables for non-selective schools in Kent and second top in the league table for modern schools in the entire country. Charles Dickens grant-maintained school has a new science block under construction and scored a commendable 89 per cent. pass rate among its GCSE candidates taking five or more subjects. Dane Court grant-maintained school had its best ever year for examination results last year, with a 95 per cent. pass rate among GCSE candidates taking five or more subjects.

At junior level, Broadstairs has three good schools: Upton, Bromstone and St. Peter's, to which I shall refer in a moment. There are also two infant schools: St. Mildred's and Callis Grange, which also features in the dispute that is central to the debate.

I should also mention that the independent sector flourishes in Broadstairs with Haddon Dene school, St. Joseph's convent school and Wellesley House school—the latter being one of the outstanding preparatory schools in the country. Perhaps I should declare an interest as I say those words of praise about Wellesley House, as our own three children have had remarkably happy and successful educations there.

What all those schools in Broadstairs have in common are high standards, dedicated teachers and a keen sense of mutual interest and interaction with the local community. When something goes right, such as the good examination results that I have just mentioned, the whole community sits up and takes notice.

The same is also true, however, if something goes wrong. That is why I now refer to a subject that is in danger of going wrong on the Broadstairs education scene—the dispute affecting three schools—and that is the main focus of the debate.

At the heart of the dispute is a question mark hanging over the future of one of the oldest and most respected schools in Broadstairs. That is St. Peter's school, or to give it its formal title, St. Peter's in Thanet Church of England aided junior school. Unfortunately, St. Peter's also has the less happy distinction of having some of the worst premises in the entire county in the shape of its 19th-century physical facilities.

St. Peter's has the fundamental disadvantage of being a split-site school, with its two main buildings separated by a high street. The busy traffic creates daily physical risks for the pupils. The buildings deserve the overworked adjective "Dickensian", for they are overcrowded, unhealthy, damp and dangerous.

To give the House a vivid picture of St. Peter's in the winter rain, I can do no better than quote a report written last autumn by the school's then chairman of governors, Mr. Norman Morland:

> "As chairman of governors I visited the school on Wednesday 13 October, following several days of heavy autumnal rain. For the sake of the morale of all concerned, I went over to the high street building and can only say that I was appalled by what I saw. The atmosphere was akin to that of a hot house in Kew. Buckets and bowls were everywhere to catch the rain. Water was trickling down one of the walls, the pages of the books were curling up in the moisture-laden air, there was fungus on the cupboard walls. The catalogue could continue on and on.
>
> In the midst of all this the staff and the pupils worked heroically and deserve the highest commendation for continuing in conditions that are totally unacceptable and are deleterious to health of pupil and teacher."

So much for the bad news, which was well recorded in Mr. Morland's vivid prose and confirmed by a recent report by the Office of Standards in Education inspectorate. However, that bad news is on the verge of being consigned to the archives of history because the good news is that the local education authority, Kent county council and the Canterbury diocesan board of education, after many long and disappointing delays, have put forward an excellent proposal for a new St. Peter's school building.

That building project, which received no objections during the consultation period and was overwhelmingly well supported by the local community, is for a new, enlarged third-form entry junior school for 360 pupils. The new St. Peter's school would consist of 12 classrooms to be built around a central courtyard on land already owned by the local education authority adjacent to Callis Grange infant school. The funding for the project—some £1.6 million—is now in place, so until the recent unexpected dispute erupted, the new St. Peter's school was ready to roll, confidently on schedule to open its doors in September 1997.

I should emphasise that the new St. Peter's school building is being developed alongside another important school building development on the same site—that of Callis Grange county infant school. Callis Grange school, which currently has 356 pupils on its roll, suffers from an overcrowding problem, which has been temporarily alleviated by the use of five mobile classrooms and a mobile toilet block.

The facilities are woefully inadequate, particularly in the freezing, wind-chill weather conditions that prevailed last week. The LEA recognised the problem, which is exacerbated by the growing demand for school places in Broadstairs, and gave its full backing to a building project that would enlarge the school by 90 extra places. That means building new classroom accommodation to cope with the expected increase in the school roll and to replace some of the mobiles. The enlargement of Callis Grange school is scheduled to take place in time for the new

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

classrooms to be opened in September 1997. As the project is being built on the same site and time scale as the new St. Peter's school, the two developments need to proceed simultaneously.

Against that background, I hope that it is clear to my hon. Friend that the substantial combined building project of a new school for St. Peter's and enlarged classrooms for Callis Grange is important and urgent in terms of the physical facilities and the basic need for more school places in Broadstairs.

Broadstairs is sometimes thought of as a town for retired people, but the community is becoming demographically more well balanced and has an increasing number of young families moving into the area. There was consternation among those young families, whose children require adequate provision for primary and infant school places, when the news broke recently that the St. Peter's and Callis Grange building projects had been halted in their tracks because of a totally unexpected and unpredictable obstacle in the form of eight letters of statutory objection signed by 10 Broadstairs residents. They were all dated 9 November. The letters were received by my hon. Friend's Department just two days before the period for objections to the public notices expired on 12 November. Those objections have the explosive potential to block or seriously delay the St. Peter's and Callis Grange school building developments unless they are withdrawn or my hon. Friend uses her statutory ministerial powers swiftly to overrule them.

I said a few moments ago that the unexpected arrival of those last-minute objections caused consternation in Broadstairs, but in some ways the word "consternation" is an understatement. For I am sorry to have to report that there was also a degree of anger and astonishment when it became apparent that the letters of objection were identical in text and had apparently been organised by the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Southwark's commission for schools in Kent, in order to draw attention to the plight of St. Joseph's convent school in Broadstairs, which faced the possibility of closure.

Needless to say, there are two sides to this story and I shall endeavour to explain sympathetically and constructively the anxieties of the archdiocese of Southwark about St. Joseph's in a moment. Nevertheless the manner and format in which those essentially bogus, although paradoxically sincere, objections were lodged raised the bizarre spectacle of a sectarian divide in Broadstairs, in which Roman Catholics were suspected of blocking the urgently needed building of a Church of England school.

I hasten to assure the House that those fears are not justified. Broadstairs has not suddenly become Belfast. The religious communities in the town remain on good terms, not least because local Catholic leaders such as Father Ronald Duggan, the parish priest of Broadstairs, and Canon Bill Clements, the dean of Thanet, have made it clear that the local Roman Catholic community has no objections to the St. Peter's school building project.

Meanwhile the Church of England vicar of St. Peter's, Canon Nick Bury, who is also chairman of the governors of St. Peter's school, has made it clear that there is nothing but Anglican good will towards St. Joseph's convent school, whose future aspirations should not affect the St. Peter's building project at all and should be seen as a quite separate issue, important though it is to the Catholic community of Broadstairs.

Let me therefore now refer to the separate issue of the future of St. Joseph's convent school. That excellent independent private school, which has approximately 100 Catholic pupils of primary school age, has for many years been run and subsidised by the sisters of the Christian retreat in Broadstairs. Sadly, the sisters, whose numbers and resources are declining, have decided that they can no longer continue to subsidise the operation of the school after 1997.

The archdiocese of Southwark, after taking local soundings in Broadstairs, came to the conclusion that, rather than see a much loved Catholic school close, it would make greater sense to try to continue the excellent traditions of St. Joseph's by seeing whether it could be taken into the maintained sector as a primary school. Confidential discussions between the LEA and the archdiocese for that purpose therefore started earlier this year.

I think it fair to say that there must have been some misunderstandings in those discussions, since for some reason or other the archdiocese came to believe that the only way to protect the future interest of St. Joseph's was to lodge objections to the St. Peter's and Callis Grange building project at the last minute in order to draw the attention of the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister to the full background of primary school options in Broadstairs. I hope that I have now explained enough about the background to primary school education in Broadstairs to demonstrate that there is a basic need for, and room for, a new and enlarged St. Peter's Church of England primary school and a St. Joseph's Roman Catholic primary school, transferred from the independent sector to the maintained sector as a voluntary-aided Roman Catholic school.

Since I started balloting for this Adjournment debate, further talks have been held between the LEA and the archdiocese of Southwark. A few days ago the Kent education committee, with much input and encouragement from Councillor Fred Shutler, the energetic county councillor for Broadstairs, decided to support the proposal to establish a new voluntary-aided Roman Catholic primary school in Broadstairs in September 1997, on the basis that the LEA will be submitting a bid for 90 additional primary school places for Thanet in 1997. Those additional places, taken together with the existing roll of St. Joseph's, will provide ample justification for the proposed new one-form entry primary school.

Against that background, and even though there is no real linkage between the St. Joseph's and the St. Peter's projects, it does seem that this should be a story that will have a happy outcome early in 1996, bringing to an end the current tense dispute affecting the three schools that I have been talking about.

So in order that those three schools can live happily ever after, I now ask my hon. Friend to respond, I hope affirmatively, to the key questions that need to be answered. So far as St. Joseph's is concerned, can my hon. Friend confirm that her Department has received, or expects to receive, a bid from Kent local education authority for additional primary school places for Thanet in 1997? Will she look favourably on the proposal, which

I know her officials are aware of, for a new St. Joseph's voluntary-aided Roman Catholic primary school, to open in September 1997?

So far as St. Peter's school and Callis Grange school are concerned, can my hon. Friend the Minister announce that she is now minded—or soon will be minded—to approve the LEA's and the Canterbury diocesan board's proposals for the combined building projects to go ahead as planned and in good time for the new St. Peter's school and the new Callis Grange classrooms to open their doors in September 1997?

If my hon. Friend is minded, in this season of peace and good will, to indicate her approval for all those projects this afternoon, I can assure her that she will be giving the education world in Broadstairs the best possible Christmas present.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) on securing this important Adjournment debate on the schools in his constituency. He is well known as a champion of the excellent education in South Thanet, and his diligence in requesting this debate is a testament to his attitude to his constituency and its schools.

I want to begin by discussing some general issues that my right hon. Friend raised, not least the sparkling success of the schools in his constituency. I am delighted to hear about the high standards being achieved in Broadstairs schools, which clearly owe much to the excellent quality of the teaching. Once again, we must applaud the enthusiasm and dedication of the teaching profession, which has so rightly been described as a vocation.

School improvement is always at the top of the Government's agenda. It is also encouraging to note that this year's GCSE results for Broadstairs continue to be good. I am aware that three of the four secondary schools are grant-maintained, and their success is a testament to the GM policy.

We firmly believe that self-government is the best way of running schools. It sets schools free to decide for themselves how they use their resources and to target them where they will have most effect. It means that they can keep and develop their distinctive characters to meet the needs of the communities that they serve. Self-government releases the energies of teachers and governors by giving them responsibility for their schools' futures, and they certainly rise to that challenge. GM schools are well managed, achieve excellent results as they have done in Broadstairs, and are clearly popular with parents. They can get things done quickly, without waiting for town hall bureaucracy to get things moving, and they are directly accountable to local parents.

In Kent, more than half the secondary pupils are now being educated in GM schools. Parents have voted yes in ballots on going GM, so it is pretty clear that Kent parents support self-government of schools. It is a pity that we do not often see a positive approach on the part of Kent county council. It has been quite hostile to grant-maintained status, and it makes life as difficult as possible once schools have decided to ballot.

The development of GM schools is only one aspect of the Government's mission to promote excellence in education. We are also f[illegible] initiatives to encourage the development of specialist schools, which bring together three important strands of our education and employment policies: raising standards, extending choice and diversity, and linking schools and the business community. My right hon. Friend will be aware of the popularity of our specialist schools programme; indeed Sandwich high school, in South Thanet, has recently been designated a technology college. That programme proves that education and business want to work together. Each technology or language college is backed by sponsorship of about £100,000; private sector sponsorship for school education totals more than £14 million as a result of the programme.

The specialist schools programme is outstandingly popular. It was launched only in September 1993, but there are now more than 140 schools in it. There are 127 technology colleges as well as the first 16 language colleges. As there is stiff competition for places in the programme, all the schools approved can be proud of their success.

I have more good news about Kent to add to that presented by my right hon. Friend. We have been able to confirm our support for capital spending on schools. The figures for Kent are not available, but we have national figures, as I announced yesterday. Despite the tight public spending round, we have been able to secure capital spending for 1996-97 in local education authority maintained schools at a level that is 7 per cent. higher than the current year. That demonstrates the Government's commitment to helping LEAs improve the quality of their school buildings.

It is for LEAs, however, to decide their own capital expenditure priorities and to make the best use of the resources that are available to them. The annual capital guidelines, the ACGs, that have been announced are not tied to particular projects. Nor do they represent the total of resources available to LEAs for capital spending. The authorities are able also to invest their capital receipts. They can use funds from their revenue budgets for capital purposes if they wish. The Government do not control the funding of individual projects at county or voluntary-controlled schools.

The Kent local education authority was given an ACG of £23,223,000 in 1996-97. That was by far the largest in the country. That sum represents 40 per cent. of its total bid. It is significantly above the national average of 23 per cent. The ACG largely reflects the extent to which the authority's plans for spending on schools matched the national priority criteria.

Allocations for voluntary-aided schools' capital works have increased by 7 per cent. to £62 million in 1996-97. There has been set aside £38 million for repair grants in line with 1995-96.

Allocations for basic need and exceptional basic need will be much higher in 1996-97 than in recent years. They will be about £6.6 million compared with £2.5 million in 1995-96. The allocations for grant-maintained schools continue to show a healthy increase as well, from £130 million in the current year to £138 million in 1996-97. Those figures demonstrate the Government's commitment to improving standards in education. The examples given by my right hon. Friend provide encouraging evidence of the success of our policies in practice.

My right hon. Friend drew the attention of the House to Callis Grange and St. Peter's schools in Thanet. Both schools are in Broadstairs. I am sure that my right hon.

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

Friend will appreciate that as an enlarged county infant school and a new Church of England junior in Broadstairs will be considered in the context of statutory proposals, those matters are currently under consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Therefore, I cannot comment in detail on the issues that he raised. I am well aware, however, of the problems surrounding the provision of primary school places in Broadstairs.

My officials visited St. Peter's junior school earlier this year. They were able to advise the governors and Kent LEA on how to proceed. My right hon. Friend will understand that I cannot prejudge the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I can assure my right hon. Friend, however, that I have listened carefully to what he said about the condition of the buildings used by pupils at Callis Grange and St. Peter's. I can give him my assurance that his description and the details that he has given will be taken into account.

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the constructive and helpful tone in which she is replying. I understand that, for statutory reasons, she cannot prejudge the ruling of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. But what is the timetable within which my right hon. Friend will make a decision? If it is a favourable one, will it be made in good time to allow the building works to start within a period that will enable them to be completed so that the schools may open their doors in September 1997?

Mrs. Gillan: I understand my right hon. Friend's determination to try to extract from me a timetable, but I am unable to give him one today. I undertake to write to him in the new year. I shall try to give him an idea of the timetable for my right hon. Friend's decisions.

As for St. Joseph's school, I should explain that we have not yet received any statutory proposals to establish a new voluntary-aided Roman Catholic primary school in Broadstairs. That remains an outstanding matter. If and when we do receive such proposals, we shall consider them fully and carefully, and as speedily as possible.

On a more positive note, I can confirm that we have accepted in principle the basic need case for additional primary school places in Broadstairs. For reasons that I think I have explained fully, I cannot comment on whether those places will be provided at St. Peter's and St. Joseph's, bearing in mind the need for the statutory process. I cannot go beyond saying that, if the proposals are approved, funding will, of course, follow.

I am sorry that I am unable to deliver all the Christmas presents on my right hon. Friend's list. I trust that he will accept my reply as just a little stocking filler.

Knockhill Motor Sport Centre

1.26 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the future of motor sport facilities in Scotland. I shall use the debate to highlight the success of Scotland's national motor sport centre at Knockhill in my constituency and express the grave concerns that I and many others have that a proposed alternative facility at Forrestburn in Lanarkshire could lead to no winners, only losers, and a waste of public money.

If the Minister and other right hon. and hon. Members want an exciting day out, I recommend that they head for Knockhill rather than remain at Westminster. Knockhill is recognised by the Scottish Sports Council and the Scottish Motor Sport Federation as Scotland's national motor sport centre. The track deals with a wide range of car and motor cycle racing. It was declared the circuit of the year by the Touring Car Association. If the Minister and other right hon. and hon. Members want to visit a successful private enterprise, I recommend Knockhill.

The track was rescued from receivership some years ago by the director, Derek Butcher, who has put more than £3 million of his own money into the venture. Knockhill has not received any public funding for capital expenditure yet it employs 16 full-time permanent staff directors. The track supports three franchise businesses on site with a further 10 permanent staff. It takes on up to an additional 100 part-time staff when there is a big event. It thus makes a considerable contribution to the local economy. In addition, when there is a big event such as the British championship for touring cars, hotels in the Fife area are fully booked. The circuit manager, Eric Houston, said:

> "We put more people into hotels than Open Golf does",

and that is once a year, not once every four years.

Knockhill's success, however, is threatened by the proposed development at Forrestburn. I can understand the Minister saying that that is a shame but asking why it should concern the Government. Let me explain.

The Minister is aware that, because of their industrial decline, parts of Fife and parts of Lanarkshire are eligible for support from European structural funds. That means that decisions on proposed programmes for areas that seek European funding are taken by committees. The principal committees involved in taking decisions on individual projects such as that at Forrestburn are, I understand, the programme management committees for eastern and western Scotland. They are chaired by the Scottish Office development department, acting on behalf of the Government as the official implementing authority for European Union funding programmes.

The first reason, therefore, why the Government should be concerned about the future of Knockhill and the proposed development at Forrestburn is that the Scottish Office retains responsibility for the payment of European grant money and is ultimately responsible for the audit requirements. My understanding is that Forrestburn has been allocated £1.4 million in European grant money, so the Government have a direct interest.

The second reason why the Government should be concerned about the Forrestburn development is that there is strong evidence that the use of European money to support the project will, in effect, displace an existing facility—in other words, it will put Knockhill out of business. I understand that such a displacement contravenes the rules for European funding.

The Treasury defines displacement as occurring when support for one project has the effect of reducing economic activity in other parts of the economy. I understand that a displacement analysis has been undertaken, but considerable concern has been expressed by many organisations that do not believe that it went into sufficient depth to enable it to be established that the only way in which Forrestburn could be successful was by taking much of Knockhill's business.

It appears that key interests such as the Scottish Sports Council, Fife Enterprise, Fife regional council and Dunfermline district council were not fully consulted about their views on displacement. Scottish Enterprise told me in a letter dated 27 October this year that

> "the developers of Forrestburn have not adequately addressed the question of displacement . . . if the Forrestburn project proceeds it may very well put Knockhill out of business."

In the past few days, Scottish Enterprise has changed its tune—one can only speculate why that is—but I hope that the Minister will want to satisfy himself about the adequacy of the displacement analysis that has apparently been conducted.

People with expertise and interest in motor sport facilities in Scotland believe that Forrestburn will be viable only if it takes business from Knockhill.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Although I do not know a great deal about Forrestburn, I agree wholeheartedly that Knockhill has been a huge success in hosting not only the touring car championship but motor cycle racing and weekly club events, which are so popular in Scotland. Whatever my hon. Friend the Minister says in reply, I hope that he will in no way deprecate Knockhill's achievement. It has been an outstanding success in recent years.

Ms Squire: I thank the right hon. Gentleman very much for his support, which I know will be greatly appreciated by Knockhill. I have no doubt that Knockhill would look forward to a visit from him in the not too distant future.

Only a limited number of motor racing events attract sufficiently large crowds to make a business viable. I understand that at Knockhill only three events a year attract crowds of more than 5,000, and they are vital to Knockhill's commercial success. Forrestburn would have to compete with Knockhill and take those events from it if it was to be viable.

I believe that Forrestburn hopes to attract formula 1 racing, which Knockhill does not stage. I believe, however, that there is already fierce competition among existing tracks such as Brands Hatch for such events. Formula 1 racing is very costly, and the £6.5 million being talked about for the Forrestburn development would not support even the track safety and maintenance requirements of a formula 1 racing track for a single year.

A formula 1 track was opened in Japan this year. According to one set of figures, it cost £60 million to develop and will require £10 million every year just to maintain the facilities. Therefore, without a sufficient market in Scotland, public money could be wasted and a successful business badly, if not mortally, damaged.

Does the Minister believe that a detailed analysis was carried out by Lanarkshire development agency? Has a careful study been made of what events Forrestburn would host and the extent to which they would displace those that Knockhill has been successful in attracting? If a full consultation has not been carried out, will the Minister assure me that one will be undertaken; that it will involve experts in the industry, not only in Scotland but in the UK as a whole; and that it will be undertaken before any further attempt is made to decide whether there is sufficient business to support two racing tracks with such a short distance between them? The Minister's answers will be heard carefully not only by me and Knockhill but by the hotels and businesses in the Fife area, which gain so much from major motor sports events.

I have already touched on the third reason why Knockhill's future and the Forrestburn development should be of interest to the Minister. It is the apparent inadequacies in the decision-making arrangements that the proposals for Forrestburn have highlighted. I do not believe that key organisations such as Fife Enterprise and the Scottish Sports Council have been fully consulted. Not even the programme management committee for the east of Scotland was consulted. Although Forrestburn is a west of Scotland development, it will have a displacement effect on an existing east-of-Scotland facility. I understand that no direct approach to Knockhill has been made by the company involved in the Forrestburn development, Inreco, and that its only contact was three or four years ago—in a telephone discussion with KPMG Peat Marwick. Full consultation would have called into question the Forrestburn project's ability to satisfy the technical and financial eligibility appraisals and the core criteria, which include demonstrating clear evidence of demand.

I hope that the Minister will say that he believes that further investigation is necessary, and that a full and thorough displacement analysis will result, with all interested parties being fully consulted. If there is not the business to support two race tracks so close together, as I and others fear, we could end up with neither being commercially viable. Public money will have been used to build up false hopes in Lanarkshire, to ruin a successful private enterprise business in Fife and, I believe, to damage the sporting reputation of Scotland.

I hope that the Minister will bring some Christmas cheer to Knockhill and to all those who support it and are concerned with its future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I understand that the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) would like to contribute. Will the hon. Lady agree to that?

Ms Squire: I am most willing to allow the right hon. Gentleman to contribute.

1.41 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I shall say a few words in support of the position of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on Knockhill.

I have been deeply involved in motor racing and motor sport in Scotland since the war, as the former president of the Auto-cycle Union. One has seen, sadly, the demise of Charterhall and Ingliston, and Crimond up in the north. The one circuit that has been a success is Knockhill. I note that the hon. Lady said that it went through a

[Sir Hector Monro]

difficult period, but in recent years it has come back very strongly indeed and is popular among competitors because in Scotland there is nowhere else to go. There are two or three major meetings that attract big crowds, particularly the touring car championship, which was an outstanding success not only at Knockhill but on television.

Many motor racing enthusiasts would have to travel far south, down to Croft or further into the midlands of England and to Oulton park if they wanted to take part in competitive motor sport. Knockhill has given them the opportunity to take part, through club meetings and renting the track for club groups. My own Bentley drivers club has a day out in August or September each year. That all brings valuable income to the area and to Fife generally. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider carefully the important issue of whether to promote what may, on paper, be an outstanding opportunity in Lanarkshire, to the detriment of Knockhill, which is so successful.

The hon. Lady flew kites about the enormous cost of major international events. It is all very well to say that we will attract formula 1 cars, but when it is difficult for a country to stage a grand prix, it is unlikely that we would get two—at Silverstone or Brands Hatch and one in Scotland. She rightly highlighted the immense cost of staging a grand prix, and the Pacific is likely to opt out next year. I think it wrong to say that we will have a formula 1 circuit, without any definite assurance that we will get a formula 1 race. The grand prix circuit is closely controlled. There is immense competition from Brands Hatch and, indeed, from Donington, which most drivers would say is a much more attractive course on which to drive than Brands Hatch.

It is not just a simple decision. We cannot just say that we should have a brand new circuit in Lanarkshire that would attract all the competition and sponsorship that is so central to modern motor racing. We should not go headlong for that concept, although it is a great vision, without realising that it could be to the detriment of Knockhill, which has done so much over the past 10 or 15 years to give those who are interested in motor sport the opportunity to participate.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I am particularly pleased to be here today to respond to the debate, which was initiated by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), and equally to have heard the wise words of experience from my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). I am most grateful to both of them, because I believe that the debate enables us to clarify the position with regard to Knockhill race track and the proposed development at Forrestburn.

There was a discussion as to whether this was a sporting debate or an industrial development debate. I am the Minister responsible for industry and, therefore, perhaps the industrial development side. I looked at the background to the sporting side and asked to be briefed on the range of motor sports that are available in Scotland at present, and how many were pursued.

In motor car racing, we have motor racing itself; circuit racing of various classes; speed events; stage rallying, road rallying; auto tests and trials; and, indeed, stock car racing. There are around 40 motor cycling clubs in Scotland associated with the Scottish Motor Cycle Union. Events include moto-cross, road racing, speedway, motor cycle trials and motor cycle rallies. Events take place throughout Scotland—I shall come to Knockhill in a moment. We have, for example, a world-renowned auto-cross event that is held annually in Fort William, which attracts a top-quality field from Europe and America.

Scotland—as even I knew—has a long tradition of success in motor sport at both national and international level. In formula 1 racing, to which the hon. Lady referred, I remember very well Jim Clark being the world champion in 1963 and 1965; Jackie Stewart held the same title in 1969, 1971 and 1973.

More recently in formula 1 racing, there is David Coulthard, whom I thought was from the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries, but when I asked earlier today, I was told that he lives in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang). David Coulthard's success in winning his first grand prix at Estoril in Portugal during this season, which has just finished, sets him up on a very promising motor racing career. I am sure that the hon. Lady will join me in wishing him every success with his new team, McLaren.

In the 1960s, Scotland had it is own motor racing stable. I am not sure whether the hon. Lady is old enough to remember Ecurie Ecosse, but I certainly do, and the driving at Le Mans and the successes that it had over those years. It helped to develop many budding young drivers, such as Jim Clark and Jackie Stewart. In the past few years, we have also seen Colin MacRae, who has been highly successful in motor rallying. He won the Royal Automobile Club rally in 1994 and earlier this year became the first British competitor to win the world rallying championship; he won it in a nail-biting climax in the Network Q RAC rally, showing tremendous skill and courage to come through an arduous final stage. Another Scotsman, John Clelland, this year won the British touring car championship, to add to his previous title won in 1989.

I think that 1995 has been a tremendous year for Scottish motor sport. I cover all this to provide a backdrop to today's debate, to emphasise the importance of sport, particularly motor sport, within the Government's wider priorities, and to stress that the future of Knockhill race track, which is the issue that we are addressing today, has indeed been carefully considered.

The hon. Lady clearly and ably set out her concerns for the future of Knockhill; she has previously raised those concerns with me in writing. I wrote to her on 14 September and 12 December, explaining the situation with regard to the proposed development at Forrestburn.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries, I am well aware of the success of the Knockhill race track in recent years. It has attracted top-level competition to the site, and has diversified its interests into other areas. I gather that it also carries out test circuit work for prominent motor companies. As the hon. Lady said, it is an excellent example of the benefits of private sector investment in sport. I join her in commending Derek Butcher for his success with Knockhill, which is currently recognised as the country's national centre by the Scottish Motor Sport Federation.

I listened carefully to the concerns expressed about the proposed development of a new motor-racing circuit at Forrestburn in Monklands, and its potential impact on Knockhill. The hon. Lady pointed out that the Forrestburn project would receive financial support from public sector bodies—Monklands district council and Lanarkshire development agency—as well as from the European regional development fund. I understand that the concerns expressed about the potential displacement effect of the new race track on Knockhill have been carefully assessed by the funding partners.

The hon. Lady quoted from a letter from Scottish Enterprise, dated 27 October. I, too, have a copy of that letter. She also referred to a later letter dated 4 December, which states:

> "Further to my letter of 27 October, I have now had the benefit of discussion with the Lanarkshire Development Agency from which I learned that a displacement analysis had indeed been undertaken with regard to the project.
>
> The decision to proceed by Lanarkshire has been taken within their authority and following proper analysis. Accordingly, Scottish Enterprise does not consider it appropriate to intervene in this matter."

The letter finishes with an apology for the fact that

> "the above information was not fully available at the time of my earlier letter."

I, too, apologise for the fact that the first letter from Scottish Enterprise to the hon. Lady was not fully informed. Earlier correspondence relating to Scottish Enterprise had made it clear that a displacement analysis had been carried out.

The proposed facility at Forrestburn is on a completely different scale from that at Knockhill. The Forrestburn circuit will be 3.2 miles long, which makes it as long as Silverstone and longer than Brands Hatch. It is well above the threshold for international racing events. The Knockhill circuit is only 1.3 miles long. I understand that the Forrestburn promoters intend to develop a circuit of international standards that would secure an FIA licence, which would allow events of international status to take place in Scotland.

I believe that the promoters of the Forrestburn facility will seek to attract such events as the British formula 2 and 3 championships, the German touring car championship and the FIA formula 3000 international championships. The hon. Lady will note that I have left out the formula 1 championship. I understand that it has not been included in the promoters' proposals; I suspect that they are being realistic about what they can achieve.

None of the events that I have mentioned is the kind that Knockhill would be able to attract. On that basis, it seems that the two facilities are considering essentially different markets, and accordingly the development of Forrestburn is unlikely to have an adverse impact on Knockhill. Indeed, the Forrestburn track is expected to bring new opportunities for co-operation with—for example—Knockhill through championships and back-to-back events. One of the wider attractions of Forrestburn is its potential to generate further interest in motor sport at an international level, and thus to expand the overall market, in which Knockhill will continue to play an important part.

As I have said, the Forrestburn project has secured funding from Monklands district council, the Lanarkshire development agency and the European regional development fund, but it would be wrong to describe it as a public sector project. The vast bulk of the finance is coming from the private sector; the public agencies are very much in a minority supporting role.

I understand—this will interest the hon. Lady—that the Forrestburn project has secured the support of the RAC Motor Sports Association and the Royal Scottish Automobile Club. Both bodies have emphasised the importance of Knockhill in Scottish motor sport, and clearly do not regard Forrestburn and Knockhill as competing facilities.

I understand the hon. Lady's reservations, expressed today and in letters that she has written. I am no expert on motor sport, and I suspect that the same applies to the hon. Lady, but I suggest that the RAC Motor Sports Association and the Royal Scottish Automobile Club are experts. I urge the hon. Lady to seek an early meeting with those organisations, and to try to understand why they consider the two projects complementary rather than adversarial.

Ms Rachel Squire: I shall take the Minister's advice, and seek meetings with those two organisations. I am, indeed, no expert on motor racing, although I share my London flat with a woman formula 3 racing driver, which gives me a certain insight into the subject.

I was not claiming that no displacement analysis had been carried out; my point is that that analysis has not been as detailed and thorough as it should have been, and has not involved all the interested parties sufficiently.

I understand that Knockhill involves formula 3 racing. I know that a longer track is being promoted at Forrestburn, but I gather that shorter tracks have distinct advantages, in that they allow spectators to see far more: the cars come round even faster.

Mr. Kynoch: I am pleased to learn that the hon. Lady shares a London flat with a young lady who is involved in formula 3 racing. Some claim that I can remember being a member of Bristol university's motor club and winning a rally. Perhaps I was wrong to say that I knew little about motor sport, but I must confess that I am a little rusty.

The hon. Lady asked whether a full displacement analysis had been carried out. That is a matter for the funding bodies—and Strathclyde European partnership, the tourism advisory group, the Lanarkshire development agency and Scottish Enterprise are indeed satisfied that the displacement issue has been dealt with adequately.

People in Fife are bound to disapprove of the project until they see that it will increase the inflow of motor sport into Scotland to their possible benefit. It might be helpful, however, if the proprietor of Knockhill talked to the project team at Forrestburn. I cannot bring that about; I can only urge the hon. Lady to suggest that Mr. Butcher in Knockhill try to establish contact. When the project is completed—if it is completed—there may well be a working relationship allowing discussion. If, as I am assured, the two facilities will not be in competition, let us ensure that the relationship is established on an informal basis at a fairly early stage. That could allay some fears. I suggest, however, that the hon. Lady contact the two bodies that I mentioned earlier.

Other than Knockhill, Great Britain has no proper motor sports venue further north than Oulton park in Cheshire. Given the potential catchment area of Scotland

[Mr. Kynoch]

and much of the north of England, there is no reason why the motor sports market should not be able to support more than one circuit. That was certainly the case in the 1950s and 1960s, when Scotland had a number of successful circuits—for example, at Charterhall, Turnberry and Crail.

Given the resurgence of interest in motor sports—encouraged by the success of David Coulthard—I believe that it is a growing business. I consider that the question of displacement has been properly investigated by the bodies concerned, and I see no justification for Government intervention.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Agricultural Subsidy

1. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current level of agricultural subsidy in Scotland. [5195]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Agriculture grants and subsidies in Scotland amounted to around £330 million in 1994.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend yet aware of the findings of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which, I understand, recently went to New Zealand? From what I have read in the newspapers, I believe that it has done away with its farmers subsidy system. At first, of course, that was greeted with consternation, but now it is being welcomed by farmers, who are doing very nicely without having to do all that dreadful paperwork. If he has been informed about that event, will he tell us a little about its outcome?

Mr. Robertson: The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs did go to New Zealand to consider a country that had abolished all agricultural subsidy under, I must add, a Labour Government, but we have no plans to follow suit. The Committee has still to report and I am sure that the Committee's Chairman will ensure that my hon. Friend has a copy of the report once it is published.

Mr. Home Robertson: I declare an interest, Madam Speaker. After years of half measures, will the Government now introduce a subsidised scheme, if necessary, for the eradication of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, both for the sake of better animal welfare and to restore confidence in Scottish beef? Meanwhile, will the Minister advise people that it might be risky to inject tissue from infected cattle into their brains, but that the more conventional practice of eating prime Scottish beef is much more enjoyable and perfectly safe?

Mr. Robertson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, two weeks ago in the Scottish Grand Committee, we had a useful Adjournment debate, initiated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), on that matter. I told the Committee on that occasion, and I repeat it now, that our measures to eradicate bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle are working. In Scotland, out of a total of more than 2 million cattle, the number of confirmed BSE cases in 1995 is expected to be around 600, some 27 per cent. below the 1993 level. We are fully aware of the problem and our measures are working.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that our support through the beef special premium and the suckler cow subsidy helps to provide the best prime Scots beef? Will he say yet again that prime Scots beef is safe to eat and that the education authorities and others who are depriving children of good Scots beef are wrong?

Mr. Robertson: I agree completely with my right hon. Friend. I know that, at this time of year, our thoughts turn to eating white meat, but, perhaps after Christmas day's turkey, hon. Members on both sides of the House will decide to have a good, big, juicy steak, preferably from an Aberdeen Angus.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Government reverse their disgraceful decision to discontinue taking up the European Union milk subsidy, which will mean that many school children will be deprived of free school milk, with detrimental consequences for their health and nutrition? Is it not ironic that the Government are proposing that measure when, earlier this week, the Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for health was complaining that 62 per cent. of Scottish five-year-old children suffered from tooth decay and that Scottish school children were near the bottom of the dental health league table?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman should direct his comments to local authorities all over the country, and I hope that he will take the opportunity to raise the matter with his own Labour-controlled authority.

Student Loans Scheme

2. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the operation of the student loans scheme in Scotland. [5196]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am pleased to say that the scheme is working well.

Mrs. Fyfe: That is not what the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment said on Thursday in Committee when he announced that the whole scheme had had to be postponed until October 1997 because the banks had difficulties over mergers and because of difficulties with information technology. That is in spite of the whole thing being hustled through in the Queen's Speech at great speed. Will the Minister extricate himself from this mess or will he be tied into his hon. Friend's shambles and share the blame for the mess that no one in Scotland needs or wants?

Mr. Robertson: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her consistency. She disagrees with the Government's approach and with that of her Front-Bench spokesmen to student support. We announced a postponement of the scheme after discussions with the banks and building societies to ensure a proper and smooth transition a year later. As always, the hon. Lady is scaremongering on student numbers and on student support. She cannot accept, and will not admit, that there are more students in higher and further education in Scotland than ever before in our nation's history.

Mr. Stewart: Can my hon. Friend confirm that parity between grants and loans will be achieved in 1996-97? Secondly, does he agree that parity will be maintained thereafter? Thirdly, does he agree that recent debates in the House have shown that the Opposition have no policy whatever?

Mr. Robertson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and I can give him the assurances that he seeks. As I have said, we have more students than ever before in higher education and the last survey showed that for the first time students from less well-off backgrounds are now in the majority in our universities and colleges.

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have been forced to walk away from the student loan privatisation proposals.

They would earn my respect and that of my hon. Friends if they would also walk away from the ill-conceived plans for nursery vouchers. Make no mistake about it, Labour is opposed to nursery vouchers. We will get rid of them when we are elected and will make sure that all three and four-year-olds get nursery education when their parents wish it. However, we have said—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have to bring two points to the hon. Lady's attention. First, I have not yet heard a question from her: that is most important. Secondly, we are dealing with student loan schemes and not with nursery vouchers.

Mrs. Liddell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just coming to my substantive question. We have put a number of questions on education to the Minister and have failed to get replies. Why are we not getting a response to our request for an independent assessment board in relation to nursery vouchers? *[Interruption.]* Why is the Minister not prepared to respond to detailed questions about student loans and student accommodation and about other aspects of education policy? Will he give us a substantive reply rather than the bluster that we are used to when he is flummoxed?

Mr. Robertson: What does the hon. Lady have against those from less well-off backgrounds? Yesterday she was at every media outlet criticising our scheme for assisted places, which helps children from less well-off backgrounds. Today she is ranting about student loans and nursery vouchers, which are designed to help everyone in society but particularly those from less well-off backgrounds. Over the recess she should take a long hard look at what she has been saying since she joined the Front Bench because some of it has been quite shameful.

Health Board Boundaries

3. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about health board boundaries in Scotland. [5197]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): We continue to consider the impact of local government reform on Scottish health board boundaries.

Mr. Worthington: When I recently met people from Argyll and Clyde who were trying to persuade Clydebank to join Argyll and Clyde health board, they told me that the Secretary of State had said that there would be no changes to health board boundaries unless they were uncontroversial. If Clydebank joined Argyll and Clyde and lost its links with Gartnavel, the Western, Queen Mother's and Yorkhill hospitals, and had to manage with the appalling transport links with the Vale of Leven, that would be very controversial. Will the Minister assure me that plans to move Clydebank into Argyll and Clyde do not exist and will not exist?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We certainly have no plans to change Scottish health board boundaries in the immediate future.

Mr. Gallie: While I welcome the ever-increasing amount of money that the Government are prepared to spend on health services in Scotland, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on the fact that he has almost managed to achieve parity in funding in the Ayrshire and Arran health board area? The redistribution of health service money around Scotland certainly benefits my constituents, and each and every one of them should say thank you to the Scottish Office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We have provided substantial expenditure of £4.2 billion this year. That is an additional £121.3 million, which provides real terms growth of 0.2 per cent. There is much higher spending per head in Scotland on health than there is south of the border. In Scotland £820 a head will be spent, which is 23 per cent. higher than in England. So very high priority is being given to that area.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Minister review the boundaries in Edinburgh and use that as a pretext for getting rid of his Conservative-appointed health board, which has presided over the shambles in the Royal Edinburgh hospital in my constituency, as evidenced in a secret report which shows that cleaning levels are "abysmal" and that staff shortages are chronic?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The answer is no. We are, however, considering a bid from the Royal Edinburgh hospital and I shall let the hon. Gentleman know the outcome in due course.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the quality of health services provided by the health authorities is even more important than the delineation of boundaries? Does he agree that, despite all the knocking copy from Opposition Members, the quality of the health service in Scotland is very much better than it was in 1979?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At all times we will give top priority to the interests of patients.

Mr. George Robertson: When the Minister is looking at the boundaries of health boards, will he consider in particular Grampian—especially Grampian healthcare trust, whose plans for a new hospital in Stonehaven break new boundaries in the Government's push towards privatising the health service? Will he perhaps look up the pamphlet co-authored by the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1985, in which the Secretary of State wrote:

> "The rise of private medicine is an excellent thing and should be encouraged even more"?

The Secretary of State has never repudiated that, and indeed claims authorship of the pamphlet in "Who's Who". Is it not a fact that the Stonehaven project is but a Trojan horse for the mission of the whole Government—not just the Thatcherite rump over there—to go ahead with the ultimate privatisation of the national health service?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is engaging in scaremongering. The proposals for Stonehaven will result very much more quickly in the provision of a purpose-built, modern hospital than would otherwise have been possible any other way. Services will of course remain free at the point of delivery.

Earnings

4. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the change in average weekly earnings for (a) males and (b) females in Scotland over the last 15 years. [5198]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): In 1995, full-time male earnings were almost three times more and female earnings were almost three and a half times more than the 1980 level.

Dr. Spink: May I follow that happy answer by wishing you, Madam Speaker, a very happy Christmas? Is it not a fact that the enterprise culture promoted by the Government's policies, which has driven up wages by such a great degree, would be damaged, if not destroyed entirely, by a tartan tax as proposed by the Opposition, which would destroy jobs and put a 3p premium on the suggested 10p minimum tax level? That would be a 30 per cent. subsidy for working in Scotland at the lowest level of the economy. How could that be just or fair?

Mr. Kynoch: I am sure that all hon. Members wish you a happy Christmas, Madam Speaker and since it is Scottish Question Time, would want you to have good Christmas spirit. My hon. Friend's point is absolutely right. Clearly, the Opposition have not worked out the damage that they are intending to do to Scotland and to Scotland's business by the imposition of a tartan tax that is bound to force earnings up. I have not heard any detail from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in explaining what extra the tax will provide. It will simply force earnings up and provide absolutely nothing for the people concerned except fewer jobs in Scotland.

Mr. Wilson: Some people in Scotland object to paying taxes, tartan or otherwise, for the purpose of moving jobs from Keith to the south of England. But that is another story.

Does the Minister recognise the effect that the firm, Burger King, is having on minimum earnings in Scotland? Does he have it in him to condemn unequivocally Grand Metropolitan, a Tory party funder, for paying its employees as little as 20p an hour? Is not that a Tory national minimum wage policy in action?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman's question is no better than usual. He does not realise the damage that his party's minimum wage policy would do to Scotland and the whole United Kingdom. Labour Front-Bench Members will not even say at what level they propose to set a minimum wage; they simply say that they want one. If they want the same level as the unions want, £4.15, it is estimated that, if only half the differentials were restored, some 950,000 jobs would go.

Mr. Simon Coombs: The question of average weekly earnings is of no interest to people who are out of work. Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to contrast the fact that unemployment in Scotland is falling steadily under this Government whereas it would undoubtedly rise as a result of the Labour party's minimum wage policy?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That would be the effect not only of a minium wage but of a tartan tax, which Labour wants to apply through a Scottish tax-raising Parliament and the imposition of the social chapter. Its policies would badly damage Scotland and the Scottish people.

Mr. McFall: Have not the Government imposed 22 tax rises in Scotland over the past three years? For the population at large, Christmas comes but once a year, but for the Government since 1992, Christmas has come on average every seven weeks. What Christmas cheer will there be for the women who constitute 80 per cent. of the low-paid in Scotland and are paid less than the European decency threshold, or for the 107,000 people in Scotland who work for the miserably low rate of less than £2.50 an hour?

Mr. Kynoch: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will say what minimum wage he proposes. Will he confirm that Labour's tax-raising Parliament would not put a 3p tax on the Scottish people? Under this Government, taxation is UK-wide; unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman represents policies that would tax Scottish people higher than people in the rest of the United Kingdom and put people out of work.

Council of Ministers

5. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent meeting of the EC Council of Ministers he has attended. [5199]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I attended a meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 26 October 1995. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), will leave today to attend a Fisheries Council. It is expected to be concluded on Christmas eve, although I assume that that depends on my hon. Friend achieving a good settlement for Scotland's fishermen.

Mr. Hamilton: In the conscientious preparation that my right hon. Friend does before he goes to Council meetings, has he ever calculated the costs that would be imposed on Scottish businesses if Labour's policy of imposing the social chapter on Scotland became Government policy? Would not the Labour party's policies grind the Scottish economy between the nether millstone of Brussels burdens and the upper millstone of tartan taxes?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Labour party's policies would destroy jobs in Scotland through the imposition of a minimum wage, the social chapter and a tartan tax. I assume that the minimum wage in Scotland would be higher than in England to compensate for the fact that the Scots will pay a tartan tax, so their take-home pay on the same wage would be less than that of people in England and Wales.

Dr. Godman: Compliments of the season to you, Madam Speaker. The Minister mentioned his attendance at the Council of Fisheries Ministers. Did he discuss the construction of the new fisheries research vessel for his Department? Could I remind him that Ferguson's in Port Glasgow has bid for that ship? Were he to announce that it was successful, it would be a very pleasant Christmas present for the men and women who work in that excellent yard in Port Glasgow.

Mr. Forsyth: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the determination with which he has pursued the case for Ferguson's. We hope to be able to make an announcement shortly and I am delighted to be able to tell the House that it is not a matter on which I require the agreement of the European Community, so the hon. Gentleman can expect us to move fairly speedily. We will certainly do our best to look out for Scotland's interests.

Mr. Salmond: Should not the question be, at how many Council meetings has the Secretary of State actually spoken? The reports were that he went to the Fisheries Council playing second fiddle to the English Fisheries Minister and never uttered a word. Given that last night he totally failed to convince his former colleagues and Euro-sceptics to bail out his Cabinet colleagues to save their discredited fishing policy, why is he not going to the Fisheries Council tomorrow? Where will Scotland be tomorrow without the Secretary of State for Scotland going to the Council to represent our interests—with him saying nothing?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the Member for Aberdeen, South, is attending that Council and will be speaking at it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the grace to welcome that, given his complaints. As for my attendance at meetings of the Council of Ministers, I think that I have attended more such meetings than the hon. Gentleman and I have spoken at a number of them, including the Justice and Home Affairs Councils and the Social Affairs Council, where I saw at first hand how disastrous the policies on the social chapter that the hon. Gentleman and the Scottish National party advocate would be for Scotland's work force. In the margins of those meetings, many of the Ministers whose countries have the social chapter say privately that they recognise that, because we have an opt-out from it, we are a magnet for inward investment. That is why Scotland has benefited from so much inward investment in jobs, which the Scottish National party would destroy.

Mr. McAvoy: The Secretary of State will be aware that we still have a Scottish steel industry. In that context, can he tell us what representations he has ensured will be made at the Council of Ministers that is dealing with the application by Irish Steel for a European Union subsidy? Will he rest assured that he has the full support of Labour Members in opposing such a subsidy to an Irish steel company—unlike the Scottish National party, which voted against Scotland's interests last week?

Mr. Forsyth: Halleluiah! Labour Members are denouncing subsidies to the steel industry and distinguishing themselves from the nationalists on the basis that they no longer believe in subsidies. We really have achieved a lot since 1979.

Mr. George Robertson: If the Secretary of State is ever allowed to attend another European Council of Ministers meeting, will he bear in mind and perhaps learn the lesson of the stinging humiliation that he and the Government suffered last night? Is not it a fact that, even though they put up the last two Thatcherites in the Government to try to appeal to the rebels, they could not stave off defeat, or the exposed chasm that exists in the Tory party on Europe? Just as he cannot speak for the people of Scotland, with 87 per cent. of them opposed to him and his Government, is it not true that the Government cannot speak for this country in Europe? The sooner we have a general election and get a Government who can speak for the whole country the better it will be for us in Europe and in Britain.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was able to follow the debate last night, but I should have thought that he would have recognised that the Labour party amendment was defeated by eight votes and did not reflect a policy that enjoyed unanimity on his Benches. Several of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues argued against the common fisheries policy, while the Opposition Front Bench argued in favour, so he should not present the idea that the Labour party is united on anything in Europe save in one respect; it is the party that would sell out our veto in Europe, hand power to Brussels, ensure that our veto was replaced by qualified majority voting in respect of the social chapter and the rest and which, on fishing, has nothing whatsoever in its manifesto because it has nothing to say to the fishermen of Scotland or of Britain.

Deregulation

6. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to accelerate the deregulatory process, with special reference to small businesses in Scotland. [5200]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office is playing its full part in the deregulation initiative and is particularly alert to the concerns of small firms.

Mr. Steen: As the Secretary of State has not referred one regulation to the Deregulation Committee to deregulate, and as his commitment to deregulation and his support for keeping enforcement of European directives from Europe to the minimum are well known, will he say something about how we can reduce the burdens on small businesses so that they can become more effective and do not have to bear the burdens of officialdom?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is aware that Conservatives are totally committed to deregulation; the Deregulation Committee has been bombarded with proposals and the Scottish Office has a number of proposals in the queue waiting to go to the Committee. I can assure my hon. Friend that my officials are well aware of the need not to hassle small businesses—the life-blood of this country. If my hon. Friend has any concrete evidence of firms being hassled, he should give it to me.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister will be aware that many small businesses are in rural areas and he will know from the rural White Paper published last week that, in one decade, employment in Cumnock and Doon valley fell by 27 per cent.—the largest fall in a rural area in Scotland. Is it not crazy to cut the grant to Scottish Enterprise by £33 million and reduce the help to those small businesses in rural areas? Is it not equally crazy for the Secretary of State to cut capital consents to local authorities and restrict their capital borrowing, thus ensuring that some of the money that was to come from the European Community will no longer be forthcoming? My constituents who are unemployed will not have a happy Christmas.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is aware that unemployment is falling significantly across Scotland. The hon. Gentleman does not recognise that the Government are committed to ensuring that taxpayers' funds are used wisely and sensibly. The board of Scottish Enterprise has assured us that, with its reduced budget, it can maintain and even improve output. The hon. Gentleman does not recognise that an important industry in rural areas such as ours is tourism, which employs about 8 per cent. of Scotland's work force. There has been a 20 per cent. increase in the budget to the Scottish tourist board—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that that is good news for tourism and rural economies.

Tourism Revenues

7. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the total tourism revenues in Scotland. [5201]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Some £2.1 billion in 1994, and we expect 1995 to be even better.

Mr. Merchant: I welcome my right hon. Friend's increased provision—to more than £18 million next year—to the Scottish tourist board. Will he confirm that that represents an increase of 20 per cent. over previous plans thanks to the reordering of priorities at Scottish Enterprise? Does he agree that that increase reflects the high priority that the Government give to the tourist industry in energising the Scottish economy?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The difference between Conservatives and hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is that Conservative Members do not believe that organisations such as Scottish Enterprise exist for their own account. If organisations such as Scottish Enterprise are able to deliver their targets within reduced budgets and we deploy the money to help tourism, which is what we have done, that is a good deal for the taxpayer and represents the right way to use scarce resources to encourage the wealth-creating sector. Tourism has a vital role to play in rural Scotland and throughout Scotland, and I congratulate the Scottish tourist board on its magnificent work in increasing the numbers of people coming to Scotland. There is still great scope for improvement, and that is why, in a difficult public expenditure round, we were able to increase its budget by no less than 20 per cent.

Mr. Donohoe: The Secretary of State, in giving us that information, will know of the shambles that has resulted from the lack of funding for the celebrations next year of the bicentenary of the death of Burns. There is a severe lack of sponsorship from the private sector. In those circumstances, will he give a commitment to funding the celebrations directly from the Scottish Office to make up for the losses that are being incurred?

Mr. Forsyth: I cannot give that commitment, but I can tell the House that we propose to have celebrations of the bard's life, in both London and Scotland. On 31 January, we shall be holding a large function in London, to which a number of Opposition Members will receive invitations, to celebrate the life and works of Rabbie Burns. It is also our intention to mark the passing of Robert Burns's life with an event in Scotland, and it is appropriate that that should take place in the south-west of Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Hear, hear.

Mr. Forsyth: I can hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) saying, "Hear, hear." I am sure that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) will welcome that information also.

Mrs. Ewing: The Secretary of State will recognise that tourism is an all-year industry, and that winter tourism plays an important part in the livelihoods of people in rural areas. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State's work in establishing the Scottish avalanche information service. Does he accept that there is now some concern about the future of that organisation? Can we expect an early report from the review group, because considered action will be needed to ensure that we continue and expand that important aspect of our tourist industry?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Lady. I established that avalanche warning service myself.

Mr. Canavan: It did not work last night.

Mr. Forsyth: This is a serious subject and people's lives are at risk.

I established the service on the recommendation of the distinguished mountaineer, Hamish McInnes. I was aware that there was a question mark over the service, and I gave instructions that the service should continue to be supported. We have given the service an extra £6,000, and we have commissioned a study, costing about £5,000, to consider the scope for expanding the service. I hope that one of the issues that will be addressed is whether we could cover a wider area using telemetric equipment.

I thought that some of the press reports were very unfair. The Government have every intention, as long as I am Secretary of State, of ensuring that the service is encouraged and expanded as far as is practically possible. However, we must ensure that money is spent wisely and that resources are used effectively, so that we get the best benefit out of the service.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me an opportunity to make that statement.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I take this opportunity to wish the Secretary of State and all Scots Members a braw hogmanay. Has the Secretary of State taken into consideration the interest in tourism in Northern Ireland, following the visit by the President of the United States, and will he urge the Scottish tourist board to use the Scottish-Irish connection to build up the tourist routes and encourage the growth of overseas visitors?

Mr. Forsyth: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his greetings for the new year. I wish him a happy Christmas and a happy new year, and you, too, Madam Speaker.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about tourism and Ulster, we Unionists must stick together on that and other matters. There is scope for encouraging tourism, and I am in discussion with the Scottish tourist board and others to improve the links between Ulster and Scotland. That will enable us to develop packages and tourism opportunities, and I shall raise the prospects for co-operation with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the light of the hon. Gentleman's helpful suggestion.

Capital Spending

8. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to authorise new capital spending under section 94 consents for local authorities for the financial year 1996-97; and if he will make a statement. [5202]

Mr. Kynoch: In February or March 1996.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will not the announcement on capital expenditure in November, which restricts the amount which local authorities can spend through capital receipts on capital expenditure in 1996-97, and the current constraints on the amount of capital that can be funded from revenue, mean that £160 million or £170 million less capital expenditure will be devoted to capital projects next year in Scotland? Is it not passing strange that, after 16 years in office, £100 billion from North sea oil and gas and £60 billion from privatisations, the Government are putting constraints on capital expenditure, which means that less will be spent on roads, bridges, schools and industrial development north of the border next year?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman refers to the capital allowances. He must accept that, at present, capital expenditure by local authorities in Scotland is running significantly higher than elsewhere—it is 77 per cent. higher overall than in England. It is therefore only right and proper that we should try to cut the borrowing costs which divert funds from front-line services. That is why the constraints have been put in place.

When the hon. Gentleman came to see me with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), we talked about specific projects in his constituency. We also spoke about the opportunity to use the private finance initiative. I hope very much that local authorities will fully explore that possibility, because they could bring forward projects sooner than would be possible if the authorities used purely public funds. They may well find that they get those projects significantly cheaper by using private expertise.

Mr. Stewart: Will my hon. Friend say something about Government policy towards smallish local authorities which may have major capital projects to finance? I have no doubt that my hon. Friend has the Eaglesham bypass particularly in mind. I am grateful to the Minister of State for meeting a delegation on that recently. Can my hon. Friend say how those projects fit into the allocation process?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend will be aware of the challenge funding arrangement, which will be maintained. Some road and transport spending may be settled by those means, and I am sure that that arrangement will be considered for the particular bypass that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Minister may know that his colleague, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), visited my constituency recently to look at multi-storey flats. He will no doubt agree that it is important that more and more of such flats, which are not the worst place in the world to live, should have concierge systems. The local authority has tried its utmost to offer to as many multi-storey flats as possible the security of concierge systems. Will the Government release funds to allow local authorities to install such systems, which offer safety particularly to the elderly living in such flats?

Mr. Kynoch: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman's local authority on the work that it has done on security. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already announced increased funding for closed circuit television, and that local authorities have greater flexibility on how they spend their capital allocations.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister not understand that, by forcing councils to use 25 per cent. of their capital receipts next year and 50 per cent. of them in the following year to repay outstanding capital debts, he is effectively cutting public investment in Scottish housing over those two years by at least £300 million, as well as depriving the already depressed construction industry in Scotland of £300 million-worth of business? How in God's name can that make any sense when there are still tens of thousands of Scots homeless and on the streets, and when the Government's own national housing conditions survey revealed that Scottish housing is riddled with damp and condensation and is in disrepair, which is an utter national disgrace? Why does not the Government give the people of Scotland and Britain the only Christmas present they want from the Government—a general election in the new year? That will give people the opportunity to cast the Government into the political oblivion that they justly deserve.

Mr. Kynoch: I look forward to whenever the general election campaign begins, because I shall be able to ensure that the people of Scotland are aware of the reckless spending that the Labour party would introduce in the country. The Opposition must accept the fact that, since 1987, local authority housing debt has risen by almost £1 billion to £3.938 billion—an increase of nearly 20 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman were to encourage stock transfers, he would get receipts. He must accept that the cost of borrowing is significant and that it is diverting taxpayers' money into funding debt rather than it being used to deliver services.

Local Government Finance

9. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government funding. [5203]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On 19 January.

Mr. McMaster: Does the Secretary of State recall that, last Christmas, hundreds of my constituents in Paisley and Johnstone were flooded out of their homes and that some of them have been unable to return to those homes? When I recently met the Secretary of State, he promised to introduce a new flood prevention Act for Scotland. When will he introduce that Act and, when he does, will he ensure that resources are available to the new unitary authorities so that they can put flood prevention schemes in place?

Mr. Forsyth: I gave the hon. Gentleman those undertakings, and we shall deliver them. He knows that I promised to consult about the matter in the new year, and I shall do that. It will then be a matter of finding a slot in the legislative programme.

Is it not a terrible condemnation of Labour councils that they must be forced by statute to do something about the flooding of people's homes? We shall place a duty upon them to ensure that the present discretion that they enjoy is replaced by a requirement to take action when people are flooded out of their homes. Strathclyde has singularly failed to take such action.

As to the legislative opportunities, I am sure that Labour Members will be delighted that the new procedures in the Scottish Grand Committee and the opportunities for introducing new legislation mean that we may be able to take more action in respect of flood prevention than would have been possible otherwise.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the people of Perth and those living in the Tay valley are very grateful to the Government for their prompt action during the flooding of the Tay last year? We welcome the pledge that my right hon. Friend has given at the Dispatch Box, that he will impose a statutory requirement on the new authorities following consultation. It is absolutely essential that local authorities are made aware of their duties and responsibilities with regard to flooding.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. However, I do not wish to misrepresent the position in respect of the Tayside region. I think that I am correct in saying that the Tayside region is taking forward a flood prevention scheme using the discretionary powers that I have mentioned. Unlike some Labour authorities, such as Strathclyde or Central region, Tayside has chosen that course of action and the Scottish Office is providing resources through the capital allocation to assist it in that process.

My hon. Friend is right to acknowledge the progress that has been made, but I do not see why that cannot be achieved using the existing discretionary powers. In response to the representations from the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) and the concerns that were expressed not only in his constituency but in Kilmarnock, we have said that we shall consult on the issue of imposing a specific mandatory duty upon local authorities.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Secretary of State confirm that his Department announced earlier today a cut of £400 million in real terms in investment in council housing over the next three years—which is equivalent to some 9,000 houses? How can the Secretary of State justify that decision against a background of too many of our fellow Scots sleeping rough and of overcrowding? When there will be no room at the inn for many thousands of Scots this Christmas, why does he assume the mantle of Scrooge so enthusiastically?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that he knows that the figures released recently show a welcome reduction in the number of homeless people. He also knows that we have spent £2 billion on housing and that we have been responsible for refurbishing about 750,000 council houses. He knows the figures for the increase in home ownership. I do not know whether he travels through Scotland on his way to Orkney and Shetland, but, if he does, he must see the transformation that has occurred under the Government, and I would have thought that he would welcome it.

The hon. Gentleman puts the worst possible interpretation on the figures. Given that he is a prudent and an honest man who argues for higher taxation in order to provide higher expenditure, I am amazed that he has anything to do with the policies of the Labour party, which seems to want to see Scotland and Scottish local authorities disappear under a sea of debt. It wants to fritter away the resources that we make available for housing by paying interest charges and by reducing opportunities for the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: The pretty one—Rachel Squire.

Ms Rachel Squire: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does the Secretary of State agree that, although the Budget announcement raising Department of Social Security thresholds in respect of means testing for residential and nursing care is welcome, it will place severe additional funding pressure on local authorities? Will he further agree to pursue additional funds for that purpose so that local authorities can ensure that no one in need of residential or nursing care is denied it or is forced into accepting a second-best standard of care?

Mr. Forsyth: I am delighted, Madam Speaker, that political correctness has not found its way into the Chamber.

I should have thought that the hon. Lady would have welcomed the changes introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, as they benefit elderly people who have scrimped and saved throughout their lives yet are placed at a disadvantage compared with those who have not. As for giving local authorities more money, if local authorities such as Edinburgh were not abandoning projects to spend £400,000 on corporate identities and painting their vans, and other Scottish local authorities were not receiving 45 per cent. more per head in grant than equivalent authorities in England, there might be a case for considering allocating more money to local government in Scotland. Local government in Scotland has grown at a rate of 6 per cent. while in England it has declined by 6 per cent. over the same period. Its expenditure and its borrowing have grown and it is out of control because it is mainly under the control of the Labour party.

Tree Diseases

10. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated into tree diseases; and what part he takes in its targeting. [5204]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission carries out a wide range of research on tree diseases. Its work is summarised in the commission's report on forest research, a copy of which is in the Library. My right hon. Friend approves the commission's expenditure plans for research.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend's expertise in these matters is well known. Can he tell the House whether fungus diseases are on the increase? I am particularly concerned about honey fungus and the way in which it attacks a wide variety of trees and shrubs. What discussions are taking place with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to produce a cure for fungus diseases?

Mr. Kynoch: I was not aware that my hon. Friend had appreciated that I had branched out into new areas.

Mr. Pawsey: Not barking up the wrong tree.

Mr. Kynoch: I am certainly not barking up the wrong tree. As it is Christmas time, I have taken a great interest in what could be wrong with my Christmas tree.

The only completely effective way of dealing with an outbreak of honey fungus is to remove as much as possible of the infected plant, including the root system, and to replant a more resistant species. I understand that there are some chemical treatments on the market, but none is completely effective. My hon. Friend can be assured that we are trying to attack the problem. He will be happy to hear that many of our native broadleaved species such as oak are relatively resistant to honey fungus.

Violent Crimes

11. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of reported violent crimes in Scotland in each of the last five years. [5205]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Some 19,700, 23,200, 24,900, 21,000 and 21,400 respectively.

Mr. Marshall: Is the Minister not ashamed and horrified by those figures? Can he explain why some old-age pensioners freeze to death because of VAT on fuel and why thousands of youngsters are homeless and refused benefits by the Government, yet violent crime continues to increase and is at an all-time high? Does one have to be a thug or a criminal to prosper in today's Tory Britain?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman should be perfectly well aware that we are spending about £86 million on urban aid in deprived areas; that should be of considerable assistance to his constituents and to many others in Glasgow.

Violent crime has fallen; serious assaults are down by 13 per cent. since 1992. Offences of handling offensive weapons are down by 19 per cent., as are robberies by 22 per cent.—a substantial step in the right direction. I am glad that we are bringing closed circuit television to more town centres, to quell crime levels still further. The experiment in Airdrie, for instance, was a complete success. We are allocating £4 million more for that purpose.

We are also bringing in proposals which mean that prisoners can expect to spend the whole of their sentences in custody, apart from a small amount of earned remission. We believe that that will be a deterrent. Of course there are appeals against too lenient sentences. When some criminals were recently caught on television, their sentence of four years was increased to seven as a result of the appeal by the Lord Advocate.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that the passage of the Carrying of Knives etc. (Scotland) Act 1993 over two years ago made an enormous difference to controlling the circulation of knives? Since then, there have been 500 convictions and 300 people have been gaoled. That is an example of the Conservatives in Scotland leading and England eventually following—in the shape of my private Member's Bill. Would my hon. Friend consider an amnesty for knives along the lines of what was done in Scotland? In 1993, 4,500 knives were thrown away in bins—the only place for them to be.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I wish my hon. Friend every success with her knives Bill for England. The Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) to control knife assaults has been remarkably successful. As my hon. Friend says, there have been a great many arrests—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is all very well for Opposition Members to grumble, but they opposed giving the police the powers of search in the first place, while the Conservatives forced the Bill through.

We shall give top priority to ensuring that those who carry knives are caught through the necessary operations, and brought to justice.

Mr. Connarty: The Minister will be aware of the success of Operation Blade in Strathclyde and Operation Combat in Tayside. One hundred and ninety-seven knives were found on the 1,011 people who were stopped—almost a 20 per cent. success rate—in the Tayside operation. Is the Minister concerned, as I am, by the fact that some police authorities which I have contacted have said that they do not have a knife problem in their areas and do not intend to carry out such operations? Will he assure me that the Scottish Office will encourage police authorities to run operations such as Blade and Combat in their areas, so as to cut out knife carrying in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The answer is yes. The key piece of evidence is the fact that the number of homicides fell substantially as a result of the operation in the west of Scotland. Operation Combat led to many arrests and also to a fall in knife crime rates over a comparable period in the year concerned.

Drift Netting

12. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the fishing industry to discuss drift netting for migratory fish. [5206]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I expect to meet members of the Association of Scottish District Salmon Fishery Boards early in the new year.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is huge concern in Scotland about the north-east drift net fishery, which regularly takes 50,000 salmon a year that would otherwise have run up Scottish rivers? Why is drift netting banned in Scotland, as it is in most other countries, but legal in England? Will my hon. Friend meet his MAFF colleagues to ensure that the fishery is closed down, with full compensation?

Mr. Robertson: I know that my hon. Friend has pursued this issue on many occasions at Scottish questions and with many Scottish Fisheries Ministers. He will be pleased to know that the phasing out of drift netting is proceeding, and that the number of licence holders has dropped by nearly 30 per cent. since 1992.

Sir David Steel: Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the work of the Tweed Foundation and the research that it is doing into migratory fish? Will he keep a close watch on the numbers being caught in the open seas, bearing in mind the decline in the east coast rivers of Scotland?

Mr. Robertson: I am happy to agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Gentleman. He will be pleased to know that interest groups, including the National Rivers Authority, support a shorter phase-out period.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my hon. Friend do all that he can to hasten the phasing out of the north-east drift net? He will appreciate that the wild salmon stock in our east coast rivers has been falling fast. That will inevitably have a long-term effect on the tourist industry, for example. Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to say whether he has obtained a minimum import price for farmed salmon?

Mr. Robertson: My right hon. Friend, who had my job until July, is fully aware of the problems that have had to be faced. He has pursued the drift net issue from the Government Front Bench, as he has from the Back Benches. He will be pleased to know that there are now fewer licences. There were 149 in 1985 and in 1995 the number is 99 and falling.

My right hon. Friend will be delighted to know that the European Union has announced a minimum import price. I am delighted to have had the opportunity of working hard with the Scottish industry in tackling the problem.

NHS Trusts (Management Expenses)

13. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with NHS trusts on management expenses. [5207]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Discussion between officials of the Scottish Office and NHS trusts on trust matters take place on an on-going basis. Trusts in Scotland have been asked to reduce their administration costs.

Mr. Hughes: Even on the Government's own figures, there has been a staggering increase in administration costs over the past four years from £218 million a year to £355 million. As Scottish Office Ministers have defended those increases to the last ditch, what reasons can the Government give for asking for a cut in administration costs without acknowledging incompetence and failure?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman must bear it in mind that more patients are being treated than ever before. That factor must be taken into account. The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that expenditure on the national health service in Scotland has increased steadily in real terms. We are insisting on a 5 per cent. switch of resources from administration, which I think he would support. That applies to trusts and health boards. That should result in £14 million more being spent by trusts on patient care. An additional £4 million will be available to health boards. It is right that we should concentrate on the top priorities of heart disease, mental illness and cancer. These are three of the highest priorities in Scotland.

Local Government Electoral Reform

14. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to implement local government electoral reform. [5209]

Mr. Kynoch: None.

Mrs. Michie: Last night, the Secretary of State said that he was open to positive suggestions on further constitutional reform. Will the Minister try to persuade him that one of the most enlightened reforms that he could undertake would be to introduce a fair voting system based on proportional representation for local government elections? That would make councils more accountable and representative and it would be an incentive for voters to vote. The reform should be attractive to the Secretary of State because, if implemented, it might just result in more Tory council seats. After all, Tory councillors are becoming an endangered species in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: When talking about a fair electoral system, the hon. Lady should talk to her colleagues in the Liberal Democrat party about a fair electoral system for their proposed tax-raising Parliament. She seems to have botched together some deal to get her party's proposals off the ground. It seems that about 56 of the 129 Members that they are proposing would be party hacks.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Conservative party has never changed constitutional rules to secure narrow benefits at elections? We are concerned about having a constitution that will stand the test of time, as has the unwritten constitution of the United Kingdom. We shall have no truck with Members being selected in smoke-filled rooms instead of at the ballot box.

Mr. Kynoch: I totally agree with my hon. Friend.

National Lottery

15. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of benefits to Scotland from the national lottery. [5211]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scotland is doing extremely well from the national lottery. To date, more than 560 awards have been made, totalling around £125 million.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the sums available for Scotland from the national lottery for the arts, heritage, sports, charities and the millennium fund are far larger than originally predicted, that that is bringing widespread benefits to Scotland, and that the national lottery is a brilliant national achievement?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some £23 million has gone towards Scotland's Field of Dreams at Hampden. The arts have received £27 million, sports £16 million, charities £17 million, heritage £22 million and the millennium £40 million, which includes a millennium forest that will extend the cover of native woodlands in Scotland. Some 80 per cent. of the awards have been for less than £100,000, so hundreds of small sports clubs, amateur dramatic societies and local museums have benefited to an extent beyond their wildest dreams.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister join me in congratulating Austin Reilly of the national stadium committee, Queen's Park football club and the Scottish Football Association on obtaining £21 million from the millennium fund for the continuing redevelopment of Hampden? Will he also find an opportunity to discuss with the Secretary of State for National Heritage the changes to the rules in the operation of the national lottery to ensure that some of the money can be used for revenue spending for the arts rather than entirely for capital spending, thus removing the threat that hangs over Scottish Opera and some of our other great cultural organisations?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage will have heard the hon. Gentleman's question. I share the hon.

Gentleman's great enthusiasm for Hampden's success and for that of many other projects in Scotland, including the Glasgow film theatre, the Scottish gallery of modern art, and the Strathclyde Poverty Alliance, in which he has an interest. In addition, £1.5 million has gone to Tayside regional council for a sports complex.

Director General of Oflot

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the conduct of the Director General of Oflot and her decision to retain him in his post.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I met the director general yesterday to discuss the issues surrounding the flights and hospitality that GTech provided for him and his staff on visits in America.

My confidence in the director general remains. There is no doubt about his integrity. He has played a major part in the launch of the highly successful lottery. He was responsible for the conscientious and effective evaluation of bids for the licence to run the lottery. The process was endorsed by the National Audit Office as

"comprehensive, consistent, logical and properly controlled",

in line with the statutory duties placed on him.

The visits to America took place some months after Oflot awarded the main licence to Camelot. The director general considered with care the issues raised, recorded them thoroughly, and made no attempt to hide them. He declared his interests appropriately. There has been no question of his having sought or received personal gain from the visits that he undertook.

The director general is accountable to Parliament. He is making a full report on his overseas travel and hospitality arrangements to the Public Accounts Committee. He has assured me that there are no other issues that may come to light subsequently which could affect my decision in this matter.

I have told the director general that I do not think that his acceptance of the flights was wise in the context of his role as regulator of the lottery. Within the statutory role that he performs, which is to ensure that the lottery is run with propriety, that the interests of players are protected and, subject to that, that the proceeds for good causes are as great as possible, it is inevitable that he needs to work closely with Camelot. I have told him that this fact makes it all the more important that he should maintain a proper distance from the company and its constituent parts, and be seen to do so, taking all steps to guard against any possible misunderstanding of his actions.

The director general has assured me that, should any issues arise that may lead to a potential conflict with his role as regulator, he will seek guidance from my Department and inform it of the decision that he takes as to how to proceed.

I can inform the House that the director general has announced today that Miss Anne Rafferty QC will head an inquiry into the allegations by Richard Branson against Mr. Guy Snowden of GTech. The inquiry will start in the new year, and the report will be published. The House will be aware that Miss Rafferty was a member of the royal commission into the criminal justice system, chaired by Lord Runciman. She is currently chairman of the Criminal Bar Association and a recorder of the Crown court, sitting in the south-eastern circuit.

Dr. Cunningham: Does the right hon. Lady recognise that her astonishing decision to give Mr. Davis a vote of confidence was rightly met with universal condemnation in the press today? Does she acknowledge that, on Monday, during questions to the Department of National Heritage, she withheld important information about Mr. Davis's disregard of clear advice from her Department? As she twice promised on Monday to report to the House on her decision, in columns 1204 and 1205 of *Hansard*, why did she then announce her decision in a press statement and not in the Chamber?

It has taken a private notice question to get the right hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box to answer questions on which she assured the House two days ago she would report. In less than three days this week, she has re-established a pitiful record for inconsistency and bad judgment.

Does the right hon. Lady recall that, as recently as Monday of this week, her own departmental officials were briefing the press that Mr. Davis had to go, yet within 24 hours she had confirmed him in his post? As Mr. Davis has brazened out his position and the Secretary of State has backed down, will she now say to whom and on what basis the regulator is accountable? Is it not absurd for Mr. Davis to suggest that he can carry out his public responsibilities for the lottery effectively only if the very organisation he is there to supervise pays his expenses? That is a completely new doctrine of public accountability.

Does the point in the right hon. Lady's letter to Mr. Davis yesterday—that his visits took place after the licence was awarded to Camelot—mean anything at all? Surely it is irrelevant, as his duties and responsibilities to regulate Camelot and GTech persist. She has confirmed him in that post. How can she possibly defend the regulator's conduct when she and her Department specifically advised him against the visits before he undertook them?

Is it not clear that, if the civil service management code applied to Mr. Davis, his position would be completely indefensible? Civil servants are told that they

"must not receive gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party which might be seen to compromise their personal judgment or integrity."

Is that not precisely what Mr. Davis has done? The code goes on to say:

"In drawing up and in interpreting their own standards of conduct, departments and agencies must pay full regard to the need for staff to conform and be seen to conform to the principles".

Has not Mr. Davis blatantly disregarded those principles? Does that not make it clear that a code of conduct for regulators of private monopoly organisations is now long overdue? Will the right hon. Lady undertake to present such a code to the House without delay?

Has not this whole episode exposed an abysmal lack of judgment, not only by Mr. Davis but by the right hon. Lady herself? Is it not clear from her inadequate response to this private notice question that she apparently has learnt nothing from the events of the past week?

Mrs. Bottomley: The decision was taken only after careful consideration, and an examination of all the facts. It remains the case that Mr. Davis, as the regulator, has overseen the introduction of an incredibly successful lottery—probably the most successful, and the most effectively regulated, anywhere in the world.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

There can be no question of withholding information from the House. The right hon. Gentleman is correct: the question of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) was answered at 3.30 pm. I hope that I have been entirely open with the House throughout. Yesterday, at the moment when I sent the letter to Mr. Davis, I also placed a copy in the House, and gave copies to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

The regulator of Oflot is indeed required to follow the directions for which the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 provides. I issue directions to him under section 11; he is required by section 14 to report annually to the Secretary of State, and I lay his report before Parliament. Indeed, I drew attention to that report at Question Time earlier this year, because it is a thorough, comprehensive and impressive document.

The regulator also answers to the Public Accounts Committee. His performance before that Committee—he replied at length to questions, openly giving information that he had recorded meticulously on all aspects of those questions—was an example of his sense of responsibility and accountability to it. Under section 15 of the Act, the regulator must supply me with any information that I require.

As for the question of advice given to the regulator, it is indeed the case—as I have made clear—that, in general terms, he was advised that he should pay the costs of the hospitality involved in the trip to America. The money used to pay for that trip was provided by Oflot and the taxpayer. In the case of these incidents, the regulator took the view—for operational reasons—that the only way in which he could visit all the different lottery centres and return to work in London in the time provided was to accept GTech's offer.

I do not think that that was wise, but it must be said that—notwithstanding the Labour party's innuendo—it did not constitute an acceptance of gifts: "gifts" implies personal gain, and there is no suggestion of any personal gain in this case. As my hon. Friends are only too aware, the beneficiary was the British taxpayer.

Throughout the affair, there has been no suggestion of the regulator's honesty or integrity being in question. The Labour party's victimisation, pursuit and hounding of a man who has done his job as well as the regulator has demonstrates that it is unfit to govern, now or ever.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): My right hon. Friend had a very difficult decision to make, and no one would have blamed her if she had decided differently. She determined the issue fairly, judiciously and decisively. Are we not lucky to have in the director general a man who has created a most efficient lottery, as yet untainted by corruption? Is it not the case that only those with the languid intellectual self-assurance of the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) would believe that total infallibility is as universal among princes as it is always supposed to be among popes?

Mrs. Bottomley: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. I believe that we should make a considered decision that is right, rather than a rash decision that is wrong. I have weighed all the elements of the case very carefully, and I consider it right to retain confidence in Peter Davis, who has so far done an extremely impressive job.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Secretary of State refrain from implying that the Public Accounts Committee has given Mr. Davis a clean bill of health? Will she recognise that many people would like to know not only whether she was satisfied about the unwisdom of his accepting hospitality and flights from GTech, but whether she has asked any questions of Mr. Davis about the possible unwisdom of involving GTech in the British national lottery when that company in the United States has left a trail of charges in the criminal courts that are in the public domain? Senior officers have been accused of bribery, fraud, corruption and other crimes. Has she or any of her officials done anything to investigate that appalling background to a company that, on the face of it, appears ill suited to be the lead in running a clean national lottery, far from sleaze?

Mrs. Bottomley: I was referring to the National Audit Office report, which commented on Mr. Davis's evaluation of the eight bids to run the national lottery, and on the investigation into all the constituent parts, including whether it was suitable, fit and proper for GTech, as a member of the Camelot bid, to undertake that responsibility. The NAO report said:

> "the evaluation process was comprehensive, consistent, logical and properly controlled".

As for the Public Accounts Committee, what I said was that the director general had given it thorough, open and honest answers at great length, on the basis of information that was carefully recorded and documented. He is a rigorous and thorough individual, which is characteristic of an accountant.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Are not the Opposition making themselves look trivial and foolish by taking this stand against Oflot's director general? Can there be any justification in attacking the integrity of that decent, honourable and successful man, who was trying only to save the taxpayer money—*[Laughter.]*—look how they laugh when it is a question of saving the taxpayer money—to no benefit whatever to himself? Can the justification be any more than a determined attempt to destabilise the lottery, which has been an outstanding success, and to undermine the Government with it?

Mrs. Bottomley: Undoubtedly, the Labour party always seeks to resort to personal vilification rather than carefully weighing up the evidence. My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right: the lottery has been a tremendous success. That affronts the Labour party, which loathes success. It would take it away from the operator, cap the prizes and reduce the remarkable amount of money coming through to good causes. Only today, there were another 22 grants from the national heritage memorial fund, which means that 4,600 different projects have benefited from the lottery.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the answer that she says she gave me at 3.30—which, incidentally, I did not receive at 3.30, but that is trivial—was nothing to do with the American flight? It was to do with Australia. Will she also confirm that her fax to me of the letter that was going in the Library was a welcome courtesy, but of no use to 650 other Members, and that it did not allow them or me to ask a question as to a decision on Monday?

Will the right hon. Lady now explain why she told me the day previously in an answer that her Department knew about these flights the week before the Public Accounts Committee hearing, why her accounting officer did not inform the National Audit Office of those flights, and why she did not, as a courtesy, inform the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee about those flights? We are left with a sneaking suspicion that, had it not been for the answer to one question at the PAC meeting, this matter would never have become public.

Mrs. Bottomley: It was neither appropriate nor necessary to take the steps that the right hon. Gentleman describes. My concern is second to none in wishing the lottery's good name to be maintained. It is a successful and well-run lottery. As I have explained to the House, I reported to it as I announced that decision. It was right to bring the uncertainty to an end.

Once I had had the opportunity, not only to discuss the matter with senior officials at my Department, who had spent a great deal of time with the director general, but to speak to him myself, as swiftly as I could, I took the opportunity of informing the right hon. Gentleman and the House, to bring the uncertainty to an end and to allow the director general to get on with his work.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is it not obvious that Opposition Members detest the tremendous success of the lottery, and would love to overturn it? They cannot succeed in doing that: all they can do is chip around the edges to try to undermine it. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the director general is a completely honest man who has done nothing bad, but that, as a distinguished accountant, he has acted more like an accountant than like a judge, which would have been wiser in the distinguished appointment that he occupies?

Mrs. Bottomley: I entirely share my hon. Friend's assessment. The lottery is certainly a great success. The director general's duty is to ensure the propriety of the lottery, to make sure that the interests of those who play are protected, and to maximise the amount for good causes. As my hon. Friend and 4,600 good causes are aware, the results for good causes have exceeded all expectations. I wish to maintain the lottery's good name, and that is the commitment of the director general. I have made it clear, albeit that these incidents took place several months after the award of the licence to Camelot, that his steps were unwise.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Did not the Secretary of State realise from the very beginning that Peter Davis was connected to this dodgy firm in the United States, which is well known for handing out backhanders to get its own way? That is the firm that he has been cosying up to, and he has been flying here, there and everywhere using its money.

I am drawn to the conclusion reached by somebody, not in the House but out there, one of the people who buy lottery tickets, who said, "What is it Peter Davis knows? How does he manage to save himself from getting the sack? Does he know where the bodies are buried? Does he know about all the lottery fiddles that have been covered up by the Government?" When will this Government learn? They are hanging on to save this man's skin, but as sure as night follows day, like all the rest of them they have defended, in the new year he will have to go, and a different story will have to be told.

Mrs. Bottomley: It saddens me to hear the hon. Gentleman speak in that way on these matters. If I had taken the view that Peter Davis was unfit to continue as the regulator, I would not have hesitated to say so. Having looked fairly and thoroughly at all the evidence, it is my view that he is a proper person to continue with that task, which so far he has undertaken successfully.

I am sure that people "out there" are influenced by repeated comments, such as those made by the hon. Gentleman, which are neither fair nor proper. I understand that Mr. Davis's wife shared childbirth classes with the wife of a director of GTech 20 years ago. That is not a matter that people are required to enter in a register of interests. The hon. Gentleman may understand that.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Does my right hon. Friend understand that her decision to stand by the director general of Oflot is widely welcomed by Conservative Members, and by the country as a whole? Does she share my sense of revulsion at the attempt by the Labour party to destroy the reputation of an honest public servant for narrow party advantage? What does she think that kind of gutter politics does for the reputation of politicians as a whole?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks exactly the view that I share—that, if someone from outside the public service comes in to take on a position of responsibility, he has as much right as anyone else to be treated fairly on the basis of the facts. I thoroughly scrutinised all aspects of this case, and I believe that it is right for him to continue with the task. Labour's attitude does it no credit at all.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Whether the Minister likes it or not, is not the sad reality that, because of what business people call the "smell factor", Mr. Davis is from now on damaged goods? He will not have the legitimacy and credibility that are necessary for the proper performance of his functions.

Mrs. Bottomley: I think that I have made it clear that he has done an effective job. He has achieved a better result for the national lottery and for good causes than anyone expected. If the Labour party thinks that the decision should be made on the "smell factor", that makes it even less fit for government. People and their jobs and responsibilities should be considered on the basis of the evidence and the facts, and not on the smell from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Was that question from the Opposition not a dreadfully obscene example of blood sports, in pursuit of not a politician but an official who thought that he was doing something good by saving his employer—in this case the taxpayer—expenses?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend encapsulates the situation precisely. Mr. Davis has been competent, effective and successful. I believe that he should continue in his job.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The Secretary of State may not know it, but she has issued a

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

serious criticism of the director general from the Dispatch Box. She said that he seriously lacked wisdom in this matter. In those circumstances, an honourable person would resign from his position, or it should be her job to remove him. From now on, should not Oflot be called "Offload"?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman did not—I believe—encapsulate the words that I used. What I said was that, in this case, which took place some months after the licence had been awarded, I took the view that it was unwise—albeit there was no personal gain, no lack of honesty or integrity and all aspects were carefully recorded and indeed discussed when questions were asked.

The hon. Gentleman should look carefully at the National Audit Office report, because it is as complimentary an endorsement of the rigour and integrity of the whole process of selection of the operator as any Member could wish to see. The director general of Oflot deserves a great deal of the credit for that successful process.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her courage in not taking the easy way out of this problem. It would have been very easy to ask Mr. Davis for his resignation. Is it right to think that a successful, intelligent and able man should be condemned and forced from a job that he is doing very well because of one instance of something that we might describe as naive?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks for a great number of Members. The decision was not wise, but it has to be seen in the context of somebody undertaking his task extremely successfully and effectively. I should like to quote from a comment made by a former colleague of the director general. It said of Mr. Davis:

> "He is totally honest and of the highest probity. He is a very meticulous man who writes down everything and all of the expenses he incurs."

That certainly coincides with my experience of him.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Will the right hon. Lady say whether the friendship of 20 years ago was continued, and whether it was known about at the time of the appointment of Camelot?

Hon. Members: McCarthyism.

Mrs. Bottomley: As my hon. Friends have said, this is becoming McCarthyism of the worst sort. Is the man fit to continue in his role or not? I have said that he retains my confidence, because I believe that he is a man of integrity and honesty. He has always been entirely clear about his past and present acquaintances. There is no evidence that I know of to suggest that the friendship affected his judgment in any way at all. I rely once again on the evidence of the National Audit Office, which gave such a thorough endorsement of his evaluation process of the eight people who bid for the lottery licence.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): My right hon. Friend has earned additional respect on the Conservative Benches for not taking the easy option. Does she not draw parallels with the visits of certain members of the National Heritage Select Committee, including myself and including the Chairman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), to Tattersall's, the Victoria state lottery in Australia, before the contract was awarded? That involved GTech too. There was no question of impropriety there, and there is no question of impropriety in this case.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Were the matters to which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred a few moments ago known to those who advised Mr. Davis? How long before the visit was that advice given? Has the Secretary of State asked Mr. Davis why that advice was ignored? What was his reply, and why did she find it of overriding significance?

Mrs. Bottomley: Much as I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's question, the process of investigating GTech as a constituent part of the bid for the lottery was thoroughly and rigorously endorsed. I would have to refer back to the question by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) to reply to the hon. Gentleman's question more thoroughly.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Despite all the innuendoes that have been levelled by Mr. Davis's critics, no one has come up with a shred of concrete evidence of corruption or malpractice. Is it not despicable that the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) should seek to smear an honest man's name in an attempt to bolster his flagging ratings with his party?

Mrs. Bottomley: The easy option is to find a scapegoat and make him or her carry the can to get a round of applause. That is always the Labour party's approach. Labour Members always look for a scalp when dealing with an issue. Some issues are more complex, and many factors are involved. We have looked at all the aspects of this case carefully and thoroughly. It would be unfair and poor judgment to take this incident out of context and say that, in spite of all that has been achieved, the director general should forgo his job.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does not the Secretary of State realise that Mr. Davis made a serious error of judgment and disregarded the advice given to him, in order to save peanuts compared with what the national lottery makes? The public expected him to resign or the Secretary of State to sack him. They now want to know whether he, she or the Government will go first.

Mrs. Bottomley: The incident involved no personal gain to the director general; only the British taxpayer benefited. He also took into account his need to return to work as director general in London as swiftly as possible. I have made it clear that it was not a wise decision, but the idea that it affected his judgment or integrity in any way is nonsense.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her firm stand, both on her decision and in dealing with questions this afternoon? Does not the director general, Mr. Peter Davis, preside over the most successful lottery in the world, and should not that count in his favour? Can it be doubted that GTech's position in all this is simply that it has developed the most successful lottery technology in the world, which is widely used by lotteries throughout the world? Are not the Opposition today motivated by the principles of a McCarthyite witch hunt, aimed not so much at Peter Davis as at my right hon. Friend and the Government?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right.

I urgently confess that I misled the House a moment or two ago. I announced that, earlier today, an extra 22 awards were made from the national heritage memorial fund for the lottery. The figure should have been 33, bringing the total to 4,625 awards. I apologise for that factual error.

My hon. Friend mentioned GTech, which is a well-known company involved in lotteries. But that was not the material factor in terms of the Camelot bid. The important factor was whether the group was fit and proper to undertake our national lottery, and whether its bid would maximise the return for good causes. As I have said repeatedly, the scrutiny of whether the group was fit and proper was undertaken very carefully. As for maximising the return for good causes, the result has exceeded expectations, as the House knows only too well.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): As one who voted for the Second Reading of the National Lottery etc. Bill, and who supported the lottery throughout and believes that it is a success, may I tell the Secretary of State that, for that success to continue, the director general of Oflot must be above all suspicion? I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that Mr. Davis is not, and that therefore he must go.

Mrs. Bottomley: I know of no one who has said that he is a subject of suspicion. I did not know that that was the issue involved. As far as I am aware, no one has suggested that he has been influenced or biased in exercising his decisions, but that is what the hon. Gentleman implied.

I also take the view that, because of the sensitivity of his job, the director general should act with propriety and be seen to do so on all occasions and that his decisions should not be the subject of misunderstanding. That is why I expressed my opinion that those incidents, which took place several months after the licence was awarded, were unwise. That is why I also sought an assurance from the director general that, in future, he would keep in even closer touch with officials from my Department, and would report back on any such matters.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Can the Secretary of State confirm that, at the time that the director general undertook the freebie flights from GTech, the contract for the scratchcards had not yet been awarded, and that he subsequently had a significant say in the awarding of that contract?

Mrs. Bottomley: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, he is correct that that took place before the scratchcard licences were awarded, but after the main on-line licence was awarded. The director general did have a part to play in that matter. His concern is to maximise the return to the good causes, and it is wrong for hon. Members to imply that his judgment was contaminated, particularly in the light of the National Audit Office's endorsement of his approach and process.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Conservative Members have said that the director general is not dishonest. I would not say that he is dishonest, but he is very stupid. It is also very stupid for the Secretary of State to say that it was all right for him to take those matters on board after the licence was awarded. How would she feel if chairmen of licensing boards accepted hospitality from public houses for which they had granted licences? She would be the first to condemn local authority people—*[Interruption.]* I let the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) speak, and he should allow me to speak.

The people out there in our constituencies who are paying for the lottery think that this is a very strange situation. If the right hon. Lady is going to back the director general, they will be asking for her resignation.

Mrs. Bottomley: I made it clear that the director general retains my confidence, because, overall, he is competent to do the job, which he is doing effectively. He made it clear that he accepted the flight so that he could visit more lottery centres in the United States than he would otherwise have been able to do, as they are nowhere near the main airline centres. It was simply his wish to complete the task swiftly, and return to London to get on with his job here.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does not the Secretary of State realise that the answer that she gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) transformed the nature of these exchanges? It is not just the regulator but she herself who should go. [*Laughter.*] Conservative Members may well laugh—I suspect that they may soon laugh on the other side of their faces. Throughout these exchanges, the right hon. Lady has repeatedly emphasised the fact that the lottery licence was granted before the regulator took the flights. She misled the House by not acknowledging that—

Madam Speaker: Order. No, no. The right hon. Lady has not misled the House. Will the hon. Gentleman withdraw that remark, and rephrase it?

Mr. Wilson: I withdraw.

Has the Secretary of State not been in danger of inadvertently giving a false impression by suggesting that no pecuniary benefit was available to GTech in the period subsequent to the gifts and favours being taken, because a hugely lucrative business in scratchcards followed it?

Following on from the question of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), those of us who have followed the matter from the outside know that there were vast questions about the propriety of GTech—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is not how the House should respond to statements—hon. Members must ask questions of the Minister. I have allowed the questions to run for some time, as there is much interest in the subject. I now want the hon. Gentleman to ask a direct question, so that the right hon. Lady can answer it. Two more hon. Members wish to ask questions, and I ask them to have them ready, as I want them to ask them briskly.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Apart from the scratchcard issue, how have even this Government ended up appointing a lottery regulator whose defence turns out to be that he has been a personal friend of the principals in GTech for 20 years?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have repeated at great length that, in all the circumstances, I have not found the director

[Mrs. Bottomley]

general to be no longer worthy to continue in office; I have confidence in his ability to continue to regulate the lottery. I set it out clearly in the letter to him, and I do not think that I can give the House any further help.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Is not the Secretary of State aware that, at the meeting between Richard Branson and Peter Davis to discuss the bribery attempt, a note was passed to GTech, not by the Treasury solicitor, as GTech's press release of 11 December states, but by Peter Davis or Oflot? Will the Secretary of State investigate that matter, and investigate what was received in return?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have already announced to the House that Miss Rafferty is establishing an inquiry into the allegations made by Richard Branson against an officer of GTech in an interview broadcast on 11 December, to consider the facts surrounding a meeting between Richard Branson and Mr. Guy Snowden in September 1993, and to report to the director general any bearing those allegations or facts may have on the exercise of his powers under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As the Secretary of State said that Mr. Davis took the free flights to save the taxpayer money, will she explain why her officials advised Mr. Davis against taking those free flights?

Mrs. Bottomley: I did not say that he did it "to" save the taxpayer money; I said that the taxpayer was the beneficiary, rather than Mr. Davis personally. I said that he took the flights for operational reasons in order to be able to complete his visits to a great number of lottery centres and return to the UK at the earliest opportunity. Officials, in general terms, advised the director general to be responsible for his travel and hospitality costs, because of the normal rules on such matters. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let the right hon. Lady answer the questions.

Mrs. Bottomley: The director general, Oflot and the British taxpayer funded the vast sums involved in the visit—for the flights and the basic accommodation. Mr. Davis took the view that, in this particular incident, it would not be appropriate for him to hire a jet independently, and he accepted the offer in order to complete the task faster and return to England. There is no question that the incident affected his judgment, integrity or honesty.

I made it clear, however, that I believed that it was unwise, which is why I asked the director general in the letter to ensure that he keeps in closer touch in future. It is not my judgment that that incident should deprive him of the job that he has so evidently carried out successfully and effectively, to the great benefit of the British people and the good causes that have received extra funds from the lottery.

Business of the House

4.13 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House please give us the details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for the period after the imminent recess—at least I hope that it is imminent—will be as follows:

TUESDAY 9 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 JANUARY—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Security Service Bill.

THURSDAY 11 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill.

Debate on progress on business links on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 12 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

More provisionally, the business for the second week back which I expect to include is as follows. On Monday 15 January, there will be the Second Reading of the Finance Bill; on Tuesday 16 January, the first allotted Opposition day, there will be a debate on an Opposition motion, the subject of which will no doubt be decided nearer the time; I am not yet in a position to give details of the business on Wednesday 17 January; on Thursday 18 January I intend to have a debate on the Army on a motion for the Adjournment of the House; and Friday 19 January is the first day for Second Readings of private Members' Bills.

Mrs. Taylor: May I thank the Leader of the House for that information? He knows from business questions last week that we were pleased that he decided to withdraw from debate the regulations that would withdraw benefit from asylum seekers. We advocated the withdrawal of the regulations because we thought it was wrong that such measures should be activated before a debate had taken place in the House. The Leader of the House will be aware that the Select Committee on Social Security is also considering that issue, and I wonder whether he can give an assurance to the House that the debate on those regulations will not take place before we have the benefit of the Committee's report on them.

Is it possible to have an early debate on the conditions in Holloway prison, which so alarmed the new chief inspector of prisons? In particular, it would be useful to have a debate so that Ministers have an opportunity to tell the House how long they have been aware of that appalling situation.

Do the Government intend to publish a White Paper setting out Government policy on the issues to be discussed at the intergovernmental conference of the European Union, which will start at the end of March? That would be very useful, because it is important that the House has ample opportunity to debate such issues before those negotiations and discussions get under way.

Will the Leader of the House ensure that there will be a ministerial statement and report to the House on the Fisheries Council, which starts tomorrow, so that

Members will be able to judge to what extent the Government have taken on board the concerns that led to ast night's defeat for the Government?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give an assurance that the Government will not propose a debate on the regulations on benefits for asylum seekers until the intended report is eceived from the Social Security Select Committee: not east because I think that urgent action is needed, for easons that have been explained to the House. I do not know when the Select Committee's report might arrive. I repeat what I said last week—the undertakings that the Deputy Prime Minister and I gave should provide an opportunity for the Social Security Select Committee to complete its deliberations. We would welcome sight of the report before any debate takes place in the House.

The hon. Lady left it to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)—I make no complaint about that—to deal with this morning's debate. Therefore, she will not have had time to receive a report on it, and still less to study it.

Mrs. Taylor: Yes, I have.

Mr. Newton: If she has been able to see a report, it must have been by mysterious means into which I will not inquire. In that case, she will be aware that I made some observations on the subject of Holloway in my speech this morning, to which I refer her.

On the subject of a White Paper on the IGC, I am not in a position to add to what has been said by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary in the recent debate, and in other exchanges that have taken place.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would expect to report to the House, in the usual way and at the appropriate time, on the outcome of the Fisheries Council.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend find time when we return from the recess for a debate on waste in local government so that hon. Members have a chance to consider the £200 million being wasted by Hackney council on paying 100 employees who should be made redundant but for the council's no compulsory redundancy policy?

Mr. Newton: As I have observed on several recent occasions, I am glad to say that there will be further opportunity to debate local government matters. For example, my hon. Friend may be fortunate in catching the eye of the Chair during the debate on the local government finance orders, which normally come before the House towards the end of January or early February.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I support the plea for an urgent report to be made early in the new year on the result of the discussions in the Fisheries Council meeting to be held later this week. The business has yet to be announced for 17 January, and it would certainly be of benefit to some of us who have fishing interests in our constituencies to know what chance there is of a sensible reform of the common fisheries policy at next year's IGC. Does the Leader of the House also accept that there is a need for a debate in Government time on the privatisation of the railways?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would expect me to respond with an immediate acceptance of the latter request in his question, given the amount of discussion that there has been just recently about the railways. However, the franchising process is now going ahead extremely well, so I see some attractions in such a debate. I might even be able to satisfy the hon. Gentleman in due course.

On the first half of the hon. Gentleman's question, obviously he can and has supported the representations about the common fisheries policy, and in my characteristically reasonable way, I have taken note of his support for the representations made.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend consider trying to give time for a debate on exports, so that we can review the considerable achievements in recent months of British industry in the export market, in particular the engineering industry of the west midlands? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that such a debate would give us the opportunity to expose those Labour party policies that can be found and the damage that they would do to our exporting record?

Mr. Newton: I might venture to suggest to my hon. Friend that the debate that I have announced for Thursday 11 January on progress on business links might provide an opportunity to make some reference to exports because the purpose of those links is to improve all the supporting services to firms, not least small firms, which are contributing greatly to our export performance.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): May we have a debate on child labour laws in Britain and the totally inadequate consultation exercise that the Government are carrying out, which will conclude at the end of January? It is proposed to deregulate further child labour so that children in Britain will be less protected than any of their counterparts in the European Union. It is important that we have a debate on that instead of the Government introducing further deregulation through the back door.

Mr. Newton: I note the hon. Lady's request, and she would expect no less. I wonder whether people who raise such issues have contemplated how much unnecessary upset would be caused, for example, if we followed the path that some advocate, which would prevent a large part of the British population from making newspaper rounds, which help the community and those making them, and which seem entirely reasonable to me.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Can my right hon. Friend find time for another debate on legal aid? He will be aware that many of our constituents are concerned that the Lord Chancellor continues to make civil legal aid available to persons from overseas, who have no real and substantial connection with this country. He will be aware that the funds available to the Legal Aid Board are limited. How can we explain to our constituents who are just above the income or capital limit that there is no money available to give them legal aid, but money is available for persons coming from abroad?

Mr. Newton: I would not rule out further discussions on that matter in due course, but I cannot promise them in the first fortnight back after the recess.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I am sorry to hear that the Leader of the House does not have the modern facilities that I have in my office, which enable me to watch what is going on in the Chamber

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

while I do constituency work. Some weeks ago, he may recall that I asked him for a debate on Ordtech and the result of the Court of Appeal judgment in that case. I am still waiting for an answer, and I note that 17 January is available for such a debate. Should we not have that debate before the Scott inquiry reports at the end of January, so that we all know what has been going on?

Mr. Newton: I shall examine what the hon. Gentleman has said. I must admit that I was still thinking about his comment about the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). I understood that she had other commitments elsewhere; I did not realise that they were with the television. My response was directed at my interpretation of her remarks that she had seen an account of this morning's proceedings in the House. But perhaps she has merely talked to the hon. Member for Perry Barr, who I am sure gave her a very accurate account of events.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Last week I raised with my right hon. Friend the matter of the adverse impact of road construction programme cuts upon business in my constituency. My right hon. Friend referred to the business links debate that is to occur on Thursday 11 January. Would it be appropriate for me to raise during that debate the matter of the adverse impact that those cuts are having upon Macclesfield and its links with the excellent and growing Manchester international airport?

Mr. Newton: That would be for the Chair to decide. As I suspect my hon. Friend knows, the links in the phrase business links refer to the flow of information rather than the flow of goods. I am not sure whether I am allowed to refer to his presence as he is below the Bar of the House, but it must be within the knowledge of the House that the Secretary of State for Transport has heard what my hon. Friend has said. Therefore, I think that we can assume that his remarks have found the right target.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Has the Leader of the House considered the request that I made last week for a debate on the textile and carpet industry? Since then, I have received a letter from the British Carpet Manufacturers Association expressing concern about the grant that the French Government are to give to the Beaulieu carpet group in Belgium to establish a plant in northern France and the alleged unfairness of the grant under European Union rules. That is one of many issues that could be considered during such a debate. Many people are concerned about the state of the textile and carpet industry and I think that hon. Members on both sides would welcome an early opportunity to debate the matter.

Mr. Newton: I was not aware of the particular point that the hon. Gentleman raised in his question, but I shall ensure that it is brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. I keep a little list—if I can put it like that—of matters for debate. I cannot promise that I shall be able to strike the hon. Gentleman's name off that list, but I can promise him that he is still on it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Could we have a debate on law and order early next year so that we can highlight the way in which the Criminal Justice Acts are beginning to hit the villains? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the sentence of 27 years' imprisonment passed today on a burglar whose practice was to threaten to poke out a pensioner's eye with a screwdriver? Is that not a disgraceful crime and is it not jolly good to see that such villains are increasingly being dealt with?

Mr. Newton: By happy coincidence, a photocopy of the front page of the *Evening Standard* happened to fall into my hands on my way into the Chamber, so I am aware of the story. I think that many people will welcome the length of the sentence in that case. As my hon. Friend says, that sentence results from criminal justice legislation passed by the Government: section 2 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I was the only hon. Member present who was unable to participate in this morning's debate—such debates used to have short speeches, but they were often long speeches today. I wished to raise the matter of the democratic deficit in local government, Northern Ireland, this country and the European Union. Would it not be a good idea to have an early debate on that subject, to which the Leader of the House could respond?

Mr. Newton: We have had a number of opportunities in recent weeks to debate matters relating to the European Union, and no doubt there will be more in due course. I felt sorry for the hon. Gentleman this morning: it was unfortunate that he was here for three hours and did not manage to participate in the debate. I had harboured hopes that he would be the only person to wish me a happy Christmas—I shall assume that he meant to do so when he rose this afternoon.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the recent publication of the Committee on Public Accounts on the Child Support Agency's continuing problems. If, as I suspect, those problems continue to dominate his postbag and surgeries as they do mine, would it be appropriate to have a debate on the Child Support Agency early in the new year?

Mr. Newton: I still have a number of cases in my own surgery. The most recent was last weekend. I acknowledge the point that my hon. Friend makes, and I hope that in return he will acknowledge that the report was based on the agency's operation in its first year—1993-94—which is some considerable time ago. At the very least, we should acknowledge that much has been done since then to improve the accuracy and performance of the agency, although of course my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give careful consideration to the report's recommendations and respond in the usual time in the usual way.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I sat through the fisheries debate yesterday, but was unlucky enough not to be called; does the Leader of the House agree that the ministerial report to the House on the decisions taken by the Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting should form the introduction of a debate on the practical implications of such decisions? Members who represent fishing interests would then have time to assimilate those decisions and their consequences. In addition, such a debate would allow us to put to the Minister the concerns of the fishermen whom we represent.

Mr. Newton: In view of the hon. Gentleman's frustration—which I had not previously realised—

in respect of the first part of yesterday's business, I am glad that he managed to get in several times during the second debate. However, even with my natural desire to please everyone before Christmas, I cannot promise him an immediate further debate on fisheries.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): While wishing my right hon. Friend a happy Christmas, I hope to influence him to have a debate on how we can attract people into public life. Is he aware that the appalling display earlier today, when the Opposition attacked a perfectly honourable person, will discourage anyone from entering public life when they might be prone to such witch hunts?

Mr. Newton: I shall not add to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage said on a number of occasions, but the exchange had an unfortunate flavour of wishing to disregard all the considerations of what had actually happened and the judgment as to how the director general was doing his job and, as my right hon. Friend said, of simply finding a scapegoat and taking the easy way out. That is not the way that any of us ought to behave on anything.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): May we have a debate after Christmas on the Crown Prosecution Service, bearing in mind press reports that the Lord Chancellor is looking at the effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service?

Mr. Newton: Of course, I shall add that to my list of issues for consideration. The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill that is currently being discussed in another place will arrive here in due course. As that is concerned with procedures, it might just possibly provide some opportunities, but in any event, as I have said to my hon. Friend, I shall put his request on my little list.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of last night's defeat, would not it be a good idea in the new year—perhaps the Leader of the House could study it over the holidays—for the Government to introduce a system so that we could have a confidence motion once a month, so that the Government could be ready, just in case, for all the subsequent defeats that might happen? In other words, they could programme it in and perhaps they might get their people to turn up more often.

Mr. Newton: That seems a long way from wishing me a happy Christmas. I shall put that thought out of my head for a while.

Madam Speaker: I will wish the right hon. Gentleman a happy Christmas.

Mr. Newton: Thank you Madam Speaker. I reciprocate that wholeheartedly.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It would be a day when I did not get a point of order.

Mr. Fabricant: Has anyone wished you a happy Christmas, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes—the Leader of the House, on behalf, I hope, of the entire House.

BILLS PRESENTED

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS)

Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Portillo and Sir John Wheeler, presented a Bill to re-enact, with omissions and amendments, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 9 January and to be printed. [Bill 37.]

SECURITY SERVICE

Mr. Secretary Howard, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Forsyth and Mr. David Maclean, presented a Bill to give the Security Service the function of acting in support of the prevention and detection of serious crime, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 9 January and to be printed. [Bill 38.]

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

IRISH STEEL (STATE AID)

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10836/95, relating to the restructuring of the Irish steel industry; considers that the proposal in the Document is unacceptable as it stands; and judges that any package that provides for aid for Irish Steel could only be agreed if further stringent conditions are attached in the interest of safeguarding employment in the United Kingdom.—[*Mr. Wells.*]

Question agreed to.

Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.34 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill provides an exceptional solution to an exceptional problem. For parts of the Humber Bridge Board's debt due to the Secretary of State, it provides the power to suspend interest payments and to write off debt. It will enable both parties to secure a long-term solution to the problem of managing the debt. Its two clauses implement an undertaking given to Parliament in July 1991 that the Government would, at an early opportunity, promote legislation to provide express powers for the writing off and suspension of parts of the Humber bridge debt.

The Humber bridge was promoted by the local authorities of Humberside through the Humber Bridge Acts of 1959 and 1971. They established the Humber Bridge Board with a preponderance of members from Hull but also with representation from other local authorities which supported the building of the bridge. Those Acts empowered the board to borrow but did not provide express powers for the Secretary of State to pay grant to meet unpaid debt or interest, or otherwise to write off debt or suspend payment of interest on it.

The local authorities of Humberside promoted the Acts of 1959 and 1971 to provide powers for the construction of the bridge—but it still had to be financed. The Government view at that time—1965—was that the bridge was not needed; but in 1966 the Government executed a U-turn. I cannot begin to speculate as to the motives for such a sudden change of policy.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): May I tell my hon. Friend that if I catch the Speaker's eye, I shall seek to explain the reason for the sudden change of policy?

Mr. Watts: We await my hon. Friend's contribution with interest.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Would the Minister be kind enough to tell the House the opinion of Her Majesty's Opposition at the time?

Mr. Watts: I shall certainly come to that. The more cynical among us—perhaps I should say, behind me—might say that it was the looming by-election in Kingston upon Hull, North that tipped the balance in favour of the project; for it was on 18 January 1966, shortly before the election, that the then Secretary of State for Transport—now the Baroness Castle—announced from the hustings that the Humber bridge would be built. The late lamented Iain Macleod said at the time that this was not a sensible project. The history of the financial difficulties of the project suggest that he was probably right about that, as about so many other things during his distinguished career in public service.

In 1971, the Government confirmed that they would provide loans for the Humber Bridge Board to finance the costs of constructing the bridge. It opened in 1981, plagued by the industrial disputes that were a feature of the era in which it was built.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Minister be kind enough to say which Government were in power in 1971, and whether any binding contracts had been entered into before June 1970?

Mr. Watts: It was of course the Labour Government in 1965 who said that the bridge was not needed and who executed a U-turn in 1966, promising, for whatever motives, that the bridge would be built. In 1971, a Conservative Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) came to the rescue of the promoters of the scheme by agreeing to provide loans—

Mr. McNamara: Answer the question.

Mr. Watts: When the hon. Gentleman reads the record he will see that I have answered his question—and given him rather more information than he wanted.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: Not again. I want to make progress. The bridge took nine years to build. How times have changed! The new Dartford bridge was built in just over three years and the new Severn bridge should be built in less than four. In both cases, it is the private sector, not the taxpayer, on which the costs of construction and debt fall. The bridge took a long time to build and the cost was greater than originally planned. Above all, it has carried less traffic than expected. It was built to promote the regeneration of South Humberside but the expected economic growth did not occur.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): The building of the bridge represents a public scandal of the time. The losses are about £14 million a year. What contribution has been made by Hull city council? Has it paid anything?

Mr. Watts: Local authorities' contributions have not been significant. A substantial amount of toll revenue is generated but it is nowhere near enough to provide the necessary funding. In recent years, the national taxpayer has been contributing £40 million a year as grant in aid pending legislation.

It was always envisaged that toll income would be insufficient to service the debt in the early years. Legislation therefore provided that unpaid interest could be capitalised. That led, however, to an exponential growth in the board's debt, which rose from £151 million in 1981 to £439 million in March 1992.

After tolls were set at their present levels in August 1989, the board formally presented my Department with a case for financial assistance in July 1990. The board undertook to promote a private Bill to index its tolls from the date of the last toll increase in 1989. For their part, the Government undertook to promote a Bill to provide express powers for writing off and suspension of some of the debt. The promise to legislate has enabled the Government, since February 1992, to meet unpaid annual interest charges of about £40 million by grants under the appropriation Acts. It is a temporary expedient and it cannot be allowed to continue much longer. We need a restructuring of the debt that will enable as much of it as possible to be repaid over the maximum 60-year period that legislation provides for repaying the debts.

The bridge board's Bill, by which it sought to index its tolls, was introduced in another place in November 1991. It did not make progress and it was lost at the end of

October 1994. Unfortunately, the board has done nothing in the meantime to increase tolls from their 1989 levels. It is now at last preparing an application to increase tolls under current legislation.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Was not the system of funding wrong or flawed? The interest charges were £15 million a year and revenue from tolls was £10 million. Surely it is common sense that the system was flawed. It was clear that those using the bridge would not provide the necessary finance.

Mr. Watts: The assessment of the project that took place before the bridge was built must have been flawed in many instances. If such a project had been presented to a Conservative Government—I explained this by quoting the remarks of the late Iain Macleod—it would not have been given a green light, as it was given in the circumstances of a by-election in 1966.

We shall be continuing our discussions with the board on its financial position as we prepare to implement legislation, should the House approve the proposed legislation.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I shall seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that I might speak in support of the Bill. I am sure that my constituents will welcome the Bill, and they have only two questions—I suspect that that applies to the constituents of all hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. My constituents want to know how much of the debt the Government will write off under the powers of the Bill, and by how much tolls will increase in the event that the board comes before the Department with a request to increase tolls. Those are the two questions that everyone is asking, on both sides of the bridge.

Mr. Watts: The board must decide what level of toll increase it wishes to promote. Once it has made that proposal, there is a period during which those who are affected by the proposed increase can raise objections. If required, there can then be a public inquiry. At the end of such an inquiry, it would fall to my right hon. Friend to decide whether to confirm the order promoted by the bridge board. Because that decision is of a quasi-judicial nature, I cannot anticipate either what level of toll the bridge board might promote or what level of toll my right hon. Friend might be prepared to approve after the proper authorisation procedures have been carried out.

As for the way in which the powers will be exercised, before I can give a clear answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) and others who are interested, we must first have further discussions with the bridge board to ascertain what level of debt can reasonably be serviced from tolls and how much it is reasonable to place as a continuing burden on national taxpayers to bail out this disastrous project.

The exercise of powers under the Bill requires an order to be laid before the House with the consent of the Treasury. It would be subject to the usual negative procedure, so there will be an opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny of the way in which the powers are exercised.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I apologise to the Minister for missing the first minute or so of his speech. Will he reflect on the fact that many of my constituents, who live a long way from the bridge in question, have identified what they perceive as an inconsistency in Government policy? A monopoly has been established in relation to access to the Isle of Skye over the bridge that has just been built, and tolls are very high. When one considers the cumulative sums from the public purse which have been poured into the Humber bridge project for 30 years, the injustice visited on a low-income, fragile part of the UK economy seem even more outrageous. Will the Minister reflect on that fact and perhaps have a word with his Scottish Office colleagues about it?

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman will know that I am responsible for railways in Scotland, not roads. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not wish me to deviate too far from the specific issue of the Humber bridge. However, I have no doubt that the people of the city of Hull will have noted the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that they should presumably be burdened with the extra cost of £40 million a year, all in the interests of ensuring equity with his constituents.

Mr. Jessel: Although my hon. Friend referred to putting some of the cost on to the users of the bridge—everyone accepts that they cannot cover all of the interest losses—and, although he said that part of the cost will have to be paid by the taxpayer, does he accept that there is a case for putting even a small part of the cost on to the city of Hull?

Mr. Watts: According to the legislation under which the bridge was promoted, any part of the debt that is not paid from tolls is a charge mainly on the taxpayers of Hull, although two other authorities have a smaller obligation. Clearly, it is not the Government's intention that the whole of that burden should so fall. Whatever the errors of the past, we do not consider it reasonable that such an extra burden—a burden presumably wished on the people of the city of Hull for several decades by their elected representatives—should fall on them.

Equally, I must have regard to what is equitable for national taxpayers. In assessing how the powers should be exercised, we shall therefore have to consider what level of debt cannot possibly be paid from tolls, even on the most optimistic assumptions. We shall then consider what cannot, in the medium term, be so funded and determine a suitable amount to be covered by the suspension of interest payments. There will then remain an amount of debt that we expect to be funded in other ways. That would be through a mixture of tolls and, possibly, burdens by precept; the bridge board has precepting powers. It will be for the bridge board to propose how that funding should be arranged. If it involves a large increase in tolls, as I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, a procedure allows for objections, appeal, public inquiry and, ultimately, a decision by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I referred earlier to the lack of action by the bridge board to maintain the value of its tolled income. In our continuing discussions with the board on the financial position and how we may implement the proposed legislation, I will bear in mind the fact that the failure of its Bill and the board's failure to make use of other procedures that are available to maintain toll increases in line with inflation since August 1989 resulted in the

[Mr. Watts]

forgoing of at least £10 million to £11 million of revenue. For an average council tax payer in Hull, that would be, roughly, an additional £37—or 7 per cent. each year.

Clause 1 confers powers on the Secretary of State for Transport to write off sums and suspend payment of interest on sums payable to him by the bridge board. It provides that that power to remit debt should be exercisable by an order, subject to the negative procedure in the House. Before my right hon. Friend can make such an order, Treasury consent is needed.

In seeking to provide a long-term solution to the problem of managing the Humber bridge debt, we shall seek to safeguard the national taxpayer from any unnecessary contributions. It should be clear to the House that the national taxpayer's existing contribution of £40 million a year is already substantial. It will also be our aim to ensure that the local taxpayers of Hull, and Humberside generally, are rid of the threat of an intolerable long-term burden of debt. The bridge board is able to issue precepts to meet deficits in its accounts, but the liability to precept is not spread evenly among the local authorities of Humberside.

Sir Anthony Durant: Who appoints the bridge board? Who are the appointees?

Mr. Watts: It is appointed by the authorities and the successor authorities to those that promoted the bridge in the first place. It is a local authority bridge that is promoted by local authorities and managed by a board on their behalf.

Two small areas—Barton-upon-Humber, which is now part of Glanford, and Haltemprice, which is now part of Beverley—are liable to the current value of an old fourpenny rate. There is, however, unlimited liability for the city of Kingston upon Hull. A precept levied by the board would therefore fall mainly on the council tax payers of Hull. As I have said, if they had to meet current deficits, they would face an additional council tax charge of something in excess of £200 per taxpayer per annum in perpetuity.

Mr. Michael Brown: My hon. Friend should be wearing a red outfit and a white beard today, because he is really playing the role of Father Christmas to the city of Hull, is he not? The city of Hull has the largest share of members of the board. It wanted the bridge more than anybody else. It drove the legislation through the House. There is only a small representation from the old Glanford borough council, Barton-upon-Humber urban district council and Haltemprice urban district council. The vast majority of the liability for the bridge lies in the legislation that Hull city council, more than anybody else, drove before the House. Why is my hon. Friend playing Santa Claus to the city of Hull?

Mr. Watts: I suppose it is because we are not very far from Christmas, and I would rather be in the role for which my hon. Friend suggests that I may be auditioning than the role of Scrooge. I am sure that the people of Hull will have recognised that they should be wary in future of the false Father Christmases who gave them this present, which has turned out to be such a heavy liability.

We have not ruled out precepting, and it could, for example, be a useful safety net to cope with short-term fluctuations and any special items of expenditure for a limited time. At the end of the day, it is the board's responsibility to decide whether any deficit is best met by precepting or by tolls.

Our objective would be to encourage the bridge board to set and maintain a high but realistic level of tolls; however, it must be borne in mind that, under the current legislation, the Secretary of State has a role in considering toll applications fairly following a public inquiry. As I have said, that role could be prejudiced if he required a specific level of tolls, or if I gave an idea of what I thought that level should be.

At this stage, I cannot be specific about the proportion of debt that would be written off, and the proportion on which interest payments would be suspended. We shall need to discuss that in detail with the Treasury and the bridge board. We do not propose to write off all the debt that is not currently serviceable. Given the long time scale over which debt may be repaid, it is possible that some could be reactivated in the future, so we shall seek to write off only debt that is clearly irrecoverable for ever. We envisage that a proportion of debt not written off but on which interest payments will be suspended will provide a cushion—a safeguard for the national taxpayer against the possibility of writing off now debt that could be serviced in future.

In reaching a decision on the amount of debt owed to the Secretary of State for Transport that can be serviced, we shall have regard to a range of financial projections that reflect different estimates of traffic growth, operating and maintenance costs, inflation and interest rates. In making use of the Bill's provisions, we shall monitor the board's performance very closely.

After the initial discussions, we shall conduct major reviews of the bridge's finances at least every five years. In those reviews, we shall consider whether the existing arrangements for suspending debt need modification—for example, by reactivation of debt that has been suspended, requiring the reactivation of interest payments. My Department and the Humber Bridge Board will have a great deal of work to do to make the best use of the powers conferred by the Bill. I do not think that there should be any doubt about the need for those powers: they give my Department and the bridge board the tools that they need to sort the matter out.

I very much regret that the Bill is needed; but Conservative Administrations have always had to follow Labour Governments with a bucket and shovel.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Minister now answer the question that he refused to answer earlier? Will he confirm that no contracts had been let and no tenders accepted up to June 1970; that those that were accepted were accepted with the full knowledge and consent of the then Conservative Minister of Transport; and that they could not have gone ahead if a Conservative Government had not provided the money? Far from a Conservative Government having to tidy up a Labour mess—if there was a mess, an idea that I do not accept—the arrangement was countenanced and approved by a Conservative Prime Minister and Minister of Transport, and the ordure had the seal of approval.

Mr. Watts: I understand from what the hon. Gentleman has just said that the promise given on 18 January 1966 was an empty promise which the Labour Government of the day had no intention of fulfilling, and certainly did not fulfil until they were reaching the end of their term in office at the time of the 1970 general election.

The need for the Bill is a testament to the failure of the Humber bridge to meet the financial objectives originally set for it. It is a monument to false expectations of traffic growth that would finance the bridge. It may have been a bridge too far, but it was built, and we must now deal—however reluctantly—with the consequences. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.58 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I do not know whether the Minister shares my sense of intruding on a family reunion, or even an old family feud. I hesitate to talk of the family feud involving the Beverley Hillbillies in the presence of the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran). Who would play the parts of Ma and Pa? I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) would fit the roles. We certainly have a sense of having been here before, although I cannot trace many debates on this subject on the Floor of the House. It seems that we will be here again, because there will be a negative order before the House. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will relish the opportunity to discuss that order, if and when it is finally put before the House.

Before we get into the Bill's nitty-gritty, it is worth putting on record the achievement of building the bridge. Mr. Roger Evans, the bridgemaster and engineer, always quotes it as

"imposing proof of British engineering skill."

It is genuinely a world wonder, with two 533-ft towers, which are set almost two inches out of parallel to allow for the earth's curvature. It is the longest single-span suspension bridge in the world, although that record may soon be challenged by bridges being built elsewhere. I understand that 50 million vehicles have used the bridge since it was built. There are therefore some clear concrete, one might say, things to say about the bridge, which are worth saying to put some perspective on the debate.

The latest review that I have read of the financial position of such crossings was undertaken by the Select Committee on Transport in 1983-84. It said that only three of the 11 major estuarial crossings—the Forth, Tamar and Tay crossings—were in a position to meet their interest payments, capital amortisation and other charges. The other eight crossings failed to generate sufficient income to meet interest charges and were borrowing to meet them, thus leading to a continuing rise in outstanding debt, which amounted to £516 million.

Let us not forget that that was 10 years ago. The Committee added that the Humber bridge accounted for 40 per cent. of the total debt. This is not, therefore, a unique case, although it may be an extreme one, so I concur with the Minister's view that special reasons exist for viewing the Humber bridge in the way we do.

It is worth briefly going over the history; I do so not to provoke any challenge from colleagues who have been more intimately involved in the matter over the years. As a Labour Member of Parliament, I take my full share of the blame for the bridge's initial construction being granted in 1959. I was six years old at the time, and gladly admit to my full part in that decision, with the passing of the Humber Bridge Act 1959 and the creation of the Humber Bridge Board in 1959.

Construction, however, was not begun until 1973, during the Government of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). At that point, the bridge and approach roads cost £98 million to build, but by the time the bridge opened, under another Conservative Government in 1981, the debt had already risen to £150 million as a result of interest charges during construction. I am sure that we are all aware of the high interest and inflation rates of the early 1970s, when Tony Barber was Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Construction costs were originally estimated at £29 million. The Humber Bridge Board attributes most of that cost increase not only to high inflation rates during construction, but to the fact that the bridge took nine years to build, instead of the proposed four or five. There were, I understand, technical difficulties, labour relations problems and unusually poor weather.

The bridge's construction was funded, as the Minister has said, by way of loans from the Department of Transport and the Public Works Loans Board, which were to be repaid out of toll income, with the Humber Bridge Board being given powers under section 74 of the Humber Bridge Act to make up any deficit via rate precepts. As I have pointed out with the Select Committee on Transport's review of river crossings, it is unusual, although not unique, for a bridge to be able to pay out such money through toll revenues.

Since the bridge's opening, income from tolls and charges has been more than sufficient to cover the operating and maintenance costs, but has not created a surplus large enough to cover the interest charges. The Secretary of State for Transport and the board entered into an agreement, again referred to by the Minister, on 29 March 1972 to capitalise the interest on borrowed money for 13 years from the opening of the bridge until 1994. That has since been extended to 1999.

At the same time as agreeing that, the then Minister for Roads and Traffic, Mr. Chope, reconfirmed that the Government intended to lift the prospect of a burden of debt falling on local Humberside taxpayers by promoting a Bill to write off or suspend debt, and instituting a five-yearly review period.

The precise amount of debt that will be written off arising from an agreement between the Government and the Humber Bridge Board will be the subject of negotiation—that much we have been told today. The Bill contains no specific amount, and we will need to revisit that when and if a negative instrument is brought before the House.

Mr. Michael Brown: As the hon. Gentleman is speaking in the name of Her Majesty's Opposition, will he say what sort of figure, between zero and £435 million, he thinks the Government should write off?

Mr. Allen: I would be happy to allow the Minister to make that decision while he remains on the Government Front Bench, and perhaps to come to a similar or dissimilar decision when we change places.

The Department of Transport has remitted part of the interest falling due since 1991-92 under the Appropriation Acts to stabilise the debt. The grant to the board was £7.6 million in 1991-92, and provision was made for £43.5 million to be repaid in 1992-93. That has stabilised the debt at around £435 million.

[Mr. Allen]

A number of further questions arise from the way in which the Bill has been introduced, which I hope the Minister will note and perhaps, if he speaks again in the debate, be in a position to answer.

First, is the Bill the forerunner of other Bills on other estuarial crossings? The Minister may feel that a number of other crossings merit further consideration, either by Bill or by announcements on further works or debts.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman please tell us what estuarial crossings, anywhere in Britain, arose from a political bribe, for which the electorate must now pick up a bill for £435 million?

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman should not make such disparaging remarks about the Macmillan Government in 1959 and the Heath Government of 1971, who initially approved the bridge's construction and then approved the moneys to create the bridge. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman seeks to attack distinguished former Conservative Prime Ministers in that way. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. These conversations across the Chamber are interesting, but it would be more useful to have them outside. Let us stick to the debate on the Bill.

Mr. Allen: The second question that I should like to ask the Minister involves the level of tolls. He was a little unkind about the Humber Bridge Board and its attempts to review the tolls level. He criticised it for being slow in making proposals. Will he therefore be a little more forthcoming about whether he would be prepared to support whatever emerged from a public inquiry launched by the Humber Bridge Board, which would review the bridge toll levels being and to be paid?

Mr. Watts: I think that I made it clear that I expect the Humber Bridge Board to make proposals for updating tolls, but, as I also explained, because the decision that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport would have to make following any inquiry is a quasi-judicial one, it is not possible for me, before I have seen the board's proposals, and considered any objections to its proposals, or the public inquiry's recommendations, to give an indication in advance of what level I would think reasonable, or that I would wish my right hon. Friend to consider reasonable.

Mr. Allen: I fully accept the quasi-judicial nature of the decisions that the Minister or the Secretary of State may need to take. Perhaps he would extend that quasi-judicial caution to attacks on the Humber Bridge Board over its efforts to present proposals on tolling. If he does that, perhaps he will be seen to be even-handed in carrying out his quasi-judicial function.

My third question relates to the deregulation of the tolled river crossings. I understand that, in the past year, the Department of Transport issued a consultation document on this matter, and that it has suggested three options. The first is the continuation of the current regulation; the second is partial deregulation, with tolls rising annually to a prescribed limit, under which key groups of users would have a right to object; and the third is full deregulation, with undertakings setting their own charges. How has that consultation gone, and how will it affect the bridge and the other river crossings in the United Kingdom?

I am sure that my suspicions about privatisation will be quickly allayed by the Minister. Is there any connection whatever between the Bill examining the debts— *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members seek to cast doubt on whether privatisation could follow. As a former member of the Public Accounts Committee and a mere reader of newspapers, I know that cancellation or elimination of debt was followed by the privatisation of a number of industries. That happened as surely as night follows day.

It is not beyond the wit of the Government to devise ways to pour money into the open pockets of those in the private sector, and they could do that from the most unlikely starting point, which may be the Bill. Perhaps the Minister will reassure us that there is no connection, however tenuous or long term, between the Bill and privatisation.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Allen: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and he rather abused the privilege.

My final question is about roads. The Minister and his colleagues were characterised by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) as like Santa Claus. Yesterday, local authorities did not regard the Minister as Santa Claus, because he and his colleagues cut by 17 per cent. the grant to local authorities for transport needs. That cut is in addition to the cut in the Budget settlement for roads. Has the Minister any proposals to enhance the north and south road links to the bridge?

The issue of the Humber bridge comes before us every so often, and I have a feeling that this will not be the last time that we shall discuss its importance. We fully support the Bill, and wish it speedy progress.

5.13 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So far, the debate has been much too low key. There is a serious scandal, in that a bribe by the Labour party for the Hull, North by-election in January 1966 is crystallised in the Bill, so that taxpayers will permanently have to pay for it. That matter should not be allowed to pass without comment. Of course, many waters have flowed since January 1966.

Mr. McNamara: Particularly under the bridge.

Mr. Jessel: Yes—and probably sleaze as well. As a matter of courtesy, I notified the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) that I intended to speak in the debate and I am glad to see him here recovered from his flu. I ought to declare a sort of interest, because I was the defeated Conservative candidate in the Hull, North by-election on 25 January 1966. I feel no rancour about that because, had I got in, it is highly likely that I would have been out again by 1974, if not sooner.

My defeat paved the way for me to stand in Twickenham in 1970, and it has been a tremendous honour and privilege to represent that constituency ever since. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North did me a good turn, because my defeat in that by-election was one of the best things that ever happened to me.

As I have said, this matter cannot pass without comment. I should have liked the Minister to comment with even more force and I shall add some comments of my own. We are supposed to be the guardians of taxpayers' money, but, as a result of that by-election bribe, taxpayers will have to pay several hundred million pounds.

It is not clear exactly how much is to be written off, but let us be in no doubt about what "writing off" means. It does not mean that the loss just disappears: it means that we have given up hope of recovering the money. But the money has gone, and £456 million has so far gone down the drain for this no doubt highly architecturally impressive, but greatly under-used bridge.

That means that £456 million less is available for our health services, education, social security, national defences or other useful purposes. It follows that people who might want to be treated sooner by the national health service, for example, have a direct interest in the fact that several hundred million pounds have been written off as a result of the bribe in that by-election.

The bribe occurred because, in the general election of October 1964, Hull, North, which was a marginal seat, was gained by the Labour party; unfortunately, the newly elected Member, Mr. Solomons, died about 13 months later, in November 1965; the by-election was fixed for two months later, but his death reduced Harold Wilson's majority from three to two; if the by-election had gone the other way, it would have been reduced to one.

At the time, there was enormous interest in the by-election. There were very big public meetings. I remember one that was addressed by the late Lord Home, at which 1,200 people were present in Hull city hall. On 18 January, Mrs. Barbara Castle, the then Transport Minister, pledged to construct the Humber bridge, and that led to the debt which is the subject of the Bill. On page 95 of the Castle memoirs, she wrote:

> "Off to Hull to speak in the by-election. Photographers at the station. Standing room only at meetings. I told them categorically they would have their bridge. Speech went down well."

She wrote that in her diary. The day before yesterday, I had it on the authority of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed), who cannot be present, that he was at Mrs. Castle's meeting on 18 January 1966, that she said, "You will get your bridge," and that there were loud cheers. The Minister has already quoted the words of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer at that time, that great man Iain Macleod, who referred to the plan for the Humber bridge as a pre-election bribe. He went on:

> "'First one of the junior Transport Ministers said that one was not needed. Then came the by-election. The same junior Minister promptly became much more enthusiastic about a new bridge.
>
> 'But the by-election continued to turn . . . and something more was needed. So Mrs. Castle says in Hull that . . . there will be a new bridge.'"

Mr. Macleod was quoted as saying that in *The Times* on 22 January 1966.

Anyone could predict—and many people did at the time—that the bridge would never pay. If the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) drove from Nottingham to Hull, regardless of whether he used the M1 or the A614, he would go along the motorway that skirts the southern side of Doncaster. The shortest way from there to Hull—well, the quickest way—is by using the M62 and not to go south of the Humber and then across the Humber bridge. With a toll, it will be more expensive as well as slower. From looking at the map, one sees that there are no large cities to the south of Hull.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): As someone who regularly drives from Scunthorpe, which is not very far from the Humber bridge, to London, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it is 177 miles exactly from Scunthorpe to Westminster via the A1. It is 200 miles via the M62 and the M1. The route is shorter and saves money to go south to London, crossing the bridge at Hull, contrary to what he is saying.

Mr. Jessel: But one would have to pay to go across the bridge. Across Lincolnshire, one would travel a long way along A-class roads, which are not of dual-carriageway standard on the whole. Therefore, although it is a squeak shorter, it is slower. That is why the Humber bridge will never pay. The losses on it are absolutely enormous.

I accept that one cannot put the whole of the cost of the bridge on the people of Hull.

Mr. Michael Brown: Why not?

Mr. Jessel: Because it has escalated with accumulated interest to between £400 million and £500 million, and would cost every man, woman and child in the city of Hull about £2,000. The interest on it is not far short of £200 a year a head. It would therefore be impossible to put all that on the ordinary householders in Hull without it having a large impact on their welfare. The cost is so vast that it is simply too much now for them to pay.

I do not see why, however, beyond what comes in in tolls, the whole of the rest of the cost should be shouldered by the national taxpayers, who are thereby being made to pay for the Labour party's by-election bribe. A token amount ought to be borne by the council tax of Hull city council—perhaps only 1, 2 or 3 per cent. of it—just so that people are reminded of the expense that was incurred in their name. Perhaps the Bill could be amended so that part of the cost was attributable by law to be paid by the Labour party via Transport house. It would thereby have to pay part of the cost of the bribe with which it sought to distort the decision of the electors of Hull.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend makes an intriguing suggestion, but I fear that it would probably hybridise the Bill.

Mr. Jessel: Where there's a will, there's a way. It could be done if the House really wanted it to be done. Indeed, I hope to have some support from my hon. Friends in wanting it to happen.

We cannot go on letting Opposition Members bribe their way through elections when the cost of their bribe comes to 12 times the figure of £29 million in the 1960s, as stated by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North. Labour Members should be made to pay a part of the cost of the bridge, and we should remind them of it day in, day out, week in, week out and month in, month out, for the rest of next year, so that the whole country can see what they are up to.

5.23 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I am very pleased that the Government are introducing this important Bill. I support the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). Whatever chaff goes from one side of the House to the other, we should realise that we are talking about one of the most stupendous examples of civil engineering in Europe, which is of enormous credit to British builders, designers and workmen. It was built on the most difficult terrain over a very wide estuary.

The building of the bridge was delayed because of problems on the south bank of the river—in a Tory constituency, but I do not hold that against the hon. Member responsible—when the south towers were being built. In addition, it is one of two very important bridges in the area. There are two great examples of civil engineering; the other is the bridge over the River Ouse. It was built on a bog, it has no bottom, it carries the M62 and has no toll at all.

The point that we should be addressing is what is the difference in principle between part of our transport infrastructure—the M62 bridge, a great engineering feat in itself—which carries no toll, and the Humber bridge? That is of the utmost importance.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: On that point—

Mr. McNamara: I shall not give way. I will let the young man chat later.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) said that the bridge was the crystallisation of a bribe. I must make a confession to the House. I did not know on the night that Barbara Castle was going to make that statement. The advice that I gave throughout the campaign had been, "Don't. You don't need to."

In many ways the campaign for the bridge at that time was media-led by the *Hull Daily Mail*. The demand for the bridge emanated from that newspaper, which had long campaigned for it. It saw a Government whom it felt might be vulnerable on that point, and led a very strong and powerful campaign for the bridge. I salute those at the paper for their effort, especially Charles Levitt, who was political correspondent at the time. Mr. Levitt was in fact—and still is, I understand—a Liberal.

I agree with the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) that it is outrageous that private money had to fund the building of the bridge to Skye. The tolls that are to be levied make it even worse. There should not be any tolls.

The campaign for the Humber bridge was media-led, as I have said. Indeed, I have been since told by those who conducted in-depth polls at the time among groups of people who discussed such things, that the Humber bridge scarcely appeared in the list of priorities of people in the Kingston upon Hull, North constituency who were seeking to re-elect a Labour Member of Parliament.

I turn to the history of the bridge and the myths surrounding it, especially those that have been put forward by the hon. Member for Twickenham. He says that he is grateful that I beat him and thereby enabled him to get his seat in Twickenham. I do not think that the people of Twickenham are particularly happy about it, since over the years his majority has gone down—he might well be out next time—whereas, on the contrary, mine has gone up and up. The hon. Gentleman said that the bridge crystallised the bribe, but let us consider the situation.

In 1959, a private Member's Bill was introduced with the approval of the then Conservative Government to establish the bridge board. In 1965, the House debated the Humber bridge and some of us listened from the Gallery. The Minister of Transport—the late Stephen Swingler, a very fine man—poured cold water on the idea and wished that my former colleague the late Mr. James Johnson had not introduced it.

We then had a campaign in Hull, which Lady Castle attended. Her words at the meeting in Lambert Street school were:

> "When the planning is completed, then you will have your bridge."

I did not attend that meeting because I was at a meeting at Endyke school. In those days, great election meetings were held.

Ian Macleod, to whom the hon. Member for Twickenham referred, was Chancellor of the Exchequer for part of the time when the Conservative Government gave the go-ahead, allowed the contracts and tenders to go out and voted the money, and the noble Lord Peyton was Minister of Transport. They could have stopped the building of the bridge. I understand that the Tories' complaint is that the Conservative Government fulfilled a Labour election promise. I wish that the Tories would keep some of their own promises, too, such as lowering taxation. The issue is that the building of the bridge was agreed then.

Mr. Michael Brown: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is trying to say. I do not dispute the fact that the bridge was given the "go-ahead" in 1971 following Lady Castle's commitment in 1966, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that the then Conservative Government made it clear that they were not giving but lending money? I have the copy of *Hansard* before me that shows that.

Mr. McNamara: Yes, but the building of the bridge could not have gone ahead had the money not been lent. The hon. Gentleman has said far more than the Minister of State was prepared to admit. He dodged the question every time that I asked it, and it is important that the House knows the answer.

The original cost was to be £19 million. By 1973, after two years of Barber and hyperinflation, it had risen to £35 million. It was escalating all the time that the Tories were in power because of their inability to control interest rates and inflation. Those are the reasons for the debt and people should be prepared to accept that. I do not blame the Tories for it completely. I blame them only for winning the 1970 election; otherwise sound finance under the then Mr. Jenkins would have continued. The only thing to his credit is that he was a successful Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Last week, the hon. Member for Twickenham said:

> "As to next Wednesday's debate on the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, I was the defeated Conservative candidate in the Hull, North by-election in January 1966, nearly 30 years ago."

He went on to ask:

> "Will there be time in Wednesday's debate for us to discuss whether the amount—nearly £500 million—should be charged to the Labour party and not to the unfortunate taxpayer, as a consequence of Labour's disgraceful electoral bribe?"—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1105.]

Everything that the hon. Gentleman said in the House last Thursday and today was incorrect, apart from the fact that he was a defeated Conservative candidate in 1966.

My constituents and the area have benefited from the Humber bridge.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: So have you.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman says that I have benefited. All the polls at that time showed that my constituents regarded the Humber bridge as a less important issue in the by-election than the media made it out to be. I do not hesitate in saying that I welcome the bridge and every hon. Member should be proud of it. It has the additional merit of joining Yorkshire with Lincolnshire and thus bringing the opportunity of civilisation to Lincolnshire. We should be happy about that, too.

But for the almighty debt, the bridge has an operating surplus. It can pay its maintenance costs of £1.7 million to £2 million a year and make a profit, but the debt is dragging it down. The debt has arisen because of what has happened over time. I do not seek to blame the debt entirely on the Conservatives; I simply ask them not to shirk their part of the responsibility for what has happened. We can then all join in welcoming the Bill.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This afternoon, I learned that the Ministry of Defence has decided to award a contract for the design and building of up to three Trafalgar-class submarines to a team led by GEC-Marconi in preference to a bid by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. in my constituency. The total value of the contract exceeds £2.5 billion.

Involvement in the contract is essential for the future of VSEL and the jobs of thousands of my constituents. The Government's decision today will, at the very least, create unwelcome uncertainty about the future of VSEL, where nearly 10,000 jobs have already been lost—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for the Chair?

Mr. Hutton: The fact that no statement has been made in the House on that major contract is an insult to my constituents and denies me an opportunity to raise my concerns about the contract in the House. Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, received a request from a Minister of the Crown to make a statement to the House about that major contract decision?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not aware of an intention to make such a statement. This is not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman is aware that there are other avenues that he can take to air his concerns.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have now ruled on that point of order. The hon. Gentleman cannot raise a point of order further to a point of order on which I have ruled. Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Spellar: It is a different aspect of that point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, I shall listen to it.

Mr. Spellar: Is it not a great discourtesy to the House and individual Members that, at this late stage, just before the Christmas recess, that announcement has been sneaked out and therefore—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking advantage. I have already ruled on that matter and told the hon. Gentleman so. He assured me that his was a different point of order. It was not. I call Mr. Michael Brown.

5.37 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): We have had an interesting and entertaining afternoon, being reminded what used to go on in politics in the 1960s, when Labour was in power and trying to cling on to power. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) were protagonists in the events of January and February 1966, when I was 14 years old. I recall the night of the sad defeat of my hon. Friend and the election of the hon. Gentleman. I remember staying up and listening to the wireless—we did not have a television in my home in those days—because I was interested in politics and knew that, if Mr. Wilson succeeded in holding that seat, there would probably be a general election and a Labour win. I was anxious that that should not happen. I remember the events from the perspective of a boy still at school. Little did I realise that, 15 years later in 1981, I would welcome Her Majesty the Queen to my constituency when she was the first person to drive over the Humber bridge.

I do not dissent from what the hon. Members for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and for Kingston upon Hull, North said: the bridge is a magnificent sight. I can see it from where I live some eight miles away in Ulceby. It is wonderful. It looks good. And so it jolly well should when we consider how much it has cost for one reason or another.

Let us not get away from the fact that the bridge was not proposed by the Labour Government until a by-election occurred. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham told the House that the first intimation of a Government go-ahead came at the point of a critical by-election. The Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill should indeed be sent as an election expenses bill to the Labour

[Mr. Michael Brown]

party, if not to the agent for the Kingston upon Hull, North constituency Labour party. I am prepared to put the burden on Walworth road, rather than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McNamara: If the hon. Gentleman is going to send the bill to my agent, we are not certain where it should go, but I am sure that he would give him the benefit of the doubt.

Mr. Brown: In that case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham proposed, there should be a clause suggesting that part of the bill should go to Walworth road. I accept that we would then have a hybrid Bill that would suffer all the difficulties that the Humber Bridge Bill—a private Bill—suffered the year before last.

My hon. Friend the Minister has come here as Santa Claus on behalf of the British taxpayer. My constituents and I will benefit from this wonderful deliverance, which other hon. Members on both sides of the House are going to give us by supporting the Bill. Why should I object to the possibility of up to £435 million of taxpayers' money being spent, which may rule out a bypass in Twickenham, north Kent or anywhere else? I have an interest to declare—that of my constituents. I cannot believe their luck; they are to have the privilege of the Bill.

Mr. Allen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he is very generous. Although, like myself, he was probably still a small child in short trousers at the time, can he tell us why the Conservative Government gave a fair wind to the Humber Bridge Act 1959 and to the creation of the board?

Mr. Brown: Yes, I can easily do so. When I was still having to be convinced of the merits of the Bill, I got a copy of the Humber Bridge Act 1959 and I have here all the yellowing pages of the proceedings. It was a private Bill and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, Governments usually do not take sides on private Bills. There was no debate in the House of Commons on any of the Readings, which all occurred after Prayers and before the start of public business.

Presumably, the Government had no problem with the 1959 Act because not a penny piece of taxpayers' money was involved in that Act, which is now on the statute book. I presume that the Macmillan Government took the view that, because section 77 of the Act states that, in the event of any unpaid debt being outstanding to the Secretary of State for Transport, the corporation of the city of Hull and the urban district councils of Beverley and Barton-upon-Humber would pay back every penny, there would be no taxpayers' involvement and, for that reason, they allowed the legislation to go through.

I expect that the hon. Gentleman will want to turn to the Humber Bridge Act 1971, when the Tories were in power again, and ask the same question. Why did they allow the 1971 Act to go through without objecting to it? For the same reason. Because that Act of Parliament also made it absolutely clear that, despite all the powers sought by the Humber Bridge Board, there would not be one penny piece of taxpayers' money for the venture. All the taxpayers' money that was to be lent to the Humber Bridge Board would be repaid to the Secretary of State. That is why neither Conservative Government of 1959 or of 1971 had any objections to those Acts.

It has been patently obvious to those of us who have had anything to do with politics and with the debate surrounding the Humber bridge in the past 10 years and, indeed, since the day it opened—to all of us locally, whether Labour or Conservative Members of Parliament, whether from North Lincolnshire or the East Riding of Yorkshire, or from what will be called Humberside for just three more months until next April—that the traffic that was forecast in the 1960s and 1970s and that justified the repayment of the debt, would not materialise.

If the Minister wants to take full advantage of the legislation that is available to him on the statute book, a mechanism is available. My hon. Friend did not need to come here today. In future, when bodies come to this House—be they local authorities or private organisations—with private legislation and make it clear that there are no financial implications for the taxpayer, we have to be much more careful about the viability of the projects involved.

In 1959 and 1971, the House was clearly somewhat tardy in considering those pieces of private legislation. In the past 10 years, it has been patently obvious to all concerned that none of those provisions could be achieved. If my hon. Friend the Minister wanted to do nothing, he could empower the local authorities, through the Humber Bridge Board, to take the necessary action under those Acts of Parliament, which would bankrupt the city of Hull.

No Labour Member has any cause to be critical of my hon. Friend the Minister. The only people who might be critical are Conservative colleagues who might yesterday have been reflecting with sadness on the announcements relating to capital programmes throughout the country made by the Department of Transport. At the end of the day, my hon. Friend has to take this money out of his Department's budget—with Treasury approval. He is to be congratulated by everyone on Labour Benches. In so far as there is any criticism, it is likely to come from the Conservative Benches.

Locally, we recognise that the bridge is wonderful, but the blunt truth is that there are not the traffic figures to justify it. What concerns me about the possibility of an increase in the tolls is that some of my constituents have to use the bridge, whether they like it or not. If one has a heart attack or a brain tumour in my constituency, one has to go to Hull hospital and one has to use the bridge. We do not have the option of going to Grimsby, Scunthorpe or Lincoln hospitals. If one suffers from certain diseases, the health authority requires one to cross that bridge.

I am concerned that there is no price on the face of the Bill to show the extent to which the Department will wipe off the irrecoverable amounts, because I want to know what the balance will be between toll increases and the amount of debt that the Minister says is irrecoverable. For those of my constituents who have no choice but to use the bridge, the level of the toll is very important. I accept that the Humber Bridge Board has been tardy since 1989, in not seeking to be responsible for making regular increases in line with inflation. Unfortunately, to the ordinary citizen in my constituency faced with paying £1.60, an increase in the toll to £2 or £2.50 will seem a massive hike.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister is not trying to change the system whereby my constituents and I can go to a public inquiry to present our case in the event of the board increasingly the toll unreasonably. In 1989, I attended the public inquiry and gave evidence on behalf of my constituents.

I acknowledge that the bridge is a convenience for many people, including my constituents who choose to work in Hull rather than in Grimsby, Lincoln or Scunthorpe. They choose to take advantage of the bridge and they gain the benefits of travelling shorter distances and saving time. That is an economic choice that they must make. Those of my constituents who, while the county of Humberside remains, have to go to county hall to transact business, have no option but to use the bridge.

I hope that many of my constituents will not have to use the bridge so often after 1 April, when the local authority boundaries will be changed, Humberside will be expunged as a local government authority and we shall have, instead, North Lincolnshire and North-East Lincolnshire. But at present, some people have no option but to use the bridge and they look to their Member of Parliament to be able to attend the public inquiries to put their case. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister is not seeking to alter that system—at least for now—although, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, North said, consultation proposals are being discussed about the future of toll crossings.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North suggested that if all the debt was wiped off, privatisation would be terrible. If I were the shadow Chancellor and somebody said to me, "Is there no debt left on the bridge because of that wonderful Minister whom the Tories had? I understand that you are against privatisation, but I should like to buy and operate that bridge," I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, as shadow Chancellor, I would jump at the offer like a shot. There will be no such offer because I do not accept—as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said earlier—that, if the debt is wiped off, the traffic will justify the operation of the bridge. Some sort of support system will always be needed, if not from the general taxpayer, certainly from the local authorities.

The local authorities have a part to play, and the Humber Bridge Board will have to be much more imaginative than it has been. I regret that the Humber Bridge Board has not increased toll traffic using the bridge by introducing a more imaginative discounted ticket scheme. Many of my constituents would be prepared to use the bridge more often if there were discounts on some occasions.

There are leisure opportunities, including the leisure centre, on the north bank. My constituents pay council tax to support the leisure centre, the Hull ice arena—they are shareholders in it—but they do not use it because they have to pay a toll to travel over the bridge. If the board were prepared to introduce a system of discounted tickets at weekends to encourage greater use of the bridge, it could generate more income. The board is trapped in a local authority style and has not shown imagination in trying to make more of the circumstances.

The bridge exists; in retrospect, if the Governments of either 1966 or 1971 had known what the future would bring in terms of the national motorway network, neither of them would have gone ahead with such a proposal. If there were no Humber bridge today, I cannot believe that either the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the shadow Chancellor would go ahead with such a proposal. But the bridge exists and, short of knocking it down, we can do nothing but make something of it.

We obviously have to do something about the problem of increasing debt. I am aware that my constituents benefit to a considerable extent from the revenues of the rest of the taxpayers. The bridge is surrounded by far too much politics and does not have enough to do with the local economy. I accept that there has been some economic investment around the area, both north and south, which might have been partly due to the good communications in the area generally. But I do not believe that when expanding industries come to my constituency, as dozens of them do, they want to locate their factories there because of the Humber bridge. They locate their factories in my constituency because of the national motorway network, the airport, the skilled labour, the good industrial relations and for a host of other reasons. The bridge is certainly part of the local infrastructure and will be there for ever; we cannot let it fall into disrepair.

The Humber Bridge Board must recognise that it has failed in its attempts to increase the tolls in a sensible way, in line with inflation. If we are not careful, we shall face a gigantic increase in tolls that will cost some of my constituents far too much. I press my hon. Friend the Minister—if not today, when the order comes before the House—to say precisely how much of the £435 million will be irrecoverable. I appreciate that he cannot tell me today.

I also want to press my hon. Friend the Minister and the board on the precise toll figure that we can expect. We could fall into a terrible trap: if the toll is increased too much, many of my constituents who have the opportunity not to use the bridge will decide not to work in Hull as it is not worth their while because of the costs of travelling over the bridge. They may decide that it is better for them to take a job with lower wages in Lincoln, Scunthorpe or Grimsby, because after they have paid their return tolls, they may have spent £40 or £50 a week. We could find ourselves in a spiral of decline and the debt could begin to increase again.

The Government and the Humber Bridge Board must be careful: if they decide to let the local user pay as much as possible and to milk the local user with no option but to use the bridge, they may find that local users—other than those poor people who have no choice but to use Hull hospital—will make alternative arrangements. The Government and the board must be wary of a dramatic leap in the toll rate.

We are now just four or five days from Christmas and my hon. Friend the Minister has come here as Santa Claus. If I did not represent Brigg and Cleethorpes as a Conservative Member, but represented another constituency elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and if I had not been able to obtain a bypass for my constituents, I would probably vote against the Bill. However, I shall certainly support the Bill today.

5.57 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Much of today's Second Reading debate has involved the history of the Humber bridge. As we are near Christmas, I shall let the House into a little secret: at the back end of 1981, when I was selected to represent Kingston upon Hull, West, I was given some advice before I attended the selection meeting. I was told to mention the Humber bridge because the people of the area were proud of it. I do not think that that tip swung

[Mr. Stuart Randall]

the contest my way—I won it with a great landslide—but I record the incident as it reveals people's attitude towards the Humber bridge then.

I shall not stray too far back into the history except to say that, before the 1966 by-election in Kingston upon Hull, North, there had been much discussion for many years about modernising the Humber crossing. It would be outrageous for the House even to suggest that we—a major industrial country—should have retained a ferry crossing at one of our most important estuaries.

After the boundary changes, my new constituency border will probably be within a mile of the Humber bridge. The area that I represent—I say this as a worried person—has a lot of economic and social deprivation, and we need to modernise. We need a mechanism to improve the development of the area and to gain economically and socially.

The bridge itself is a fine piece of work. I have always regarded the Minister as a competent person, but I will not follow the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) in describing him as Father Christmas. We do not know whether he will be Father Christmas, because we do not know the figures. Until we know, we shall not be able to respond to the very uncharacteristic comments by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes and by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) that the cost should be dumped on to the people of Hull. That kind of comment is not very becoming just before Christmas.

Funding is at the heart of the matter. The project escalated in price because it was advanced, there were problems with subsidence on the south side of the river, and there were changes in the specification. However, the funding of the project was based on loans, at a time of high inflation and when interest rates were very high. The system of funding for that magnificent project was not viable. There was no possibility, in the economic circumstances that prevailed at that time, that the project could be viable.

I welcome the Bill in principle, because I believe that it will offload much of the debt that is interest-rate linked and will enable the books to be balanced. That is just plain common sense. The Bill will be good for Hull, as long as there is no massive offloading of the financial problems on to the people of Kingston upon Hull, West, which will include Hessle under the boundary changes.

The escalation in cost was horrific. My figures show that in 1970, the cost was £19 million; that rose to £35 million; to £67 million; to £98 million; and finally to £151 million. Those figures are horrific, but we had huge inflation rates at the time—11 per cent. for a long time. We were also capitalising the debt, which resulted in the loan rising as it has.

Traffic levels have been acceptable. Some people say that the bridge is not used, and hon. Members have said that today. That is absurd. The bridge is used extensively. The problem of financial viability is not related directly to the traffic. The mismatch between the debt arising from the interest rates and the income from the tolls is so great that it is impossible to solve the problem from the tolls. The Minister's speech alluded to that.

The main problem has been the Government's inaction. It is clear that the funding arrangements were not viable, and I regret that we have not taken action sooner. There has been a regrettable amount of procrastination. I also regret that the Humber Bridge Board was not aware that the Bill was going to be published. The board had no forewarning of the Bill, and in May it decided to increase the tolls by 32.5 per cent. to try to balance the books.

I wish to ask the Minister about privatisation. There is rumour whizzing around that the Bill is part of a devious scheme to prepare the ground, and to get rid of the debt so that the project can be become viable and ready for privatisation. I would also like to know more about the deregulation. At the moment, the bridge board has powers, but are there plans to change the system of regulation to total deregulation? Specifically, is there a plan to allow the tolls to be changed at any time rather than annually? An answer to that would be helpful.

I have focused on viability, and the failure to get to grips with the financial arrangements. The debt is now running at the stupid and absurd figure of £439 million. That is the latest figure I have. It is unacceptable to allow that to continue. As I said earlier, the interest charges on the long-term money have gone up by £50 million per annum. The toll income is about £10 million, of which about £1.75 million is used in operational costs. We are a long way from achieving balance in the books, so I welcome in principle the idea that at last we shall wipe out some of the debt.

We must make the Humber bridge operate viably, because that is important for economic regeneration. We do not want high tolls, because they stifle use, and that is wrong. Many man hours and years have been spent tackling the problem of debt, and nobody likes that. I hope that, when my constituents ask me whether the Minister will be a Father Christmas, I can say that I think he will. However, we need to see the impact on the council tax payers in Hull. I hope that the Bill will be good news.

6.8 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Earlier this afternoon, at the request of the Labour Opposition, we spent 42 minutes on allegations of sleaze against a public official—the director general of Oflot, Peter Davis. He was accused because he had tried to save the taxpayer the cost of his travelling expenses on official business. There was a busy House then, but look at the House now. This debate is about perhaps the biggest political sleaze scandal of all time.

We are being asked to write off £435 million because of a political and electoral bribe by the Labour party some 30 years ago. Let us be clear what that was about. In the other place, when he was replying for the Labour Government, Lord Lindgren said about the Humber bridge:

"at the present time our limited resources do not allow us to give construction of such a bridge the highest priority."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 November 1965; Vol. 270, c. 1136.]

Yet two months later, the then Minister, Mrs. Barbara Castle, made it clear in her diaries, which my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) so aptly quoted, that the Labour Government intended to offer a clear electoral bribe. She wrote in her diary:

> "Off to Hull to speak in the by-election; photographers at station, standing room only at meetings. I told them categorically that, as soon as the development plan was decided for Humberside, they would have their bridge. Speeches went down well."

I bet they did.

I have been absolutely amazed, and perhaps have felt a tinge of admiration, at the brass face of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who has been the beneficiary of what is perhaps the biggest political bribe in history. The cost of it is far more than his own weight in gold. The taxpayers have paid for that gold. The hon. Gentleman has stood up today, however, and said it was quite wrong to set tolls on the bridge in the first place. We are passing on to the taxpayer a debt of £435 million, but he now wants to pass on even more debt. He is about to get up and tell us how much the debt would be if no tolls had been set.

Mr. McNamara: I just want to ask the hon. Gentleman what proportion of the development costs of Concorde were written off in order to make it a suitable object for Lord King and privatisation. What about the debts of British Steel, British Rail and all the other debts that have been wiped out to enable the hon. Gentleman and his friends in the City to line their pockets from privatisations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I want to stop this once and for all. It serves no useful purpose in a debate to exchange insulting remarks across the Chamber. Responsible and good debate can well do without insulting personal remarks, whoever they come from and whoever they are aimed at. I hope that we will not hear any more insults.

Mr. Arnold: I do not recall a by-election at Heathrow, east or west or north. I notice that the hon. Gentleman did not even try to quantify the cost to the taxpayer had no tolls been set for 30 years. Now we are being asked to pass on to the taxpayer a debt of £435 million.

I noticed earlier that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North accused Peter Davis of sleaze because his wife and the wife of an American business man had been friends for 20 years. The hon. Gentleman has been friends with the bridge for 30 years because it started his political career.

The brass face of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North is exceeded only by the contemptuous dismissal of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who has not even bothered to turn up. He is usually ready to throw around wild allegations of sleaze, but when the Labour party is on the receiving end of such allegations, he is not here. Perhaps that is a commentary on how any future Labour Government would deal with difficult questions.

Was the bridge an electoral bribe or was it not? The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North denied that the project had any electoral impact, but the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) well and truly let the cat out of the bag when he said that at his first election to the western division of Hull his agent said, "Don't forget to mention the bridge. It will go down awfully well."

Mr. Randall: It is important for me to clarify the matter. I was advised that the people of our area are very proud of the bridge. That is perfectly reasonable. That pride has nothing to do with bribery.

Mr. Arnold: If they are delighted with the bridge, obviously they are delighted with the people who ran up the bill, which everyone is now having to settle, including my constituents in Kent.

The people of north-west Kent particularly resent paying that bill because for many years our roads by the two Dartford tunnels were clogged up every morning. We waited and we waited, but the Labour Government never gave us a Dartford bridge to solve our problems. Perhaps it was because we did not have a by-election in the immediate vicinity. We had to wait for a Conservative Government to introduce a scheme to raise private investment to build a far more beautiful bridge than the Humber bridge, the Queen Elizabeth II bridge on the Thames. My constituents resent paying a proportion of the Humber bridge debt.

When my hon. Friend the Minister finally works out on whom the enormous debt will land, I hope he ensures that the city of Hull jolly well pays a considerable proportion of it. Let the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, who was a beneficiary of the bridge, explain that to the people of Hull.

I must confess that I felt a certain amount of irritation throughout my hon. Friend the Minister's speech. I sometimes think the Government commit the cardinal sin of being too responsible. They work out the accounts of our country far too responsibly. If a bill is run up, and is then to be written off, I would prefer it if my hon. Friend came to the Dispatch Box, put the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill on it and said to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, "I propose this formally, and I expect the people who incurred the debt of £435 million to stand at the Dispatch Box and justify why we should impose that enormous debt on the people of this country."

Mr. Watts: I am not quite ready to change places with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen).

Mr. Arnold: That was not my point. As a Minister, my hon. Friend had to draft the Bill—he acted responsibly—but the Opposition incurred the debt for the British public and they should come to the Dispatch Box to justify it.

The speech of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), the Opposition spokesman, was uncharacteristically subdued, as well it might be. He was quite happy to shelter under the skirts of the Minister and let my hon. Friend bear the weight of explaining the Bill's purpose.

Who were the beneficiaries of the Humber bridge project? The answer is the Labour party. Where is it today? There is not a single Labour Member here other than those from the immediate vicinity of the bridge, and what a lot of apologies we have heard from them.

Our taxpayers have been treated with contempt. One does not need to raise one's eyes particularly high to notice that the press do not seem to give a damn about the taxpayer either.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) was right when he said that the £435 million is coming out of the capital programme of the Department of Transport. Many of us were in the Chamber yesterday to discover what will become of our capital programmes, and the allocations for them were far lower than we might otherwise have hoped. My constituents in Gravesham did not get their Northfleet bypass. I can blame the Labour-Liberal council for making that a secondary priority, but—

Mr. Allen: It is because the Government grant is down 17 per cent.

Mr. Arnold: I note that sedentary intervention from the Opposition spokesman. I wonder whether the

[Mr. Arnold]

hon. Gentleman knows that 17 per cent. is part of the impact of swallowing £435 million in one go. Has he quantified that? It is disgraceful that because of the Labour party's political sleaze taxpayers across the country will have to foot a bill of £435 million.

Mr. Allen: Let me just reply to the hon. Gentleman's tirade. If he continues to support ever-larger tax cuts in the basic rate of income tax—taxes are increased in other areas—he must accept that that money must be found from somewhere. Yesterday's announcement of a 17 per cent. reduction in local transport projects, which are funded by central Government, must be found from some source. Of course the hon. Gentleman cannot disguise that fact. He cannot have his cake and eat it. If he votes for reductions in income tax, I am afraid that he must realise that they need to be paid for.

Mr. Michael Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The problem may have been solved, but my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) says that he had sat down.

Mr. Allen: No, he gave way.

Mr. Arnold: No, I did not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair was under the impression that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) had given way. However, the Chair was deceived as the hon. Gentleman had sat down.

6.19 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): During this very interesting debate we have explored the history of the Humber bridge and people's attitudes to it. However, the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) are on very dangerous ground when they comment on the cost of the Humber bridge. In response, we can easily ask: what about the poll tax and the £3 billion that was wasted on it? Will that cost be borne by the Conservative party?

If the same rules applied to local government, Conservative Members would face surcharges for the poll tax and for selling public assets at below their book value as election bribes. They would be surcharged for the give-away Budgets in the 1980s, which caused tremendous damage to industry and to this country's economy. Conservative Members are in no position to talk about the Humber bridge. The hon. Member for Gravesham talked about brass necks, but we have seen brass cheek from Conservative Members in this debate.

Let us return to the issue of the Humber bridge and the importance of it. To be fair, hon. Members on both sides of the House mentioned the tremendous engineering achievement that the bridge represents and to the pride that local people take in it. The bridge is a wonderful showcase for British engineering and the engineering industry has benefited from that experience. It has gone on to build bridges abroad, which has had a beneficial impact on our exports and on British Steel, in which I have an interest.

There is also the question of need. I have no doubt that the Humber bridge meets a vital infrastructure need in Humberside. Without the bridge, Humberside's economic development would have been constrained. I remember what it was like before the bridge was built. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) referred to the ferry service. Although it was a very inefficient service, I used it regularly. As a student, I did teaching practice in Cleethorpes in the winter—the digs in Cleethorpes were very cheap in winter—and I would catch the ferry every Monday morning. In those days, the journey across the Humber was a long and complicated affair, but many people made the journey even then. Many of them hoped that the ferry would run aground in the middle of the river, as it often did, so that the bar would be open for a few hours before the ferry eventually reached Barton-upon-Humber.

The construction of the bridge reduced the 100-mile journey between Grimsby and Hull to a convenient, short crossing and it allowed the economy to develop on both sides of the Humber. I am surprised that hon. Members who have spoken in the debate—particularly the Minister for Railways and Roads—did not refer to the haulage industry and the importance of the Humber bridge to it. The introduction of tolls has had a major impact on the haulage industry. Has the Minister met representatives of the Road Haulage Association recently? I have met them to discuss their concerns about the impact of tolls on their members in my constituency.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) mentioned the impact of the Humber bridge on his constituency. We have very good communications and an airport in the area, but when I talk to people in South Humberside, including some very large investors, they all emphasise the fact that the Humber bridge provides access to the deep-water ports of Hull and the daily roll-on, roll-off ferries to Holland. That is very important to many local businesses. The Humber bridge is a vital part of the local infrastructure.

There is no denying that the Humber bridge has not been able to cover its debt. It was never going to, and in that respect the Government have recognised the inevitable and introduced the Bill to deal with that debt. Labour Members welcome the legislation as a recognition of the real situation, as the problem can by solved only by writing off the debt in that way.

As to the cost of the Humber bridge, I draw the House's attention to the cost of other road developments, which will not be recovered. One development that springs to mind is the recent Limehouse link construction in north London. The construction of the road link tunnel cost £360 million and it cost a further £89.2 million to relocate people whose houses were demolished to make way for the link. The Limehouse link—a road of only 1.8 km—cost the taxpayer a total of £449.2 million.

Tonight we are talking about a total debt of £435 million for the Humber bridge. The cost of the Limehouse link at only 1.8 km is far more than the debt that we are talking about in this debate. The Humber bridge will continue to contribute towards its cost through its tolls, while the Limehouse link will have no such tolls and is part of the national road network.

Many of my constituents are confused by that logic. They ask why such a big fuss is made about the Humber bridge when the motorway network—including the Limehouse link—is simply regarded as part of infrastructure investment in this country, although it is just as costly. Let us put the debate into perspective. Yes, we re writing off debt on the Humber bridge; I believe that we are correct to do so. The Humber bridge is an mportant piece of infrastructure and its cost pales into nsignificance when compared with other major road and communications infrastructure investments in this country.

I echo some of the comments of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes regarding the people of Humberside. My constituents have no choice but to use the bridge regularly, particularly when travelling to Hull royal infirmary. The infirmary provides medical treatment that is not available in any other part of the region. The only other hospital is at Cottingham. When people are hospitalised at the infirmary, their relatives must travel across the Humber bridge regularly and the costs can be very high. People who live and work on different sides of the Humber must also bear that cost.

I was such a person. When I was selected to contest the Glanford and Scunthorpe seat in 1985, I travelled across the bridge daily. My family moved to Winterton and I travelled to work in Hull each day. My wife and I had to pay the toll daily, and sometimes twice a day.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The hon. Gentleman referred to the Limehouse link. A proportion of the cost of that link was paid for by the developers of Canary wharf. Will he inform the House what contribution he believes the city of Hull should make to the cost of the Humber bridge?

Mr. Morley: I have read the Public Accounts Committee's report on the Limehouse link and it does not mention any contribution by developers towards its cost. It says that the link was commissioned by the London Docklands development corporation, which was established as a non-executive body by the Department of the Environment. As far as I know, the bulk of the money came from taxpayers. Even if there was a contribution from the private sector, it was still a major investment by the public sector. There is no toll on that road and none is expected to be introduced. Many people who use the Limehouse link to travel to work in the City are in a much better position to pay tolls than many of my constituents in Glanford and Scunthorpe—or those in Brigg and Cleethorpes, for that matter. We should put the matter in perspective.

I commuted to work via the Humber bridge for some years; I made that choice. I once remarked to the former chairman of the bridge board, Councillor Alex Clarke, that I had crossed the bridge so many times that I must have paid for part of it. I asked whether my name could be written on it and he replied that, given the escalation in debt, in all my daily journeys I may have paid for only one rivet in the bridge. He said that I could put my name on that if I wanted to. That puts in perspective the escalation of debt, which is dealt with under the Bill.

I hope that the Minister will give some assurances about future tolls. It is not good enough for him to say that it is purely a matter for the bridge board. We all know that tolls will be determined by how much debt the Government are prepared to write off under the powers that they are taking in the Bill. The private Bill that the Government were blackmailing the bridge board to introduce would have proposed that no public inquiries be held. I am glad that there is no such suggestion now as local people have a right to make representations about toll increases.

It was also clear from the discussions that the Government wanted that private Bill to include the automatic index-linking of tolls. That would put an intolerable burden on people who use the bridge because they have no choice. Some people have to use the bridge as a direct result of Government policy—for example, the location of health care facilities. They have no option but to cross the bridge and pay the tolls. There must be some consideration for such people's needs and the impact on them.

There must also be consideration for local businesses—the Minister failed to mention them in his opening remarks—and the impact of tolls on lorry companies and local distribution businesses with bases on both sides of the bridge. A sharp increase in tolls would put an intolerable burden on their profitability. That has to be taken into account.

The Minister said that he could not tell the House what the tolls would be, but it would be useful if he gave us an assurance that whatever the increase was, it would be within reasonable limits—perhaps the level of inflation. I would be interested to hear the Minister's opinions on that.

The Minister has been described as a Father Christmas figure as he is writing off the debt. If we have no idea of what future tolls will be, he will not be a Father Christmas figure but the ghost of Christmas yet to come and we should remember that that ghost foreshadowed some unpleasant consequences and implications. There will be unpleasant implications in the Bill unless the Minister ensures that any future increase in tolls is reasonable for the people whom it will hit.

6.32 pm

Mr. Watts: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) asked me about further Bills in respect of other crossings. I have no such proposals. There are only two other bridges, the Tyne and the Mersey, where there is any debt owed to the Government and in both those cases that debt is now being repaid by the setting of appropriate toll levels by the bridge operators.

In respect of the proposal to deregulate tolls, the consultation period has finished. We are now considering the responses to consultation. I am not in a position today to state what our reaction will be, but I hope to make an announcement at the earliest opportunity when we have finished our consideration. I can confirm, however, that the Humber bridge was included in the consultation and I expect that it will be included within any powers that we might take in any such legislation.

Privatisation is not an objective of the Bill. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) made a very good case for privatisation as a longer-term solution to the problem, that is not in any way connected with the Bill, which relates to the undertaking given by one of my predecessors in 1991.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North also asked me about improvements to the road links to the bridge. At present, we have no such proposals. I really could not begin to improve upon the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), which brought great pleasure to both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) questioned some of the timings to which I referred. I understand that the final decision to build the

[Mr. Watts]

bridge was taken in 1969 and my source of information for that is a publication by the bridge board, which would have no particular reason to give false information. Loans were agreed in May 1971 and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes explained why the Government of the day were not concerned about that because the responsibility for repaying the loans rested firmly and squarely with the local authorities that promoted the bridge.

It was a bit rich for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North to mention sound finance and to criticise my noble friend Lord Barber. His memory conveniently slipped over 1976, when we experienced some of the highest levels of inflation Britain has ever known. If, as he said—of course I accept what he said on this point—the promise to build the bridge was not necessary to secure his election as the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, it was even more a waste of money. Although I have no doubt that at the time we would have liked to see my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham representing Kingston upon Hull, North, he has told us that he is well satisfied with his continuing election in perpetuity in Twickenham. Nobody on either side of the House bears any malice towards the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, who is a distinguished Member of the House, and who has added to its variety.

I owe my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes a debt of gratitude, as he has given me another new alibi. When Members ask me why they cannot have their bypass in future, I shall say that all the money has been expended on the Humber bridge. He also stressed—as he has on many occasions—as did the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), the importance of the bridge to his constituents, who require access to a hospital located on the north side of the river.

My hon. Friend may know that when I had a meeting with the bridge board on my birthday on 19 April this year, we discussed the burden of tolls on those needing to go to hospital for treatment. I told those on the board that if they wished to put forward a workable scheme for a concession to such essential users, I would look at it sympathetically as part of the package of proposals.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I have no difficulty with increasing tolls because they have not increased since 1989. The question is by how much. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) was absolutely right to stress those special categories, but we shall want to encourage usage of the bridge. My hon. Friend the Minister said that tolls must be high but realistic. However, those two conditions may be mutually exclusive. All I want to hear from him tonight is that he is not leading the board by the snout and telling it to do what he wishes. If he does that, it will simply put a very large increase to the public inquiry and we shall all have to give our views on it.

Mr. Watts: I would not seek, nor would the board promote, a level of tolls that would reduce the traffic and the revenue. That would be counter-productive. As I have said before, it is for the board to promote a new toll tariff and then for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to determine it when the other procedures have been completed.

In view of the assurance from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) that the bridge did not assist his election to this House, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes will not try to send him a bill for part of the cost.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to have some of the arguments the wrong way round. He seemed worried that I might be trying to offload a problem on to local taxpayers. On the contrary: the purpose of this generous legislation is to take some of the burden off them. The local authorities promoted the legislation authorising the bridge in such a way as to put the whole burden—£435 million as it now is—firmly on local taxpayers, chiefly those of Hull. So the hon. Gentleman must not reverse the argument; he must accept that the burden arose in the first place because of the way that the project was taken forward. I am taking powers that will enable the Government to relieve the local taxpayer of some of the burden. The precise amount of write-off and suspension will have to be determined and then contained in the order that I shall put before the House in due course.

On the whole, the constituents of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West ought to view me as Father Christmas; but he will recognise that Father Christmas does not always give children everything they want. It is not, as he suggested, a lack of action on the part of the Government that has allowed the problem to accumulate. The board has procrastinated by not coming up with proposals to maintain the levels of its tolls. Certainly, it tried to introduce a Bill, but if it had acted sensibly, it would have promoted an increase in tolls using the procedures currently available to it. It would also have promoted a Bill to provide for a more efficacious method of keeping the value of the tolls up to date in future. The board should not have sat back and waited for a private Bill to be taken through the House.

I remind the House that the Bill failed because not a single hon. Member was prepared to pick it up and sponsor it, even though it went through the other place—

Mr. Morley: Quite right.

Mr. Watts: But the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West has suggested that the Government are responsible for the board's inability to maintain its toll charges.

Mr. Michael Brown: I plead guilty, and I do so publicly along with the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). I objected to the Humber Bridge Board seeking to use private legislation to deal with its problems. A clause in the Bill would have enabled the board to abdicate responsibility for setting tolls; it handed over to the Secretary of State unlimited powers over future tolls. I had to have regard to the fact that one day there might be a Labour Secretary of State who might misuse those powers.

Mr. Watts: I was not necessarily criticising my hon. Friend—only Opposition Members who suggested that the Government failed to help bring about a solution. If Opposition Members had wished to do so, they could have sponsored the Bill on behalf of their local authorities.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe almost led us astray today by saying that £3 billion was wasted on the poll tax. He will know that any such figure represented the increase in revenue support grant from central Government to local government. If he really thinks the money should not have been spent, he is advocating a reduction in central Government support for local government by that amount. I am sure that he will want to reconsider; it would be a most inconvenient proposition for Labour Front Benchers.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the impact of tolls on road haulage. The current toll for the largest heavy goods vehicle is £10.90. He will know, from the excellent information provided by the bridge board, that on the journey from Hull to Grimsby using the bridge involves a saving of 47.9 miles. Most hauliers would consider the toll good value for money, given that the alternative would involve more fuel and more time for the driver.

Comparisons with other crossings and links on the trunk road network are invalid. I remind the House that the bridge was promoted by local authorities to serve a local purpose. Once a local authority has done such a thing and accepted that the financial responsibility for it should rest with its local taxpayers, it is a bit rich to compare the bridge with crossings on other parts of the trunk road network promoted by my Department to serve national strategic needs.

Mr. Morley: I mentioned the Limehouse link earlier. No private sector contribution was forthcoming for it, and the Public Accounts Committee criticised the Department of the Environment—the funding agency—for that, recognising that the link benefited the private developers of Canary wharf who contributed nothing. So there was an even poorer return for the money put into that link, which amounted to more than the cost of the Humber bridge. Surely in any case the Minister must recognise that the bridge is part of our national infrastructure network.

Mr. Watts: One's perception of the value of that link depends on the value one places on the redevelopment of docklands. Some of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends who represent parts of east London might take a rather different view.

For all the reasons adduced in this debate, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

HUMBER BRIDGE (DEBTS) [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the Secretary of State to provide that sums which would otherwise be payable to him by the Humber Bridge Board shall not be so payable.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee, pursuant to Order [19 December]; reported, without amendment; not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed.

PETITION

War Medals (Replacement)

6.48 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of my constituent, Mr. J. Conn. It concerns the fact that he and other pensioners like him who have had their medals stolen or who have lost them by misadventure are asking the Ministry of Defence to take that into account and to make efforts to replace the medals. I think that a worthy cause, particularly on the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in which Mr. Conn and many others saw service. That is why they would like the medals they won in the war to be replaced. This is not a big matter, but I hope that the Ministry of Defence will take account of it—as I know that many hon. Members will.

The petition ends:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Ministry of Defence to consider the plight of Mr. Conn and others in a similar situation and endeavour to replace these medals.

Your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I beg leave to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Textile Effluent

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

6.49 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful to have secured the debate. It will be the last debate today and, therefore, of the pre-Christmas part of the Session.

I wish to highlight a serious threat to the dye-works in Hinckley in my constituency, the threat to Brookside Dyers, Atkins, Fludes, Halls and Sketchley. It is a threat to 500 jobs in the industry in Hinckley and a threat to thousands of other jobs in the related hosiery, knitwear and textile industries. I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight that threat there and at other towns in the county and in the region.

In February 1990, at a meeting called at the request of Severn Trent Water Ltd., the dyeing and finishing sector committee of the Knitting Industries Federation Ltd., KIF, was told for the first time that the then newly formed National Rivers Authority intended to introduce consents on the discharge of dye colour in textile effluent received at certain sewage treatment works. The treatment works at Hinckley, Loughborough, Wigston, Wanlip and Pinxton were all identified as problem areas.

It was explained by Severn Trent Water that the procedures in place at the works to which I have referred were ineffective in removing dye colour, which was passing through the treatment process into rivers. Surprisingly, STW stated that it was not prepared to offer any solution but laid the responsibility for the removal of the colour firmly on the shoulders of individual dischargers.

It was not until June 1992 that the NRA's proposed colour consents were revealed, with the declaration that these would be introduced by 1 January 1994 at the latest. The consents amounted to a gin-clear discharge for 100 per cent. of the time. I always thought that gin had a blue tinge and was not exactly clear, but we had better not pursue that line this evening.

The proposal to implement gin-clear discharge—that is discharge without any coloration—would have had a catastrophic impact on the industry then, and would have one now unless STW took the necessary action. Fortunately, at the time, the KIF sprung into action. I congratulate it on what it has done. It appointed an environment committee. It rapidly established, following a worldwide trawl, that there were no known solutions at end of pipe that would be viable for those compelled to discharge into sewers. The committee stressed the non-toxic nature of the effluent at the levels of dilution involved, together with the major threat to jobs in the east midlands.

There was clearly a need for a formal tripartite action group—it is known as the TAG—between the KIF, STW and the NRA. That group was set up in January 1993. General meetings of dyers were held at Leicester and Mansfield, at which the NRA and STW gave audio-visual presentations. These did nothing to allay the sector's fears.

By the end of March 1993 it became clear that the TAG had become deadlocked. That was principally because of the NRA's insistence on maintaining its so-called gin-clear consents for 100 per cent. of the time. That gave STW an excuse for not accepting the responsibility for removing dye colour at its treatment works, although it was much better placed to carry out the job more economically, efficiently and effectively than any of the dye-works.

The KIF took the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The meeting took place in July 1993, with support from the union, the National Union of Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades and the all-party knitting industry lobby at Westminster. Meanwhile, the support of the influential Chemical Industries Association Ltd. dye users group was enlisted along with the Textile Finishers Association in Manchester. It was agreed with the then Minister that the TAG should have high-level talks with senior officials at the Department of Trade and Industry to arrive at a workable solution through mediation.

Trials were agreed. It was not until October 1993 that the long-awaited but elusive dividend which had been sought was achieved. Severn Trent finally agreed to undertake, on a trial basis, to remove the colour at selected sewage treatment works. A joint action plan was submitted to the NRA with the following central aims: the pursuit of practical colour removal at selected treatment works, the examination of dye house discharge management procedures, the formulation of best practice for dye house operations and the establishment of further research development programmes. But the breakthrough became shortlived.

The NRA's response to the JAP of continuing insistence on the gin-clear consent for 100 per cent. of the time, compounded by the introduction of the unacceptable peg-in-the-ground concept—you are probably as confused as I was, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I first came across the concept, but broadly speaking it means no increase in capacity for existing dye-works—caused STW to revert to its original and, I suggest, unacceptable policy of passing the problem back along the pipe to the dischargers.

Simultaneously, the KIF, as part of its responsibilities under the JAP, initiated—this was with the assistance of an expert, Dr. Skelly—the publication of a water and effluent management manual. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department for a contribution of £10,000. The total cost was £30,000. The manual, which included individual case studies by the products sector, set out best practice for dye house operations. Copies were distributed to the member dye houses in May 1994.

What is the NRA's response to the JAP? By the end of March 1994 it had become clear that although the NRA would not become a party to the JAP, it was prepared, provided all parties proceeded with their respective commitments, to postpone the introduction of its colour consents until 1 January 1996. More time had been bought for the industry, and that was important.

During this period, or breathing space, a significant number of dischargers, such as those in my constituency, continued their search for suitable technologies to remove the colour in association with a variety of water equipment suppliers. They were not idly standing by but taking action. Many of the pilot rigs installed proved effective in removing the colour. However, the associated costs of bulk applications, in terms either of capital or of revenue, proved prohibitively expensive in the absence of an ability to recycle a significant volume of the effluent. Only through recycling could meaningful payback be achieved.

The KIF therefore decided, with the co-operation of four member dye houses, to make an application to the Department, under the Government's Link programme, for a 50 per cent. grant towards a £2.5 million project. The very size of that figure indicates the enormous costs that dye houses face in responding to the problem. Unfortunately, the Department rejected the application in June 1995 on the ground that it was oriented towards near-market applied research rather than pure research. However, I have to thank the Minister because I understand that, in the past few days, £8,000 has been made available, and several companies will be able to install new equipment and work on recycling as a result.

What about this year? Severn Trent commenced bulk trials on part of the effluent flow at the Wanlip sewage treatment works in Leicester. The Wanlip works is the biggest of the works that I am talking about this evening and, depending on how one classifies dischargers, there are 30 to 40 whose discharge is sent there. It is therefore a very important works. I understand that the trials have proved successful although the seasonality and long-term prospects have still to be tested. Further trials at Pinxton, where there is a sole discharger with a dedicated sewer, have so far failed to produce satisfactory results.

Severn Trent claims, however, that it has not been possible to carry out trials at the other peripheral treatment works at Hinckley—which is the principal subject of my debate—or Loughborough because of the intermittent absence of perceptible colour in the effluent. That was no doubt influenced by the fashion colours for the spring-summer 1995 season. My hon. Friend the Minister may not study such matters in great detail, but the colours were neutral and pastel shades, which meant that it was difficult to test for dye. Severn Trent's declared intention to pursue trials at Wigston have apparently been similarly frustrated.

In January this year, the halfway point in the NRA's two-year postponement of the introduction of colour consents—a postponement for which, as I have already said, the industry is grateful—the Knitting Industries Federation called for a mid-term review to be carried out by itself, Severn Trent and the NRA, again under the chairmanship of the DTI. That chairmanship was provided by the Department's textiles and retailing division. The mood of the industry is very much one of gratitude to the Department for taking that interest and for chairing the review so effectively. I thank the Minister on behalf of the Knitting Industries Federation and other parties.

Four meetings took place throughout the year, the last of which was held on 1 December in Nottingham. During that process, the KIF successfully demonstrated, among other things, that the NRA's proposed colour consents were flawed, firstly because the gin-clear approach was unnecessarily excessive, having regard to the inherent background colour in the affected rivers. In other words, there is a great deal of coloration in the rivers anyway. Secondly, the so-called "100 per cent. of the time" requirement was prohibitive, given the untested nature of the colour-removal treatment at sewage treatment works over an extended period.

Fortunately, modified and less stringent wavelength criteria were finally accepted by the NRA which, at the same time, agreed to adopt a phased percentile approach with associated look-up tables starting with 90 per cent. compliance—rather than 100 per cent. compliance—from 1 January next year; 95 per cent. compliance with effect from 1 January 1997; and, with effect from 1 January 1998, 95 per cent. compliance but including an upper-tier absorbency limit for each wavelength. At that point, the upper tiers will be absolute and must not be exceeded.

The NRA then served the modified consents on Severn Trent on 1 October, covering the treatment works at Hinckley in my constituency, and the ones at Loughborough, Pinxton, Wanlip and Wigston, by giving the statutory three months' notice in advance of their introduction on 1 January next year. In turn, Severn Trent—in compliance with statutory requirements—served consents on all the dischargers in each of the consented catchment areas on 1 November.

Severn Trent claims that it is not possible to pass the percentile approach to dischargers end of pipe, except perhaps to a single discharger into a dedicated sewer. In the process, Severn Trent declared to dischargers in the Wanlip catchment area its preparedness to remove the colour at the sewage treatment works at a cost of between 20p and 30p per cubic metre, always provided that there was a sufficient level of take-up by the dischargers; I can tell my hon. Friend that there almost certainly will be.

However, Severn Trent has not offered the dischargers into the peripheral sewage treatment works, such as that at Hinckley, the facility of removing the colour from their effluent. That is grossly unfair and wholly unreasonable. Bearing in mind where the colour saga began in 1990, and taking into account the KIF's prolonged and determined campaign in the subsequent 70 months, the outcome at the large Wanlip catchment area in Leicester might be considered satisfactory. In contrast, as no facilities are being offered by Severn Trent to remove the colour at the designated peripheral sewage treatment works such as that in Hinckley, the position of the dyers that I cited earlier is as grave as ever.

The absence of an even-handed approach by Severn Trent across the affected area is regrettably divisive and threatens the future of those who discharge into the designated peripheral treatment works, not only at Hinckley but at Loughborough, Pinxton and Wigston. The unavoidable next step is for those dischargers in question to enter an appeal to Ofwat.

The KIF's five years of campaigning and lobbying has achieved significant and meaningful progress. At the outset, Severn Trent refused to accept responsibility for removing colour at the affected sewage treatment works. Meanwhile, the NRA stuck rigidly to its excessive and, I would suggest, ridiculous gin-clear standards for 100 per cent. of the time. The KIF campaign initially persuaded the NRA to postpone the introduction of colour consents for two years until 1 January 1996. Thereafter, the NRA was further persuaded to modify the severity of its original consent proposals and at the same time to adopt a phased percentile approach. That is jargon which means that it allowed some failures, thus making it much easier for dischargers to meet the requirements.

Following succesful trials at Wanlip, Severn Trent has in turn been persuaded to accept the responsibility for removing colour at that works but at a cost of 20p to 30p per cubic metre, assuming that there is sufficient take-up. As I said, I am fairly sure that there will be.

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

Meanwhile, the collective research efforts of many members for end-of-pipe solutions at an estimated cost of £1 million have resulted in considerable progress being made in identifying suitable combination technologies for colour removal, albeit largely unproven throughout the cycle. At the moment, there is no technology in the world to cope with the specific problem. In any event, the cost of bulk installation would be around £300,000 per firm. I should like my hon. Friend to bear that figure in mind.

If dye-works at Hinckley in my constituency are going to have to pay £300,000 each, one does not have to be psychic to work out the impact on their competitiveness. If they are forced to pay such an amount, I envisage the thriving dye industry at Hinckley facing serious difficulties. It would affect not only Hinckley but the other centres to which I have referred, such as at Loughborough and Wigston. A very serious cost factor is involved, and I encourage my hon. Friend to look carefully at the possibility of making further money available for research, perhaps to Severn Trent, for the peripheral works that are necessary.

The absence of colours in the flows, apart from intermittently during the summer months, which was due to the fashion colours—the light colours—to which I referred, has prevented Severn Trent from carrying out any trials. It stated that, despite the works being included in the original joint action plan in late 1993, it is not in a position to offer colour removal facilities at those sewage treatment works from 1 January 1996, when the consents are due to become operative. Thereafter, Severn Trent seems to be of the opinion that the associated costs would be excessive at those works, always assuming that suitable technologies were available. It claims that it does not follow that the system established at Wanlip would be suitable elsewhere.

If Severn Trent, with its massive resources, thinks that the costs will be excessive, how does it think that Halls, in my constituency, Atkins or any of the other dye houses to which I referred, are supposed to continue trading? Severn Trent has advised that it will not be appealing against the NRA's colour consents, but meanwhile has imposed consents on each of the dischargers—passing the buck, one might say. Those consents are not identical to those that the NRA has imposed, and Severn Trent argues that it is not possible to pass the percentile approach up the pipe to individual dischargers, with the possible exception of Pinxton, where there is only one discharger.

According to Ofwat, its target time scale for deciding appeals is 18 weeks from the date when the further mediation between Severn Trent and the dischargers breaks down—I think that it probably will break down. In practice, though, the time scale is within the gift of Severn Trent. For those discharging at Loughborough, Hinckley, Pinxton and Wigston, where no colour-removing facility is being offered by Severn Trent, there is no choice but to enter appeals not later than 31 December. The central thrust of the appeals, subject to obtaining sound legal advice, would be that the discharger's costs are more than those of Severn Trent to treat the discharge to the same environmental standard at its works.

I know that the KIF is perfectly prepared to co-ordinate such appeals, with the assistance of an experienced environmental law practice; I have had discussions with it on that point. I hope that it does not get as far as that, and that is one reason why I raised the issue this evening. My understanding is that, under paragraph 6 of schedule 10 to the Water Resources Act 1991, the Secretary of State for the Environment has the power to direct the NRA to revoke a discharge consent or impose or modify any conditions of the consent if it appears appropriate to him to do so, in consequence of any representations or objections made to him. It appears, however, from the general context in which that provision is set, that its purpose is to enable the Secretary of State to impose stricter requirements—I certainly do not argue that that is what we want from my hon. Friend tonight—and not to relieve the burden. The KIF has been advised that that power is capable of being interpreted in such a way as to allow a relaxation, even a direction quashing the NRA's consents. I ask my hon. Friend a specific question—I know that this is a complicated matter. Will he give an undertaking that he will at least consider what action he can take directly to alleviate the problem, and not, as seems to be the current policy with Severn Trent, pass the problem down the pipe, as we say?

In five days, the KIF has raised enough money for legal costs, including counsel's opinion, to address the issue at Hinckley, Loughborough, Wigston and Pinxton, on the Erewash. I understand that, when an appeal is entered, consent is immediately set aside. If it has to get the consents set aside—it cannot comply with them anyway by 1 January next year, for all the reasons that I have given—and an appeal is entered, we shall be in a state of suspended animation. We shall have to look at ways to break that. Severn Trent could have appealed against the NRA consents to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but it took a policy decision not to do so. Why did it not appeal? Why did it not get on and do something about it? I think that the answer is that it thought that if it left the problem alone, it would not have to address it and that it would end up at the discharger's door.

I hope very much that in the first stage of the appeals procedure, which now looks to be an inevitability, action will be taken to get the relevant parties—the NRA, Severn Trent and the dischargers—together for sensible discussions. I know that the KIF intends to set up consultative meetings between those key groups. The mediation process could take weeks or months. The length of the negotiations is under the control of Severn Trent. If it got beyond the preliminary appeals procedure, to what is the appeals procedure proper, the consents would not be quashed, but Severn Trent would be forced to remove the colour at reasonable cost. It could have undertaken trials in 1994, but it did not. In 1995, it has a problem because the fashion colours are light.

This is a complicated business. It is not an issue on which people can easily hold their attention, precisely because it is so detailed. One of the complexities of the problem is that the dye discharged is not of a constant nature; the chemicals in it are not constant. That means that there are changes daily. We need not just one process to clean the dye that is in the discharge but several, and that raises some big issues. If the end users, for example the dye-works at Hinckley, are supposed to deal with the problem themselves—never mind the enormous costs, at £300,000 per dye-works—there are environmental issues, too, because with such constantly changing chemicals, they will need a chemist to get it right. It would be much safer for Severn Trent to take the issue and solve the problem collectively in the peripheral treatment works. It is absurd to expect individual dye-works to introduce very complicated processes at vast expense.

It is also grossly unfair on my region, because specific problems relate to rivers. The River Soar in Leicestershire is a slow-flowing river, unlike many others, so disposal of effluent takes longer. That is why there is pressure. Never mind Sketchley brook at Hinckley, into which most of the Hinckley dye-works discharges. The quality of receiving water, to use the jargon, in the area is worse than in the rest of the country, where the problem does not exist. It behoves Severn Trent to face up to its responsibilities.

I must compliment my hon. Friend and his Department on the participation of the textile and retail division in presiding over the tripartite talks set up by the review committee. That really has helped, and I understand that it has led to a satisfactory solution at Wanlip, where there are between 30 and 40 dischargers. However, other dyers in Leicestershire—not least the five in Hinckley to which I have referred—face a tremendously difficult time, with 1 January, when the consents come in, just around the corner.

I have referred to the enormous costs that those dyers face, and I have mentioned the environmental worries. I plead with my hon. Friend the Minister to make every effort to make the mediation stage of appeal a success—to persuade Severn Trent to accept the responsibility, which it is morally obliged to accept, to upgrade the peripheral treatment works at Hinckley and Loughborough, and the others that I have listed. If my hon. Friend can do that, he will have served the House well.

I look to my hon. Friend to press for a sensible negotiated settlement that will protect not only the environment but jobs in Hinckley's dye houses, which are vital to the town, the county and the country.

7.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) for raising such an important subject. I know that he is very concerned about the health of the textile industry, which, as he rightly said, is important to many of his constituents. He has certainly demonstrated that concern tonight, along with his mastery of the technical details of a complicated subject. He has used that knowledge to give the House a penetrating analysis of the problems facing the textile industry in his constituency, and in other parts of Leicestershire and the midlands.

My hon. Friend has outlined some of the issues that face the textile industry in its efforts to meet the standards required for the discharge to water of effluent coloured by dyestuffs. The issue also involves problems for the National Rivers Authority and the water companies in the meeting of their objectives, as the House will have gathered. As I have said, the matter is complicated and sensitive, and I do not wish to upset the delicate balance that has been reached in discussions among the parties so far; nor can I comment in any detail on issues that may affect individual cases, for fear of prejudicing any appeals to the Secretary of State by those who feel aggrieved.

I do, however, wish to outline the position, and the reasons why the NRA considers it necessary to control the discharge of dye colour by textile companies. We are all familiar with the high quality of the knitwear goods produced in Leicester and surrounding areas, and with the attractive range of colours and patterns that are available nowadays. Of course, once dyes have been applied, any surplus must discharged from the premises in waste water.

In matters of this sort, there is a danger that the issues will be exaggerated. It would be wrong to characterise this issue in terms either of an over-zealous regulator making life difficult for British industry to no worthwhile purpose, or of a lurid picture of rivers flowing purple and red and devoid of life. Neither of those characterisations would be accurate.

Generally, dyestuffs are non-toxic pollutants. However, in this case it is not a question of interference for no good reason. Although dyestuffs are not toxic, the discolouration of rivers caused by uncontrolled discharge of dyestuffs is of legitimate aesthetic concern, and a source of pollution. There is understandable public concern about visibly coloured water, or rivers suddenly changing colour. That concern, and the need to control such pollution, is at the heart of the wide and diverse range of uses to which we put our rivers.

Rivers are major features of our landscape. When they are used for the discharge of waste, it must be on a sustainable basis. They are used not only as sources of water for a wide range of industrial purposes, but as sources of drinking water. They support valuable ecosystems, which must be protected. Just as important, they are an invaluable recreational asset, particularly for the angling community.

For those reasons, we must manage our rivers efficiently, and ensure that they are able to meet the needs of all who wish to use them. The NRA exists to carry out that management, and has a statutory duty to ensure that pollution is controlled. There is, of course, public concern about pollution, and the NRA is properly responsive to that concern.

Under the Water Resources Act 1991, it is an offence to cause or knowingly permit polluting matter to enter a water course; however, acting under and in accordance with a discharge consent provides a defence against such charges. Thus, both discharges made from a manufacturing plant and those made via a sewage treatment works require consents, and the NRA is able to impose requirements in respect of the discharge that protect the local aquatic environment and the key users of those waters.

As for dyestuffs, I understand that, for some time, the NRA has been keen to introduce conditions into consents to control the discharge of coloured waste that meet environmental needs, while ensuring that the consent conditions that they set are achievable. For a variety of reasons, progress has been slow.

Mr. Tredinnick: I asked my hon. Friend to find out whether his Department has direct powers to intervene, and whether, if the Secretary of State has such powers, he would at least consider using them.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend has issued a powerful plea. As he implied, he knows of the rights of appeal that exist, and is aware that some of the matters to which he referred are within the province of the regulators, and are involved in the relationship between regulators and

[Mr. Clappison]

dischargers. I will respond to that powerful plea in due course, but before I do so, I feel that I should set out the background, and the reasons why regulation is required.

As I said, progress has been slow, but discussions have continued. This year, discussions between the Government, the NRA, water companies and industry representatives have made good progress on standards and their implementation from 1 January 1996. The objective is to ensure that discolouration caused by dyestuffs is not visible to the naked eye. I noted my hon. Friend's comments on that.

I believe that the NRA has worked to ensure that attention is paid to the needs of industry, as well as fulfilling its statutory duty to protect our rivers. At the same time, industry is aware that this source of pollution must be controlled, and that it will be necessary to contribute to the cost of reducing discolouration: it is a well-established principle, applying widely across the environmental field, that the polluter pays.

The sewerage undertakers have also been included in the dialogue. When discharges are being made to sewer, a consent is required from the sewerage undertaker, who must ensure that discharges are such as to enable effective treatment to take place to remove pollutants, and—when the effluent is finally treated and released into the river—for NRA requirements to be met in respect of the discharge from the treatment works that they operate.

As I understand it, the National Rivers Authority has come up with proposals that have secured a good measure of agreement. Acceptable standards that will achieve the desired aesthetic effects, but that are not overly stringent, will be progressively introduced from 1 January, and compliance will be assessed on a basis established with some flexibility.

That provides the conditions for the textile industry to rise to the challenge and, to meet pollution reduction targets, to work on means of reducing discolouring emissions. One of the most promising may be to recycle waste water within the plant, which would have the benefit of allowing installation costs to be offset against other savings. The complex process of dyeing and treatment of residues might be re-examined with a view to minimising waste.

I congratulate the regulators and the industry on progress so far, but I do not underestimate the difficulties that must be resolved in an industry that, for historical reasons, is based on old infrastructure. The ability to invest and to modernise has been affected by global competition, and there have been job losses and poor profitability. The industry has gone through difficult times.

That combination of factors lies at the root of many of the environmental concerns that the industry faces. The National Rivers Authority is aware of those difficulties, and has aimed to recognise the problems and to reach a sensible agreement that will not jeopardise the industry's future.

Many of the factors that I have outlined affecting the manufacturers' economic position will concern manufacturers in my hon. Friend's constituency, especially in relation to the dischargers to the six peripheral treatment plants to which he drew attention. I am sure that he will share my pleasure that good progress has been made on discharges to the treatment plants at Wanlip, which will help 30 to 40 dischargers. As he rightly says, however, issues remain at the six peripheral works.

My hon. Friend has made a strong case on those dischargers and those plants. In response to his plea for an undertaking, as I have said, there are some restrictions on my position on this matter. I must be aware of matters that properly lie within regulators' province and of any possible appeal rights, but he has rightly outlined the interests that my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry have taken in the matter so far, which will be maintained. We recognise the importance of securing an agreement, if possible, on this important subject, which affects, as he has said, so many of his constituents who are employed by these manufacturers.

It would be for the House's benefit if I briefly repeated the background of assistance that has been given by the Department of Trade and Industry and by the Department of the Environment, which my hon. Friend fairly and fully outlined. That assistance has been in the form of funding for a manual of best practice through a £10,000 grant, mediation between parties, recycling support—which is important and which, as my hon. Friend has said, has been valued by industry—and a continued role in meetings between the parties. In all those respects, the Government have been seeking to assist the industry, and will of course continue to do so in the same way.

It is worth emphasising that the benefits go further than just to the industry, important though that is. There are other benefits for the environment and for industry in environmentally friendly processes. They are a hallmark of an efficient and competitive industry. Consumers of the end product are increasingly seeking reassurance that the process of manufacture has not damaged the environment, and green technology can therefore help in the marketplace.

The textile industry is no exception; it cannot afford to fall behind. New technology and investment may be necessary to meet environmental standards, but development of that technology should be of long-term benefit to the industry that develops it. It is part of the process of change and adaptation, which also benefits the environment. I emphasise that.

There are signs that that is already happening. The NRA annual report for 1994-95, published earlier this year, showed that, overall, there has been a considerable improvement in the quality of our rivers and canals in the past few years. More specifically, there has been a net improvement of 26 per cent. in the length of rivers and canals, between 1990 and 1994, achieving good environmental standards.

Next year, the NRA will be publishing its quinquennial report on river quality in 1990-95. In part, that is a result of a joint approach by the NRA with industry in developing workable standards that meet the environment's needs and safeguard industrial output.

I think that that is an appropriate point on which to draw my remarks to a conclusion. Against that background, I reiterate the need for continuing, sensible dialogue to resolve the remaining difficulties. The NRA has a duty to protect our water environment from pollution, from whatever source. A timetable has been drawn up for implementation of the NRA consent conditions, and, in turn, conditions laid down by water companies.

I therefore congratulate all concerned on the way in which they have, in recent times, approached this problem, with a genuine desire to cater for one another's particular needs. I am pleased to note the progress that has been made so far. It is in all our interests to ensure that river pollution is minimised. The NRA has been working towards that, and I hope that the opportunity to move forward will produce the desired results.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes to Eight o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 December 1995

DEFENCE

Married Housing Stock

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department's married housing stock will be moved into the private sector. [3680]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 30 November, *Official Report*, columns *810–11*, we propose that the Ministry of Defence should transfer ownership of the married quarters estate in England and Wales to the private sector on a series of very long leases, renting back the accommodation which is needed to meet service housing needs. Several thousand surplus properties would be transferred on a freehold basis at the same time. The Ministry of Defence would retain, through the Defence Housing Executive, responsibility for maintenance and the allocation of housing rented by MOD. Further details of this proposal are set out in the preliminary information memorandum published on 30 November, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the preliminary information memorandum on the sale of the married quarters estate. [4168]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The preliminary information memorandum was published on 30 November 1995, and a copy was placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Targets

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [2999]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my predecessor on 6 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *148*.

Queen's Flight

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since the recent change in procedures aircraft of the Queen's Flight have been used by members of the royal family for private travel, unconnected with their official duties. [3254]

Mr. Soames: Since the introduction, on 1 April 1995, of arrangements under which the royal households are charged for private use of aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron, there have been six occasions when such aircraft have been used for private travel.

Navigation Systems

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the specification for integrated inertial navigation and global positioning system equipment for Sea Harriers was drafted in accordance with the US Department of Defence's requirement; and if he will instruct British Aerospace to amend that specification to accord with British requirements. [3727]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As prime contractor with responsibility for conducting the competition for an integrated inertial navigation and global positioning system for the Sea Harrier, British Aerospace defined the specifications to be applied. My Department has reviewed these specifications and is satisfied that they are consistent with recognised international standards.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that British Aerospace treats all bidders fairly in its administration of the competition for the supply inertial navigation and global positioning systems for the Sea Harrier aircraft; [3725]

(2) what are the implication for the IN-GPS contract for the Sea Harrier aircraft of the relationship between British Aerospace, BASE and the division of Honeywell which is bidding for the contract. [3726]

Mr. Arbuthnot: British Aerospace's handling of the competition for an inertial navigation and global positioning system for the Sea Harrier has been closely supervised by my Department's technical and contracts staff. We are satisfied that the conduct of this competition has been fair and proper.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the economic and strategic importance of maintaining a British industrial capability to design and manufacture inertial navigation and guidance systems. [3728]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department is now assessing the results of the competition for an inertial navigation and global positioning system for the Sea Harrier prior to reaching a procurement decision. This assessment will take into account any impact on a continuing United Kingdom design capability in this technology field.

Armed Forces Exercises (Ebford)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying operations or exercises were conducted by the Royal Air Force or other NATO armed forces over the village of Ebford, Devon, during the autumn of 1988. [2855]

Mr. Soames: Although records are maintained of the total number of sorties flown in the UK low flying system, statistics are not available on, nor is it possible to estimate, the number of sorties flown over precise locations.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions a Royal Marines colour sergeant was deployed in Ebford village during autumn 1988. [2860]

Mr. Soames: No colour sergeant of the Royal Marines command was deployed in Ebford village during the autumn of 1988.

Departmental Efficiency Savings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details of the efficiency savings required to meet his Department's budget settlement. [3679]

Mr. Soames: The MOD efficiency programme has led to savings worth more than £3 billion and "Front Line First" will produce a further £1 billion of savings per year by the end of the century. We will build on this in setting targets for future efficiency savings.

Amphibious Operations

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of his directorate of operational capability's latest report in the Library; if he will make a statement on the Royal Navy's capability to mount an amphibious operation equivalent to the Falklands campaign; and what immediate plans he has to order new amphibious assault ships or other vessels to improve that capability. [3745]

Mr. Soames: Reports produced by my directorate of operational capability are classified documents, and constitute advice to Ministers. It is not our practice to place such documents in the Library of the House.

The Royal Navy retains the capability to conduct amphibious operations in support of our defence policy objectives. This capability is currently being enhanced by the acquisition of the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean, which was launched earlier this year, and the refit of the landing ship logistic Sir Bedivere.

Negotiations are under way with VSEL on its tender to replace the amphibious ships HMS Fearless and Intrepid.

Aircraft Spare Parts

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the provision of spare parts for British aircraft. [3677]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry of Defence obtains spare parts from industry for support of its aircraft. Logistic support procedures are designed to ensure that requirements are satisfied while minimising spares holdings in the interests of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Unforeseen problems can mean that aircraft are unavailable awaiting spare parts but this has not affected our current operational commitments.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF aircraft are currently not operational due to the lack of spare parts. [3678]

Mr. Soames: The number of RAF aircraft unavailable awaiting spare parts from industry varies on a daily basis. The figure for Monday 27 November 1995, including training aircraft, was 44.

Ro-ro Ferries

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to purchase roll-on roll-off ferries; and if he will make a statement. [3676]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are examining a number of possible enhancements to the civil and military strategic lift available to the joint rapid deployment force, including the charter, lease or purchase of suitable shipping and cargo aircraft.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will set out the Exchequer grant for the promotion and support of tourism for each of the years 1979–80 to 1995–96, at 1979 prices and expressed per head of population, for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. [2158]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 November 1995]*: The total Government grant to the statutory tourist boards, expressed in 1979 prices—millions of pounds—for each year from 1979 to 1995, and expressed per head of population—pounds—for the countries covered by the boards, was as follows:

	British tourist authority		*English tourist board*		*Scottish tourist board*	
	GIA £ million	*£ per head population*	*GIA £ million*	*£ per head population*	*GIA £ million*	*£ per head population*
1979–80	12.8	0.23	10.3	0.22	4.3	0.83
1980–81	12.0	0.22	9.7	0.21	4.4	0.85
1981–82	12.5	0.23	9.8	0.21	4.7	0.91
1982–83	13.0	0.24	10.7	0.23	5.2	1.01
1983–84	11.6	0.21	10.3	0.22	5.6	1.09
1984–85	11.3	0.21	11.6	0.25	6.6	1.28
1985–86	10.6	0.19	10.4	0.22	5.4	1.05
1986–87	12.4	0.22	12.2	0.26	5.5	1.07
1987–88	12.6	0.23	13.3	0.28	5.2	1.02
1988–89	12.7	0.23	13.8	0.29	5.3	1.04
1989–90	12.8	0.23	10.9	0.23	6.0	1.18
1990–91	12.8	0.23	8.0	0.17	5.7	1.12
1991–92	12.8	0.23	8.7	0.18	5.6	1.10
1992–93	13.0	0.23	7.6	0.16	5.7	1.12
1993–94	13.1	0.23	6.1	0.13	5.6	1.09
1994–95	13.3	0.23	4.5	0.09	7.0	1.36
1995–96	13.4	0.24	3.9	0.08	6.6	1.28

	Wales tourist board		*Northern Ireland tourist board*	
	GIA £ million	*£ per head population*	*GIA £ million*	*£ per head population*
1979–80	3.7	1.32	3.9	2.55
1980–81	3.6	1.28	4.1	2.67
1981–82	3.9	1.39	4.1	2.67
1982–83	4.0	1.43	3.7	2.41
1983–84	3.4	1.21	3.1	2.01
1984–85	4.2	1.50	3.4	2.19
1985–86	4.8	1.71	3.4	2.18
1986–87	4.8	1.70	3.4	2.17
1987–88	5.0	1.76	2.9	1.84
1988–89	5.0	1.75	2.9	1.84
1989–90	5.0	1.74	2.9	1.83
1990–91	4.9	1.70	3.5	2.20
1991–92	5.0	1.73	3.1	1.94
1992–93	5.8	2.00	4.9	3.03
1993–94	5.6	1.93	4.9	3.00
1994–95	5.7	1.96	5.0	3.05
1995–96	5.7	1.95	5.3	3.24

Sources:

Population Estimates Unit (OPCS) 1979–1994.

Government Actuaries Department 1995.

(1992—based projections).

The British Tourist Authority is responsible for marketing Great Britain overseas. The grant per capita for BTA has therefore been calculated using the total population of England, Wales and Scotland.

ENVIRONMENT

EU Directives

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all EU and EEC directives which have come into force and have not yet been translated into United Kingdom regulation. [2075]

Mr. Clappison: Directives for which my Department is responsible, for which the date for transposition has passed but for which no transposing legislation has been made are those relating to: nitrates, hazardous waste, safety signs and the adaptation of the directive on contained use of genetically modified organisms—GMOs. The steps necessary to give effect to these are well in hand, although explanatory guidelines from the Commission are necessary before the GMOs directive can be transposed. Directives on the quality of fresh waters to support fish life and the quality required of shellfish waters were implemented by administrative means, which are soon to be replaced by new regulations. My Department intends to transpose into United Kingdom law the directive on the control of volatile organic compound emissions from the storage of petrol and its distribution to service stations by the compliance date of 31 December 1995.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all EU and EEC directives which will come into force during the next 12 months indicating the dates when he expects to lay regulations to implement them in the United Kingdom. [2076]

Mr. Clappison: There are no directives for which my Department is responsible which are certain to come into force during the next 12 months.

Planning Permission

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if local authorities will be expected to meet the costs of *(a)* the new rural business use class initiative and *(b)* informing unsuccessful applicants of the outcome of their application for planning permission from within their existing budgets. [2644]

Sir Paul Beresford: The present regime under which local planning authorities charge fees for applications for planning permission would apply to applications relating to any new rural business use class. The Government's policy is to progress to full-cost recovery by local planning authorities, including the cost of notifying applicants of planning decisions, and we are close to achieving this target.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each regional office the number of notices served for each of the last 12 months, for extension of time owing to failures to determine the call in process for planning applications, within the prescribed period of time, together with the average period of time for which such extensions were required. [3487]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [2997]

Mr. Gummer: My Department has a target of replying to all letters from the public, including individuals, businesses and local authorities, within 15 working days of the letter being received by the Department.

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase his Department's support to voluntary organisations which assist homeless people. [2870]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing White Paper "Our Future Homes", issued on 27 June 1995, undertook to continue the Government's rough sleepers initiative—RSI—in central London beyond March 1996, and to assist the development of the successful RSI model in other areas where rough sleeping could be demonstrated to be a major problem. Over the next three years—1996–97 to 1998–99—my Department plans to make available an additional £50 million to meet these commitments. Following analysis of the responses to a consultation paper issued on 3 October 1995, we will be issuing a strategy paper in the new year inviting bids for these resources.

My Department also provides grants under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 to voluntary sector organisations to provide practical help for single people in housing need. Planned provision for this programme is an increase from £6.9 million in 1995–96 to £7.8 million in 1996–97.

Public Inquiry (Welbeck)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he intends to decide on the inspector's report covering the public inquiry into the appeal by the Warmfield Company against the planned refusal to develop the Newland park and Welbeck site in the Normanton constituency; [3206]

(2) if he will now make a statement on the inspector's report following the public inquiry held on the Welbeck reclamation and landfill projects and compulsory purchase orders by the Warmfield Company. [3207]

Sir Paul Beresford: The inspector's report has been received. The Secretary of State's decisions on the Welbeck compulsory purchase orders and the appeal by the Warmfield Company have been deferred at the request of Wakefield council and the company. The Secretary of State currently awaits their confirmation of whether they wish to withdraw the orders and appeal or proceed with them. It is not possible to say when the decision on the appeal will be issued, should the company decide to proceed with it.

Voting Disqualifications (Councillors)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many councillors since 1979 have sought a dispensation from him to allow them to vote on matters in which otherwise they would be disqualified from voting by virtue of a declared interest. [3376]

Sir Paul Beresford: There would be a disproportionate cost involved in providing such figures from 1979. However, records kept since 1985 indicate some 1,360 councillors have sought a dispensation from the Secretary of State to allow them to vote on matters in which otherwise they would be disqualified from voting by virtue of a declared interest.

Housing Associations

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of new lettings by housing associations have been made to people in receipt of housing benefit in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 to date. [3187]

Mr. Clappison: The latest available information relates to housing association lettings to households that are eligible for either full or partial housing benefit.

The figures for 1994 and the first nine months of 1995 are:

Housing association new lettings: per cent. eligible for housing benefit

	England Percentage
1994	82
1995[1]	82

Note:

[1] 1 January to 30 September.

Source:

CORE new lettings database.

Local Government Finance

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the metropolitan district budgets for 1994–95 ranking them in order from the largest increase from the previous year to the lowest. [3199]

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

Percentage increase in budgeted net revenue expenditure 1993–94 to 1994–95

Metropolitan districts	*Budgeted net revenue expenditure 1993–94 £000*	*1994–95 £000*	*Increase Per cent.*
Bury	110,399	119,950	8.7
Dudley	191,851	208,375	8.6
Sunderland	216,544	230,944	6.6
St. Helens	132,743	140,857	6.1
Salford	179,220	188,998	5.5
Rochdale	161,430	170,041	5.3
Oldham	176,578	185,750	5.2
Sheffield	370,880	389,219	4.9
Stockport	186,869	196,104	4.9
Doncaster	206,068	215,770	4.7
Sefton	199,304	208,661	4.7
North Tyneside	137,860	144,150	4.6
Birmingham	892,141	932,140	4.5
Kirklees	277,650	289,371	4.2
Leeds	491,611	511,947	4.1
Wolverhampton	206,863	215,307	4.1
Manchester	417,968	434,576	4.0
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne	217,066	225,691	4.0
Liverpool	447,622	465,140	3.9
Knowsley	141,829	147,285	3.8
Tameside	154,292	160,092	3.8
Barnsley	143,527	148,718	3.6
Wirral	248,457	257,081	3.5
South Tyneside	121,977	125,429	2.8
Bolton	192,921	198,298	2.8
Rotherham	183,835	188,901	2.8
Calderdale	143,241	146,839	2.5
Coventry	238,382	243,646	2.2
Bradford	394,674	402,018	1.9
Wigan	205,223	208,862	1.8
Sandwell	236,219	239,676	1.5
Solihull	123,725	125,507	1.4
Trafford	143,137	145,174	1.4
Gateshead	165,567	167,526	1.2
Wakefield	212,640	214,138	0.7
Walsall	207,930	205,563	-1.1

Debt Charges (North Yorkshire County Council)

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the annual debt charges paid by North Yorkshire county council in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95. [3502]

Sir Paul Beresford: Annual debt charges paid by North Yorkshire county council were:

(a) 1992–93: £18.3 million

(b) 1993–94: £18.9 million

(c) 1994–95: £18.3 million

Sick Leave (Lancashire County Council)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many days off sick were taken by employees of Lancashire county council social services department in *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94 and *(e)* 1994–95 indicating (i) the total figure and (ii) the average for each employee. [3505]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many days off sick were taken by employees of Lancashire county council in each of *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94 and *(e)* 1994–95 indicating (i) the total figure and (ii) the average for each employee. [3508]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not available centrally.

Gas Pipeline (Zeebrugge-Bacton)

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call in for public inquiry the application by Interconnector for construction of a gas pipeline from Zeebrugge to Bacton, Norfolk. [3524]

Sir Paul Beresford: No. The Secretary of State for the Environment has no statutory powers to call in proposals for submarine pipelines. Submarine pipelines, from low water mark to the median line, are authorised by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under the provisions of the Petroleum and Submarine Pipelines Act 1975. The section of pipeline from low water mark to the proposed Interconnector (UK) Ltd. facility at Bacton is currently the subject of planning applications before North Norfolk district council. Consideration has been given to call in that application, and one for the related gas processing facility, but it was considered that no more than local issues were involved and North Norfolk district council was best placed to determine the applications accordingly.

Emergency Drought Order (Yorkshire Water)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the proceedings, and representations made at the public inquiry into Yorkshire Water's request for an emergency drought order. [3449]

Mr. Curry: In line with usual practice, the record of the proceedings of, and representations made at, the public hearing into objections to the application by Yorkshire Water Services Ltd. for an emergency drought order will be the inspector's report.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the inspector's report of the public inquiry into Yorkshire Water's request for an emergency drought order; and on what date he will be able to issue the report. [3451]

Mr. Curry: The inspector's report will be made public when a final decision is taken whether or not to make the emergency drought order sought by Yorkshire Water Services Ltd.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each measure and drought order he has approved in the current year for the Yorkshire region indicating the dates of each approval, in respect of Yorkshire Water's statutory duty to provide a supply of drinking water. [3453]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend has made the following drought orders on the application of Yorkshire Water Services Ltd:

1. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (RIVER WHARFE) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 18 August 1995.

This order reduced the support to the River Wharfe which Yorkshire Water was required to give Grimwith reservoir and thus allowed more water from Grimwith to be available for public supply. It also allowed the Nidd Aqueduct to be used to take water *from* Grimwith, rather than just bring water *to* Grimwith.

2. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 26 August 1995.

This order authorised the restriction of non-essential uses of water in the Bradford area.

3. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (HEBDEN WATER AND RIVER WORTH) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 7 September 1995.

This order reduced the amount of compensation water that Yorkshire Water had to release from certain reservoirs.

4. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (SILSDEN RESERVOIR) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 31 August 1995.

This order reduced the compensation water that had to be discharged from Silsden Reservoir.

5. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (PENNINE RESERVOIRS) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 2 October 1995.

This order reduced the amount of compensation water that had to be discharged from a range of Pennine Reservoirs.

6. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (CHELLOW DEAN RESERVOIRS) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 2 October 1995.

This order allowed abstraction from reservoirs not normally used for drinking water abstraction.

7. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (RIVER WHARFE) (AMENDMENT) (EMERGENCY DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 28 September 1995.

This order allowed increased abstraction from the River Wharfe to provide water for Bradford.

8. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (RIVER WHARFE) (DROUGHT) (EMERGENCY AMENDMENT) (EXTENSION) ORDER 1995.

Order made 31 October 1995.

This order extended the period for which Order No. 7 was valid.

9. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (SILSDEN RESERVOIR NO. 2) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 30 October 1995.

This order extended the period during which the amount of water required to be discharged from the reservoir was reduced.

10. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (HAIGH COTE DAM) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 31 October 1995.

This order allowed abstraction from a reservoir not normally used for drinking water.

11. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (RIVER OUSE) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 3 November 1995.

This order allowed increased abstractions from the River Ouse for supplies to Leeds.

12. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (DROUGHT NO. 2) ORDER 1995.

Order made 3 November 1995.

This order authorised the restriction of non-essential uses of water in Leeds, Selby and Wakefield.

13. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (RIVER WHARFE) (ARTHINGTON) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 8 November 1995.

This order allowed additional abstraction from the River Wharfe for supply to Leeds.

14. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (PENNINE RESERVOIRS) (NO. 2) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 9 November 1995.

This order reduced the requirements to discharge compensation water from a large number of Pennine reservoirs.

15. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (HEBDEN WATER, RIVER WORTH AND PENNINE RESERVOIRS) (NO. 3) ORDER 1995.

Order made 15 November 1995.

This order consolidated orders Nos. 3 and 5 and reduced further the required compensation water discharges.

16. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (DROUGHT) (NO. 3) ORDER 1995.

Order made 20 November 1995.

This order restricted non-essential uses of water in Harrogate area.

17. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (LEIGHTON AND HAVERAH PARK RESERVOIRS) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 17 November 1995.

This order reduced the compensation water required to be discharged from these reservoirs.

18. YORKSHIRE WATER SERVICES LTD. (ABSTRACTION LICENCES) (DROUGHT) ORDER 1995.

Order made 21 November 1995.

This order allowed all operators of licensed boreholes in Yorkshire to provide water to any premises in West Yorkshire, within the quantity limits in their licences.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received the inspector's report of the public inquiry into the request by Yorkshire Water for an emergency drought order. [3450]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend has received the report of the inspector on the public hearing into objections to Yorkshire Water Services Ltd.'s application for an emergency drought order.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to respond to the inspector's report of the public inquiry into Yorkshire Water's request for an emergency drought order. [3452]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend indicated on Friday 24 November that he had received the inspector's report, but that in present circumstances he did not propose to take a decision on the application: the matter would be kept under review.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has collected from local authorities about the allocation of properties to asylum seekers and refugees; and how many representations he has received from local authorities about the provision of housing for refugees and asylum seekers. [3669]

Mr. Clappison: My Department does not collect information from local authorities about the allocation of properties to asylum seekers and refugees. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has received a request from the Association of London Government to discuss housing for asylum seekers.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applicants for political asylum qualified for housing and housing benefits in the last year for which figures are available. [3667]

Mr. Clappison: The only available data relate to asylum seekers seeking housing under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985.

In the year ending June 1995, 2,190 households which had applied under these provisions in England were found to be registered as asylum seekers with the Home Office. Local authorities have a duty to provide temporary accommodation for these households until their asylum application is resolved.

Over the same period, 930 of the households which local authorities accepted for rehousing under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 were former asylum seekers.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties *(a)* by local authorities and *(b)* by Government Departments are currently vacant in the United Kingdom; and what percentage of vacant dwellings were made available to refugees and asylum seekers during the past 12 months. [3668]

Mr. Clappison: I will write to the hon. Member about the numbers of vacant dwellings in England when the analysis of the data reported by local authorities on their 1995 housing investment programme returns is complete. No data are collected centrally on vacant dwellings made available to refugees or asylum seekers.

The information on vacant dwellings relating to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland is a matter for the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of providing temporary accommodation for applicants for political asylum in the last year for which figures are available. [3674]

Mr. Clappison: This information is not held centrally.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the results of the latest round of bidding under the single regeneration budget. [3952]

Sir Paul Beresford: Before Christmas.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2464]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The Department of the Environment was responsible for 192 statutory instruments in the last Session of Parliament. It is not possible to give a precise number for those which constituted a new rule or regulation. However, the White Paper "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead", Cm 2867, presented to Parliament in May this year, referred at page 192 to seven categories of regulations made in 1994. The statutory instruments made during the last Session of Parliament for which the Department was responsible fell within those categories as follows:

(i) EU and international obligations: 9
(ii) NHS Trusts: 0
(iii) Fees and local provisions: 43
(iv) Facilitating privatisation and competition: 12
(v) Repeals and more favourable regimes: 12
(vi) Other (with possible impact on business): 39
(vii) Other (with no impact on business): 80.

In addition, there were five commencement orders.

The totals do not exactly correspond with the total number of statutory instruments as a small number fall within more than one category.

In addition, nine statutory instruments have been made since the Health and Safety Executive became a non-departmental public body in connection with which the Department of the Environment has responsibilities.

Of these, three fell within the category of giving effect to EC and international obligations, one fell within the category of fees and local provisions, five fell within the category of repeals and more favourable regimes and six within the category of other instruments with a possible impact on business.

None of the instruments adopts measures which set higher standards than minimum standards explicitly laid down in an EC directive.

Radioactive Waste Dumping

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a complete list of all radioactive waste dumped since 1965 west of the Hebrides showing *(a)* the date, *(b)* the amount, *(c)* the source and *(d)* the exact location. [3177]

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

No radioactive waste has been dumped since 1965 west of the Hebrides. The "Report of the Independent Review of Disposal of Radioactive Waste in the North East Atlantic" by Professor F. G. T. Holliday, which is in the House Library, lists all the locations where the United Kingdom has disposed of radioactive waste at sea.

TREASURY

Regional Electricity Companies

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if regional electricity companies will be able to claim corporation tax relief or any other tax relief on any rebate given to domestic consumers arising out of the sale of the national grid; and what is his estimate of the expected value of any such tax relief to the regional electricity companies *(a)* per customer and *(b)* in total. [3391]

Mr. Jack: The general tax rules apply to any business which reduces its charges to customers. The precise tax consequences will depend on the particular arrangements. If, for example, a business reduces its prices for future services, then, in general because the business is not entitled to the money, there would be no charge to tax—a business would not be charged to tax on profits to which it was never entitled. If, however, the circumstances were such that a rebate was made out of sums which counted as taxable trading receipts, the rebate would be allowed only as a deduction in calculating the business's profits for tax purposes if the expenditure satisfied the general test that it was revenue in nature and incurred wholly and exclusively for the purposes of earning the business's profit.

I cannot comment on the particular arrangements and tax affairs of individual taxpayers.

Fuel Duties

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reduce the tax on low sulphur motor vehicle diesel to eliminate the retail price difference. [3750]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. There are a number of new diesel products under development which will meet future environmental standards. I am not satisfied that any change in the duty structure would be justified.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax expenditure of mortgage interest relief in each of the years since 1991–92. [3731]

Mr. Jack: The total cost of mortgage interest relief in the years 1991–92 to 1994–95 is given in table 5.1 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995", a copy of which is in the Library.

The estimated total cost of the relief in 1995–96 is about £2.8 billion. This is based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the current average building society interest rate.

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing to increase public service pensions from April 1996. [4459]

Mr. Waldegrave: Under the legislation governing public service pensions, they are increased annually by the same percentage as state earnings-related pensions—additional pensions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced on 28 November, *Official Report,* column *618,* that additional pensions will be increased by 3.9 per cent. in line with the annual increase in the retail prices index up to September. Public service pensions will therefore be increased by 3.9 per cent. from 8 April 1996. Pensions which have been in payment for less than a year will receive a pro rata increase.

Paymaster General

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the future of the office of Her Majesty's Paymaster General. [4460]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In accordance with its framework document, a full prior options review of the office of Her Majesty's Paymaster General will now be conducted, covering all its activities. The terms of reference for the review will be as follows:

> To carry out a full Prior Options Review of the Office of Her Majesty's Paymaster General (PAYMASTER), consulting interested parties. To consider the need for the functions of the Agency and for the Government's retaining responsibility for them; whether any need to remain in the Civil Service and if so, to recommend suitable arrangements and a mechanism for transferring the rest to the private sector.

Since the office of Her Majesty's Paymaster General became a next steps agency nearly three years ago, it has made significant improvements to its efficiency, competitiveness and quality of service. It has won substantial business in competition with public and private sector competitors. I believe that there is a prima facie case now for moving the work of the agency into the private sector, subject to the review revealing no obstacles to this. Privatisation could offer new opportunities for the agency, its staff and—most important—its customers. The review will, therefore, focus on feasible options for moving the agency into the private sector.

Contributions from interested parties are invited and should be addressed to:

The Treasury Accountant
HM Treasury
19 Allington Street
London
SW1E 5EB

They should be received before 26 February 1996. The results of the review will be announced in due course.

Finance Act 1995

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the Finance Act 1995; [246]

(2) if the Finance Act 1995 was *(a)* subject to and *(b)* modified on account of an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [244]

(3) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the Finance Act 1995 were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [245]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 22 November 1995]:* The main measure in the Finance Act 1995 relevant to the environment was the real terms increase in road fuel duties enacted in sections 6 and 7.

It was announced in the March 1993 Budget that the Government's policy would be to increase fuel duties by at least 3 per cent. on average in real terms in future Budgets in order to help to restrain carbon dioxide emissions. In the November 1993 Budget, this was raised to 5 per cent. Raising duties in this way will make a significant contribution to the UK programme for limiting CO_2 emissions in line with our commitments under the UN convention on climate change.

Emissions of CO_2 are subject to regular monitoring by the Department of the Environment. It is not normal practice to disclose options considered, but not pursued, in the course of preparing the Budget.

The 1995 Finance Bill largely related to measures announced in the 1994 Budget. This year's Budget contained other environmental measures: a further 5 per cent. real increase in fuel duties, the definitive arrangements for the new landfill tax, reduced duties on liquid petroleum gas and compressed natural gas, which are relatively clean road fuels, and an additional increase in the duty on super unleaded petrol, which causes higher levels of pollutants such as benzene. These measures will be enacted in the 1996 Finance Bill. The Chancellor also announced that the Government would look into ways of using vehicle excise duty to encourage the use of low emission vehicles.

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the annual income from *(a)* fees *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the Inland Revenue, (2) Customs and Excise and (3) the Central Statistical Office. [2742]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The information is set out in the table.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Inland Revenue[1]			
Annual income from			
(a) fees and charges pound million	303	296	288
(b) fines[2]			
Number of staff employed[3]			
(i) part-time	9,126	9,569	9,438
(ii) full-time	64,337	61,595	57,686
Annual running costs[4] pound million	1,766	1,823	1,816
Customs and Excise			
Annual income from			
(a) fees and charges pound million	5	2	2
(b) fines[5] pound million	162	130	113
Number of staff employed[3]			
(i) part-time	1,358	1,556	1,570
(ii) full-time	24,967	25,112	23,803
Annual running costs[4] pound million	738	735	745
Central Statistical Office			
Annual income from			
(a) fees and charges pound million	1	2	2
(b) fines	—	—	—
Number of staff employed[3]			
(i) part-time	98	125	130
(ii) full-time	1,110	1,205	1,197
Annual running costs[4] pound million	43	44	48

[1] Includes the Valuation Office agency.

[2] Not applicable. Penalties are part of overall tax revenues.

[3] As at 1 April.

[4] Gross running costs.

[5] Covers fines and penalties.

PRIME MINISTER

Former Prime Ministers (Briefings)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the procedures by which civil servants are allowed to provide advice and information to former Prime Ministers; and if he will make a statement. [3025]

The Prime Minister: Subject to the approval of Ministers, civil servants may provide factual briefing to former Prime Ministers, as to other Members of Parliament. Such briefing is often provided for visits to overseas countries.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister what is the latest total cost to public funds of providing legal services for witnesses to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry. [3028]

The Prime Minister: The accounts settled to date from public funds for the provision of external legal services to witnesses to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry are approximately £750,790. The value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department is £306,320. Some legal advice has also been provided by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties. The cost of this advice is not quantifiable.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Mr. Forman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give an account of his latest discussions with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic on the peace process; and if he will make a statement. [3699]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 29 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns 199-201.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England and Wales had, at the latest available date, been held on remand for *(a)* up to three months *(b)* from three to six months *(c)* from six to 12 months and *(d)* for more than 12 months. [3271]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tim Smith, dated 4 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asked how many prisoners in England and Wales had, at the latest available date, been held on remand for (a) up to three months, (b) from three to six months, (c) from six to twelve months, (d) for more than 12 months.

The latest available provisional information for England and Wales is for 30 June 1995 and is given in the attached table.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales by length of time since first reception[1] *on 30 June 1995*

Time since first remand	*30 June 1995*
Less than 3 months	6,830
More than 3 months, up to and inc. 6 months.	2,343
More than 6 months, up to and inc. 12 months.	1,542
Over 12 months.	341
Total	11,056

[1] Awaiting trial or sentence. Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

Dr. Bayo Omoyiola

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* right hon. and hon. Members, *(b)* Church spokesmen and *(c)* other organisations that have made representations against the deportation of Dr. Bayo Omoyiola to Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [3357]

Mr. Kirkhope: Details of people and groups who have made representations in this case are set out in the tables.

(a) Honourable and right honourable Members for	*(b) Church spokesmen*	*(c) Other organisations*
Birmingham Selly Oak Chesterfield Cynon Valley Falkirk West Hackney North and Stoke Newington Islington North Littleborough and Saddleworth Liverpool Mossley Hill Liverpool Riverside Liverpool West Derby Renfrew West and Inverclyde Staffordshire Moorlands Sunderland North Warrington North Warrington South	The Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Coventry The Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Liverpool The Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Ripon The Rt. Rev. the Bishop of Blackburn The Rt. Rev. Bishop of Truro The Most Rev. Derek Warlock The Rt. Rev. David Sheppard The Rev. Russell Naylor	Edward Frais Abrahamson Bayo Omoyiola Anti-Deportation Campaign Bolton Communities of Resistance Merseyside and Region Churches The Campaign Against Double Punishment Partners of Prisoners' Families Support Group Theatre Link Liverpool Black Sisters Unison Black National Caucus Friends Information Centre Merseyside Region of Churches City of Liverpool Housing and Community Services Directorate Liverpool Housing Trust National Museum and Galleries on Merseyside Merseyside African Council Methodist Church in Liverpool Liverpool and Law Centre Merseyside Immigration Advice Unit Federation of Black Housing Associations Merseyside Caribbean Council Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit Toxteth Activity Group

In addition, an early-day motion was signed by the following:

The hon. Members for:
Liverpool, Garston
Bootle
Liverpool, Walton
Tottenham
Nottingham, South
St. Helens, South
Knowsley, North
Wakefield
Bolton, South-East
Easington
Leyton
Knowsley, South
Islwyn
Birkenhead
Blyth Valley
St. Helens, North
Halifax
Liverpool, Broadgreen
Wigan
Wallasey

Dr. Omoyiola has been in the United Kingdom without leave since 14 May 1991 and entered his employment without permission to do so. He has been refused a work permit. On 16 November 1994 he was given notice of a decision to deport him and his appeal was subsequently dismissed by an independent adjudicator who considered it inappropriate to make any recommendation on his case to the Secretary of State. Full account has been taken of the various representations made on Dr. Omoyiola's behalf. However, he has no claim to be here and his circumstances are not so compelling or compassionate as to warrant him being allowed to remain exceptionally. A deportation order has therefore been signed on 10 November 1995 and this will shortly be served on Dr. Omoyiola. Arrangements will be made for his removal to Nigeria.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the number of claims for political asylum which have not yet been decided and which date from *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1993, *(e)* 1994 and *(f)* 1995; [3641]

(2) how many applications for political asylum dating from before 1990 have not yet been decided. [3631]

Mr. Kirkhope: The number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision as at 31 October 1995 was 66,655. The available information on the years in which these applications were made is given in the table.

Proportion of total number of asylum applications awaiting initial decisions as at 31 October 1995, by year of application.

Year of application	*Percentage*
pre 1991	5
1991	15
1992	15
1993	15
1994	25
1995	25

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against a decision to refuse political asylum on the grounds that the applicants have visited a third country were received in the last year for which figures are available; and how many were *(a)* upheld and *(b)* dismissed. [3633]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested for without foundation appeals—the majority of which are against refusals on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country—is given in table 8.4 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum have been received from applicants fleeing countries affected by civil war; and how many of such applications were successful, in each year since 1990. [3635]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum applications are considered on the individual merit of each case. The basis for an application is not centrally recorded, so the number of those lodged directly as a result of civil wars is not available.

Information regarding asylum applications, by nationality, for the years 1986 to 1994 is given in table 2.1 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95, a copy of which can be found in the Library. Tables 3.1 to 3.3 of this publication gives decisions on asylum applications, by nationality, for the same time period.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which countries are currently classified as undergoing or having undergone events likely to give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution among the nationals of those countries. [3637]

Mr. Kirkhope: Under proposals on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has been consulting for restricting the benefit entitlement of asylum seekers, it will be possible for the Benefits Agency to be notified in the event of a future fundamental upheaval in a country such that persons cannot normally be returned to it for the time being.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications for political asylum by applicants with dependent children were refused in the last year for which figures are available; and how many dependent children were involved; [3639]

(2) how many applications for political asylum by unaccompanied minors were received for the last year for which figures are available; and how many were *(a)* successful and *(b)* rejected. [3638]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information on the number of asylum applications which were refused in 1994, both including and excluding dependants, is given in table 1.2 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95, a copy of which can be found in the Library. The available information on applications from unaccompanied children is given in table 2.4 of the same publication. A more detailed breakdown of these figures is not available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average time taken to process an application for political asylum for the latest year for which figures are available; [3640]

(2) what is the average number of hours taken to decide an application for political asylum from the receipt of the application to a decision. [3632]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) on 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *219*, which provided the available information on the average times involved in deciding applications for asylum.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum were dismissed as frivolous and vexatious under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1993; and how many of these cases went to appeal and how many appeals were successful, in the last year for which figures are available. [3634]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum have been received from applicants from *(a)* Croatia, *(b)* Serbia, *(c)* Bosnia, *(d)* the Sudan and *(e)* Rwanda; and how many were successful in each case since 1990. [3636]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information regarding asylum applications from nationals of Sudan and the former Yugoslavia for the years 1986 to 1994 is given in table 2.1 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issued 15/95, a copy of which can be found in the Library. Tables 3.1 to 3.3 of this publication give decisions on asylum applications, by nationality, for the same time period.

In 1994, there were an estimated 110 applications from nationals of Rwanda. During the same time period there were approximately 15 decisions on Rwandan applications, of which five were granted asylum and 10 were refused.

Information on applications from the individual states of the former Yugoslavia, and one of those from Rwanda prior to 1994, is not available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the situation in *(a)* Somalia *(b)* Liberia, *(c)* Nigeria, *(d)* Sierra Leone, *(e)* Sri Lanka and *(f)* Rwanda for the purposes of allowing asylum applications. [3682]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum applications are considered in accordance with the 1951 convention, taking account of available information from a wide range of sources about the position in the country of origin and its significance for the particular application in question.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers currently held in detention by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* place of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application. [1523]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *655*, which gave a breakdown of asylum seekers held in detention.

Asylum and Immigration Problems

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *659*, concerning the bodies from which he sought information, or had consultations concerning current asylum and immigration problems, if he will place in the Library a list of the organisations he then referred to, distinguishing those from which he sought information or with which he had consultations, respectively. [3701]

Mr. Kirkhope: The discussions referred to in my previous reply are generally ad hoc rather than in the nature of formal consultations. Information about them could be collated in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Parole Applications

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of *(a)* first and *(b)* second parole applications from prisoners in England and Wales were granted to prisoners serving more than four years in each ethnic category in 1994; [3654]

(2) what percentage of first and second parole applications were granted to prisoners in England and Wales in each ethnic category in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1994. [3656]

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is given in the tables; information for 1989 is not available. Comparisons between the ethnic categories are affected by many factors which influence the outcome of parole reviews, including length of sentence, type of offence and amount of time remaining to be served before unparoled released. These factors were analyse in Home Office statistical bulletin 2/94 "Parole recommendations and Ethnic Origin, England and Wales 1990", published in January 1994. Comparisons between 1990 and 1994 are affected by the substantial changes in the parole system—to which annual reports of the parole board refer. Copies are available in the Library.

Parole reviews for prisoners serving 4 years or more 1994: Proportions recommended for parole

Percentage

Ethnic origin	*Consideration* *First*	*Second*
White	35	44
Black	33	49
South Asian	48	48
Chinese, Other Asian	[1]14	[1]65

[1] Fewer than 50 cases considered.

Parole reviews 1990 and 1994: Proportions recommended for parole

Percentage

Ethnic Origin	*1990* *Consideration* *First*	*Second*	*1994* *Consideration* *First*	*Second*
White	58	46	36	45
Black	47	39	33	50
South Asian	53	40	48	49
Chinese, Other Asian	[1]42	[1]—	[1]18	[1]68

[1] Fewer than 50 cases considered.

Prisoners

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current prison population in England and Wales. [3657]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 4 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the current prison population in England and Wales.

On Thursday 30 November, a total of 52,617 prisoners were in custody in England and Wales.

Visa Applications (Algeria)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities were available in Algeria to deal with visa applications to enter the United Kingdom in 1994; how many staff were involved; how many applications were *(a)* received and *(b)* successful for a visa to enter the United Kingdom in 1994; how many applicants were recognised as political refugees in 1994; and how many applicants were granted long stay in the United Kingdom in 1994. [3264]

Mr. Kirkhope: A full entry clearance service was available in Algeria until 18 August 1994. Since then a service has been available for diplomats and officials only. A list of entry clearance staff appears in the list:

1 x full-time Entry Clearance Officer (United Kingdom-based) all year

1 x full-time Entry Clearance Officer (United Kingdom-based)

January–September 1994

1 x full-time Vice Consul spending 15 per cent. of his time as Entry Clearance Manager January–September 1994

2 x LE3 (Locally Engaged) assistants all year

1 x LE3 (Locally Engaged) assistant January–September 1994

Information on grants and initial refusals of entry clearance by overseas posts in Algeria and by category—settlement and temporary purposes—in 1994 is given in table 2.1 of "Control of Immigration Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issued on 10 August 1995, Cm 2935 HMSO. Information on applications for asylum made at United Kingdom ports or after entry into the United Kingdom by Algerians in 1994 and the initial decisions is given in table 4.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics, United Kingdom 1994", issued on 30 June 1995—issue 15/95. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Mr. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applicants from Algeria for visas to enter the United Kingdom have relatives living in the United Kingdom who are British citizens; and what is the breakdown in age groups of those applicants who were successful in 1994. [3265]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Prisons

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made by the Prison Service to accommodate expected peaks in the prison population over the next 12 months. [3085]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Battle, dated 4 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what arrangements have been made to accommodate expected peaks in the prison population over the next twelve months.

In dealing with a rising population, our first priority is to ensure that existing accommodation is fully utilised. To meet expected peaks in the population, arrangements have been made to identify accommodation which would normally hold one prisoner but is suitable for holding two for a short period of time; and to bring forward, where practicable, the opening of new accommodation. Around 2,700 additional prisoner places are expected to become available for use over the next twelve months.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of increasing the density of accommodation use at local and training prisons. [2993]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Battle, dated 4 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what assessment has been made of the impact of increasing the density of accommodation use at local and training prisons.

The majority of prisons are not overcrowded. Overcrowding is concentrated principally in some local prisons. This is because of the need to hold unsentenced prisoners close to the courts.

The Prison Service recognises that overcrowding has the potential to impact on the delivery of planned regimes and other purposeful activity. In spite of increases in the population, since April 1995 prisoners have on average spent 25.5 hours a week on purposeful activity. This is in line with the target set in the Prison Service Business Plan for 1995–96. The proportion of prisoners unlocked for twelve hours or more on weekdays is currently 38 per cent, which is the target set in the 1995–96 Business Plan.

In dealing with a rising population, our first priority is to ensure that existing accommodation is fully utilised. In addition, there is a substantial programme for the building of new accommodation. A new houseblock building programme will provide an additional 2,000 places by 1996–97. Further new accommodation is planned to come into use by 1997–98 with the rebuilding and re-opening of Lowdham Grange prison near Nottingham and the opening of two new privately financed prisons in South Wales and Merseyside.

Prisoner-prison Ratios

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by region, the prisoner to prison officer ratio in 1989–90, and the latest year for which figures are available. [2498]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 4 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the ratios, by region, of prisoners to prison officers.

Annex A shows the overall prisoner:officer (including prison custody officer) ratio in each of the Prison Service's fifteen areas. These figures reflect the position on 31 January 1995 and are the latest available.

Area information for 1989/90 is not available. Annex B shows the available information for this period, which is restricted to an overall prisoner:officer ratio for the whole Prison Service.

Annex A: Prisoner—Prison Officer/Prison Custody Officer ratio by area as at 31 January 1995

Inmate population	*Officers/SO's/PO's*	*Inmate: Officer ratio*
Central Area 4,515	2,243	2.0:1
East Midlands 4,018	1,539	2.6:1
Mercia 2,359	976	2.4:1
North-east 3,356	2,104	1.6:1
North-west 3,149	1,417	2.2:1
Trans Pennine 5,168	2,595	2.0:1
Yorkshire 2,165	1,107	2.0:1
Chilterns 2,539	1,240	2.0:1
East Anglia 2,666	1,250	2.1:1
Kent 3,217	1,479	2.2:1
London north 4,302	2,590	1.7:1
London south 4,214	2,752	1.5:1
South coast 2,255	1,244	1.8:1
Wales and west 2,158	1,147	1.9:1
Wessex 2,570	1,213	2.1:1

Annex B: Inmate—Officer ratio—1989

Average number of inmates for 1989 calender year	*Officers in post in establishments*	*Inmate: Officer ratio*
46,736	20,532	2.28:1

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of public interest immunity certificates signed by his Department for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2352]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *670.*

Murder Victims (Family Compensation)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applicants were successful in respect of families of murder victims in general and specifically in respect of *(a)* parents of adult victims, *(b)* the adult children of murder victims, *(c)* the unmarried partners of murder victims and *(d)* the fathers of illegitimate murder victims under the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation which was announced in April 1994 and subsequently withdrawn; [2307]

(2) how many applications were received but not processed from the families of murder victims in general and specifically from *(a)* parents of adult victims, *(b)* the adult children of murder victims, *(c)* the unmarried partners of murder victims and *(d)* the fathers of illegitimate murder victims in respect of the tariff-based scheme of criminal injury compensation which was announced in April 1994 and subsequently withdrawn. [2306]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to him on 28 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns *652-53.*

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many oral statements have been made by the Secretary of State for Wales in each Session since May 1992; and what was the total length of time taken in making these statements and replying to questions. [1709]

Mr. Newton: The information is as follows:

Number of statements made

1992–93: 5

1993–94: 1

1994–95: 2

Information on the total length of time taken in making these statements and in replying to questions is not held centrally.

Welsh Grand Committee

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many occasions the Welsh Grand Committee has sat in each Session since the 1992 election; what was the number of total hours of those sittings; and what proportion those hours represent of the total number of hours that the House has sat. [1802]

Mr. Newton: The Welsh Grand Committee has met 12 times since the 1992 general election, for a total of 29 hours. This represents 0.64 per cent. of the House sitting time.

Oral Answers

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many oral answers have been made by the Secretary of State for Wales in each Session since May 1992; and how many oral questions sessions have taken place since that date. [1710]

Mr. Newton: The POLIS database holds the following information:

Session	*Number of orals answered* From Order Paper	Supplementaries	*Number of question times*
1992–93	119	320	12
1993–94	74	174	6
1994–95	98	213	8
Total	291	707	26

Short Money

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list *(a)* additional office allowances and *(b)* other allowances paid from public funds made available to (i) the Leader of Her Majesty's official Opposition and (ii) other spokesmen from Her Majesty's official Opposition. [1854]

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 21 November, *Official Report,* column *46.*

Select Committees

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has for submitting the Bills proposed in the Queen's Speech to pre-legislative inquiries by Select Committees. [598]

Mr. Newton: It will be proposed that the Armed Forces Bill be committed to a Select Committee prior to its conventional Committee stage. This is the usual practice for such Bills, which are required once every five years.

Select Committee on Welsh Affairs

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many reports have been received by the House from the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs; and how many of these reports have been debated on the floor of the House. [1801]

Mr. Newton: The Welsh Affairs Select Committee has made 36 reports to the House. None has been debated on the Floor of the House.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Beijing Programme of Action

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which aspects of the Beijing programme of action he is prioritising. [2911]

Mr. Hanley: We plan to discuss with our aid recipient partners their priorities for our support in implementing the global and regional platforms for action. Their response will also influence our approach to the newer priorities highlighted at the conference, including promotion of women in politics and decision making, statistical work, credit, the revision of legal frameworks and capacity building, both of institutions of civil society and of Governments.

Nigerian Police Force

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of the Nigerian police force have visited the United Kingdom for training purposes in each year since 1990. [3147]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Two members of the Nigerian police force visited the United Kingdom in financial year 1990–91; two in 1991–92; one in 1992–93; nine in 1993–94; and seven in 1994–95.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Nigerian police officers have received scholarship awards in each year since 1990; and if he will give in each case the recipient's rank, the cost and duration of the scholarship. [3151]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Twenty-one officers have received awards as follows:

Year	*Rank*	*Cost £*	*Duration*
1990–91	Deputy Superintendent	2,601	Six weeks
1990–91	Not available	2,601	Six weeks
1991–92	Chief Superintendent	11,306	Three months
1991–92	Not available	2,400	Six weeks
1992–93	Superintendent	5,783	Six weeks
1993–94	Nine Assistant Superintendents	2,915 each	Two weeks each
1994–95	Deputy Commissioner	1,650	One week
1994–95	Assistant Commissioner	4,482	Four weeks
1994–95	Deputy Superintendent	4,482	Four weeks
1994–95	Two Detectives	4,482 each	Four weeks each
1994–95	Two Deputy Superintendents	4,482 each	Four weeks each

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many policemen or women have been seconded to Nigeria in each year since 1990; for what periods of time; and from which forces. [3155]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Seven police officers have been seconded to Nigeria as follows:

	Force
October 1991–May 1994	Cleveland
March 1991–April 1993	West Yorkshire
April 1991–May 1993	Greater Manchester
October 1993–November 1994[1]	British Transport Police
October 1993–November 1995	Metropolitan
September 1995–October 1995	Metropolitan
September 1995–October 1995	Metropolitan

[1] Retired officer, so not strictly a secondee.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where and when Nigerian policemen or women have been trained in Britain under the police training programme since November 1993; and if he will make a statement. [3154]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Since November 1993, Nigerian police officers have been trained with the west midlands fraud squad, Birmingham in June 1994 and at the Police Staff College at Bramshill in March–April 1995.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Nigerian police training programme started; when it finished; how much in total has been spent in each year; and if he will make a statement. [3152]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The programme started in March 1991, and ended in November 1995. Expenditure by financial year is as follows:

1990–91: £91,793

1991–92: £272,571

1992–93: £311,962

1993–94: £293,085

1994–95: £197,398

1995–96: £42,000 (Estimated)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Nigerian policemen or women have been trained in Britain under the police training programme since November 1993; and if he will make a statement. [3153]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Seven Nigerian police officers have received training in the UK since November 1993.

Police Training

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many requests for funding for police training projects overseas have been refused and from which countries; what consideration is given to such requests to human rights and the rights of the individual; and if he will make a statement; [3146]

(2) what proportion of *(a)* the overseas aid budget and *(b)* the amount of that budget allocated to good government has been spent on police training; what sums have been spent, in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement; [3148]

(3) what has been the cost of scholarship awards in Britain in each year since 1990 for *(a)* Nigerian police officers and *(b)* all police officers funded by his Department; [3149]

(4) how many study tours to the United Kingdom were organised and funded for overseas police officers by his Department; and if he will state the countries that participated and at what cost in each year since 1990; [3150]

(5) on how many occasions in the past five years, a request for funding for police training from a foreign country has been referred for ministerial approval; and if he will name the countries concerned; [3156]

(6) which countries have benefited from police training since 1990; and if he will list the programmes, giving the start date and the size of the individual project budget; [3157]

(7) how many evaluations have been made by his Department of the effectiveness of aid in respect of police training; and if he will make a statement. [3158]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Questions 3146, 3148, 3149*(b)*, 3150 and 3156 to 3158 all concern police training worldwide; I can answer most helpfully by taking them together. The answer to 3149*(a)* is included in that for 3151.

Under the aid programme, we provide management and technical training for police forces, both in the United Kingdom and in-country, including the development of in-country training capacity. This is usually in support of a wider objective of enhancing the effectiveness and public accountability of the police. This assistance is only a small part of the aid programme, currently accounting for under 0.5 per cent. of overseas aid. Such assistance is not separately recorded and details could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Support for overseas police forces under the aid programme, whether through training, study visits or other support, is considered as part of individual country programmes. There is no global allocation either for police or more generally for good government. Proposals are considered on their merits and in comparison with other competing demands.

Priorities for the use of aid are considered periodically as part of the reviews of country programme strategy, which are approved by Ministers, as well as in response to short-term events. Human rights issues are taken into account in these processes. Where support for the police is not identified as a priority for a country or is considered inappropriate, requests will often be refused at an early or informal stage rather than requiring detailed review. No records are kept of requests which are refused. Nor are separate records kept of submissions to Ministers. Issues are referred for ministerial consideration as necessary in view of their size, political sensitivity or novelty. In many cases, assistance to the police will have been only one facet of a wider-ranging submission or review.

Since 1994, a quarterly report has been made to the Minister for Overseas Development, summarising assistance being provided to police forces under the aid programme.

Police training is kept under regular review by two police advisers and by the departments financing such training. No overall evaluation has been made in recent years but the 1995 to 1997 work plan for ODA's evaluation department will include a review of assistance to police forces, including training.

Police training is also supported on a more limited scale from diplomatic wing funds. Efforts are currently being made to assess the impact of such training by tracing the careers of trainees since their return home.

Nigeria

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding his Department has given *(a)* civil liberties organisations, *(b)* the Campaign for Democracy, and *(c)* the constitutional rights projects in Nigeria, in the last five years. [3159]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has funded specific projects designed to foster good government through a number of Nigerian non-governmental organisations in the last five years, including those named.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the aid projects to Nigeria agreed before December 1993 received funding in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [3160]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* Projects receiving funding in 1994–95 were:

National Electric Power Authority (institutional development)
University Management Systems

Those funded in 1994–95 and 1995–96 were:

Crop Protection Training

Middle Level Agricultural Education

Cross River State Forestry Management

Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (institutional development)

Police Training

Lagos Lagoon (pollution reduction plan)

Polytechnic Equipment Maintenance

Integrated Science Teacher Education

Federal Technical College, Yaba (institutional development)

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place an embargo on military equipment shipments in Nigeria. [2967]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* On 20 November 1995 the European Union adopted a common position extending measures against the Nigerian military regime in force since 1993. These included a full arms embargo. We shall continue to strictly enforce all European Union measures against the Nigerian military and keep them under review in the light of progress towards civilian democratic rule.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

HMSO

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will make a statement on his plans for the privatisation of HMSO; and what is the time scale for his plans for the privatisation of HMSO; [3210]

(2) when he will be able to announce details of his plans for the future of HMSO. [3217]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *447*. The Government's plans envisage completing a privatisation during 1996.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many of its financial targets HMSO has met since 1980; [3212]

(2) if HMSO has been self-financing since 1980. [3213]

Mr. Freeman: As a trading fund, HMSO is required to cover all its costs with income from activities, and to make a small annual surplus. It has broken even every year, and achieved the target surplus on all except two occasions—1991 and 1994—since 1980.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people are employed in HMSO. [3211]

Mr. Freeman: The total number including casual staff on 1 November 1995 was 2,898.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what *(a)* representations and *(b)* requests for a meeting he has received from trade unions representing employees in HMSO with respect to the possible privatisation of that agency; and what response he has given. [3215]

Mr. Freeman: I and my colleagues have so far received one letter on the possible privatisation of HMSO from the Graphical, Paper and Media Union, and one from the HMSO trade union side, and have responded to the points each raised. I have received no requests for a meeting. However, I met local trade union representatives at my own request during a visit to HMSO's Norwich headquarters in September.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many times he has met the chief executive of HMSO to discuss proposals for the privatisation of the agency. [3214]

Mr. Freeman: Five times.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from organisations or groups interested in bidding for the contract to run a privatised HMSO. [3216]

Mr. Freeman: Around 60 potential purchasers of HMSO have so far contacted me or my advisers. Their identities must remain confidential for the time being for commercial reasons.

HEALTH

Breastfeeding

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list breastfeeding rates in England for each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy with regard to the encouragement of breast feeding. [2531]

Mr. Horam: Breastfeeding rates are surveyed every five years. Survey results for 1985 and 1990 are comparable. The Government continue to protect and promote breastfeeding as the best way of feeding a baby. Information on breastfeeding rates for 1985 and 1990 are available in "Infant Feeding 1990", copies of which are available in the Library.

Clinical Psychologists

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many vacant posts for clinical psychologists there were in English NHS trusts in each region on *(a)* 1 April 1994 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [543]

Mr. Malone: The table shows the number of vacancies for clinical psychologists in English national health service trusts by region at 31 March 1994 and 31 March 1995.

The figures shown for the two years are not comparable because 1995 figures include data from about 80 fourth wave trusts which were directly managed units in 1994.

The vacancy rate as a percentage of the funded establishment in all trusts in 1994 was 15.2 per cent. In 1995 it was 15.5 per cent.

The figures supplied are for advertised vacant posts.

Clinical psychologist all vacancies in English NHS trusts by region: England as at 31 March 1994 and 1995

	Number
1994	
Northern	10
Yorkshire	30
Trent	10
East Anglia	20
North-west Thames	30
North-east Thames	20
South-east Thames	20
South-west Thames	10
Wessex	20
Oxford	10
South Western	30
West Midlands	10
Mersey	10
North Western	10
SHAs	[1]—
England total	240
1995	
Northern and Yorkshire	60
Trent	20
North Thames	60
South Thames	30
East Anglia and Oxford	40
Wessex and South Western	50
West Midlands	60
Mersey and North Western	60
SHAs	[2]—
England total	380

Source:
The Department of Health Joint National Professional Manpower Initiative Survey.

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Total may not equal sum of components due to rounding.
[1] Denotes zero
[2] Denotes figures of five and under.

NHS Finance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide an analysis of capital expenditure compared to cash limit allocation for *(a)* trusts in each region and *(b)* regions in each of the last three years. [2400]

Mr. Horam: The available information is shown in the tables. "Allocations to RHAs" represent the final capital cash limits for the year. Trusts do not have cash limits; their equivalent control is external financing limits, but these cover both revenue and capital expenditure. The figures provided for trust "Capital Allocations" in the tables therefore represent initial planned capital allocations for the year concerned. In each case, capital expenditure covers capital additions, which include assets purchases by, and donated to, authorities and trusts, as shown in their accounts. Expenditure also includes assets purchased with the proceeds from land sales which are not included in allocations.

Information is now available for 1994–95, and provisional figures from the summarised accounts for capital expenditure for that year are also included.

£ thousand

	RHAs		*Trusts*	
Region	*Capital allocations*	*Capital expenditure*	*Capital allocations*	*Capital expenditure*
1992–93				
Northern	73,952	73,531	17,553	33,270
Yorkshire	56,137	66,052	49,017	76,104
Trent	107,883	134,592	37,684	55,044
East Anglian	49,673	54,727	9,975	8,215
North-west Thames	78,952	105,782	22,928	39,532
North-east Thames	58,819	137,600	28,691	38,669
South-east Thames	103,389	119,133	34,900	80,401
South-west Thames	48,846	60,975	40,078	39,381
Wessex	58,405	66,282	26,504	24,028
Oxford	61,129	66,567	8,802	11,175
South Western	48,692	56,472	73,680	93,486
West Midlands	129,651	145,852	27,435	23,799
Mersey	18,525	25,637	47,054	57,071
North Western	106,797	108,136	30,333	44,915
Totals	1,000,850	1,221,340	454,634	625,090
1993–94				
Northern	71,205	70,965	40,751	47,780
Yorkshire	16,650	18,509	94,772	97,041
Trent	37,780	48,638	108,112	158,828
East Anglian	16,692	30,752	47,412	49,012
North-west Thames	9,396	15,549	40,958	55,981
North-east Thames	45,820	58,965	71,408	84,208
South-east Thames	20,327	27,967	76,691	120,639
South-west Thames	4,681	26,755	50,232	71,330
Wessex	29,543	42,610	54,167	62,732
Oxford	27,384	38,238	31,408	37,227
South Western	18,062	62,705	97,775	120,957
West Midlands	97,904	85,784	44,775	54,989
Mersey	–1,907	4,790	64,030	73,452
North Western	79,721	125,351	54,731	64,593
Totals	473,258	657,578	877,222	1,098,769
1994–95				
Northern and Yorkshire	12,502	16,949	187,702	208,695
Trent	10,175	18,073	143,074	190,355
Anglian and Oxford	8,992	14,021	128,693	138,132
North Thames	–8,447	42,576	154,420	244,318
South Thames	–27,362	22,445	194,640	263,946
South and West	–732	18,137	188,038	234,856
West Midlands	13,814	26,603	140,940	136,741
North-west	–342	10,950	185,941	214,079
Totals	8,600	169,754	1,323,448	1,631,122

1. Capital allocations for RHAs are final cash limits which include in year adjustments made to the original cash limits. The transfer of capital cash limit and capital receipts to Trust external financing limits by some RHAs resulted in negative final cash limit figures.
2. Capital allocations for trusts are capital planning totals.
3. The 1994–95 capital expenditure figures are unaudited and therefore provisional.
4. Capital expenditure represents capital additions, as shown in annual accounts, which includes assets purchased by, and assets donated to, authorities/trusts.
5. Changes were made to the definition of capital spending in 1993–94. Some items of expenditure formerly treated as capital are now treated as revenue.
6. RHAs were restructured in 1994–95.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service trusts have borrowed money from commercial sources; and if he will list the sums involved. [3249]

Mr. Horam: Information on national health service trusts' borrowing from commercial sources during the year is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is *(a)* the current capital value of the Princess Margaret hospital, Swindon, *(b)* the capital value of the proposed new hospital, *(c)* the cost of refurbishment and rebuild, *(d)* the length of the lease from the private financiers with the NHS, *(e)* the annual cost of the lease to the NHS for each year of the duration, *(f)* the cost to the NHS of preparing the bid and *(g)* the projected time to rebuild the hospital; [3765]

(2) what is *(a)* the current capital value of the Bishop Auckland hospital, *(b)* the capital value of the proposed new hospital, *(c)* the cost of refurbishment and rebuild, *(d)* the length of the lease from the private financiers with the NHS, *(e)* the annual cost of the lease to the NHS for each year of the lease, *(f)* the cost to the NHS of preparing the bid and *(g)* the projected time to rebuild the hospital; [3761]

(3) what is *(a)* the current capital value of the Wycombe and Amersham general hospital, *(b)* the capital value of the proposed new hospital when completed, *(c)* the cost of refurbishment and rebuild, *(d)* the length of the lease from the private financiers with the NHS, *(e)* the annual cost of the lease to the NHS for each year of the lease, *(f)* the cost to the NHS of preparing the bid and *(g)* the projected time to rebuild the hospital. [3752]

Mr. Horam: The capital value of individual hospitals and the costs of preparing individual business cases are not available centrally. The other information requested is a matter for negotiation between the individual trusts and the private sector consortia bidding for the developments.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish information on health authority costs and NHS trust management costs. [4461]

Mr. Dorrell: I shall tomorrow publish "Health Authority Costs" setting out actual spending on running each district health authority and family health services authority for 1994–95 together with plans for 1995–96 and the planned spending for the new health authorities in 1996–97. I shall also publish "National Health Service Trusts Management Costs 1994–95" setting out spending on management for each NHS trust for 1994–95.

Copies of the documents will be placed in the Library.

Methionine

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to introduce legislation to require methionine to be added to paracetamol products; [3136]

(2) what assessment he has made of the benefits of adding methionine to paracetamol products. [3135]

Mr. Malone: There are no plans to make the inclusion of methionine in paracetamol-containing medicines mandatory.

Methionine is sometimes given by mouth to treat paracetamol overdose. It is not possible to assess directly the benefits of adding methionine to paracetamol products. It is believed that methionine may have a protective effect on the liver in paracetamol overdose, but clinical trials to establish this would be unethical. At the recommended doses the addition of methionine provides no benefit.

Prescriptions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was received in prescription charges in respect of prescriptions where the cost of the drugs to the NHS was less than the prescription charge in each year since 1989. [3121]

Mr. Malone: The estimated amounts received in 1993–94 and 1994–95 were £86 million or 32.5 per cent. and £111 million or 38.7 per cent. respectively. Information is not available for earlier years.

These figures take no account of income received from prepayment certificates or prescriptions dispensed by dispensing doctors.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress has been made towards establishing national clinical guidelines for the prevention of osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement; [2861]

(2) in what percentage of hip fractures experienced by women osteoporosis has been identified as a contributing factor; and if he will make a statement; [2864]

(3) what research is being conducted by his Department into the prevention of osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement; [2865]

(4) what measures have been taken since 1994 at a local and national level to educate the public and health professionals about the prevention of osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement. [2866]

Mr. Horam: It is likely that osteoporosis is a contributing factor in most hip fractures, of which about 80 per cent. are suffered by women. Our concern about these and other effects of osteoporosis caused us to set up the advisory group on osteoporosis, whose report was published in January 1995. The Department is currently working to implement its recommendations.

It is the responsibility of professional bodies to develop clinical guidelines where a need has been identified. Discussions have begun the Department and the relevant medical royal colleges with a view to their developing guidelines for osteoporosis, in response to one of the recommendations of the advisory group. The Department has this year significantly increased its financial support to the National Osteoporosis Society, which does a great deal at both national and local levels to educate the public and health professionals about the disease.

The Department is funding a study into the cost-effectiveness of hormone replacement therapy, including the benefits of using it for the prevention of osteoporosis. The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, also funds a significant amount of research on osteoporosis. We are discussing with the Medical Research Council what further work should be undertaken.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the published recommended response time within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [2995]

Mr. Horam: "Access to Information: a guide for the public" states that the Department aims to respond to letters requesting information under the open government code of practice within 20 working days of receipt.

Breast Cancer Screening

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that all women aged over 65 years will be offered breast cancer screening in the same way as women aged 50 to 64 years. [3137]

Mr. Horam: The Government announced proposals on 18 October for pilot schemes in Northern and Yorkshire, and South Thames regions to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the call/recall breast screening programme to women up to the age of 69. These schemes will run for three years to enable an assessment of the likely uptake, effect on work load, and effectiveness in terms of cancers detected. We will base any changes to our policy on the evidence emerging from these studies.

Women over 65 can continue to have three-yearly breast screening free of charge if they request it. This facility has been well publicised in leaflets available in general practitioner surgeries and clinics as well as in breast screening centres.

NHS Trust Directors

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the compensation given to directors of trusts for loss of office in each financial year since 1991–92 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by each trust. [3113]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Capital Projects

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in order of priority capital projects in the NHS which he plans to undertake. [3430]

Mr. Horam: No such list is compiled centrally. Programming of capital developments is devolved to national health service executive regional offices and is ultimately determined at local level by the decisions of local purchasers and providers.

Infertility Treatment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities provide in vitro fertilisation treatment free within the national health service system. [3185]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Information on the services available under the national health service for the treatment of infertility is contained in "The Effective Health Care Bulletin", "The Management of Subfertility", August 1992, published for the NHS management executive by a consortium of Leeds and York universities and the research unit of the Royal College of Physicians. Copies of the bulletin are available in the Library.

Local health authorities are responsible for the provision of local health services, including the provision of infertility services. Decisions about the resources available for these services must be left to individual health authorities as they are in the best position to determine priorities in the light of local needs and circumstances.

In-patient Episodes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average length of in-patient hospital stay for each specialty in each year since 1989–90. [3250]

Mr. Horam: Mean duration of stay by specialty is published annually in volume 1 of "Hospital Episode Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average throughput of patients per hospital bed in each major specialty in each year since 1989–90; and what was the percentage change over the entire period. [3251]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available in the form requested. Information on average throughput by sector groups is published annually in the "Statistical Bulletin—NHS Hospital Activity Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Market Testing (Clinical Services)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his Department's press release 95/532, dated 21 November 1995, concerning his speech on that day to the Royal College of Physicians, if he will identify the NHS trusts which have explored local arrangements for private sector provision of clinical services; and if he will list the clinical service or services considered for private sector provision by each of those trusts. [3474]

Mr. Horam: A table will be placed in the Library listing the trusts that are recorded on the national health service executive's market-testing database as having market-tested one or more of their clinical services together with details of the outcome.

Out-patient Attendances

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of out-patient attendances in each of the last five years. [3763]

Mr. Horam: Information on out-patient attendances is published annually in "Outpatients and ward attenders, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Beds

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of NHS beds in the last five years. [3769]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave to her on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *604*.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of private pay beds in the NHS in each of the last five years. [3768]

Mr. Malone: This information has not been collected centrally since 1990–91 when there were 2,956 pay beds. Laing's "Review of Private Healthcare", copies of which are available in the Library, provides estimates for subsequent years.

National Blood Service

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what types of blood products are currently sold by the blood transfusion service outside the United Kingdom; and what is the total value of these contracts every year. [3770]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 2 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *455*. The value of these exports has never exceeded £5 million in any one year.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors led to the difference between the figures for the National Blood Authority budget for the national blood service quoted in "Plans for the future of the National Blood Service", dated November 1995, and in the National Blood Authority consultation document of August 1994; and if he will make a statement. [3675]

Mr. Horam: The figure of £135 million contained in the consultation document is based on actual expenditure in the blood service for the year 1992–93. The figure of £154 million in the November 1995 document is a cost forecast for the current financial year. The difference reflects an average annual increase in the amount of blood supplied of 4 per cent. and a general increase in the level of provision of other services to hospitals.

NHS Pensioners Trust

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the management costs of the national health service benevolent fund. [3840]

Mr. Malone: Further to my answer of 19 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *38*, I now wish to clarify the situation. The parliamentary question tabled in June asked for details of the benevolent fund. It was impossible to identify the body on the basis of the information given. Further information was sought but none was provided. We now have full information which indicates that the question related to the national health service pensioners trust. The trust was formally established in 1990. It is managed independently by its trustees and any action regarding the management costs of the trust is the responsibility of those trustees.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all NHS trusts *(a)* as of 30 November 1995 and *(b)* with effect from 1 April 1996. [4064]

Mr. Malone: A list of all national health service trusts as at 30 November 1995 will be placed in the Library. No decision has yet been made on any trust applications for 1 April 1996.

EU Health Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Health Council held on 30 November, giving details of all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1972]

Mr. Bowis: The Health Council agreed a common position on a proposal from the European Commission for a programme of action within the field of public health on combating drug dependency. The Council agreed six resolutions, two in response to reports from the Commission—on the integration of health protection requirements into other Community policies, and on the state of health in the European Community—and four which invited the Commission to produce a study on an area of interest to the Health Council concerning orphan drugs, the mutual recognition of prescriptions, generic medicinal products and medicinal plant preparations. The Council also discussed a modified version proposal on tobacco advertising put forward by the presidency but reached no decision on it. The matters on which decisions were taken were agreed by all member states with no abstentions or votes against.

NHS Reforms

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the income that has become available to the private sector as a result of NHS reforms. [2272]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department was first notified of an outbreak of legionnaire's disease at Kusadasi, Turkey, in 1995; what action was taken and at what time to advise travel agencies operating in the United Kingdom about the outbreak; and what advice has been issued to United Kingdom travellers to Kusadasi, Turkey, since May 1995 about the outbreak of legionnaire's disease associated with the Hotel Imbat. [3273]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health was informed of five possibly related cases of legionnaire's disease which were known to have occurred in travellers returning from Kusadasi on 16 August and of a sixth case on 21 August 1995. The Turkish authorities were informed, via the British embassy in Turkey, of all cases as they became known. The consular department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Association of British Travel Agents were informed on 23 August. The Federation of Tour Operators was informed of further cases on 29 September 1995. A notice to travellers was issued on the Prestel database on 23 August and updated on 29 September.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action was taken to alert medical agencies in the United Kingdom about an outbreak of legionnaire's disease in Kusadasi, Turkey. [3274]

Mr. Horam: Public health doctors were alerted about cases of legionnaire's disease in travellers returning from Kusadasi, Turkey via the Epinet electronic message system on 23 August and through the public health laboratory service communicable disease reports of 15 September and 6 October.

Patient Records

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to introduce measures.

including specific criminal offences, to prevent the obtaining of particulars of patient records from general practitioners other than in circumstances of clinical need; and if he will make a statement. [3356]

Mr. Horam: Patient confidentiality is already protected by a number of legislative measures. The General Medical Council re-emphasised the importance of confidentiality in guidance to the profession earlier this year. We shall shortly be issuing guidance to the national health service as a whole on the protection and use of patient information.

Community Care Services

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *523*, on community care services, what relevant information is held by his Department. [3618]

Mr. Bowis: Information is collected on expenditure on the community health programme on a provider basis. Information about purchaser expenditure on board service groupings, including community health services, will be available at the end of 1995–96.

Tiffield Secure Unit

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the capital and revenue costs of proposals with regard to the Tiffield secure unit. [3625]

Mr. Bowis: The capital cost of the new children's secure unit at Tiffield is £4,308,379. A grant to cover this cost has been made available to Northamptonshire county council. The county council is responsible for all revenue cost matters.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has *(a)* to place in the Library or *(b)* to place in the nearest public libraries to the development affected, the principal components of the agreements signed between NHS provider units and private sector facilities management and design and build consortia under the private finance initiative. [3733]

Mr. Horam: The private finance initiative will further develop our excellent record of co-operation with the private sector and ensure new national health service capital schemes are provided promptly and run efficiently, for the benefit of all NHS patients. Before any PFI scheme with significant expenditure consequences for the NHS is approved, a business case is produced to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of the proposal and assess the public spending implications. Approval to PFI schemes is only given only if the business case demonstrates that a PFI approach increases the cost-effectiveness of the scheme for the NHS and if any expenditure implications are affordable to NHS purchasers. NHS trusts and health authorities are accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who is accountable to Parliament. He is supported by an accounting officer who has to answer to the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons. The Audit Commission, which we invited into the NHS in 1990, carries out independent financial audits in every NHS trust and health authority and it sends to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State any report that is causing it particular concern. Since we are satisfied that all of this process protects the interests of the NHS and patients and taxpayers, I do not propose to place the commercial contracts in Libraries.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures on clinical negligence settlements for each of the last four years *(a)* by region, *(b)* by district and *(c)* by trust indicating (i) their number and (iii) their cost. [2419]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* Information is no longer collected centrally about the numbers of clinical negligence claims settled, nor is any information held about claims settled by districts. However, I am able to give details of the costs of clinical negligence claims by trust, and this will be placed in the Library.

For information by region, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *40-42*, which contains the most current data available.

Medicine Prices

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received calling for the abolition of the retail price maintenance scheme for medicines. [3017]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* None.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received that patients purchasing medicines are being disadvantaged through the higher prices required by resale price maintenance of medicines. [3014]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* None.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Grid

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact of the promised rebate to domestic consumers, arising from the sale of the national grid, on the collection of the fossil fuel levy; and if any rebate will be leviable. [3390]

Mr. Eggar: The rebate is expected to take the form of a discount in the first quarter of 1996 with a consequent effect on the fossil fuel levy collected in that quarter.

Gas Pipeline (Zeebrugge-Bacton)

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement with regard to the implications for United Kingdom energy reserves of the proposed construction of a gas pipeline from Zeebrugge to Bacton, Norfolk. [3484]

Mr. Eggar: The Department considers the proposed gas pipeline from Bacton to Zeebrugge to be an important strategic project that will ensure the continued development of our oil and gas resources.

Natural Gas Reserves

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the United Kingdom's current reserves of natural gas; and what is the rate of consumption through *(a)* domestic supply and *(b)* exports. [3483]

Mr. Eggar: Estimates of the United Kingdom's remaining recoverable reserves of gas are given in my Department's energy report 1995, volume 2, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The report shows that discovered reserves could yield 1,915 billion cu m of gas. Allowing for the full potential from as yet undrilled structures could raise this to 3,815 billion cu m.

In 1994, some 63.5 billion cu m were produced for United Kingdom supply and 0.9 billion cu m were exported.

Late Payment

Mr. Day: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans there are to review the case for a statutory right to interest in June 1996 in accordance with the commitment made in the White Paper of June 1994. [3553]

Mr. Page: The incidence of late payment and the need for new measures to address the problem are subject to on-going investigation. A number of measures were put in place following the publication of "Competitiveness—Helping Business to Win" in May 1994 and the effect of these will need to be evaluated. Any decision to review the case for a statutory right to interest will be dependent on these considerations and will be announced by June 1996.

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date in 1981 a United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority shipment destined for Rockall Deep in 1981 was diverted to Beaufort's dyke; what was the reason for the diversion; and if he will list the full contents of that shipment. [3552]

Mr. Page: In November 1981, the MV Gem left Bromborough bound for the Rockall Deep. It was intended to test a new mechanism for handling drums of the type used for sea disposal of radioactive waste. However, due to severe weather it was necessary to carry out the tests at an alternative approved site at Beaufort's dyke.

The tests involved the dumping of a small batch of dummy drums containing only solid concrete. Beaufort's dyke was not used for the disposal of radioactive waste.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated cost to date of the Scott inquiry. [1890]

Mr. Lang: The direct cost to date of the Scott inquiry is £1.8 million.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2358]

Mr. Lang: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the chief executives of the agencies for which my Department is or has been responsible. I have therefore asked Mr. David Durham of Companies House, Mr. Peter Joyce of the Insolvency Service, Dr. Richard Worswick of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, Dr. Peter Clapham, acting chief executive for the National Engineering and National Physical Laboratories, which ceased to be agencies earlier this year, Dr. Seton Bennet of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Mr. Paul Hartnack of the Patent Office and Mr. Jim Norton of the Radiocommunications Agency to arrange for replies to be given. My Department's Accounts Services Agency has also ceased to be an executive agency. Its financial and management accounting functions did not necessitate overseas travel.

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to you about overseas travel by staff of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC).

In financial year 1994/95 just over £99,000 was spent on overseas travel (air fares, hotel bills and subsistence); of this £56,000 was for travel to EU countries and £43,000 for travel outside the EU.

Visits were made to Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, and the USA. These visits were made in order to fulfil customer contracts.

The staff involved were within the Civil Service grades Scientific Officer to Grade 3, with the bulk of the trips made by staff in Grades 5, 6, 7 and Senior Scientific Officer.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel by staff in The Insolvency Service during 1994/95.

The total cost of overseas travel for 1994/95 was £9,050: the countries visited were Austria, Belgium Canada, France and Spain: and those visits were made by myself, a grade 4, a grade 5, and insolvency B grade (equivalent grade 7) and an insolvency C grade (equivalent SEO).

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML) to your Question about overseas travel by the staff of the Agency.

For NWML, the information you requested is as follows:

(a) The cost of foreign travel by Agency staff in the financial year 1994/95 was £25,692 (some of which was recovered from the European Commission);

(b) The countries visited were Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland;

(c) Apart from myself, some 13 different members of staff were involved, who hold a variety of posts in the Agency.

Letter from Peter Clapham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel by staff of the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and the National Engineering Laboratory (NEL) during the last financial year.

As you will be aware, NPL and NEL are no longer executive agencies, both now being operated by private sector management. However, as the last Chief Executive of both laboratories I am pleased to respond to your question.

I should comment that as internationally active research and technical advice laboratories, both NPL and NEL have a wide range of overseas commitments associated with, for example, collaborative projects, international consultancies, conferences and committee work. A significant proportion of staff travel costs is met directly by customers and in some cases these costs are not separately identified in our accounts. However, the approximate totals for overseas travel and subsistence in 1994/95 were £520,000 and £130,000 for the NPL and NEL respectively.

As you might expect from the extent of both laboratories' activities, the countries visited and the grades of staff involved are very wide ranging and it would not be practicable to provide you with a breakdown. However, if you have some specific queries I should be happy to do my best to elicit the information for you.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel by staff of the Agency.

The Radiocommunications Agency has a major international role. It represents UK-wide interests in many international fora at the European and global levels. These activities all relate to the effective management of the radio frequency spectrum and include the harmonisation of frequency usage, the development of radio regulatory regimes, and the adoption of international standards for radiocommunications equipment. The interests we represent include the Agency's customers who use the radio spectrum, other government departments, manufacturers, operators and service providers. In some fora we also represent the interests of the UK's dependant territories.

With the agreement of ministers, we play an active and constructive role in the relevant fora and, particularly in Europe, we play a leading role by holding chairmanships and making substantive contributions to the development of international agreements.

For the financial year 1994/95, the Agency spent a total of £538,202 on overseas travel including subsistence. In keeping with the Agency's net running cost regime, all of this expenditure was recovered through licence fees and other income.

This expenditure involved extensive travel throughout Europe, some visits to the Americas and occasional visits to other parts of the world. The staff involved ranged from the Chief Executive to junior administrative staff (in support of large delegations to world treaty-making conferences). A detailed breakdown of countries visited and staff levels involved could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

I hope that this information is of interest.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 December 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade, the Rt Hon Ian Lang MP, has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel by staff of Companies House Executive Agency during the last financial year.

The information you sought is as follows:

(a) Cost: £12,000

(b) Countries Visited: Anguilla, USA, Eire, Belgium and France

(c) Posts held by staff involved: Chief Executive, senior and middle management grades.

I should explain that in the case of Anguilla, the net cost to Companies House will be nil, because the visit was in connection with consultancy advice we provided to certain overseas administrations, for which we are reimbursed.

I hope this information fully answers your question.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about overseas travel by Patent Office staff in 1994/95.

The information you requested is as follows:

Countries visited	*Grades visiting*	*Total cost £*
America	2xSPE 1xPE	10,472.09
Austria	2xG3 1xG6 1xEO 1xPE 2xSE	4,748.98
Belgium	2xG3 3xG5 6xG7 1xSEO 10xSPE 21xPE 33xSE	37,708.90
Canada	2xG7 1xSPE	4,974.85
Denmark	1xSPE 2xSE	3,335.68
Finland	1xSPE	905.13
France	1xSPE 1xPE 5xSE	5,781.01
Germany	10xG3 8xG4 2xG6 1xHEO 3xEO 6xSPE 5xPE 8xSE 2xE	34,875.97
Greece	1xG4 1xPE 1xSE	2,436.98
Holland	1xG5 2xG7 2xSPE 2xPE 5xSE	6,754.41
India	1xPE	1,113.52
Ireland	1xPE 2xSE	961.66
Italy	1xG4 1xPE 1xSE	1,529.66

ountries visited	Grades visiting	Total cost £
apan	1xG4 1xPE	7,285.02
uxemborough	1xG4 1xG5 1xPE	1,298.44
Solvenia	1xG3	778.80
Spain	2xG3 2xG4 3xG5 1xG6 2xG7 3xPE 2xSE	10,320.90
Sweden	1xG7	719.05
Switzerland	1xG3 7xG4 1xG5 1xG6 5xG7 3xSEO 2xHEO 2xSPE 13xPE 13xSE	47,815.37
Zambia	1G4	965.54

Note:

G3 Grade 3.

G4 Grade 4.

G5 Grade 5.

G6 Grade 6.

G7 Grade 7.

SEO Senior Executive Officer.

HEO Higher Executive Officer.

EO Executive Officer.

SPE Superintending Examiner.

PE Principal Examiner.

SE Senior Examiner.

E Examiner.

As can be seen the bulk of overseas travel by Patent Office staff was to Belgium, Germany, Spain and Switzerland. These countries are respectively the seats of the European Commission, the European Patent Office, the EC Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (which deals with trade marks) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those companies that have prequalified as potential buyers for British Coal Enterprise. [3384]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal. Details of the pre-qualifiers are commercially confidential and are not being released by British Coal, but I understand that there has been a very positive interest in purchasing BCE or its various activities.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with the British Standards Institution regarding a British standard for small firms. [3692]

Mr. Page: This Department has had no discussions with the British Standards Institution regarding a British standard for small firms. As I stated in my reply on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *209*, there are no plans to introduce a British standard for small firms.

Public Service Contracts

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what powers he has to intervene when there is evidence of anti-competitive activity by local authorities in the award of contracts for public services; [3778]

(2) how many councils have been investigated by the Office of Fair Trading for favouring their in-house supplier over external contractors bidding for work under CCT; and if he will list them. [3779]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Under legislation governing local authorities, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible for investigating behaviour by local authorities in connection with compulsory competitive tendering for contracts for public services.

Cycle Imports

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cycles were imported from *(a)* China and *(b)* south-east Asia as a whole in each of the last five years; what has been the allotted quota for each of these years; and by what month in the year the quota was exceeded. [2440]

Mr. Oppenheim: The figures for imports of bicycles from China and south-east Asia for 1990 to 1994 are given in table 1. There are no import quotas for bicycles. However, a "ceiling" on duty-free imports of bicycles into the EC under the previous generalised system of preferences scheme was introduced in 1991. When a ceiling was reached, full import duty could be reimposed at the request of a member state. Duty was reimposed on imports of bicycles from a number of countries in south-east Asia at various points—in some instances, at the request of the United Kingdom. Details of ceilings and duty reimpositions under the GSP scheme are provided in table 2. A revised EC GSP scheme introduced from 1 January this year contains no limits on the amount of a product that could be imported under it. Instead, a fixed rate of reduced duty is applied to sensitive products. In the case of bicycles this is set at 70 per cent. of the full duty.

Table 1: UK imports of cycles

thousands

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
China	101.0	141.9	127.6	7.7	12.5
ASEAN	121.6	136.3	412.5	318.2	395.2
Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia	119.0	125.1	361.1	300.2	387.2
Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea (north and south)	1,048.0	1,012.6	1,001.6	664.1	624.2

Note:

ASEAN = Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines.

Source:

Her Majesty's Customs & Excise.

Table 2: GSP Ceilings

Year	*EC ceiling (ECUs)*	*Country*	*Ceiling reached*[1]	*Duty reimposed*
1991	9,004,000	China	14 June	10 September
1992	9,454,000	China	27 March	12 May
		Indonesia	21 August	22 November
		Thailand	21 August	22 November
1993	9,454,000	China	8 February	14 May
		Indonesia	6 August	5 December
		Malaysia	6 August	30 November
		Thailand	6 August	5 December
		South Korea	1 December	
1994[2] January to June	4,727,000	Indonesia	22 July	
		Malaysia	22 July	
		Thailand	22 July	
		South Korea	22 May	
July to December	4,727,000	India	17 November	
		Malaysia	9 November	
		Thailand	1 December	

[1] The date on which the United Kingdom were notified that the ceiling was reached.

[2] The GSP scheme was under review in 1994 and was operated as two separate six monthly schemes in that year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest assessment he has made of the probability of BSE entering the human food chain. [1993]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are currently in place to prevent cattle infected with BSE from entering the food chain. [2668]

Mrs. Browning: The following measures are in place to prevent issue from cattle infected with BSE from entering the food chain:

(i) BSE is a notifiable disease;

(ii) all cattle suspected to be suffering from BSE are killed and their carcases incinerated;

(iii) all cattle receive an ante mortem inspection at the slaughterhouse. Any that display signs of BSE are killed and the carcases incinerated; and

(iv) cattle which are incubating BSE but are not yet showing clinical signs cannot be identified. All cattle are therefore assumed to be potentially infected, and the tissue in which infectivity may be present are removed and cannot be used in human food or animal feed. The tissues are the so called specified bovine offals—brain, spinal cord, spleen and tonsils of cattle over six months of age and the thymus and intestines of all cattle.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food also announced new measures to control the use of bovine vertebral columns in the making of mechanically recovered meat—MRM—in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) on 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *530–531*.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers have been prosecuted to date for falsifying documents relating to BSE in cattle. [2670]

Mrs. Browning: Farmers' declarations that cattle have not resided on a holding in which a case of BSE has been confirmed during the previous six years, or that individual animals are less than two and a half years of age, are required for export purposes. They do not form part of our comprehensive system for the protection of the consumer in this country.

Responsibility for enforcement and prosecution in relation to these declarations rests with local authorities. Although the Department is often kept informed at local level, we do not keep central records of such prosecutions and information on total numbers could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by agency staff *(a)* the costs of the travel, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff concerned. [2287]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Responsibility for this matter is delegated to agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from George Trevelyan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about overseas travel made by staff in this Agency for the last financial year as this matter is within my operational responsibility.

The total cost of overseas travel between 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995 was £77,986.

Countries visited by Agency managers were Belgium, Denmark, Eire, France, Greece, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and the United States.

In all, 62 managers were involved with official business visits and a number of these visited several of the countries concerned over the year. These include the Agency's Finance Director, Chief Accountant, Finance Policy Adviser, Finance Group Managers, Finance Managers, the Head of Information Systems, Group Manager Business Systems, Group Manager IT Development, Information Systems Contracts and Procurement Manager, Computer Services Senior Accounts Manager, Internal Market Director, Head of Internal Market Operations, Internal Market Group Manager, Scheme Managers, Technical Services Managers, Deputy Technical Services Manager, Procurement Manager, Head of External Operations, Group Managers External Operations, External Operations Scheme Managers, Group Manager Anti-Fraud Unit and Anti-Fraud Unit Scrutineers.

Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply on behalf of this Agency to your Parliamentary Question number 62. In this you sought details for this Agency, for the last financial year, for a) the cost of travel, b) the countries visited and c) the post held by the staff concerned in respect of overseas travel.(2287)

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency in April 1992 and is jointly owned by MAFF and the Welsh Office. It undertakes a broad range of consultancy and R&D work for commercial customers as well as government.

In recent years, ADAS has been heavily involved in overseas work mostly in Central and Eastern Europe. The majority of work concentrates on consultancy to the emerging governments in matters related to re-structuring of agriculture and food production. Approximately £1.4 million of ADAS income derives from this source. The Agency incurs approximately £200,000 per annum in travelling expenses. These are relating to visits made by ADAS in order to secure future business, visits made to deliver consultancy services and visits to International conferences where these are required to update the professional knowledge of ADAS staff.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), I have been asked to respond to your question regarding overseas travel with respect to this Agency.

As you may know, the MHS was established as an Executive Agency of MAFF on 1 April this year. Since that time there has been no overseas travel by any member of staff.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question about overseas travel.

During the 1994/95 financial year the cost of overseas travel undertaken by PSD staff totalled £42,339. Details of the countries visited and the posts held by the officers concerned could only be provided at disproportionate cost but the greater part of this expenditure relates to attendance at meetings in Brussels.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the costs of overseas travel by staff of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, the countries visited, and the posts held by the staff concerned, as these are operational matters for which I am responsible.

The cost of overseas travel, including subsistence, in 1994/95 was £126,863.82. Full details of the countries visited and the posts held by the staff involved could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The main element of overseas travel however, was by immunological inspectors (Grade 7 equivalent) in the VMD, carrying out inspections of manufacturing premises for immunological veterinary medicines in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and in Europe, and by staff, mainly at Grade 7 level and above, attending meetings of scientific, Commission and Council working groups in Brussels. In both cases, all or part of the travel costs is recovered from the companies involved or from the Commission.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on overseas travel by staff in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (known as the Central Veterinary Laboratory until 30 September 1995).

In the last financial year, overseas travel costs in the Central Veterinary Laboratory amounted to £40,008. Due to internal management restructuring we have only been tracking the costs from the beginning of this financial year and, consequently, are not able to provide any further breakdown. However, the posts held by staff and the countries visited will be varied as we consider overseas travel, for the purpose of attending conferences and presenting papers, an essential component of the scientific development of staff.

Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 4 December 1995:

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to provide information for each of his executive agencies relating to overseas travel by agency staff in the last financial year. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

In 1994–95:

(a) The total cost of overseas travel was £175,779.

(b) Countries visited were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USA.

(c) The posts held by staff concerned were 109 scientific and 3 administrative. The main purpose of overseas travel was either to present scientific papers at conferences or to represent the UK in EU meetings.

Early Retirement (Farmers)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received over the past three years on the subject of initiating an early retirement scheme for farmers; what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the likely benefits of this to the tenanted sector; and if he will make a statement. [2526]

Mr. Boswell: In the past three years, the Department has answered four parliamentary questions and 28 Ministers' correspondence on the subject of an early retirement scheme for farmers. Council regulation 2079/92 permits member states to provide early retirement pensions to farmers aged between 55 and normal retirement age who release their land for amalgamation with other holdings or for non-agricultural use. This option has not been taken upon the United Kingdom because we take the view that its terms are not appropriate to the conditions of agriculture here. For that reason, we have not commissioned any research on early retirement for farmers nor evaluated the likely impact on the tenanted sector.

Executive Agencies (Meetings)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what record he keeps of the number and dates of meetings he has with the heads of agencies which report to him. [3081]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My office holds a record of all my meetings. Those with the heads of agencies which report to me form a part of that record. They are not singled out in any special way.

Arable Areas (Checks)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will commission a survey of arable areas throughout the European Union by the Western European Union satellite centre to facilitate a scientific comparison between the arrangements made by member states to secure compliance with common agricultural policy regulations including set-aside areas. [3259]

Mr. Baldry: No. Most EU member states carry out remote sensing checks on arable areas including set-aside land, using satellite imagery or aerial photography as part of an EC Commission co-financed programme. Discrepancies found are followed up by individual member states and results monitored by the EC Commission. These measures, together with those applied by all member states under the integrated administration control system, are designed to ensure compliance with CAP regulations.

Sheep and Beef Support Schemes

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was spent on *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowances, *(b)* suckler cow premiums, *(c)* sheep annual premiums and *(d)* beef special premiums in each country of the United Kingdom in 1994–95. [3221]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* In 1994–95 £31.3 million[1] was spent on hill livestock compensatory allowances, £64.7 million was spent on suckler cow premium, including extensification premium; £163.7 million was spent on sheep annual premium, including Less-favoured area supplement, and £81.1 million was spent on beef special premium, including extensification premium, in England. Expenditure on these schemes in the other parts of the United Kingdom is a matter for the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

[1] This includes expenditure carried forward from the previous financial year.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money will be spent on *(a)* the hill livestock compensatory allowances, *(b)* suckler cow premiums, *(c)* sheep annual premiums and *(d)* beef special premiums in each country of the United Kingdom in 1995–96. [3222]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* In 1995–96, we estimate that £27.6 million will be spent on hill livestock compensatory allowances; £83 million will be spent on suckler cow premium, including extensification premium; £182 million will be spent on sheep annual premium, including LFA supplement, and £129.2 million will be spent on beef special premium, including extensification premium, in England. Expenditure under these schemes in the other parts of the United Kingdom is a matter for the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

European Funding (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much matching funding his Department has provided for European agricultural guarantee and guidance projects in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 within the north Yorkshire area; and if he will provide a breakdown based on (i) parliamentary constituency and (ii) local authority. [3744]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 19 October, *Official Report*, column *323*. A breakdown of this information by parliamentary constituency and local authority can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Investor in People Status

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to achieve investor in people status; when they started the process; when they expect to achieve investor in people status; and if he will make a statement. [2971]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The Department is committed in principle to pursuing the investor in people standard. The Ministry's information technology directorate achieved the standard at the end of 1993; the regional organisation recently carried out a diagnostic survey and is now evaluating the results; and the rest of the core Department is preparing to follow suit by assembling the various elements that are required in order to attain investor in people status.

Overgrazing

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers had their payments withdrawn as a result of overgrazing in each country of the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 to the latest available date. [3223]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* In England, four farmers had their hill livestock compensatory allowances withheld in whole or in part in 1994–95 as a result of overgrazing. To date, three farmers have had their hill livestock compensatory allowances withheld in whole or in part as a result of overgrazing in 1995–96. Responsibility for the implementation of overgrazing provisions of the livestock subsidy schemes in other parts of the United Kingdom falls to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Moorland Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many lectures have been entered into the moorland scheme in each region of the United Kingdom to which the scheme applies. [3225]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* In England, 4048.63 hectares of heather moorland grazing have been entered into the moorland scheme. Responsibility for schemes to enhance the nature conservation value of moorland in other parts of the United Kingdom falls to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers have entered their land into the moorland scheme in each region of the United Kingdom to which the scheme applies. [3226]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* In England, 13 farmers have to date signed agreements entering land into the moorland scheme. Responsibility for schemes to enhance the nature conservation value of moorland in other parts of the United Kingdom falls to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

TRANSPORT

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the results of his assessment of the further work required to be undertaken to identify the cause of the sinking of the MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [4119]

Sir George Young: I have today published Lord Donaldson's assessment. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House and are available in the Vote Office.

The formal investigation in 1987 into the loss of the Derbyshire decided that

> "... the Derbyshire was probably overwhelmed by the forces of nature in Typhoon Orchid"

and added that

> "the evidence available does not support any firmer conclusion".

Following the discovery in June 1994 of the wreckage of the Derbyshire during a search sponsored by the International Transport Workers Federation, my predecessor appointed the right hon. Lord Donaldson of Lymington to undertake an assessment of what further work might be undertaken to seek to determine the actual cause of the loss of the Derbyshire, together with assessments of the costs involved, the likelihood of establishing the cause and the likely benefits to ship safety.

Lord Donaldson has recommended that a second, and final, re-examination of the wreck should be carried out, at a cost which he estimates at around £2 million. He believes there is a compelling case for seeking to establish the cause of the loss, with resulting benefits to ship safety.

I have decided to accept his recommendation. The timing of his re-examination will depend on making the necessary arrangements—drawing up a specification, inviting tenders and selecting a contractor—and will take place as soon as practicable in either spring 1996 or spring 1997. I have raised within the European Commission the possibility of sharing the costs with it, as the potential benefits are not confirmed to British ships and seafarers. The Commission has confirmed its readiness to assist financially.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *505*, what considerations led him not to place all documents currently held by his Department relating to the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, seven years ago, in the Library. [3783]

Mr. Norris: It is not my Department's normal practice to release official files other than at the appropriate time under the procedures and criteria set down by the Public Record Office. There are no plans for earlier release of the papers in question, given the classified nature of some of the material and the pending criminal trial.

South Yorkshire Supertram

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the financial impact of the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram; [3364]

(2) what will happen to any debts of South Yorkshire Supertram which are not covered by the sale; [3363]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* revenue funding, *(b)* capital funding and *(c)* capping levels of each council in South Yorkshire of the sale of Supertram. [3362]

Mr. Norris: My Department and South Yorkshire passenger transport executive are currently discussing these issues.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he announced the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram; and what steps he will take to advertise the sale; [3361]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* organisation and *(b)* individuals which he has engaged to assist with the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram; [3360]

(3) what restrictions will be placed on the bodies able to purchase South Yorkshire Supertram in respect of *(a)* bus companies and *(b)* other organisations; [3367]

(4) if the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram will be by competitive tender. [3365]

Mr. Norris: Arrangements for the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram are a matter for South Yorkshire passenger transport executive.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the timetable and process for the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram. [3368]

Mr. Norris: Arrangements for the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram are a matter for South Yorkshire passenger transport executive. It is, however, this Government's policy to privatise public transport operations wherever possible. I therefore look forward to South Yorkshire Supertram being sold at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under what powers he has taken the decision to order the sale of South Yorkshire Supertram. [3366]

Mr. Norris: The Government and South Yorkshire passenger transport executive have always agreed that the operation of South Yorkshire Supertram will be privatised at the earliest opportunity. South Yorkshire passenger transport executive proposed the "build first, sell later" structure for Supertram and has put in place arrangements for privatisation. The director general of the PTE has frequently confirmed to me the PTE's commitment to privatisation.

White Hart Roundabout, Northolt

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will order an inquiry into the time scale adopted by Ealing council in constructing phased traffic lights at the White Hart roundabout, Northolt; and if he will make a statement. [1853]

Mr Norris: No. It would not be appropriate for Ministers to intervene in the timing of this local highway scheme.

A36 (South Newton)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the work, referred to in his answer of 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *753*, will commence on installation of experimental speed limit warning signs on the A36 at South Newton. [3617]

Mr. Norris: Some of the installation work to accommodate the electronic speed limit warning signs has already started. Following the commissioning and testing of the equipment, the trial will be fully operational from 15 December onwards. The highway authority will be monitoring the site for a minimum period of six months.

Pollution

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to establish freephone numbers to which the public can report excessively smoky and polluting vehicles. [3721]

Mr. Norris: No. I am satisfied that the current reporting procedure for the smoky vehicle hotline explained in the publicity leaflet—copies of which were placed in the library on 27 October—is adequate.

Cycle Tracks

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures have been made in major cities for the provision for cycle tracks; and if he will make a statement. [3514]

Mr. Norris: Cycle facilities such as cycle lanes on the carriageway, cycle tracks away from the road, advanced stop lines at traffic lights and toucan crossings exist in most of our major cities. I hope all local highway authorities will respond positively to our initiatives to encourage cycling.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of cycle track currently exist in the cities of *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Newcastle, *(d)* Leeds, *(e)* Liverpool and *(f)* Sheffield; and if he will make a statement. [3196]

Mr. Norris: This information is not held centrally. The responsibility for cycle facilities rests with individual local highway authorities.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to extend the existing cycle track network in Sheffield; and if he will make a statement. [3197]

Mr. Norris: Responsibility for providing cycle facilities in Sheffield lies with Sheffield city council as the local highway authority. Proposals for cycle improvements in Sheffield were included in the south Yorkshire package bid, which is currently under consideration. I expect to make an announcement on funding shortly.

Cycling Accidents

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* injury causing non-fatal and *(c)* minor accidents were recorded involving cyclists who were (i) minors and (ii) adults on pavements in each of the last five years. [3468]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Road Accidents

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has *(a)* commissioned, *(b)* published and *(c)* evaluated from (i) the Transport Research Laboratory and (ii) others on the contribution of sideways spray from lorries and coaches to accidents on motorways. [3429]

Mr. Norris: In 1990 the Transport Research Laboratory undertook a review of the contribution of spray to motorway crashes and followed this with a study in which the police were asked about the contribution of spray when they reported injury accidents on wet motorways or A and M roads.

The study suggested that spray was a contributory cause in about 131 and 552 accidents on motorway and A and M roads in Britain each year. The annual cost of these accidents was estimated to lie between £6,905,010 and £29,095,020, based on the Department of Transport's figure for the average cost of a motorway injury accident.

The reports also discuss results of earlier estimates by the Transport Research Laboratory and others on the contribution of spray to accidents.

British Railways Board (Logo)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that for the foreseeable future the present logo of the British Railways Board will be continued to be displayed *(a)* on all buildings, direction signs, maps and publicity literature and *(b)* in all other ways as currently practised in respect of public rail services. [3342]

Mr. Watts: I intend to continue to use the double arrow symbol in those places where it is used as a road sign at present. Its use as a logo by the British Railways Board and others is a matter for them.

Defective Pavements

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will issue guidelines to ensure compensation will be provided for accidents involving faulty paving stones of less than 1in in height. [3332]

Mr. Norris: No. In any claim for compensation for injury allegedly caused by a defective pavement, it is for the courts to decide whether a highway authority's refusal to accept liability is reasonable in the light of the circumstances of the case.

Vehicle Statistics

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total number of *(a)* vehicle and *(b)* passenger miles travelled by (i) motor car, (ii) omnibus and (iii) private coach in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Norris: Passenger and vehicle miles by vehicle type and year are given in the table. Figures for buses and coaches are available only as a single combined category. However, further information on the use of buses run by public service vehicle operators can be found in section 5 of "Transport Statistics Great Britain" 1995 edition, a copy of which can be found in the Library. [3464]

	Vehicle miles (billion)		*Passenger miles (billion)*	
Year	*Cars and taxis*	*Buses and coaches*	*Cars and taxis*	*Buses and coaches*
1984	151.6	2.4	255	30
1985	155.6	2.3	260	30
1986	164.3	2.3	275	29
1987	176.9	2.5	295	29
1988	189.8	2.7	316	29
1989	205.8	2.8	343	29
1990	208.7	2.8	347	29
1991	208.3	3.0	346	27
1992	210.0	2.9	348	27
1993	210.4	2.9	348	27
1994	214.5	2.9	355	27

1. Estimates are derived from the traffic series (vehicle miles) and average occupancy rates from the National Travel Survey.

2. Changes are estimated by deflating passenger receipts by the most appropriate price indices available. Because the proxy method has to be used the series gives only a broad guide to trends.

Supplementary Credit Approvals

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* all metropolitan boroughs the number and the value of each supplementary credit approval not used within the specified time period for each of the last three years; [3195]

(2) if he will list for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* all the metropolitan boroughs the time limit specified for each supplementary credit approval granted for each of the last three years; [3194]

(3) if he will list for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* all the metropolitan boroughs the total value of each supplementary credit approval granted for each of the last three years. [3193]

Mr. Norris: Supplementary credit approvals, SCAs, may be issued at any time during the financial year and are valid for expenditure incurred up to the end of the financial year in question. If they are not used, the local authority is expected to return the SCA to the Department for reissue to another authority.

The following SCAs have been issued to Sheffield city council by my Department in the last three years:

1992–93:

£1,175k

1993–94:

(a) £3,326k

(b) £1,391k

1994–95

(a) £529k

(b) £244k

(c) £80k

(d) £419k.

None of these SCAs has been returned to the Department.

Information for the the metropolitan boroughs is as follows:

£000

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
Authority	*Tot SCA*	*Return*	*Tot SCA*	*Return*	*Tot SCA*	*Return*
Bolton	603	260	1,342	0	632	0
Bury	335	0	600	0	564	0
Manchester	1,495	0	12,986	0	3,458	565
Oldham	1,521	0	1,830	0	646	0
Rochdale	502	0	656	0	672	0
Salford	913	0	1,054	0	1,079	0
Stockport	1,154	0	1,410	0	379	0
Tameside	997	0	877	0	525	0
Trafford	170	0	673	1,572	477	0
Wigan	443	0	405	0	394	0
Knowsley	388	0	2,956	7,867	762	0
Liverpool	1,100	0	1,042	835	1,324	0
St. Helens	310	0	11,130	1,069	3,131	0
Sefton	458	0	623	0	627	0
Wirral	435	0	1,984	0	1,009	0
Barnsley	680	0	2,116	21	704	290
Doncaster	3,158	0	2,407	0	1,198	40
Rotherham	284	0	304	0	1,350	751
Gateshead	598	0	937	0	616	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	398	0	518	0	355	0
North Tyneside	110	0	315	275	634	0
South Tyneside	67	0	338	0	441	0
Sunderland	719	0	2,630	595	885	834
Birmingham	2,829	0	18,791	299	14,507	1,037
Coventry	617	0	2,553	4,034	756	1,250
Dudley	1,250	0	2,692	188	1,440	0

£000

Authority	1992–93 Tot SCA	Return	1993–94 Tot SCA	Return	1994–95 Tot SCA	Return
Sandwell	2,088	0	2,393	0	421	83
Solihull	988	0	1,652	0	442	0
Walsall	9,236	0	10,969	0	901	0
Wolverhampton	3,580	0	6,898	0	803	0
Bradford	1,000	0	1,929	0	1,635	0
Calderdale	363	0	1,090	0	528	0
Kirklees	1,722	0	3,351	51	3,929	174
Leeds	1,881	0	5,518	600	2,417	370
Wakefield	1,107	0	1,597	0	1,584	397

Kingskerswell Bypass

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when work is to begin on the Kingskerswell bypass. [2102]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Rupert Allason, dated 4 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, when work is to begin on the Kingskerswell Bypass.

As announced in Managing the Roads Programme published on 28 November, this scheme has been transferred to the Longer Term programme.

It is too soon to anticipate when it might be possible to move the scheme back into the main programme.

Royal Family (Diary Engagements)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent he is consulted in respect of diary engagements for members of the royal family. [3253]

Sir George Young: The extent to which my Department is consulted on visits in the United Kingdom depends on the nature of the engagement. My Department's transport security division is represented in discussions on the security for royal visits overseas.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent of non-compliance with vehicle construction and use regulations in respect of motor vehicle emissions in each of the last five years. [3472]

Mr. Norris: The extent of non-compliance with emissions standards in the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 is assessed in terms of prohibitions issued by the Vehicle Inspectorate after vehicle enforcement checks, which are targeted on vehicles thought most likely to be defective.

The figures for the last three years, in respect of emissions, are as follows:

	Heavy goods vehicles checks	prohibition rate (per cent.)	Public service vehicles checks	prohibition rate (per cent.)	Light vehicles checks	prohibition rate (per cent.
1992–93	5,706	0.6	4,647	1.7	4,759	0.5
1993–94	10,589	2.1	5,165	2.8	33,103	0.7
1994–95	12,959	3.5	7,292	2.5	70,899	3.6

During 1992–93 and 1993–94, no delayed prohibitions were issued on light vehicles, thus depressing the failure rate.

The figures collected before 1992–93 did not specify prohibitions issued for non-compliance with emissions standards.

Ro-ro Ferries

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress was made at the specially convened International Maritime Organisation diplomatic conference to consider the recommendations of the IMO's panel of experts, set up after the loss of the ro-ro passenger ferry, Estonia, on survivability, evacuation and life-saving appliances; and if he will make a statement. [307]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* The Government welcome the outcome of the IMO conference, which has agreed significant amendments to the safety of life at sea convention.

On the ability of a ship to withstand a significant amount of water on the car deck, the conference passed a resolution which paves the way for regional agreements applying the high SOLAS 90 plus 50 cm of water on the car deck standard recommended by IMO's panel of experts established after the Estonia.

We fully support this resolution and the future application of the SOLAS 90 plus 50 cm standard, through a regional agreement, to all ro-ro passenger ferries serving our ports. We will shortly be initiating, with other northern European states, discussion of such a regional agreement.

The amendments to the convention introduced a wide range of safety improvements including enhanced life-saving equipment, evacuation requirements, search-and-rescue procedures and the extension of the SOLAS 90 survivability standard to all existing ro-ro ferries worldwide.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3009]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Office Ministers aim to reply to letters within 17 working days of receipt. Performance against that target is published in the *Official Report*. A 20-day response time has been set for letters addressed to Ministers which are answered by officials, although individual areas may set a tighter deadline. Executive agencies include details of target response times and performance in their annual reports.

Acts of Parliaments of Scotland

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those Acts of the Scottish Parliament before 1707 which are still in force. [3209]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A list of the Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland before 1707 which have not been statutorily repealed follows. While there is a presumption that any Scots Act which has not been so repealed remains in force, that presumption can be rebutted through application of the doctrine of desuetude. That doctrine requires proof to the satisfaction of the Scottish courts that an enactment has not been repealed and that there has been contrary practice.

Index of short titles of the current Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland 1424–1707:

Adjudication Act 1621 (c.7)
Adjudication Act 1672 (c.45)
Ann Act 1672 (c.24)
Arrestments Act 1617 (c.17)
Arrestments Act 1661 (c.283)
Bills of Exchange Act 1681 (c.86)
Bonds Act 1661 (c.244)
Breach of Arrestment Act 1581 (c.23)
Burghs Act 1578 (c.11)
Burghs Act 1587 (c.114)
Church Act 1579 (c.6)
Church Jurisdiction Act 1567 (c.12)
Church Jurisdiction Act 1579 (c.7)
Citation Act 1592 (c.59)
Citation Act 1686 (c.5)
Claim of Right Act 1689 (c.28)
College of Justice Act 1532 (c.2)
College of Justice Act 1540 (c.10)(14 March)
Common Good Act 1491 (c.19)
Compensation Act 1592 (c.61)
Confession of Faith Ratification Act 1560 (c.1)
Confession of Faith Ratification Act 1690 (c.7)
Confirmation Act 1690 (c.56)
Confirmation Act 1695 (c.72)
Coronation Oath Act 1567 (c.8)
Court of Session Act 1693 (c.42)
Courts Act 1672 (c.40)
Criminal Letters Act 1579 (c.16)
Crown Appointments Act 1661 (c.6)
Crown Proceedings Act 1600 (c.23)
Curators Act 1585 (c.25)
Declinature Act 1681 (c.79)
Decrees in Absence Act 1584 (c.10)
Deforcement Act 1592 (c.72)
Diligence Act 1469 (c.12)
Diligence Act 1621 (c.6)
Diligence Act 1661 (c.344)
Disqualification of Ministers Act 1584 (c.6)
Division of Commonties Act 1695 (c.69)
Ejection Caution Act 1594 (c.27)
Election Act 1707 (c.8)
Entail Act 1685 (c.26)
Executors Act 1617 (c.14)
Expenses Act 1592 (c.62)
Feu-Duty Act 1597 (c.17)
Fisheries Act 1705 (c.48)
General Assembly Act 1592 (c.8)
Inland Bills Act 1696 (c.38)
Kirk Dykes Act 1597 (c.3)
Land Purchase Act 1594 (c.26)
Lands Redemption Act 1555 (c.3)
Lawburrows Act 1429 (c.20)
Lawburrows Act 1581 (c.22)
Lawburrows Act 1597 (c.40)
Leases Act 1449 (c.6)
Leases Act 1491 (c.7)
Liferent Caution Act 1491 (c.6)
Liferent Caution Act 1535 (c.14)
Lyon King of Arms Act 1592 (c.29)
Lyon King of Arms Act 1669 (c.95)
Lyon King of Arms Act 1672 (c.47)
March Dykes Act 1661 (c.284)
March Dykes Act 1669 (c.38)
Mines and Metals Act 1592 (c.31)
Ministers Act 1693 (c.38)
Minority Act 1663 (c.4)
Papal Jurisdiction Act 1560 (c.2)
Parliament Act 1661 (c.7)
Parricide Act 1594 (c.30)
Precedence Act 1661 (c.211)
Prelacy Act 1689 (c.4)
Prerogative Act 1661 (c.13)
Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Act 1707 (c.6)
Real Rights Act 1693 (c.22)
Redemptions Act 1661 (c.247)
Register of Sasines Act 1693 (c.23)

Registration Act 1617 (c.16)
Registration Act 1661 (c.243)
Registration Act 1693 (c.24)
Registration Act 1696 (c.41)
Reversion Act 1469 (c.3)
Royal Burghs Act 1487 (c.17)
Royal Mines Act 1424 (c.13)
Runrig Lands Act 1695 (c.36)
Sovereignty Act 1584 (c.2)
Sovereignty Act 1606 (c.1)
Sovereignty Act 1633 (c.3)
Teinds Act 1690 (c.63)
Theft Act 1607 (c.6)
Tolls Act 1587 (c.37)
Udal Tendure Act 1690 (c.61)
Union with England Act 1707 (c.7)
Unlawful Jurisdictions Act 1584 (c.4)
Writs Act 1672 (c.16)

Salmon Fishing

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the Scottish district salmon fishery boards for the restriction of the salmon netting season in Scotland following the publication of the Salmon Advisory Committee report of the timing of salmon runs. [1974]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I have made one order to implement a two-and-a-half month reduction in the netting season from the River Eachaig district salmon fishery board, and an application for a reduction in the season for the River Dee (Aberdeenshire) district is under consideration. Scottish district salmon fishery boards can also arrange for reductions in net fishing effort in their districts by other means without my intervention, and many have done so in the past 10 years.

Communication Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children of school age there are with communication autistic spectrum disorders; and how many places there are in schools appropriate for their needs. [2709]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is not held centrally.

A1 (Haddington-Dunbar)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the target date for the completion of the Haddington and Dunbar section of the A1 dual carriageway. [3664]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In his announcement on 15 June of the programme for developing Scotland's trunk road network, my right hon. Friend announced that, subject to the usual criteria including satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the necessary preparatory work, it is intended to start work on this section of the A1 dualling by March 1998. The subsequent construction period is expected to be approximately two years.

The Department plans to publish revised draft road orders early next year to re-test public reaction to the scheme and the design revisions which have been adopted following earlier publication of the proposals. Subsequent progress will be dependent on the reaction of the public to the revised proposals.

Roads Programme

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's road construction programme following the Chancellor's financial statement. [3665]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will make an announcement on the roads programme for the next three years after he has set out his new expenditure plans for the Scottish Office.

Hairmyres Hospitals

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the time scale and funding arrangements for the proposed new build hospital facility at Hairmyres. [3843]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS trust is currently seeking a private sector partner to design and build a new hospital at Hairmyres, East Kilbride. The Scottish Office Department of Health expects to received a full business case from the trust in the spring on 1996. Subject to approval, final contractual and planning issues will be completed in 1996 with a start on site scheduled for early 1997.

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. McShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* None.

Unitary Councils

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the guidance circulars issued by his Department to the new unitary councils. [1739]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* Circulars issued by the Scottish Office to the new unitary councils have included the following:

Local Government, Finance, CCT, Staff, Property etc

Finance Circular No. 15/95: Distribution of Grant to Shadow Authorities

SOEnvD Circular No. 11/95: Local Authorities (Allowances) (Scotland) Regulations 1995

Finance Circular No. 16/95: Preparation of Notional Budgets

Circular Letter: Distribution of Grant to Shadow Councils

Circular Letter: The Local Authorities (Staff Transfer) (Scotland) Order 1995

SoEnD Circular No. 13/95: Outlining in detail the provisions of the Statutory Instrument suspending Compulsory Competitive Tendering during local government reorganisation.

Finance Circular No. 19/95: Illustrative Grant Aided Expenditure Assessments (GAEs) for 1995–96.

Circular Letter: The Local Government (Transitional Provisions) (Scotland) Order 1995

Circular Letter: The Local Government (Relevant Date) (Scotland) Order 1995

Circular Letter covering decentralisation guidance

Circular Letter: Announcement of Publication of "Green Book" (Illustrative GAEs)

Finance Circular No. 20/95: Notional Budgets

Circular Letter: The Local Authorities (Property Transfer) (Scotland) Order 1995 and The Local Authorities Property Commission (Scotland) Order 1995.

Circular Letter: The Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995

Circular Letter (issued by Scottish Office Pensions Agency): The Local Government (Compensation for Reduction of Remuneration on Re-organisation) (Scotland) Regulations 1995

Finance Circular No. 22/95: Mismatch Problem Transitional Schemes

Circular Letter: CCT and Local Government Reorganisation in Scotland

Housing
Circular: Housing Management Compulsory Competitive Tendering—Arrangements for Tenant Involvement and Consultation.

Circular: List of Housing Circulars in force at 31 October 1995.

Circular: A Baseline Study of Housing Management in Scotland

Planning
SOEnD Circular No. 15/95: The Town and Country Planning (Demolition Which is Not Development) (Scotland) Direction 1994.

SOEnD Circular No. 18/95 Planning and Compensation Act 1991: Simplified Planning Zones

Roads etc.,
"Competing for Better Roads"–response to the consultation paper Laying of Records (Transitional Powers) (Scotland) Order 1995

The Roads (Transitional Powers) (Scotland) Order 1995

Circular Letter: Provision for routine and winter maintenance on the trunk road network (from 1 April 1996)

Education etc.
Circular No. 5/95: Local Government Etc. (Scotland) Act 1994: Local Government Reorganisation—Guidance on Education Provisions

Circular No. 6/95: Local Government Etc. (Scotland) Act 1994: Guidance to New Authorities on their responsibilities for Community Education.

Circular on provision of cultural and library services

Industry
Circular concerning notification of Local Authorities State Aids

Circular on the implementation arrangements of new urban regeneration policy arrangements under the programme "Policy for Partnership"

Social Work
SWSG 8/95: Cancellation of obsolete and superseded circulars

SWSG 2/95: Local Government Etc., (Scotland) Act 1994—(Section 45) Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (Section 3)—Chief Social Work Officers: Responsibilities, Appointments and Qualifications

SWSG 9/95: Community Service for Offenders: Revised National Objectives and Standards

SWSG 10/95: Local Government Reorganisation and Social Work Services

SWSG 11/95: The Adoption (Designation of Overseas Adoptions) (Variation) (Scotland) Order 1995

SWSG 12/95: Criminal Justice Social Work Services: Options for Management and Organisation Arrangements (Shared Services)

SWSG 13/95: Community Care: National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Amendment Regulations 1995: Regulations and Guidance

SWSG 14/95: Criminal Justice Social Work Services: Standard requirements in Supervised Release Orders

SWSG 15/95: Local Government Etc. (Scotland) Act 1994: Children's Hearing System

SWSG 16/95: Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995: Commencement of Supervised Attendance Order Provisions

SWSG 17/95: Children (Scotland) Act 1995: Commencement Order No.1

SWSG 18/95: Children (Scotland) Act 1995: Implementation Plan

Police
Circular covering the issue of a new guidance booklet for members of the new police authorities.

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of Scottish private nursing homes; what subjects were discussed; and who attended. [2956]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* On 25 September 1995, my right hon. Friend met Mr. John Shearer, chairman of Lanarkshire Nursing Homes Association, and Mr. Neil Cameron, a residential care home proprietor, to discuss community care issues.

WALES

Unemployment

17. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current level of unemployment in Wales. [1872]

Mr. Richards: In October 1995, the seasonally adjusted number of people on the claimant unemployment count in Wales was 106,600.

Welsh Development Agency

18. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next proposes to meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss its financing. [1873]

Mr. Hague: I regularly meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss a wide range of issues.

20. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the board of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss its budget cost. [1875]

Mr. Hague: I met the board of the Welsh Development Agency in October to discuss a range of issues.

National Health Service (Costs)

19. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total cost of health care provided by the NHS in Wales; and what was the comparable figure in 1979. [1874]

Mr. Richards: Planned expenditure on the NHS in Wales in 1995–96 is £2,191 million compared with expenditure of £466 million in 1979–80.

Inward Investment

21. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total value of inward investment into Wales since the signing of the Maastricht treaty. [1876]

Mr. Hague: The forecast value of inward investment into Wales since February 1992 is £3.2 billion with 23,000 associated new jobs and almost 22,000 safeguarded jobs.

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about inward investment in Wales. [1881]

Mr. Hague: Inward Investment in Wales has made and continues to make a major contribution to the diversification of the industrial base and to the well-being of the economy.

Business Advice and Support

22. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps have been taken to improve the advice and support available to the business community in Wales from governmental organisations. [1877]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In November, the Department's small firms roadshow completed a tour of Wales. A mobile unit visited many industrial estates and business centres throughout the Principality. It was attended by advisers from the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the training and enterprise councils and other local business support bodies. It gave a shop window on business support to local business people and enabled the business community to air its views and have access to the support available. The roadshow provided advice to some 820 small and medium-sized firms in Wales.

The roadshow precedes the launch, on 15 January 1996, of "Business Connect Wales". This new initiative will greatly simplify access to publicly funded business support services throughout Wales. One low-cost telephone number will connect callers to the full range of services. Callers will be automatically switched to one of 34 outlets at which trained staff will either deal with the inquiry direct or refer to the source of expertise.

Further Education

23. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what increase there has been in enrolments on further education courses in Wales from 1979–80 to 1994–95. [1878]

Mr. Richards: The number of student enrolments on further education courses in Wales for the 1979–80 academic year was 62,207 compared with a provisional figure of 105,994 in 1994–95. This is an increase of nearly 44,000 or 70 per cent.

Assisted Places Scheme

24. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to expand the number of places in the assisted places scheme in Wales. [1879]

Mr. Richards: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) on 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *757–58*.

25. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he intends to undertake with representatives of parent-teacher organisations following the Prime Minister's recent announcement of the enlargement of the assisted places scheme. [1880]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I will consider carefully all points made to us about our proposal to double the number of places available under the assisted places scheme in Wales.

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about inward investment in Wales. [1881]

Mr. Hague: Inward Investment in Wales has made and continues to make a major contribution to the diversification of the industrial base and to the well-being of the economy.

Fluoridation

27. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to require Welsh Water plc to fluoridate drinking water supplies. [1882]

Mr. Hague: I support the principle of fluoridation but I do not have the statutory power to require Welsh Water to fluoridate drinking water supplies.

Cancer

28. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in the treatment of cancer in Wales. [1883]

Mr. Richards: In response to the report on cancer services from the chief medical officers of England and Wales we have commissioned a review of existing services throughout the Principality which will recommend how the necessary improvements identified in the report can be implemented to bring about better quality of care to patients.

Work is being undertaken in parallel in the NHS in Wales to establish the right local framework to facilitate progress. We expect to receive a report by September 1996 which will include recommendations on links between the providers of treatment and care, clinical standards and targets and the contribution which can be made to research in this field.

Parliamentary Accountability

29. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the improvement in parliamentary accountability and scrutiny of his Department's affairs; and if he will make a statement. [1884]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 30 November on proposed changes to procedures in the Welsh Grand Committee, *Official Report*, columns *1353–55*.

Block Grant

30. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the block grant settlement for expenditure by the Welsh Office in 1996–97; and what percentage change this represents on planned expenditure in 1995–96. [1885]

Mr. Hague: In 1996–97 the provision for the Welsh Office will be £6,865 million, including the proceeds of the sale of the Housing for Wales loan portfolio. This represents a 1.4 per cent. increase over the original planned expenditure for 1995–96 and 2.2 per cent. higher than the forecast outturn.

Community Forests

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on community forests. [2656]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government are committed to the expansion of forests close to where people live, with benefits for local communities. We have introduced a range of measures to achieve this aim. The woodland grant scheme offers a community woodland supplement to encourage the creation of new woodlands close to towns and villages, and an annual management grant which can contribute towards the cost of providing public access in existing woodlands. We recently announced a new woodland improvement grant project to encourage owners to provide new facilities for informal public recreation in existing woodlands and a locational supplement for planting in the Aman Gwendraeth community forest project area in south Wales. In addition, the Welsh Valleys initiative encourages local people to make full use of the Forestry Commission's forests through community involvement.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the probability of BSE entering the human food chain. [2659]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*, by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Welsh Office has issued the draft regulations for consultation in Wales.

School Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the planned expenditure in the schools service in Wales for the year 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [2924]

Mr. Richards: It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pedestrians have been killed at pedestrian crossings in the past five years, and if he will make a statement. [2922]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of pedestrians recorded by the police as having been killed in road accidents at pedestrian crossings in Wales between 1990 and 1994 are as follows. These figures exclude those killed while waiting to cross or while crossing near to but not actually on the crossing.

Year	*Number killed*
1990	1
1991	3
1992	3
1993	0
1994	3

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what monitoring his Department has undertaken of public and domiciliary care; and if he will make a statement. [2926]

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office collects the following information form local authorities:

care arrangements, including those for domiciliary care, made each quarter following assessments of individuals' needs;

the number of people receiving different types of care arranged by the local authorities at 31 March each year;

local authority annual budgets and expenditure for home care arrangements and annual expenditure on private and voluntary non-residential care.

From 1995–96, information will also be collected annually on the volumes of domiciliary care provided directly by local authorities and arranged by them with the independent, private and voluntary, sector.

Figures on privately arranged domiciliary care are not collected centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made with the private finance initiative in Wales: and if he will make a statement. [3486]

Mr. Hague: Good progress is being made. Twenty-five projects, with a combined capital value of some £1 billion are being examined at the moment with a view to taking them forward under the initiative. I estimate that £360 million of private finance will be generated by the PFI in Wales over the next three years.

Chemical Bank

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will recover the grants paid to Chemical bank following its decision to close its branch in Wales. [3681]

Mr. Hague: Discussions with companies are commercial in confidence and I cannot comment on particular cases. However, all offers of regional selective assistance contain clawback provisions which are deployed where appropriate.

WDA Funding

Mr. Ainger: to ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the Welsh Development Agency to make its contribution to Leader and 5b projects in west Wales. [3738]

Mr. Hague: This is an operational matter for the agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Shorthold Tenancies

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to require landlords to issue a specific prior notice concerning shorthold tenancies; and if he will make a statement. [3388]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The consultation paper "The Legislative Framework for Private Renting", issued in July, outlined proposals to change current notification arrangements for shorthold tenancies. My right hon. Friend and I are currently considering the responses.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will for each county and for Wales as a whole the total number of ballots held in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* in total to determine whether grant-maintained status should be adopted, indicating the numbers of votes cast for and against the proposals; and what percentage of schools held such ballots in each case. [1855]

Mr. Richards: The information is as follows:

			Votes cast		
Authority	*Type of school*	*Number of ballots*	*For grant-maintained status*	*Against grant-maintained status*	*Percentage of schools holding ballots*[1]
	Primary	5	598	735	2.1
Clwyd	Secondary	[2]8	4,074	2,104	21.9
	Primary	1	27	155	0.3
Dyfed	Secondary	1	37	426	3.2
	Primary	1	151	44	0.5
Gwent	Secondary	[2]6	2,432	1,699	15.2
	Primary	1	195	48	0.5
Gwynedd	Secondary	1	84	311	4.3
	Primary	1	26	2	0.3
Mid Glamorgan	Secondary	0	0	0	—
	Primary	1	36	12	1.0
Powys	Secondary	1	209	499	7.7
	Primary	2	122	273	1.3
South Glamorgan	Secondary	[2]5	1,687	1,560	15.4
	Primary	0	0	0	—
West Glamorgan	Secondary	4	1,771	3,053	14.8
	Primary	12	1,155	1,269	0.7
Wales	Secondary	26	10,294	9,652	10.1

[1] These figures represent the number of schools holding a grant-maintained ballot since the Education Reform Act 1988 as a percentage of LEA maintained and grant-maintained schools existing at September 1995.

[2] These figures include schools which have held more than one ballot.

Autism

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children of school age there are with communication autistic spectrum disorders; and how many places there are in schools appropriate to their needs. [2711]

Mr. Richards: According to returns made by schools to the January 1995 schools census, 240 pupils in Wales had statements of special educational needs in which autism was identified as the major need. All these pupils were in maintained schools: 146 were in special schools, 79 were in primary schools, 14 were in secondary schools and one was in a nursery school.

Staffing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest number of staff employed for each civil service grade by his office, indicating the percentage who are Welsh speaking where this is known. [2067]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Grade	*Number of people*	*Percentage who have notified they have some ability in the use of Welsh*
G1	1	—
G2s and equivalents	2	50
G3s and equivalents	11	9
G4s and equivalents	6	33

Grade	Number of people	Percentage who have notified they have some ability in the use of Welsh
G5s and equivalents	48	15
G6s and equivalents	29	10
G7s and equivalents	159	16
SEOs and equivalents	139	24
HEOs and equivalents	312	17
EOs and equivalents	488	17
AOs and equivalents	570	16
AAs and equivalents	457	8
Industrial and museum support grades	120	13

Measles and Rubella Immunisation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the monitoring and aftercare support programme established in conjunction with the vaccination campaign instituted in November last year against measles and rubella, covering *(a)* Blaenau Gwent and *(b)* Wales. [2766]

Mr. Richards: I am content that there is a well-established satisfactory system in place, covering the United Kingdom as a whole, to monitor adverse reactions to all medicines, including vaccines. Aftercare support, following vaccination, would be a matter for the clinical judgment of an individual patient's practitioner.

European Funding

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how much matching funding the Welsh Development Agency is committing to Leader and 5b projects in Wales this year; and if he will list those projects; [3739]

(2) if he will list those Leader and 5b projects that have received official approval by his Department this financial year; how much each will receive from the EU and from each of the partners involved on the projects; and how many jobs will be supported or created in each project; [3737]

(3) if he will list the Leader and 5b projects the Welsh Development Agency contributed to in each of the last two financial years; how much each received; how many jobs were supported or created; and what was the contribution from other partners on the projects; [3736]

(4) how much the Welsh Development Agency contributed to Leader and 5b projects in each of the last two financial years. [3732]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Breast Cancer Mortality

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has initiated to examine the reasons for the higher rates of mortality from breast cancer in Wales relative to the rest of the United Kingdom. [4003]

Mr. Richards: Whilst a number of factors influence the mortality rate from breast cancer, the higher rate in Wales may partly be a reflection of its higher incidence in Wales. The Government's priorities in this area have been directed at achieving a reduction in the overall mortality rate from this disease, through improved diagnosis and treatment.

European Education Programmes

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the organisations which bid for the provision of the advisory and information service for further and higher education establishments in Wales on European matters, when put out to tender by the Welsh Office; how many had knowledge and experience of further and higher education in Wales and the activities relevant to this field in the European Union; how many had the support of organisations representing and involved in the relevant activity areas in Wales and the European Union; and what considerations led to the selection of Euclid of Liverpool for this contract. [3945]

Mr. Richards: The following seven organisations tendered for the provision of services for European education programmes in Wales:

City college, Manchester and Cardiff institute of higher education—joint tender

Cynefin Environmental

Euclid

Friarsgrove Management Services Ltd.

Gwent Tertiary college

Penzer Allen Ltd.

Welsh joint education committee.

All tenderers expressed knowledge and experience of the further and higher education sectors in Wales, and activities relevant to the European Union.

One tenderer declared expressions of support for its tender by other organisations.

The contract was awarded to Euclid because its tender met the specification at the lowest price.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iran

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the observations of the European Union observers at the trial of those accused of murdering the Christian leaders, Rev. Tateos Michaelian and Rev. Mehdi Dibaj in Iran. [1996]

Mr. Hanley: A representative of the European Union presidency attended two of the four sessions of the trial. No formal observations have been issued. But despite the fact that the trial was held in public, it is not possible to say that justice was done. We are concerned that certain aspects of the procedure did not conform to generally accepted international standards. Examples are the publicity given to the apparent confessions made by the accused before the trial, and the impression that it was stage-managed.

Nevertheless, the holding of a public trial is a welcome development in itself and we shall continue to stress the importance of public trials and of due process.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to press the Iranian Government to allow the free sale and distribution of bibles and to put an end to the forced closures of churches. [1998]

Mr. Hanley: Following the hon. Member's question on the Bible Society on 10 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *60–61*, we raised the matter with our European Union partners. As a result, one partner pressed the Iranian Government to clarify their position: no substantive response has been forthcoming. In March 1995 the European Union sponsored a tough resolution on human rights in Iran, adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which reflected the criticisms of the then UN special representative, Mr. Galindo Pohl. Mr. Pohl referred to the Bible Society's predicament in his final 1995 report.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to press for the Government of Iran to allow an independent investigation into the murders of Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr, Rev. Tateos Michaelian and Rev. Mehdi Dibaj by the United Nations human rights rapporteurs. [1997]

Mr. Hanley: We fully support the involvement of UN special representatives in investigating the human rights situation in Iran. We and our European partners co-sponsored resolutions on human rights in Iran adopted at the General Assembly in December 2994 and by the Committee on Human Rights in March 1995. They called on Iran to co-operate with the UN special representative and to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into the deaths of the three pastors.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to link the United Kingdom's trade and defence policies with Saudi Arabia's performance in the area of respect for religious liberty; and if he will make a statement. [2000]

Mr. Hanley: The practice of any form of religious other than Islam in Saudi Arabia is prohibited by law. Her Majesty's Government have no plans to link the UK's trade and defence policies with Saudi Arabia's performance in the area of respect for religious liberty. But the Saudi Government are well aware of our views on freedom of thought, conscience and religion and on the importance of inter-faith dialogue.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage the Government of Saudi Arabia to permit *(a)* Christian worship, *(b)* the building of churches and *(c)* the free sale and distribution of bibles in that country; and if he will make a statement. [1999]

Mr. Hanley: The practice of any form of religion other than Islam in Saudi Arabia is prohibited by law. The Saudi authorities are aware of our views on the importance of the freedoms enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2323]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO—diplomatic wing and ODA—has two executive agencies, Wilton Park and the Natural Resources Institute.

The details requested of overseas travel in financial year 1994–95 for Wilton Park were as follows:

(a) Cost: £19,472 total.

(b) Countries visited: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, USA.

(c) Posts of staff involved: the Director of Wilton Park, and four Associate Directors.

The chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute has written to the hon. Gentleman with the information requested in respect of that executive agency. The lists mentioned in his letter have been deposited in the Library of the House.

Letter from Anthony Beattie to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 November 1995:

In your question addressed to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs you asked for information about travel undertaken by the staff of executive agencies. It has been agreed that I should provide this information in respect of NRI.

I am enclosing lists of all visits undertaken by NRI staff during 1994–95, with details of countries visited, the grade of the person visiting, dates and costs. You will see that these visits fall into two broad categories: those which are project funded and those which are funded from running costs.

The majority of visits (accounting for £1.670 million out of total visits expenditure of £1.872 million) fall into the former category. They are undertaken by members of the Institute's scientific and professional staff (staff grades are shown on the list) in connection with projects, programmes, and other assignments on behalf of the Overseas Development Administration and other clients.

Visits funded from running costs are mainly in connection with marketing and business development (the Institute operates on a commercial basis and these are important aspects of our work), professional development and representation of the Institute in a wide variety of scientific fora. Visits are frequently undertaken for a combination of project- and running-cost-related purposes and these elements have been shown separately in the attached lists.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to propose an amendment to article 2.2 of the European convention on human rights, in respect of the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary to replace the word "absolutely" with the word "reasonably". [3165]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Government do not intend to propose any amendment to article 2 of the European convention on human rights. As my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development said in another place on 23 October, the European Court of Human Rights did not find a violation in relation to compatibility of the national law on the use of lethal force article 2 standards.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the compliance of the security forces of other signatories to the European convention on human rights with article 2 of that convention. [3166]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Compliance with the European convention on human rights by other states party to it and their security forces is a matter for them or, when applications raising questions of such compliance are introduced, for the European Commission and Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers, as appropriate.

International Court of Justice

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy in respect of advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice. [2942]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The Government believe that advisory opinions by the International Court of Justice at the request of the UN or a specialised agency can serve a useful purpose when they resolve legal matters on which the requesting organisation requires guidance for its current activities. Advisory opinions of the court are given careful consideration. However, they are not binding either on the requesting organisation or on its member states. The Government's attitude to particular advisory opinions depends on the terms of the opinion and the circumstances of the case.

BBC World Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the charges for the use of transmission faciltiies by the BBC World Service when transmission is privatised will be paid out of the Foreign Office grant; and what proposals he has to bring forward in respect of specific grant for transmission charges. [3248]

Mr. Hanley: The BBC World Service's costs will continue to be paid by grant in aid after privatisation of the BBC's transmission services. I have no proposals for a specific grant for transmission charges.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the BBC World Service would be allowed to hire foreign transmission facilities if these were cheaper than its own transmission facilities following privatisation. [3242]

Mr. Hanley: The BBC World Service already hires foreign transmission facilities where they fit in with its delivery plans, which are a matter for the World Service.

Iraqi Marshlands

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on evidence obtained by his Department from the Western European Union satellite centre about the effects of the construction of the Euphrates barrage in southern Iraq in 1993; what percentage of the Al Amarah and Hawr al Hammar marshes have been drained; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the draining those marshes on the population of that area. [3260]

Mr. Hanley: Although we cannot estimate the precise extent to which the marshlands have been drained, satellite and other imagery of southern Iraq points to a severe reduction of the Amarah and Hammar marshes. This repressive policy has enabled Iraq to control the local population by driving them from the marshes, upon which they rely for their livelihood, into impoverished conditions in cities.

Visa Applications (Turkey)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average waiting time between the receipt of a decision to grant a visitor's visa to a visitor from Turkey and the visa being obtained by a visitor. [3694]

Mr. Hanley: In Istanbul, once a decision has been made to issue a visitor's visa the visa may be collected the same afternoon, provided the application was received before 11 am. Those received after 11 am may be collected the following working day.

In Ankara, once a decision has been made to issue a visitor's visa, the visa may be collected within 24 hours.

Mrs. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average waiting time for an interview for a visitor's visa for a visitor from Turkey. [3693]

Mr. Hanley: The longest waiting time for an interview in Istanbul in 1994 was 20 working days and in Ankara in 1994 was two working days.

Records for average waiting times are not kept.

Former Soviet Union

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all independent states with a population of 3 million or less, ranked in order of population and indicating for the latest available date *(a)* population, *(b)* gross domestic product or gross national product per head in sterling and *(c)* area. [2068]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No independent state of the former Soviet Union has a population of 3 million or less.

We do not consider that the Baltic states, which regained their independence in 1991, are part of the former Soviet Union. We never recognised de jure their incorporation into the Soviet Union. Two Baltic states have a population of less than 3 million.

	Estonia	*Latvia*
(a) Population	1.5 million	2.56 million
(b) Per capita GDP	$1,100	$1,600
(b) Area	45,200 km^2	64,600 km^2

United Nations

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of all countries that have been members of the United Nations since 1965 indicating, where appropriate, the date on which they gained independence. [2069]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The list of states that have become members of the United Nations since 1965 can be found in the "United Nations Handbook 1995" edited by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This book is available in the House of Commons Library.

Turkey (Legionnaire's Disease)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when notification was first received about an outbreak of legionnaire's disease in Kusadasi, Turkey. [3275]

Mr. Hanley: On 17 August 1995, when the Department of Health asked our consular officials to notify the Turkish authorities that there may be a link between visitors to Kusadasi and the reported cases of legionnaire's disease.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with Turkish officials about the safety of United Kingdom travellers to Kusadasi. [3276]

Mr. Hanley: Our consular officials alerted the provincial and local health authorities, the provincial governor's office, a local hospital, and the Hotel Imbat to the possibility of the hotel being linked to an outbreak of legionnaire's disease.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom nationals visiting *(a)* Kusadasi and *(b)* the Hotel Imbat between May and October 1995. [3277]

Mr. Hanley: Based on figures from the provincial tourist authority in Turkey and the Hotel Imbat, we estimate *(a)* some 21,000 British nationals visited Kusadasi, and *(b)* some 4,230 British nationals stayed at the Hotel Imbat between May and October 1995.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom nationals visiting *(a)* Kusadasi and *(b)* the Hotel Imbat since official notification of legionnaire's disease. [3278]

Mr. Hanley: Based on figures from the provincial tourist authority in Turkey and the Hotel Imbat, we estimate *(a)* some 8,750 British nationals visited Kusadasi, and *(b)* some 1,250 British nationals stayed at the Hotel Imbat after the possible link was made between the resort and the reported cases of legionnaire's disease.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice was issued to British persons located in *(a)* the Hotel Imbat and *(b)* Kusadasi when the outbreak of legionnaire's disease was formerly notified. [3358]

Mr. Hanley: In late September the Hotel Imbat told British tour companies and their clients that the hotel was a possible source of legionnaire's disease. British tourists were transferred to other hotels.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice was issued to British persons planning to travel to *(a)* the Hotel Imbat and *(b)* Kusadasi following formal notification of legionnaire's disease. [3359]

Mr. Hanley: The Department of Health issued advice to public health doctors about the possibility of a link between the hotel and the reported cases of legionnaire's disease. It also wrote to the Federation of Tour Operators and to the Association of British Travel Agents advising them of the situation.

Budget

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the implications for his Department of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's financial statement. [3700]

Mr. Hanley: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will respond imaginatively to the challenge of maintaining the front-line effort through demanding efficiency targets, and use of the private finance initiative.

With 21 new posts opened since 1990, the United Kingdom has diplomatic relations with a record high number of countries. The effort to promote exports and investment has been considerably enhanced in recent years and remains a high priority. The British Council and BBC World Service will continue to make an outstanding contribution to the overall UK diplomatic effort.

The UK's aid programme will remain the fifth largest in the world. Its overriding priority will continue to be poverty reduction through sustainable development, focused on the poorest countries in Africa and Asia.

Committee of the Regions

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which councillors appointed by him to the Committee of the Regions are no longer elected members of local authorities; and what plans he has to request them to stand down from the committee. [3844]

Mr. David Davis: Two of the full UK members appointed to the Committee of the Regions in 1993 and six of the alternate members are no longer elected members of local authorities. The full members are:

Dame Elizabeth Anson

Roy Cross (who has since resigned from the committee)

The alternate members are:

Doreen Fleming OBE

Bill Hughes

Marcus Humphrey

Frazer Mitchell

Tony Prior

Hedley Salt.

Since losing his seat in the 1994 local elections, Marcus Humphrey has gained a seat on the new Aberdeen council, representing the mid-Deeside ward, which will come into being in April 1996.

The European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, which implemented the Maastricht treaty, states that UK members of the Committee of the Regions must be elected members of a local authority

> "at the time of the proposal of their membership".

Nothing therefore requires committee members who lose their local authority seats to resign.

Article 198a of the treaty of European Union states that Committee of the Regions members should be

"completely independent in the performance of their duties".

The Government have no intention therefore of imposing their views on the committee, or its members.

Aral Sea

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's response to Kazakhstan's request for technical help in relation to the Aral sea. [3089]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The British Government have committed £500,000 to the World bank's programme for the rehabilitation of the Aral sea. Using funds from the know-how fund for the former Soviet Union, we are providing expertise to enhance Kazakhstan's environmental monitoring capabilities and to investigate climate changes and the geology of the region.

Retrospective Service Awards

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Australian and Canadian Governments' approval of retrospective awards of a special service medal for prescribed peacekeeping and non-warlike operations for the period 1945 to 1975; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have to issue a similar medal for Her Majesty's forces. [3240]

Mr. Soames: The decision of a Commonwealth Government to institute retrospectively the award of a medal for any service operation, and any approval which Her Majesty the Queen may have given as Queen of that Commonwealth country, is the sole responsibility of the country concerned. It has been a long-standing policy of successive British Governments not to consider the belated institution of medals and awards, and we therefore have no plans to introduce any medals for the period 1945 to 1975 additional to those already approved.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service (Discontinued Cases)

36. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Attorney-General what proportion of cases are discounted by the Crown Prosecution Service, and if he will make a statement. [1893]

The Solicitor-General: The rate of discontinuance has fallen from 13.4 per cent. of cases for the year ending September 1993 to 11.9 per cent. of cases for the year ending September 1995.

Court of Appeal (Referrals)

37. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases he has sought leave to refer to the Court of Appeal on grounds of unduly lenient sentencing since 1 January 1995. [1894]

The Attorney-General: Since 1 January 1995, I have referred 68 cases in England and Wales and four in Northern Ireland. One has been withdrawn, twenty-four have so far been heard by the Court of Appeals of which 22, or 92 per cent., have resulted in an increase in sentence.

Serious Fraud Office

36. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the current case load of the Serious Fraud Office. [1895]

The Solicitor-General: The current case load of the Serious Fraud Office is 63 cases, excluding appeals. In addition to its domestic case load, the SFO is increasingly being called upon to assist overseas investigators.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff work in his Office; at what cost to the public funds; and if he will make a statement. [2169]

The Attorney-General: Twenty-six staff are employed in the legal secretariat to the Law Officers. The total staff costs for the financial year 1994–95—consisting of salary, allowances, overtime, earnings-related national insurance contributions and superannuation—were £1,040,018. These figures do not include agency staff.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff in his Department are involved in matters related to the Lockerbie crime. [2170]

The Attorney-General: Responsibility for the prosecution aspects of the Lockerbie crime lies with the Lord Advocate and his staff in the Crown Office in Edinburgh. Members of my chambers may become involved in the course of their normal duties but only in relation to aspects of the case which have a bearing on my own responsibilities.

Electro-shock Batons

Mrs. Clywd: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress of the police investigations into the allegations about the production of electro-shock batons. [1887]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have been asked to reply, since the question relates to a Scottish police investigation.

The inquires which are being conducted by Strathclyde police into these allegations are still continuing.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for industrial injuries benefit in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema were made in Nottinghamshire up to 31 October; how many were successful and how many were refused; and if he will indicate the grounds for refusal or acceptance. [3022]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 30 November 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many claims for industrial injuries benefit in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema were made in Nottinghamshire up to 31 October 1995; how many were successful and how many were refused; indicating the grounds for refusal or acceptance.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics on the number of claims for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit are maintained by each Benefits Agency District office. The figures provided in the attached Appendix A are for the main benefit offices in the North, East and West Nottinghamshire areas for the period from 1 April 1995. These include those offices in Nottingham, Mansfield and Sutton in Ashfield. It is possible that these figures will include some people living outside Nottinghamshire.

The information in this reply follows on from your earlier Parliamentary Question, on 21 April 1995, in which you were provided with the details to 31 March 1995.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A: Claims to IIDB for prescribed disease D12—Chronic Bronchitis and/or emphysema in the Nottinghamshire area for the period 1 April to 31 October 1995

	Number
Claims made	127
Successful claims assessed at 14–19 per cent.	3
Successful claims assessed at 20–25 per cent.	6
Successful claims assessed at over 25 per cent.	37
Disallowed claims—20 year rule	10
Disallowed claims—failed FEV test	71
Disallowed claims—failed X-Ray test	59
Assessed at 1–13 per cent.	0

IIDB not payable for assessment under 14 per cent. Note that not all claims received within the period will have been decided by 31 October 1995. Similarly some claims decided in the period will have been made prior to 1 April 1995.

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Peter Sutton

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Wakefield will receive a full reply from the finance director of the Benefits Agency to inquiries made by Mr. Peter Sutton, national insurance No. ZS065267D, in the hon. Member's letter to the Benefits Agency, dated 13 September; and for what reasons the response has taken longer than the three weeks indicated in the agency's letter of 6 October and the further two weeks reported in its letter of 2 November. [3352]

Mr. Heald: The administration of the national insurance scheme is a matter for Mrs. Faith Boardman, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 30 November 1995:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the Agency and the National Insurance (NI) scheme.

I have been asked to reply to your enquiry made on behalf of Mr. Peter Sutton, National Insurance Number ZS065267D, regarding difficulties with his National Insurance affairs.

When my assistant wrote to you on 2 November 1995 I anticipated being able to provide a full response within the 2 weeks indicated. Due to the issues raised this was not possible but we should have provided a further update. Please accept my apologies for this oversight.

I anticipate that all the information will be available to provide a full response within 2 weeks, if I am unable to meet this deadline I will write to you again.

War Pension Disregards

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many local authorities and London boroughs currently offer *(a)* full disregard, *(b)* partial disregard and *(c)* the statutory £10 disregard of war widows' and war disablement pension for the purpose of council tax benefit and housing benefit. [1660]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. All local authorities and London boroughs operate the statutory £10 disregard.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what extra public expenditure he estimates would be entailed in implementing a full nationwide disregard of war widows' and war disablement pensions for the purposes of *(a)* council tax benefit and *(b)* housing benefit. [1662]

Mr. Evans: The information required to make such an estimate is not available.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average length of time taken to process an appeal against the disallowance of a disability living allowance applications; [2687]

(2) how many appeals have been lodged following the disallowance of a disability living allowance application since 1 April 1994; and, of these appeals, how many have been upheld. [2688]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the average clearance time for appeals considered by disability appeal tribunals, which include disability living allowance appeals, is 30 weeks.

Between 1 April 1994 and 31 October 1995, 41,800 disability living allowance appeals have been decided and, of these, 26,662 cases the appeal was upheld.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disability living allowance applications have been received since 1 April 1994; and how many of those were disallowed. [2686]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table:

	Number
DLA claims received between 1 April 1994 and 31 October 1995	747,000
DLA claims processed between 1 April 1994 and 31 October 1995	735,000
Number disallowed between 1 April 1994 and 31 October 1995	378,000

Compensation Recovery

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many victims of *(a)* culpable accidents, *(b)* illnesses and *(c)* diseases are now settling for compensation of £2,500 or less; and what assessment he has made of the relationship between the number settling at this level and the rules of the compensation recovery unit. [2902]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Settlements at or under £2,500 are not necessarily notified to the compensation recovery unit. However, the effect of the small payments limit on settlements has been examined as part of a compliance cost assessment of the changes to the compensation recovery scheme proposed by the Social Security Select Committee. The assessment will be published shortly.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to raise the limit of £2,500 as the threshold for non-recovery by the compensation recovery unit. [2903]

Mr. Mitchell: A consultation document was published in October on the implications of changes to the compensation recovery scheme proposed by the Social Security Select Committee. One issue discussed in the consultation document is the future of the small payments limit of £2,500. The Government are now considering the responses to the consultation exercise, and will announce their decision in due course.

Funeral Benefit

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the maximum funeral benefit available to claimants or families in receipt of benefits such as income support in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* when it was last uprated. [3735]

Mr. Roger Evans: In each of these years, the maximum amount payable would have been the reasonable cost of specified essential expenses which fell to be met by the person responsible. There was no set maximum amount. Since 5 June 1995, the social fund funeral payment scheme allows up to £500 for specified funeral directors' services, the payment of reasonable costs for other specified disbursements and up to £25 for flowers. Payments may still exceed £1,000, especially in the case of burials. The £500 and £25 caps will be kept under review.

Disabled People, Carers and the Long-term Sick

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the projected total annual spending on benefits for disabled people for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98; and what was the equivalent figure for 1978–79; [3801]

(2) what is the projected total annual spending on benefits for carers for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98; and what was the equivalent figure for 1978–79; [3800]

(3) what is the projected total annual spending on benefits for the long-term sick for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98; and what was the equivalent figure for 1978–79. [3802]

Mr. Burt: Total projected spending on carers is not available as carers have access to the full range of social security benefits, depending on their individual circumstances. The available information is in the table.

£ million

	1978–79	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Long term sick and disabled	1,771	20,230	20,550	21,250
Invalid Care Allowance	4	609	700	750

Source:

1995 Departmental Report and earlier equivalents.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons the forecast of his Department's running costs for 1996–97 has risen from £3,195 million, as set out in table 3.7 of the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96", Cm 2821, published by Her Majesty's Treasury, to £3.5 billion, as set out in chart 6.6 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97". [4057]

Mr. Burt: The main reason for the increase is a reclassification of £200 million of other current expenditure as running costs. This does not alter overall DSS current provision. The remaining increase of around £100 million is to cover the implementation of jobseeker's allowance, changes to child support, further anti-fraud measures and increases in work load.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of holders of appropriate personal pensions who are contributing only their national insurance rebate; and if he will provide this information by relation to the income of the holder. [2701]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested.

Out of a total of 5.6 million appropriate personal pensions in 1993–94, we estimate that some 1.25 million received DSS contributions and associated tax relief only.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of holders of appropriate personal pensions who have rejoined the state earnings-related pension scheme in each of the past five years; and if he will provide this information by relation to the income of the holder. [2702]

Mr. Heald: The information up to the end of 1991–92, the latest year for which figures are available, is set out in the table.

(£pa)

Reckonable earnings in the year of termination	*APPs terminated in* 1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	*Total*
All cases	14.1	16.2	9.6	13.9	21.2	75
Zero	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.9	1.9
1 to 4,999	3.7	3.9	1.5	1.1	2.2	12.4
5,000 to 9,999	6.4	6.2	4.4	3.6	6.4	27
10,000 to 14,999	3	4.7	1.8	5.2	5.6	20.3
15,000 and over	0.7	1.3	1.8	3.5	6.1	13.4

Source:

1 per cent sample for the National Insurance Recording System.

Note:

1. As the numbers of cases are low the figures are subject to large sampling errors.
2. The analysis uses reckonable earnings as data on income are not available.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals currently *(a)* contribute towards a state earnings-related pension, *(b)* do not pay SERPS because they are in an occupational scheme and *(c)* do not pay SERPS because they are in a personal pension scheme. [2703]

Mr. Heald: The information for 1992–93, the latest year for which all the requested data are available, is in the table.

	Millions
Accruing SERPS entitlement only	8.3
In a contracted-out occupational scheme only	7.7
Accruing SERPS entitlement only for part of the year, and in a contracted out scheme during another part	0.8
In an Appropriate Personal Pension Scheme	5.7

Source:

1 per cent. sample from the National Insurance Recording System.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members of personal pension schemes who have opted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme he estimates will opt back into SERPS over the next five years; and how many have opted back into SERPS. [2704]

Mr. Heald: It is not possible to give a firm estimate of the number of people likely to opt out of an appropriate personal pension into the state earnings-related pension scheme, since the decision depends on an individual's particular circumstances. However, the introduction of age-related rebates from April 1997 should enable the majority of appropriate personal pension holders to maintain their arrangements.

We estimate that some 75,000 United Kingdom appropriate personal pension holders joined SERPS over the five-year period from 1987–88 to 1991–92, the latest year for which figures are available. This may include people who have left their appropriate personal pension and joined SERPS more than once.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of those taking out personal pensions and who have ceased to pay national insurance rebates to this policy after *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years, *(d)* four years and *(e)* five years. [2705]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is set out on pages 40 and 41 of "Personal Pension Statistics 1993–94", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost to the national insurance fund of all current holders of an appropriate personal pension with an annual income of *(a)* £2,000 or below, *(b)* up to £3,000, *(c)* up to £4,000, *(d)* up to £5,000, *(e)* up to £6,000, *(f)* up to £7,000, *(g)* up to £8,000, *(h)* up to £9,000 and *(i)* up to £10,000 opting back into SERPS. [2706]

Mr. Heald: Information is not available in the format requested. Any estimates of the total cost to the national insurance fund of current holders of appropriate personal pensions opting back into the state earnings-related pension scheme would depend on a number of unknown factors. These include how long the people concerned would remain contracted in to SERPS, how long they would otherwise have contributed to APP schemes and what their future earnings would be. The table gives illustrative estimates of the cost arising, in selected future years, from contributions paid solely in the single year in which the individuals concerned are assumed to contract into SERPS.

Extra SERPS expenditure in selected years if APP holder in low earnings bands opt back into SERPS for one year

£ million 1995–96 prices

APP holders with earning under (£ per annum)	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*	*2040–41*	*2050–51*
2,000	—	—	—	—	—
3,000	—	—	—	—	—
4,000	0	0	0	0	0
5,000	0	1	2	2	1
6,000	0	1	4	4	3
7,000	1	3	10	10	5
8,000	1	5	15	15	10
9,000	2	5	20	25	15
10,000	2	10	30	35	20

1. Little extra cost until 2010 as most APP holders are under age 45.
2. Estimates of numbers affected based on data for 1993–94, the most recently available, used to estimate proportions of APP holders in respect of people in the earnings bands quoted.
3. Earnings under £3,000 would not accrue SERPS so no financial effect in respect of that year.
4. Earnings have been used, as a breakdown by income is not available.
5. The year in which opting back into SERPS is assumed to take place is 1995–96.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost to date to the national insurance fund of *(a)* national insurance rebates, *(b)* tax relief and *(c)* other incentives paid in respect of personal pensions contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme. [2707]

Mr. Heald: The information up to and including 1993–94, the latest year for which audited accounts are available, is set out in the table:

GB receipts

	£ millions
Rebates to personal pensions (a)	9,149
Tax relief to personal pensions (b)	1,067
Incentives to personal pensions (c)	3,126
Total (a) + (c)[1]	12,275

Notes:

[1] The cost of tax relief is not a cost to the National Insurance fund as it is continually reimbursed by the Inland Revenue.

Source: National Insurance Fund Accounts and data from the Contributions Agency.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost, in each year until the most recent, to the national insurance fund of *(a)* national insurance rebates, *(b)* tax relief and *(c)* other incentives paid in respect of personal pensions contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme of individuals with an annual income of (i) £2,000 or below, (ii) up to £3,000, (iii) up to £4,000, (iv) up to £5,000, (v) up to £6,000, (vi) up to £7,000, (vii) up to £8,000, (viii) up to £9,000 and (ix) up to £10,000. [2708]

Mr. Heald: The information up to the end of 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, is set out in the tables. Tax relief is not a cost to the national insurance fund as it is continually reimbursed by the Inland Revenue.

GB accruals of rebates

£ millions

Reckonable earnings less than £pa	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
2,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3,000	4	4	2	2	0	0	0
4,000	23	22	18	14	8	7	4
5,000	65	63	54	43	31	26	17
6,000	127	127	120	95	74	60	43
7,000	206	205	209	175	139	120	85
8,000	299	301	308	275	230	205	145
9,000	397	399	420	394	338	306	224
10,000	487	500	540	519	464	427	316

Notes:

1. The figures are for accruals of rebate up to and including the year 1993–94. These will normally be paid in the following year.
2. The analysis uses reckonable earnings as data on income is not available.

Source:

One per cent. from the National Insurance Recording System.

GB accruals of incentives and additions

£ million

Reckonable earnings less than £ pa	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
2,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3,000	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
4,000	7	8	6	5	3	2	0
5,000	20	21	18	15	10	9	2
6,000	40	43	41	32	25	20	4
7,000	65	70	71	59	47	41	7
8,000	94	102	105	93	78	70	12
9,000	125	135	143	134	115	104	19
10,000	153	170	183	176	158	145	28

Source:

1 per cent. sample from the National Insurance Recording System.

Notes:

1. The figures are for accruals up to and including the year 1993–94. These will normally be paid in the following year.
2. The analysis uses reckonable earnings as data on income are not available.
3. The figures between 1987–88 and 1992–93 refer only to the 2 per cent. incentive. These payments ceased to accrue after 1992–93. The figure for 1993–94 is for the 1 per cent. age-addition only, payable to all appropriate personal pension holders aged 30 and over. This began to accrue from April 1993.

Invalidity and Incapacity Benefits

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons were found fit for work following medicals for *(a)* invalidity benefit and *(b)* incapacity benefit between (i) 1 April and 30 September and (ii) 1 October and 31 March in each year since 1990; and what studies he is undertaking in order to compare invalidity benefit take-up and benefit suspension with incapacity benefit. [3272]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available prior to April 1995 is in the table. Between April and September, 18,898 people have been disallowed under the all work test and 293 people because they are capable of their own occupation. Direct comparisons between incapacity benefit and invalidity benefit are not possible because of the different structure, qualifying conditions and administration of the two benefits.

The figures for incapacity benefit reflects activity during a time when the take-on of cases has been carefully controlled to match capacity as experience of the new procedures grows. It is not representative and it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the new procedures.

A number of studies and research projects are planned to establish the effect of the introduction of incapacity benefit.

Period	*Number of medical opinions given—capable of own occupation*	*Number of medical opinions given—capable of alternative work*
April 1992–September 1992	19,504	29,502
October 1992–March 1993	18,217	33,118
April 1993–September 1993	12,511	47,370
October 1993–March 1994	9,904	52,996
April 1994–September 1994	8,499	52,217
October 1994–March 1995	8,365	52,684

1. Figures for Great Britain prior to 1992 are not available. The figures relate to the number of medical opinions given by the Medical Reference Service that the claimant was capable of work following examination for Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance and not the number of disallowances. Excluded are references where the National Insurance contribution conditions for Sickness/Invalidity Benefit were not satisfied and benefit was payable because the person's incapacity was the result of an accident at work or a prescribed industrial disease.

2. The decision whether to disallow benefit following a medical opinion was made by an independent adjudication officer.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefit provision Her Majesty's Government *(a)* currently make and *(b)* intend to make available to disabled applicants for political asylum and those asylum seekers who care for disabled applicants. [3672]

Mr. Roger Evans: Disabled asylum applicants, and carers who are themselves asylum applicants, are currently entitled to claim social security benefits, including invalid care allowance, subject to the normal conditions of eligibility. Payment of income support is at the urgent cases rate, which limits the claimant's personal allowance to 90 per cent. of the normal rate. Entitlement to income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit ceases on the abandonment or final negative determination of an asylum application.

Under proposed changes to these provisions, benefit entitlement would be limited to income support at the urgent cases rate, housing benefit and council tax benefit for people who applied for asylum on entry to the UK.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of his Department's budget is represented by social security benefits made available to refugees and asylum seekers. [3630]

Mr. Evans: Approximately one quarter of 1 per cent. of total benefit expenditure, or £215 million per annum.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefit provision Her Majesty's Government intend to make for pregnant women who apply for political asylum during the course of the application with regard to housing, maternal and foetal health and food. [3673]

Mr. Evans: The two maternity benefits, statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance, are specifically aimed at pregnant working women and both have qualifying conditions closely related to the woman's recent employment and earnings history. They are therefore not available to women who have newly arrived in this country. This applies whether or not they are asylum seekers and the proposed benefit changes do not affect this position. People from abroad, including pregnant women, who apply for asylum on entry to the UK will remain entitled to claim income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit under currently proposed benefit changes. In addition, an application may be made to the social fund for a maternity payment if the applicant or her partner is in receipt of income support, housing benefit or disability working allowance.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with his European counterparts about the harmonisation of welfare benefits available for asylum seekers and refugees. [3629]

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend and his ministerial team have had no such discussions.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the maximum amount of disability benefit that may be claimed by an applicant for political asylum; and what amount is then deducted from the amount paid to the applicant in income support; [3671]

(2) what is the maximum weekly amount of benefit which may be claimed by applicants for political asylum who are *(a)* a single mother with one child, *(b)* a married couple without dependent children and *(c)* a married couple with two dependent children. [3670]

Mr. Evans: Asylum seekers are currently entitled to claim any social security benefit, subject to the normal conditions of eligibility appropriate to each. The weekly amount of benefit paid will depend on which benefits are claimed and on the individual circumstances of the claimant and any partner and dependants.

Income Support

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the current monetary value of the capital thresholds for eligibility for income support; and where these have been indexed if he will give the date they were set at *(a)* £3,000 and *(b)* £8,000. [3623]

Mr. Roger Evans: The income support capital threshold of £3,000 was introduced in April 1988 and the threshold of £8,000 was introduced in April 1990. Had these limits been indexed in line with prices since their respective dates of introduction, the levels that they would be in 1995–96 are set out in the table:

Income support capital thresholds indexed by prices

Current actual levels in 1995–96 £	Levels if indexed since introduction by ROSSI £	Levels if indexed since introduction by RPI £
Lower thresholds @ 3,000	4,172	4,254
Upper threshold @ 8,000	10,101	9,955

1. The lower capital limit of £3,000 is indexed from 1988 to 1995–96 and the upper capital limit of £8,000 is indexed from 1990 to 1995–96.
2. Indexation is based upon the yearly (September) CSO figures for ROSSI and RPI. The September figures are used because annual Social Security benefits uprating in April is based upon the ROSSI and RPI figures of the preceding September.
3. RPI is the CSO Retail Prices Index. ROSSI is the RPI minus adjustments for housing expenditure. ROSSI is the price index used for uprating most of the Income Support allowances and premiums.
4. No rounding has been assumed at each year so the results are presented to the nearest one pound.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the published response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3007]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor's Department comprises two next steps agencies—the Court Service and the Public Trust Office—the departmental headquarters and associated offices. The two agencies have published target response times to correspondence as part of their charter standards. As this is an operational matter, I have asked the chief executives of the two agencies to reply direct. There is no universal or published recommended response time in the headquarters of the Department or its associated offices, although individual divisions work to local targets. Every effort is made to respond substantively to letters from the public within 20 working days.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Ms Hilary Armstrong, dated 4 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply in respect of the Court Service to your Question about replies to letters from the public.

If a member of the public writes to a court they should receive a written reply or telephone call usually within 5 but no later than 10 working days. If they are not satisfied with the reply they have received and write to the Court Service Customer Service Unit, they should receive an acknowledgement within 2 working days and a reply within 20 working days from the date the Unit receives the letter, unless legal advice is required. If we need to take legal advice, the member of the public will be notified within 20 working days and will be sent a final reply within 40 working days.

These response times are published in the Charter for Court Users.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Ms Hilary Armstrong, dated 4 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 24 November 1995, regarding the published recommended response times to letters from the public.

The Court Funds Office's standard for correspondence is to respond to all letters of enquiry within 5 working days. The Mental Health Sector and Trust Division standard is to respond to all letters within 10 working days or to acknowledge letters within 3 working days and respond fully within 20 working days.

NORTHERN IRELAND

School Meals

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken following the survey conducted by the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association on the dietary content of school meals. [2676]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Education has consulted the Department of Health and Social Services, the education and library boards and other agencies about the issues raised in the survey conducted by the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association and in particular the application of recommendations made by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy about nutrition. The Department will review the existing guidelines for school meals in light of these consultations.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the dietary value of school meals. [2677]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Education has issued nutritional guidelines for school meals in nursery, primary and special schools.

The Department and the education and library boards school meals service regularly assess the nutritional value of meals offered to pupils.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the expenditure permitted on school meals per pupil in real and constant price terms in each school board area in each year since 1990. [2678]

Mr. Ancram: This information requested is in the table.

	Belfast board £	*Western board* £	*North-eastern board* £	*South-eastern Board* £	*Southern board* £
1990–91—actual	206.54	216.35	234.89	232.53	229.04
at 1994–95 prices	239.36	250.73	272.22	269.48	265.44
1991–92—actual	233.31	230.30	255.30	239.85	236.53
at 1994–95 prices	254.40	251.12	278.38	261.53	257.91
1992–93—actual	214.58	240.93	254.54	225.20	238.97
at 1994–95 prices	225.02	252.65	266.92	236.15	250.59
1993–94—actual	233.93	247.59	248.71	226.51	245.58
at 1994–95 prices	238.02	262.10	253.06	230.47	249.88
1994–95—actual	227.40	247.81	260.46	239.03	248.53

Roads (Belfast)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what low-cost anti-accident measures have been considered as an alternative to the current enlargement scheme for the Balmoral avenue–Malone road junction in Belfast. [2510]

Mr. Moss: A number of low-cost options based largely on modified traffic signal arrangements were considered but none was found to be suitable. The proposed scheme is the most appropriate means of dealing with the major problems identified at the junction, a view confirmed by the independent inspectors who conducted two separate public inquiries.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Balmoral avenue junction scheme in Belfast is part of a wider road enlargement scheme being considered in that area; and how much extra traffic it is expected to generate. [2511]

Mr. Moss: The proposed scheme at the Balmoral avenue-Malone road junction does not form part of any other scheme and is not expected to generate additional traffic.

Road Safety Education Officers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many road safety education officers have been employed in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and how many are planned to be employed in the next financial year. [2717]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Road safety education officers*
1991–92	[1]16
1992–93	15
1993–94	15
1994–95	13
1995–96	13

[1] Reducing to 15.

It is anticipated that the complement will be 11 road safety education officers with effect from 1 April 1996.

Social Fund

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much receipts under the European social fund for Northern Ireland in each financial year to date were earned by *(a)* the private sector, *(b)* non-central Government public sector bodies, and *(c)* central Government. [2487]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

£ million

Year	*(a)* *Private/Voluntary sector*	*(b)* *Non-central Government public bodies*	*(c)* *Central Government*
1973–74	—	—	—
1974–75	0.41	0.31	2.68
1975–76	—	—	—
1976–77	0.77	0.58	5.05
1977–78	0.90	0.68	5.92
1978–79	1.80	1.35	11.85
1979–80	1.80	1.35	11.85
1980–81	2.76	2.07	18.17
1981–82	3.00	2.25	19.75
1982–83	4.22	3.17	27.81
1983–84	4.56	3.42	30.02
1984–85	4.56	3.42	30.02
1985–86	3.00	2.25	19.75
1986–87	6.39	4.80	42.11
1987–88	6.77	5.08	44.55
1988–89	4.33	3.25	28.52
1989–90	4.17	5.57	36.66
1900–91	4.57	6.08	40.05
1991–92	4.75	6.32	41.63
1992–93	3.77	5.03	33.10
1993–94	3.16	4.21	27.73
1994–95	6.36	8.47	55.77
	72.05	69.66	532.99

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money Northern Ireland has received in each financial year to date; how much each year represented a cash addition to the Northern Ireland economy; and how much was used to offset Government expenditure on Northern Ireland. [2484]

Sir John Wheeler: The following amounts were received from the European social fund:

Financial year	*Total £ million*
1973–74	—
1974–75	3.4
1975–76	0.0
1976–77	6.4
1977–78	7.5
1978–79	15.0
1979–80	15.0
1980–81	23.0
1981–82	25.0
1982–83	35.2

Financial year	*Total £ million*
1983–84	38.0
1984–85	38.0
1985–86	25.0
1986–87	53.3
1987–88	56.4
1988–89	36.1
1989–90	46.4
1990–91	50.7
1991–92	52.7
1992–93	41.9
1993–94	35.1
1994–95	70.6
Total	674.7

Receipts earned by the private sector and by non-central Government public sector bodies are paid to the claimant. The receipts represent cash additions to the recipients. Receipts earned by central Government are paid into the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. All ESF receipts are subject to EC audit arrangements and normal government accounting requirements.

The overall level of receipts is taken in account in the Government's decisions on public expenditure allocations, and their availability enables public expenditure to be maintained at a higher level than would otherwise be feasible.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the budget in *(a)* real, and *(b)* constant price terms, of each education and library board in each year since 1988. [2537]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Recurrent financial allocations to Education and Library Boards

£000

Financial year	*Belfast*	*North Eastern*	*South Eastern*	*Southern*	*Western*	*Total*
1988–89						
Actual	47,959	55,284	44,927	54,083	47,841	250,094
Current prices	66,152	76,256	61,969	74,599	65,990	344,966
1989–90						
Actual	53,017	62,309	51,246	60,528	53,914	281,014
Current prices	68,354	80,334	66,071	78,038	69,511	362,308
1990–91						
Actual	58,888	70,036	59,590	68,820	61,371	318,705
Current prices	70,291	83,598	71,130	82,147	73,256	380,422
1991–92						
Actual	141,136	169,298	144,105	167,182	146,637	768,358
Current prices	158,506	190,135	161,841	187,758	164,684	862,924
1992–93						
Actual	156,957	189,915	159,702	185,858	161,017	853,449
Current prices	169,524	205,121	172,489	200,739	173,909	921,782
1993–94						
Actual	161,214	195,910	166,957	193,438	170,183	887,702
Current prices	168,952	205,314	174,971	202,723	178,352	930,312

Note:

As from 1991–92, under the terms of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, the Education and Library Boards became responsible for teachers' and lecturers' salary costs.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what resources were made available to each of the education and library boards in connection with the amalgamation of further education colleges in 1993–94 and 1994–95. [2494]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £
North Eastern education and library board	52,000	258,000
Southern education and library board	17,000	89,000
South Eastern education and library board	17,000	93,000

Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many playing fields are currently under threat of development; [2583]

(2) what area of playing fields has been sold off since 1981; [2581]

(3) what estimate he has made of value of playing fields that have been sold off since 1981; [2673]

(4) how many playing fields have been sold off since 1981. [2582]

Mr. Ancram: Comprehensive records of playing fields in Northern Ireland are not held centrally. Of those grant-aided by the Department, 13 have been sold since 1981 and of these seven were on school/university sites, five were owned by voluntary sports clubs and one was owned by a district council. The total area involved exceeds 76 acres and the total sale value exceeds £4 million.

Two former school playing fields are currently on the market for disposal with planning permission for housing development. These sites have become available only because of the closure of the schools in question.

My Department is exploring, with the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), the scope for introducing arrangements which would provide for consultation with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland on planning proposals which adversely affect playing fields.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* compulsory redundancies there have been in each further education college in Northern Ireland in each academic year since 1988. [2535]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

College	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Voluntary redundancies					
Belfast (wef 1 April 1991)	n/a	—	—	16	—
Fermanagh	—	—	—	1	1
Limavady	—	—	—	—	1
North-west	1	—	—	—	—
Omagh	—	—	—	3	2
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering		2	—	—	—
North Antrim	2	—	—	2	Causeway
Coleraine	—	1	1		7
Antrim	—	—	—	1	
Ballymena	1	—	—	6	North-east
Magherafelt	—	—	—	2	7
Newtownabbey	—	—	—	1	East Antrim
Larne	—	2	—		9
Castlereagh	—	—	—	—	3
Down	—	—	—	5	East Down
Newcastle	—	—	1		4
North Down and Ards	—	—	—	—	3
East Tyrone	—	—	—	—	1
Newry and Kilkeel	—	—	—	—	2
Banbridge	—	—	—	2	Upper Bann
Lurgan	—	—	—	3	4
Portadown	—	—	—		
Compulsory redundancies					
Belfast (wef 1 April 1995)	n/a	—	—	—	—
Fermanagh	—	2	—	—	—
Omagh	—	—	—	—	1
North Antrim	1	—	1	—	Causeway
Coleraine	—	—	—		
Antrim	3	—	—		
Ballymena	—	—	—	—	North-east
Magherafelt	—	—	—		
Newtownabbey	—	—	—	—	East Antrim
Larne	—	3	—		2
Banbridge	—	—	—		Upper Bann
Lurgan	—	3	—	—	1
Portadown	—	—	—		

Information on Belfast is not available prior to 1991–92. There were no voluntary or compulsory redundancies in the other colleges in 1988–89 or 1989–90.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time lecturing posts have been funded from the further and higher education budget in each further education college in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990–91. [2491]

Mr. Ancram: The information as at October in each year is as follows:

College	*[1]1990–91*	*[1]1991–92*	*[2]1992–93*	*[2]1993–94*	*[2]1994–95*	*[2]1995–96*
BIFHE	551	567	551	550	524	526
Fermanagh	74	69	64	59	63	68
Limavady	44	45	32	36	35	46
North-West	156	158	132	146	154	175
Omagh	67	68	67	64	61	63
NI Hotel and Catering	22	22	19	23	24	24
North Antrim	30	27	20	20	Causeway	—
Coleraine	64	64	53	56	97	89
Antrim	40	38	31	33	North East	
Ballymena	106	105	98	82		
Magherafelt	44	44	41	37	184	182
Newtownabbey	100	94	89	92	East Antrim	—
Larne	54	50	38	37	145	127

College	*[1]1990–91*	*[1]1991–92*	*[2]1992–93*	*[2]1993–94*	*[2]1994–95*	*[2]1995–96*
Castlereagh	78	70	67	70	70	70
Down	67	71	56	58	East Down	—
Newcastle	36	34	23	27	98	96
Lisburn	96	91	65	64	66	68
North Down and Ards	128	134	106	107	116	120
Armagh	71	70	66	60	57	61
East Tyrone	67	70	64	59	67	64
Newry and Kilkeel	92	92	86	86	86	101
Banbridge	31	30	28	28	Upper Bann	—
Lurgan	59	60	47	52		
Portadown	98	96	88	88	178	140

Notes:

[1] Includes full-time lecturers employed in the Youth Training Programme (YTP lecturers cannot be separately identified for 1990-91 and 1991-92).

[2] Excludes full-time lecturers employed in the Youth Training Programme.

1. From 1994–95 North Antrim and Coleraine became Causeway; Antrim, Ballymena and Magherafelt became North East; Newtownabbey and Larne became East Antrim; Down and Newcastle became East Down; and Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown became Upper Bann.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many industrial tribunal and fair employment tribunal cases have been lodged against which further education colleges in each year since 1988. [2536]

Mr. Ancram: The following information has been provided by the education and library boards. Their records do not show cases prior to 1990.

College	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Belfast	—	1	—	1	4	6
Fermanagh	—	2	—	—	2	—
North-west	—	1	1	—	3	1
Omagh	1	1	—	2	1	—
NI Hotel and Catering	—	—	—	2	—	2
North Antrim	1	—	—	—	—	—
Antrim	—	1	—	—	—	—
Larne	—	—	—	—	2	—
Castlereagh	—	—	1	—	—	2
Down	—	—	1	—	—	—
Newcastle	—	—	5	1	1	—
Lisburn	—	—	3	—	—	2
North Down and Ards	—	1	1	2	2	6
East Tyrone	—	—	—	—	4	4
Newry and Kilkeel	—	—	—	—	7	2
Lurgan	1	—	—	1	—	—
Portadown	—	1	—	—	2	1
Upper Bann[1]	—	—	—	—	—	3

[1] Amalgamation of Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge on 1 September 1994.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many part-time lecturing staff have been employed in each college of further education in Northern Ireland in each year since 1990. [2492]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

College	*[1]1990–91*	*[1]1991–92*	*[2]1992–93*	*[2]1993–94*	*[2]1994–95*
College of Technology	83	BIFHE 876	903	882	857
College of Business Studies	89				
Rupert Stanley	851				
Fermanagh	56	47	48	53	79
Limavady	56	60	67	70	77
North West	137	156	184	203	337
Omagh	58	52	60	53	101
NI Hotel and Catering	5	9	5	6	11
North Antrim	30	54	35	45	Causeway
Coleraine	36	39	32	38	85
Antrim	39	31	51	54	North-east 195
Ballymena	61	72	73	67	
Magherafelt	29	25	16	23	
Newtownabbey	154	134	116	79	East Antrim
Larne	29	15	7	7	127
Castlereagh	184	139	100	145	186
Down	126	75	99	118	East Down
Newcastle	52	34	44	57	183
Lisburn	154	89	96	142	163
North Down and Ards	264	167	170	281	235
Armagh	71	51	38	40	66

College	*[1]1990–91*	*[1]1991–92*	*[2]1992–93*	*[2]1993–94*	*[2]1994–95*
East Tyrone	47	51	51	43	119
Newry and Kilkeel	64	82	54	53	135
Banbridge	41	44	44	46	Upper Bann 249
Lurgan	28	26	33	45	
Portadown	83	47	20	12	

Notes:

[1] Part-time teachers as at January.

[2] Part-time teachers as at October.

1. From 1994–95 North Antrim and Coleraine became Causeway; Antrim, Ballymena and Magherafelt became North East; Newtownabbey and Larne became East Antrim; Down and Newcastle became East Down; and Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown became Upper Bann.

Road Deaths (Children)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children died in road traffic accidents in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [2719]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Age	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Under 1	0	0	1	1	0
1	1	0	1	0	1
2	2	3	2	0	3
3	0	1	1	0	0
4	2	1	1	0	2
5	4	1	1	0	1
6	0	2	2	0	1
7	4	2	1	0	3
8	1	1	1	2	0
9	0	4	2	4	2
10	2	1	1	1	2
11	1	2	0	1	2
12	1	1	0	0	2
13	5	1	1	3	1
14	0	2	0	0	2
15	2	6	1	2	4
Total	25	28	16	14	26

European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money Northern Ireland has received in each financial year to date from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund guidance section; how much of these receipts were paid to the private sector; how much of these receipts were paid to the public sector; how much of these receipts represented a cash addition to the Northern Ireland economy; and how much was used each year to offset Government expenditure on Northern Ireland. [2485]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	Individual capital products		*Other guidance schemes*		
Financial year	*Private sector*	*Public sector*	*Private sector*	*Public sector*	*Total*
1990–91	4.75	—	6.25	—	11.0
1991–92	4.31	—	21.78	2.86	28.95
1992–93	8.31	—	9.56	0.45	18.32
1993–94	2.32	—	23.08	2.7	28.10
1994–95	6.23	—	22.13	—	28.36

All these receipts present cash additions to the recipients and are subject to normal European Community audit arrangements. The overall level of receipts is taken into account in the Government's decision on public expenditure allocations and their availability enables public expenditure to be maintained at a higher level than would otherwise be feasible.

Hotel and Catering College Lecturers

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many lecturers, who are citizens of the Republic of Ireland, were enrolled in hotel and catering colleges in Northern Ireland for each year since 1990–91. [2478]

Mr. Ancram: The information is not available.

General National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the expenditure on the introduction of GNVQs in schools and further education colleges in Northern Ireland in each year since 1992–93. [2493]

Mr. Ancram: It is not possible to identify separately the total expenditure on GNVQs in schools and further education colleges. Schools and colleges which provide GNVQs meet the costs from within the totality of the resources available to them.

However, additional resources have been made available to 16 schools and to all colleges to assist them to pilot GNVQs and to facilitate the introduction of new subject areas. To date, a total of £32,000 has been paid to schools and £264,000 to colleges.

Common Land

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will institute an interdepartmental policy group to address the problems of those who live adjacent to common land and thoroughfares where anti-social elements gather; and if he will make it his policy to enclose publicly owned common land where persistent offences occur. [2507]

Sir John Wheeler: At present there are no plans to institute an interdepartmental policy group on these issues.

The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments do not have a policy to enclose lands to which the public has access; rather, where offences occur, they take whatever steps are necessary to address the problem in consultation with the RUC.

Road Safety

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response he has made to the recommendations contained in the 13th report of the Committee of Public Accounts on the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland on road safety—HC 26th Session 1993–94—in respect of the adoption of the local authorities, road safety code of practice. [2716]

Mr. Moss: The Public Accounts Committee made no such recommendation. In 1989 the local authority associations in Great Britain produced a road safety code of good practice. The Department of the Environment has not formally adopted the code. However, it has given formal expression to the code principles, in so far as they are relevant to the Department's functional responsibilities, within the body of the road safety plan for Northern Ireland. The plan was formally launched on 5 July 1995.

Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to bring in legislation similar to the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995. [2509]

Mr. Moss: None. The Department of Health and Social Services already has the legislative authority to direct health and social services boards and trusts to carry out assessments of carers' needs as provided by the Act and has done so.

European Regional Development Fund

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money Northern Ireland has received in each year to date from the European regional development fund; how much has been earned by *(a)* infrastructure projects undertaken by non-central Government bodies, *(b)* infrastructure projects undertaken by central Government and *(c)* industrial projects. [2486]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

£ million

	Infrastructure Projects				
Financial year	*Non-central government*	*Central government*	*Industrial projects*	*Programmes*[1]	*Total*
1975–76	0.6	—	2.3	—	2.9
1976–77	0.6	2.8	3.8	—	7.2
1977–78	3.2	0.7	2.5	—	6.4
1978–79	2.4	0.8	0.8	—	4.0
1979–80	9.7	3.3	3.0	—	16.0
1980–81	9.7	1.3	10.0	—	21.0
1981–82	4.7	4.0	7.6	0.1	16.4
1982–83	3.8	11.3	2.5	0.4	18.0
1983–84	3.9	7.5	1.3	0.8	13.5
1984–85	5.1	7.5	3.0	1.3	16.9
1985–86	7.0	9.0	1.0	1.4	18.4
1986–87	10.3	6.8	3.8	2.3	23.2
1987–88	22.9	6.4	11.1	5.5	45.9
1988–89	18.9	7.0	15.2	5.6	46.7
1989–90	8.4	4.9	16.9	10.2	40.4
1990–91	7.6	4.2	4.9	9.0	25.7
1991–92	2.4	1.0	3.2	29.3	35.9
1992–93	2.6	0.8	4.5	76.7	84.6
1993–94	2.6	0.7	10.5	88.3	102.1
1994–95	0.7	—	0.6	65.8	67.1
1995–96[2]	0.0	—	—	35.9	35.9
Totals	127.1	80.0	108.5	332.6	648.2

[1] These programmes combine elements of both industry and infrastructure.

[2] Includes estimated receipts to date for 1995–96 financial year.

University Research Funding

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements are in place to ensure the continuation of "DevR" research funding for the universities in Northern Ireland. [2532]

Mr. Ancram: The developmental element of research funding for the Northern Ireland universities, NIDevR, is to extend until the end of the 1996–97 academic year. Following the outcome of the 1996 research assessment exercise, the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council, which advises Government on the planning and funding of higher education in Northern Ireland, will make recommendations on the totality of research funding for both universities beyond 1996–97.

Foyleside Centre

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what public funds have been allocated for the Foyleside centre, Northern Ireland; how much the total budget for the centre is, and if he will make a statement. [2909]

Mr. Moss: The allocation of public funds for the Foyleside centre in Northern Ireland comprised a grant of £7.5 million from the Department of the Environment urban development grant budget. The total budget for this centre including fitting-out costs is estimated at some £65 million.

EEC Payments

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much Northern Ireland's share of the United Kingdom's payments into the European Economic Community was from 1 January 1973 to date; how much Northern Ireland's share of the receipts was for the same period; and how much of those receipts was used to offset Government expenditure in Northern Ireland. [2482]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to determine Northern Ireland's actual share of the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Community because payments are made on a national and not a regional basis. Similarly, it is not possible to identify the full extent of receipts from the Community. However, a Northern Ireland attributed share of the contribution to the EC is calculated as an accounting mechanism necessary because of the operation of a separate Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. This notional attributed share does not count as an item of expenditure within the Northern Ireland public expenditure programme and has therefore no bearing on the level of public expenditure in the Province.

Figures for the notional attribution of part of Northern Ireland's share of the United Kingdom's payments and for those areas where the receipts from the European Community's structural funds can be separately identified are as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Attributed share (part)*	*[2]Identified receipts*
1973–74	1	0
1974–75	6	4
1975–76	8	4
1976–77	13	16
1977–78	16	14
1978–79	24	19
1979–80	28	31
1980–81	28	44
1981–82	50	41
1982–83	66	53
1983–84	66	51
1984–85	68	58
1985–86	74	44
1986–87	62	77
1987–88	91	111
1988–89	85	96
1989–90	104	95
1990–91	107	110
1991–92	100	132
1993–93	134	158
1993–94	[1]171	185
1994–95	[1]173	157
Total	1,475	1,500

[1] Attributed share figures for the last two years are provisional estimates which will be revised when final details of tax revenues are determined.

[2] This comprises total identified EC Structural Funds and, from 1994–95, Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance receipts in Northern Ireland.

All receipts represent cash additions to the recipients and are subject to normal European Community audit arrangements and the requirements of government accounting.

The overall level of receipts is taken into account in the Government's decisions on public expenditure allocations and their availability enables public expenditure to be maintained at a higher level that would otherwise be feasible.

Structural Funds

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money Northern Ireland has received in each financial year from EEC sources apart from payments under the three structural funds. [2483]

Sir John Wheeler: The following amounts have been identified as being received in Northern Ireland from European Community sources other than the three structural funds since 1987–88 when meaningful figures first became available.

Financial year	*Total £ million*
1987–88	27.6
1988–89	27.8
1989–90	46.0
1990–91	48.0
1991–92	59.5
1992–93	56.1
1993–94	89.7
1994–95	114.7

These receipts are from the guarantee section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. However, it should be noted that the bulk of guarantee section receipts are disbursed centrally by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and details of payments are not generally maintained at regional level. Other small payments are made by the European Commission direct to recipients which are not passed through the United Kingdom Government.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been received by Northern Ireland under each of the European Community initiatives to date. [2481]

Sir John Wheeler: Under the 1989 to 1993 structural funds allocation, Northern Ireland had 11 approved Community initiatives. The amounts received to date under each initiative are:

Initiative	*£ million*
Interreg I (assistance to border areas)	26.90
Stride (research and technological development)	8.55
Envireg (environmental improvement)	11.23
Prisma (assistance to firms)	3.41
Telematique (promotion of telecommunications service)	3.36
Euroform (qualifications and new skills, and employment opportunities)	1.63
Now (employment opportunities for women)	0.84
Horizon (handicapped and certain disadvantaged groups)	1.18
Retex I (diversification for textile regions)	1.45
Leader I (rural development)	2.26
Konver I (restructuring of defence-dependent areas)	0.25

Under the 1994 to 1999 structural funds allocation, eight of the nine Community initiative programmes benefiting Northern Ireland have been approved. The amounts to date under each initiative are:

Initiative	*£ million*
Interreg II (Promoting cross border areas)	5.94
Smes (small firms)	2.55
Retex II (diversification for textile regions)	1.54
Employment (addressing exclusion and marginalisation in the labour markets)	0.49
Adapt (industrial change)	0.13
Urban (developing selected urban areas)	5.65
Pesca (development of fishing areas)	—
Leader II (rural development)	0.64

Proposed Memorial Volume

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for the publication of a memorial volume relating to the Northern Ireland conflict, listing the names and details of those members and former members of the armed forces and the police who were murdered or died in accidents while serving since 1969, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. [1407]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government have no plans, at present, to publish a memorial volume relating to the Northern Ireland conflict. A number of memorial volumes already exist in many military chapels and police stations across the Province, including a book of remembrance at St. Anne's cathedral in Belfast.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3006]

Sir John Wheeler: The published recommended response time for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments to reply to requests for information under the code of practice on open government is 20 working days.

Targets for replying to other letters from the public are published by the individual NI Departments and agencies as follows:

Department/Agency	*Published target response time (working days)*
Social Security Agency	7 for letters of complaint
Child Support Agency	10
Department of Agriculture	15
Valuation and Lands Agency	10
Department of the Environment:	
Environment Service, NI	5
Monuments and Building Record	
Making Belfast Work	10
Roads Service	15
Driver and Vehicle Licensing NI:	
Vehicle Register information	4
General Correspondence	5
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	10
Ordnance Survey of NI:	
Despatch of Orders	7
General Correspondence	10
Public Records Office for NI:	70 per cent. of cases within 10 95 per cent. of cases within 14
Rate Collection Agency	10
Training and Employment Agency	5 (where an acknowledgement is sent, full reply within 10 days)
Department of Economic Development:	
Redundancy Branch	5
Companies Registry	5 (where an acknowledgement is sent, full reply within 10 days)
Trading Standards Branch	5
Health and Safety Division	10
Compensation Agency	95 per cent. of cases within 14

Springvale Campus Project

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions representatives of Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers met representatives of the university of Ulster in the evaluation of the Springvale campus project on behalf of the Government; and whom they met and when. [1773]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Representatives of PIEDA met with officials from the university of Ulster on five occasions. Details of the names of the university of Ulster officials and dates of the meetings are listed:

University of Ulster officials	*Dates of meeting*
Vice Chancellor and Senior Academic Officials	16 December 1994
B. Osborne	16 December 1994
Professor Wallace Ewart	16 December 1994
P. Donnelly	5 January 1995
Professor Wallace Ewart	13 June 1995

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which representatives of the local community representatives of PIEDA met in their evaluation of the Springvale campus project on behalf of the Government; and on what dates they met. [1774]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* PIEDA did not meet local community representatives as part of its assignment.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which representatives of the Government representatives of PIEDA met in their evaluation of the Springvale campus project on behalf of the Government. [1775]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* PIEDA met senior officials at grade 5 level from the Departments of Education, of Finance and Personnel and of the Environment and the Northern Ireland Office in its evaluation of the Springvale campus project. These officials make up the steering group which was chaired by T. McCusker from Making Belfast Work.

T. Quinn, P. Hewitt: Department of Finance and Personnel

J. Cowan: Department of the Environment (NI)

P. Holmes, R. Davison: Department of the Education (NI)

D. Gibson: Department of Economic Development

D. Brown: Northern Ireland Office.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much PIEDA's evaluation of the Springvale campus project has cost; and if there will be further cost. [1776]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* To date PIEDA's evaluation of the Springvale campus project has cost £82,263. A further payment of £40,000 will be made shortly.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Initial Teacher Training

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funds will be available nationally for initial teacher training in 1996–97, and what funds were available in 1994–95 and in 1995–96. [23]

Mr. Robin Squire: The funds available for initial teacher training for 1996–97 are set out in the letter of 28 November from the Department to the Teacher Training Agency. A copy of this letter is in the Library.

Some £151.641 million has been notionally allocated for the funding of ITT courses. It is for the agency to decide on the distribution of funds between the activities that it supports.

In 1994–95, the Higher Education Funding Council for England allocated £141.587 million for the recurrent funding of ITT. In addition, the Department for Education and Employment spent approximately £1.259 million of the school-centred ITT-SCITT-scheme.

In 1995–96, the HEFCE allocated £53.91 million for ITT funding, for the final term of academic year 1994–95. The Teacher Training Agency has allocated £109.953 million for recurrent ITT funding for the first two terms of academic year 1995–96. In addition, the Department has provided £448,000 for funding for SCITT courses in 1995–96.

None of these figures includes student support, or the income from fees for students on ITT courses.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the grant-maintained schools which have applied for consent for the disposal of premises, in each case stating *(a)* the nature of the premises, *(b)* if the premises were previously transferred from a local authority, *(c)* if the premises were used also by other schools, *(d)* if consent was given, *(e)* the proceeds from disposal, *(f)* the attribution of proceeds and *(g)* the purpose for which proceeds were used by the school. [2896]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Table *(a)* contains the information for disposals by sale, including land exchanges, and table *(b)* contains disposals by lease and easement. The term "disposal" also covers compulsory purchase of school premises and payments "in kind". There have been no applications for the Secretary of State's consent involving either compulsory purchases or payments in kind.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what provision has been made in the 1996–97 budget for an increase in the number of grant-maintained schools, in terms of *(a)* capital and *(b)* current expenditure; [3712]

(2) what is the planned *(a)* current and *(b)* capital spending on grant-maintained schools in the years 1996–97 and 1997–98. [3734]

Mr. Squire: Recurrent provision for grant-maintained schools takes the form of annual maintenance grant and special purpose grants. Provision in 1996–97 and 1997–98 for annual maintenance grant—the bulk of recurrent funding for grant-maintained schools—will depend on school budget decisions yet to be taken by local authorities, and by the Department in respect of the common funding formula, and on the number of additional schools which become grant-maintained in these years. Within the overall provision of £103 million for GM recurrent in 1996–97, £86 million has been allocated to special purpose grants for grant-maintained schools. The planning figure for GM recurrent in 1997–98 is £125 million. This total, and within that the provision for special purpose grants, will be subject to review in the next public expenditure survey.

As regards capital, the Government have announced the allocation of £138 million to the Funding Agency for Schools for 1996–97. The planning figure for 1997–98 is now £134 million. These figures take into account the overall level of capital funds available for schools, the scope offered for work to be supported under the private finance initiative and, subject to parliamentary approval of the proposed legislation, the power which grant-maintained schools will in due course have to borrow on the commercial market. There is no separately identifiable provision for schools newly entering the grant-maintained sector.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* proportion of (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools opting out of local authority control in the coming year. [3714]

Mr. Squire: The number of schools leaving local authority control in the coming year will depend on parental choices in ballots on grant-maintained status.

Special Needs

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of disabled children with special educational needs were in mainstream schools in each year since 1979. [3616]

Mr. Forth: Data are available only for the years 1984 to 1994, and for all children with statements of special educational needs. The data are provided in the table:

Pupils with statements of special educational need in mainstream schools

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Number	1,815	26,014	30,047	33,277	40,931	47,262	54,299	61,992	71,246	85,013	100,254
Percentage of all pupils with statements	9.8	20.3	22.2	24.7	29.7	34.1	38.9	40.1	43.2	48.1	52.1

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been awarded an assisted place in the years since 1990. [3504]

Mrs. Gillan: The numbers of children who were awarded and took up assisted places for the first time in England in each year since academic year 1990–91 are given in the table:

Assisted places scheme

Academic	*Numbers of children taking up Assisted Places*
1990–91	4,948
1991–92	5,602
1992–93	5,815
1993–94	5,775
1994–95	5,813

The total number of assisted place holders in England in the academic year 1994–95, including those who took up places for the first time in earlier years, was 29,747. Questions about the operation of the assisted places scheme in Scotland and Wales are for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales. There is no assisted places scheme in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Blunkett: to ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much is proposed to be spent on the assisted places scheme in 1995–96, and in each year to 1998–99. [3713]

Mrs. Gillan: Provision in the supply estimates for the assisted places scheme in England in the current financial year 1995–96 is £104.4 million. We have increased the planned spending for financial year 1996–97 to £118 million. Provisional figures for the following two years will be published in the departmental report. The actual outturn will depend on the number of acceptable bids from eligible schools for new places from September 1996, and on parental demand.

Diploma Directive

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will add anything to his answer of 25 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *166*, as to when he intends to issue a consultation document on the implementation of the Council directive for a second general system to supplement second diploma directive 89/48/EEC. [3551]

Mr. Forth: The preparation of legislation has proved not to be an easy task but is now at an advanced stage. We are hoping to take forward the process of consultation in the near future with legislation following.

Work Force Skills

Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how the £250 million announced in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" for industry's efforts to improve the skills of the work force will be allocated. [3705]

Mr. Paice: The £250 million that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *684–88*, will be used to support the following programmes:

> employer investment in people which enables TECs to help local businesses to improve their performance through the development of their people and, particularly, by achieving the investors in people standard;
>
> skills for small businesses which will improve the training skills of 24,000 key employees, who will lead the development of workforce skills in small firms across the country; and
>
> career development loans which aid individuals to upgrade their vocational skills with accessible bank loans.

Literacy and Numeracy Centres

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the cost of the project to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schools in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [3710]

Mr. Robin Squire: Up to £5 million will be made available to support the establishment of primary literacy and numeracy centres in 1996–97. Funding for later years will be decided in the light of each year's public expenditure settlement; it is expected that broadly similar sums will be available in 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Technology and Language Colleges

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been allocated for the 60 additional technology and language colleges announced on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *684*. [3709]

Mrs. Gillan: The public expenditure settlement provides funding of some £23 million in 1996–97 to support technology and language colleges. This will support the 107 schools already designated as technology or language colleges, and around 60 schools which will be newly designated before or during 1996–97. The newly designated schools will be eligible for additional capital and recurrent funding in 1996–97 totalling some £11 million.

Student Loans

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when her Department asked the Contributions Agency to assess the feasibility and cost of collecting student loan repayments using the national insurance system on behalf of the Student Loan Company and the proposed private sector scheme; what costs were quoted for the first and subsequent years of operation and what these costs represent as a percentage of the total costs of running the social security deductions system; and if she will make a statement. [3615]

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions her Department has had with officials of the Department of Social Security regarding the use of the national insurance system to collect student loan repayments. [4014]

Mr. Forth: My officials, with the assistance of other Government Departments, have looked at this option on a number of occasions. There are fundamental objections of principle to collecting repayments via the Contributions Agency or Inland Revenue. Any such scheme would have significant implications for both employers and the collecting agency, in addition to the operational costs that the Student Loans Company would still incur in issuing and monitoring loans. For these reasons, no detailed analysis of the cost has been made.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if students who have been declared bankrupt will remain eligible for subsidised loans made by private sector lenders under the proposed reforms of student loans provision. [3923]

Mr. Forth: The Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 does not specifically prevent students classified as bankrupt from being eligible for a loan. Private lenders, who would bear a large share of the risk, would be free to accept loan applications from students, or not.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if it is her policy that private sector levels of subsidised student loans should be permitted to shorten the current loan repayment period if overall public sector subsidy per loan is held constant. [4054]

Mr. Forth: Contracts with the private lenders will set out minimum standards to be met to be eligible for subsidies. This will include a requirement that interest payments are no higher than the rate of inflation as measured by the retail prices index.

If a lender wishes to offer different terms, including a shorter repayment period and lower interest rates, that is a matter between it and the borrower. Our contracts will ensure that, in such cases, the public subsidy paid will have the same overall value to the taxpayer and to the student.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the cost of establishing a new central database for the processing of student loans. [4056]

Mr. Forth: This work is being put out to tender. No estimate has been made at this stage.

School Meals (Beef Products)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance her Department has issued to local education authorities on the use of beef products in school meals; and if she will make a statement. [3662]

Mrs. Gillan: None, but both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health have made public statements on the safety of beef products.

Communication Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children of school age there are with communication autistic spectrum disorders, and how many places there are in schools appropriate for their needs *(a)* in London and *(b)* in England. [2710]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not held centrally.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much of the £390 million over the next three years for nursery vouchers announced on 28 November *(a)* will be spent on administration costs and *(b)* will be spent on staff training and capital investment; [3743]

(2) if the £390 million over the next three years for nursery vouchers announced on 28 November is in addition to the £185 million announced in her statement to the House on 6 July, *Official Report*, columns *517–32*; and what proportion of the £390 million will be spent in each of the three years; [3741]

(3) what proportion of the extra £390 million for nursery vouchers announced on 28 November will be channelled through local authorities; and what proportion will go to the private company appointed to administer the voucher scheme. [3742]

Mr. Robin Squire: The £390 million for the nursery education voucher scheme announced on 28 November is in respect of those four-year-olds who do not have a place in a maintained school, with £21 million for phase 1 in 1996–97 and £185 million for 1997–98 when the scheme is fully implemented and for the following year. It will be added to sums deducted from each LEA in respect of existing places for four-year-olds.

The Government's contract with Capita Managed Services Ltd. to administer phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme was awarded after competitive tender. The financial details are commercially confidential. The contract for phase 2 will also be the subject of a competitive tender.

The proportion of the £390 million channelled through local authorities will depend on where new places are created.

The value of the voucher includes elements for training and the servicing of capital debt.

Educational Psychologists

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list by local education authority for each year since 1985 *(a)* the number of educational psychologists employed, *(b)* the ratio of educational psychologists to school children, *(c)* the number of children with statements and *(d)* to the ratio of children with statements to the school age population. [3627]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the table:

Educational psychologists in service and children with statements of special educational needs maintained by each Local Education Authority area in England

Position as at January in each year

	1985			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[1]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[3]
Corporation of London	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Camden	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Greenwich	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Hackney	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Hammersmith and Fulham	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Islington	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Kensington and Chelsea	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Lambeth	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Lewisham	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Southwark	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Tower Hamlets	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Wandsworth	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Westminster	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Barking and Dagenham	7.0	2.8	384	154.1
Barnet	8.5	1.8	644	136.7
Bexley	5.0	1.4	713	205.7
Brent	9.6	2.6	[5]—	[5]—
Bromley	8.0	1.8	766	171.7
Croydon	9.0	1.7	791	151.3
Ealing	5.4	1.3	513	119.5
Enfield	9.0	2.2	779	188.9
Haringey	7.0	2.3	556	184.5
Harrow	6.0	1.9	596	186.7
Havering	8.0	2.0	626	158.5
Hillingdon	5.0	1.3	698	184.6
Hounslow	5.9	1.8	12	3.6
Kingston upon Thames	2.0	0.9	340	160.2
Merton	5.0	1.9	160	60.9
Newham	11.0	2.9	755	199.5
Redbridge	6.0	1.7	724	210.5
Richmond upon Thames	4.0	1.7	305	133.0
Sutton	4.0	1.6	190	75.8
Waltham Forest	8.0	2.3	716	203.8
Birmingham	37.2	2.0	3,478	188.7
Coventry	12.3	2.2	1,232	222.7
Dudley	7.5	1.5	908	181.7
Sandwell	8.0	1.5	1,103	203.1
Solihull	7.3	1.9	84	22.1
Walsall	7.0	1.3	777	148.4
Wolverhampton	6.0	1.2	720	150.0
Knowsley	7.0	2.2	348	111.4
Liverpool	15.5	1.8	1,663	188.0
St. Helens	4.0	1.1	647	185.3
Sefton	9.0	1.7	581	109.3
Wirral	8.0	1.3	1,277	211.6
Bolton	4.0	0.8	675	135.4
Bury	3.5	1.1	507	165.9
Manchester	14.0	1.8	345	43.2
Oldham	5.0	1.2	661	159.3
Rochdale	9.0	2.3	618	159.8
Salford	6.0	1.4	815	191.0

Educational psychologists in service and children with statements of special educational needs maintained by each Local Education Authority area in England

Position as at January in each year

	1985			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Stockport	6.7	1.3	862	166.8
Tameside	7.0	1.8	669	175.8
Trafford	3.0	0.9	278	79.4
Wigan	8.0	1.4	108	18.9
Barnsley	4.0	1.0	443	112.3
Doncaster	9.0	1.7	14	2.6
Rotherham	9.0	1.9	844	178.7
Sheffield	13.6	1.6	1,383	162.3
Bradford	14.0	1.6	1,391	157.0
Calderdale	2.0	0.6	338	96.7
Kirklees	12.0	1.7	929	132.2
Leeds	13.5	1.1	1,038	85.9
Wakefield	6.0	1.0	981	170.7
Gateshead	8.0	2.4	598	176.7
Newcastle upon Tyne	12.0	2.6	882	188.1
North Tyneside	8.0	2.4	604	178.3
South Tyneside	6.0	2.3	467	175.7
Sunderland	9.0	1.6	1,000	178.8
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0	[5]—	[5]—
Inner London	87.7	2.6	7,349	220.7
Avon	28.6	1.8	617	39.7
Bedfordshire	12.0	1.3	1,529	162.5
Berkshire	17.3	1.3	2,121	164.2
Buckinghamshire	16.0	1.5	2,859	268.0
Cambridgeshire	12.0	1.1	1,252	119.1
Cheshire	17.0	1.0	3,468	209.1
Cleveland	18.0	1.6	2,290	208.8
Cornwall	8.0	1.1	965	132.9
Cumbria	9.0	1.1	1,363	164.6
Derbyshire	21.5	1.4	2,698	172.6
Devon	20.4	1.4	2,807	188.2
Dorset	14.5	1.6	1,590	171.7
Durham	17.4	1.7	1,569	149.5
East Sussex	11.8	1.2	1,766	181.0
Essex	31.4	1.3	4,555	182.1
Gloucestershire	11.0	1.3	483	55.4
Hampshire	31.5	1.3	5,252	214.4
Hereford and Worcester	11.0	1.0	14	1.2
Hertfordshire	21.5	1.2	3,472	193.2
Humberside	21.0	1.4	2,417	158.5
Isle of Wight	3.0	1.6	317	166.8
Kent	19.0	0.8	5,137	203.2
Lancashire	34.0	1.4	4,708	200.2
Leicestershire	19.0	1.3	1,797	118.9
Lincolnshire	10.0	1.1	2,001	217.9
Norfolk	14.0	1.2	1,494	130.4
North Yorkshire	15.2	1.3	1,723	151.5
Northamptonshire	15.0	1.5	1,858	183.2
Northumberland	4.1	0.8	806	156.9
Nottinghamshire	30.0	1.7	2,617	152.3
Oxfordshire	12.5	1.4	1,046	115.7
Shropshire	8.0	1.1	780	110.6
Somerset	9.0	1.2	1,320	175.6
Staffordshire	17.7	1.0	2,671	150.2
Suffolk	13.0	1.3	1,532	148.8
Surrey	22.0	1.3	3,384	204.0
Warwickshire	9.8	1.2	1,547	183.9
West Sussex	12.0	1.1	1,394	130.8
Wiltshire	13.0	1.5	1,795	202.7
England	1,173.4	1.5	127,889	160.7

[1] Children with statements of special education needs maintained by the LEA.

[2] Divisor includes pupils of all ages in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special; independent and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Derived from returns received from LEA's-Special Educational Needs Survey (SEN2). Includes children in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools; independent and non-maintained special schools and children being educated otherwise than in a school.

[4] Not applicable.

[5] Not available.

	1992			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[1]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Corporation of London	0.0	0.0	5	28.2
Camden	7.8	2.9	454	170.4
Greenwich	11.0	2.9	1,000	262.6
Hackney	8.5	3.0	575	203.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	8.0	4.1	414	213.9
Islington	10.0	4.2	445	189.1
Kensington and Chelsea	6.0	2.9	264	126.0
Lambeth	7.8	2.8	752	269.7
Lewisham	10.0	2.9	760	219.0
Southwark	10.0	2.8	779	217.9
Tower Hamlets	10.0	3.1	672	208.1
Wandsworth	11.0	3.4	1,028	321.2
Westminster	7.0	3.2	457	206.0
Barking and Dagenham	7.5	3.0	347	140.5
Barnet	13.6	2.8	752	153.6
Bexley	6.5	1.9	814	242.4
Brent	11.2	3.2	543	154.0
Bromley	10.0	2.4	1,018	244.9
Croydon	10.8	2.1	1,016	200.1
Ealing	9.8	2.1	907	198.8
Enfield	12.5	3.1	241	58.8
Haringey	9.8	3.2	414	136.4
Harrow	6.0	1.9	540	169.1
Havering	8.0	2.2	629	174.0
Hillingdon	8.2	2.2	575	157.0
Hounslow	5.8	1.7	1,020	301.9
Kingston upon Thames	3.0	1.4	433	204.9
Merton	5.7	2.2	581	227.0
Newham	11.0	2.8	690	176.5
Redbridge	7.4	2.0	621	169.9
Richmond upon Thames	5.5	2.3	430	176.8
Sutton	6.0	2.3	581	227.0
Waltham Forest	7.0	2.1	674	198.1
Birmingham	37.5	2.0	3,122	170.1
Coventry	14.0	2.7	1,021	198.4
Dudley	8.5	1.8	897	192.8
Sandwell	14.0	2.7	740	144.2
Solihull	8.0	2.2	631	172.0
Walsall	10.0	2.1	899	185.6
Wolverhampton	10.0	2.3	938	217.3
Knowsley	6.8	2.4	813	288.2
Liverpool	18.0	2.1	1,870	221.4
St. Helens	6.5	2.1	808	260.4
Sefton	11.0	2.2	1,049	207.7
Wirral	13.5	2.3	1,270	218.4
Bolton	7.4	1.5	696	145.6
Bury	4.5	1.5	804	269.5
Manchester	19.3	2.5	1,024	130.6
Oldham	4.0	0.9	860	202.8
Rochdale	7.5	2.1	781	220.3
Salford	7.0	1.8	470	120.5
Stockport	9.5	1.9	1,293	261.4
Tameside	11.0	2.9	1,126	301.0
Trafford	4.0	1.1	671	192.1
Wigan	6.5	1.3	1,000	195.3
Barnsley	4.5	1.3	520	154.1
Doncaster	9.0	1.7	1,023	198.0
Rotherham	10.3	2.4	1,171	269.0
Sheffield	16.2	2.2	1,261	171.7
Bradford	19.0	2.1	1,267	141.0
Calderdale	6.8	2.0	461	136.9
Kirklees	15.0	2.3	1,551	237.9
Leeds	19.0	1.7	2,879	252.0
Wakefield	12.0	2.2	1,011	186.4
Gateshead	10.0	3.2	503	161.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	11.0	2.4	948	206.0
North Tyneside	8.0	2.4	888	268.8
South Tyneside	8.0	3.1	497	193.5
Sunderland	10.1	2.0	1,107	216.5
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
Inner London	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—

	1992			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Avon	28.8	1.9	4,131	275.0
Bedfordshire	17.0	1.8	1,893	199.8
Berkshire	17.0	1.3	2,450	192.2
Buckinghamshire	21.9	2.1	3,413	319.9
Cambridgeshire	14.0	1.3	1,745	161.9
Cheshire	25.1	1.5	3,798	233.7
Cleveland	18.3	1.7	2,272	210.5
Cornwall	12.0	1.7	2,152	299.8
Cumbria	18.0	2.3	2,049	263.4
Derbyshire	33.1	2.2	3,945	266.9
Devon	22.1	1.5	4,704	316.3
Dorset	17.5	1.9	2,151	229.6
Durham	20.4	2.1	1,938	195.9
East Sussex	19.6	2.0	1,888	191.1
Essex	42.7	1.8	4,923	210.6
Gloucestershire	17.0	2.6	1,477	176.6
Hampshire	44.0	1.9	7,048	298.2
Hereford and Worcester	16.5	1.5	1,197	110.2
Hertfordshire	28.4	1.7	3,806	224.2
Humberside	24.0	1.6	2,207	150.8
Isle of Wight	3.0	1.6	378	201.1
Kent	30.0	1.2	5,862	236.9
Lancashire	42.0	1.8	5,950	262.0
Leicestershire	33.6	2.3	2,592	174.1
Lincolnshire	13.0	1.4	2,534	281.7
Norfolk	18.5	1.7	2,732	248.7
North Yorkshire	20.0	1.8	2,238	200.8
Northamptonshire	17.5	1.7	1,847	181.7
Northumberland	9.5	1.9	1,016	198.3
Nottinghamshire	28.5	1.8	1,914	118.0
Oxfordshire	14.5	1.6	1,078	121.9
Shropshire	12.0	1.8	2,004	296.3
Somerset	11.0	1.5	1,052	144.4
Staffordshire	29.4	1.7	3,400	201.1
Suffolk	14.0	1.4	2,384	239.2
Surrey	28.4	1.8	4,172	265.3
Warwickshire	12.3	1.6	1,600	203.5
West Sussex	17.4	1.7	1,555	148.0
Wiltshire	14.8	1.7	3,299	386.6
England	1,496.6	1.9	165,095	214.0

[1] Children with statements of special education needs maintained by the LEA.

[2] Divisor includes pupils of all ages in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special; independent and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Derived from returns received from LEA's-Special Educational Needs Survey (SEN2). Includes children in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools; independent and non-maintained special schools and children being educated otherwise than in a school.

[4] Not applicable.

	1993			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Corporation of London	0.0	0.0	5	27.9
Camden	7.0	2.5	508	184.5
Greenwich	12.0	3.1	1,200	314.3
Hackney	7.5	2.7	1,027	363.6
Hammersmith and Fulham	7.0	3.6	497	253.5
Islington	8.0	3.4	567	243.4
Kensington and Chelsea	7.0	3.3	285	135.4
Lambeth	11.1	3.9	598	210.8
Lewisham	9.0	2.5	912	256.2
Southwark	10.5	2.9	814	221.3
Tower Hamlets	8.5	2.5	829	245.0
Wandsworth	10.0	3.0	920	278.0
Westminster	6.0	2.7	523	231.3
Barking and Dagenham	7.5	3.0	404	159.2
Barnet	14.5	2.9	781	157.9
Bexley	6.5	1.9	873	255.9
Brent	8.5	2.3	629	169.2

	1993			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Bromley	10.0	2.3	946	219.0
Croydon	10.8	2.1	992	189.7
Ealing	9.8	2.2	1,024	225.7
Enfield	13.0	3.1	397	93.5
Haringey	10.8	3.5	479	154.0
Harrow	9.0	2.8	594	182.9
Havering	8.7	2.4	671	183.6
Hillingdon	8.8	2.3	423	112.0
Hounslow	6.0	1.7	1,038	300.9
Kingston upon Thames	4.0	1.8	437	202.1
Merton	6.6	2.5	706	267.6
Newham	10.2	2.5	794	193.6
Redbridge	7.4	1.9	681	179.0
Richmond upon Thames	6.0	2.4	491	196.1
Sutton	4.0	1.5	673	256.6
Waltham Forest	7.0	2.0	672	192.1
Birmingham	31.5	1.7	3,598	192.8
Coventry	12.0	2.3	1,025	196.4
Dudley	7.1	1.5	940	198.7
Sandwell	14.0	2.7	660	126.8
Solihull	8.4	2.2	713	188.7
Walsall	9.0	1.8	951	192.9
Wolverhampton	9.0	2.0	1,044	234.5
Knowsley	5.8	2.0	810	283.6
Liverpool	18.0	2.1	2,092	244.2
St. Helens	9.0	2.9	1,020	327.0
Sefton	10.0	2.0	1,119	219.2
Wirral	10.5	1.8	1,431	242.8
Bolton	7.4	1.5	823	169.4
Bury	4.6	1.5	990	322.9
Manchester	18.2	2.3	1,217	153.6
Oldham	7.0	1.6	768	176.6
Rochdale	7.5	2.1	810	225.1
Salford	7.6	1.9	445	112.2
Stockport	9.5	1.9	1,397	278.0
Tameside	8.0	2.1	1,086	284.3
Trafford	4.0	1.1	757	212.3
Wigan	6.5	1.3	1,409	272.3
Barnsley	4.5	1.3	631	184.4
Doncaster	11.0	2.1	1,112	212.7
Rotherham	9.3	2.1	1,207	272.4
Sheffield	18.2	2.4	1,483	199.1
Bradford	20.0	2.2	1,270	137.9
Calderdale	6.5	1.9	488	142.1
Kirklees	17.0	2.6	1,691	256.6
Leeds	19.0	1.6	3,011	258.2
Wakefield	10.5	1.9	1,074	194.6
Gateshead	8.5	2.7	536	169.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	11.0	2.4	1,019	219.8
North Tyneside	8.0	2.4	1,066	319.4
South Tyneside	6.0	2.3	501	191.8
Sunderland	11.1	2.1	1,200	231.8
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0	1	35.5
Inner London	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Avon	25.5	1.7	4,054	265.8
Bedfordshire	15.9	1.6	2,448	253.7
Berkshire	19.5	1.5	3,009	234.2
Buckinghamshire	23.0	2.1	3,793	349.1
Cambridgeshire	16.0	1.5	1,842	168.3
Cheshire	25.3	1.5	4,154	252.5
Cleveland	16.5	1.5	2,353	215.8
Cornwall	12.0	1.6	2,571	352.3
Cumbria	19.0	2.4	2,076	264.3
Derbyshire	30.3	2.0	4,066	271.3
Devon	24.5	1.6	4,740	313.0
Dorset	18.6	2.0	2,320	243.5
Durham	23.5	2.3	2,133	213.2
East Sussex	18.7	1.8	2,200	217.4
Essex	42.3	1.8	5,067	214.5
Gloucestershire	17.4	2.0	2,070	243.5
Hampshire	46.8	1.9	6,802	281.9

	1993			
	Educational psychologists		Children with statements[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	per 10,000 pupils in schools[2]	Number[3]	per 10,000 pupils in schools[2]
Hereford and Worcester	16.0	1.5	1,676	153.1
Hertfordshire	33.0	1.9	4,145	240.6
Humberside	24.0	1.6	2,373	159.0
Isle of Wight	3.0	1.6	391	205.7
Kent	36.5	1.5	6,008	239.2
Lancashire	40.2	1.7	6,556	284.8
Leicestershire	32.6	2.2	[5]—	[5]—
Lincolnshire	13.0	1.4	2,810	306.1
Norfolk	19.0	1.7	3,060	274.3
North Yorkshire	19.0	1.7	2,193	192.8
Northamptonshire	19.0	1.8	1,983	192.4
Northumberland	9.5	1.8	1,200	230.1
Nottinghamshire	29.0	1.8	1,934	117.3
Oxfordshire	14.5	1.6	1,521	169.4
Shropshire	11.6	1.7	2,112	305.0
Somerset	11.1	1.5	1,594	215.4
Staffordshire	27.4	1.6	3,699	215.1
Suffolk	14.0	1.4	2,704	268.9
Surrey	29.5	1.9	4,449	281.2
Warwickshire	12.7	1.6	1,458	182.9
West Sussex	17.1	1.6	1,930	180.3
Wiltshire	13.3	1.5	3,419	388.9
England	1,497.7	1.9	176,698	225.2

[1] Children with statements of special education needs maintained by the LEA.

[2] Divisor includes pupils of all ages in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special; independent and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Derived from returns received from LEA's-Special Educational Needs Survey (SEN2). Includes children in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools; independent and non-maintained special schools and children being educated otherwise than in a school.

[4] Not applicable.

[5] Not available.

	1994			
	Educational psychologists		Children with statements[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	per 10,000 pupils in schools[2]	Number[3]	per 10,000 pupils in schools[2]
Corporation of London	0.0	0.0	6	32.7
Camden	8.2	2.9	645	230.4
Greenwich	12.0	3.1	1,174	306.8
Hackney	10.0	3.5	1,041	366.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	7.0	3.6	519	263.6
Islington	8.0	3.3	786	326.8
Kensington and Chelsea	7.0	3.4	298	145.7
Lambeth	13.5	4.8	518	183.1
Lewisham	9.0	2.5	1,142	320.6
Southwark	11.6	3.0	955	247.8
Tower Hamlets	8.0	2.3	1,063	303.0
Wandsworth	5.6	1.7	916	277.2
Westminster	6.0	2.6	481	210.5
Barking and Dagenham	7.2	2.8	478	183.6
Barnet	14.5	2.9	884	178.5
Bexley	8.0	2.3	916	261.3
Brent	10.5	2.8	805	213.3
Bromley	9.0	2.0	1,059	234.0
Croydon	10.8	2.1	1,012	195.1
Ealing	11.8	2.6	956	209.8
Enfield	15.2	3.5	406	93.5
Haringey	10.8	3.4	588	183.5
Harrow	8.6	2.6	693	212.6
Havering	8.0	2.2	691	192.3
Hillingdon	8.9	2.3	840	217.7
Hounslow	8.1	2.3	1,064	302.1
Kingston upon Thames	4.3	1.9	484	218.0
Merton	5.4	2.0	661	248.3
Newham	10.0	2.4	963	234.7
Redbridge	7.4	1.9	758	193.7
Richmond upon Thames	6.0	2.3	515	200.7
Sutton	5.0	1.8	707	261.5
Waltham Forest	7.0	2.0	566	165.4

	1994			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[3]
Birmingham	39.3	2.1	4,182	226.9
Coventry	12.0	2.3	1,028	195.1
Dudley	6.6	1.4	918	188.4
Sandwell	12.0	2.3	667	128.4
Solihull	7.5	2.0	758	204.2
Walsall	10.0	2.0	1,263	252.9
Wolverhampton	9.0	2.0	1,046	233.3
Knowsley	6.8	2.4	828	288.3
Liverpool	18.0	2.1	2,339	266.7
St. Helens	8.0	2.6	1,326	433.3
Sefton	10.0	2.0	1,304	255.6
Wirral	11.5	2.0	1,556	264.4
Bolton	7.4	1.5	927	191.8
Bury	4.6	1.5	1,120	366.5
Manchester	17.8	2.3	1,267	164.9
Oldham	6.0	1.4	487	111.9
Rochdale	7.5	2.1	797	218.1
Salford	7.6	2.0	642	166.5
Stockport	10.4	2.2	1,437	298.1
Tameside	7.0	1.9	1,140	303.2
Trafford	4.0	1.1	812	221.2
Wigan	9.0	1.8	1,836	362.7
Barnsley	5.6	1.6	813	234.7
Doncaster	11.0	2.1	1,349	254.6
Rotherham	10.3	2.3	1,123	252.8
Sheffield	16.3	2.2	1,656	219.2
Bradford	21.5	2.3	1,417	151.6
Calderdale	7.0	2.0	566	163.0
Kirklees	18.0	2.7	2,000	304.0
Leeds	15.0	1.3	3,371	282.2
Wakefield	8.5	1.5	1,303	235.0
Gateshead	9.0	2.8	621	193.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	11.0	2.4	1,099	236.3
North Tyneside	8.0	2.4	895	272.7
South Tyneside	6.0	2.3	577	218.1
Sunderland	11.5	2.2	1,170	223.1
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0	2	68.7
Inner London	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Avon	25.0	1.6	3,929	255.6
Bedfordshire	14.9	1.5	2,858	294.0
Berkshire	18.8	1.4	3,273	250.0
Buckinghamshire	22.8	2.1	3,802	344.6
Cambridgeshire	18.0	1.7	2,109	193.4
Cheshire	25.1	1.5	4,829	293.9
Cleveland	19.9	1.9	2,454	232.0
Cornwall	12.0	1.7	2,662	366.1
Cumbria	19.0	2.4	2,506	319.4
Derbyshire	29.0	1.9	[5]—	[5]—
Devon	24.5	1.6	4,824	313.9
Dorset	17.6	1.8	2,536	261.4
Durham	21.5	2.1	2,789	278.0
East Sussex	19.8	2.0	3,064	304.2
Essex	35.8	1.5	5,322	226.4
Gloucestershire	18.4	1.9	2,320	268.6
Hampshire	46.9	1.9	7,526	312.0
Hereford and Worcester	16.0	1.5	1,853	169.1
Hertfordshire	28.0	1.6	4,299	245.0
Humberside	21.0	1.4	2,751	186.4
Isle of Wight	3.0	1.6	436	227.4
Kent	42.1	1.7	6,347	248.8
Lancashire	43.5	1.9	7,518	324.3
Leicestershire	32.7	2.2	3,412	226.6
Lincolnshire	15.0	1.6	3,140	335.9
Norfolk	18.0	1.6	582	321.0
North Yorkshire	18.0	1.6	2,520	221.3
Northamptonshire	25.5	2.4	2,049	195.4
Northumberland	8.4	1.8	1,232	234.8
Nottinghamshire	28.6	1.7	1,836	110.6
Oxfordshire	14.5	1.6	1,653	180.3
Shropshire	11.6	1.7	2.221	324.0
Somerset	11.9	1.6	1,415	189.7

	1994			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Staffordshire	27.0	1.6	4,136	239.3
Suffolk	15.0	1.5	3,078	302.1
Surrey	27.2	1.7	4,673	298.7
Warwickshire	14.1	1.8	1,812	226.4
West Sussex	19.0	1.8	2,223	208.7
Wiltshire	14.0	1.6	3,087	344.5
England	1,514.2	1.9	192,308	243.8

[1] Children with statements of special education needs maintained by the LEA.

[2] Divisor includes pupils of all ages in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special; independent and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Derived from returns received from LEA's–Special Educational Needs Survey (SEN2). Includes children in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools; independent and non-maintained special schools and children being educated otherwise than in a school.

[4] Not applicable.

[5] Not available.

	1995			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Corporation of London	0.0	0.0	12	65.3
Camden	6.5	2.3	788	276.2
Greenwich	14.0	3.6	1,358	353.1
Hackney	8.3	2.8	1,038	348.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	6.5	3.2	580	288.0
Islington	8.0	3.2	849	341.9
Kensington and Chelsea	7.0	3.4	333	161.5
Lambeth	11.0	3.8	668	233.3
Lewisham	8.0	2.2	1,229	338.9
Southwark	10.0	2.6	1,111	286.6
Tower Hamlets	11.5	3.2	1,367	380.0
Wandsworth	10.7	3.2	1,088	320.6
Westminster	7.0	3.0	575	249.2
Barking and Dagenham	8.9	3.3	607	221.7
Barnet	13.0	2.6	1,141	225.0
Bexley	8.0	2.2	1,010	275.2
Brent	10.0	2.6	899	234.2
Bromley	10.0	2.2	1,312	282.1
Croydon	6.3	1.2	1,018	189.5
Ealing	7.3	1.6	1,118	239.7
Enfield	14.1	3.2	608	136.5
Haringey	14.8	4.4	822	246.8
Harrow	9.6	2.9	846	257.1
Havering	8.5	2.3	841	231.5
Hillingdon	11.4	2.9	1,201	302.7
Hounslow	7.6	2.1	1,052	293.8
Kingston upon Thames	4.0	1.8	528	233.2
Merton	3.6	1.3	796	294.1
Newham	10.7	2.5	1,063	243.9
Redbridge	7.4	1.9	792	200.2
Richmond upon Thames	6.0	2.3	527	201.8
Sutton	6.0	2.2	794	285.5
Waltham Forest	7.0	2.0	828	236.6
Birmingham	39.4	2.1	4,437	237.7
Coventry	13.0	2.4	1,051	197.6
Dudley	8.0	1.6	974	196.9
Sandwell	12.0	2.3	714	135.1
Solihull	9.0	2.4	786	205.4
Walsall	10.0	2.0	1,301	258.4
Wolverhampton	9.8	2.2	1,115	246.4
Knowsley	6.8	2.2	969	320.6
Liverpool	18.0	2.1	2,654	304.8
St. Helens	8.0	2.6	1,385	449.9
Sefton	11.0	2.1	1,339	257.7
Wirral	15.0	2.5	1,629	275.0
Bolton	8.4	1.7	1,051	214.1
Bury	6.5	2.1	1,210	388.0
Manchester	13.1	1.7	2,084	269.1

	1995			
	Educational psychologists		*Children with statements*[1]	
	Full-time equivalent	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]	*Number*[3]	*per 10,000 pupils in schools*[2]
Oldham	7.0	1.6	510	116.1
Rochdale	6.5	1.8	876	237.0
Salford	7.6	1.9	641	161.9
Stockport	11.7	2.4	1,421	290.5
Tameside	7.0	1.8	1,115	291.1
Trafford	4.0	1.1	750	199.1
Wigan	9.0	1.8	2,091	409.9
Barnsley	6.4	1.8	1,046	298.0
Doncaster	10.9	2.0	1,763	328.8
Rotherham	10.3	2.3	1,375	303.0
Sheffield	17.0	2.2	2,002	261.3
Bradford	19.5	2.1	1,736	183.5
Calderdale	9.4	2.7	696	196.7
Kirklees	18.5	2.8	2,242	337.0
Leeds	18.7	1.5	3,436	283.5
Wakefield	7.5	1.3	1,512	266.5
Gateshead	9.0	2.8	756	233.5
Newcastle upon Tyne	12.0	2.6	1,184	252.4
North Tyneside	8.8	2.6	956	287.0
South Tyneside	6.0	2.2	641	237.6
Sunderland	10.5	2.0	1,485	282.8
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0	5	176.7
Inner London	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Avon	30.0	1.9	4,712	303.7
Bedfordshire	14.3	1.5	2,754	280.1
Berkshire	22.8	1.7	3,625	272.8
Buckinghamshire	23.2	2.1	3,929	349.1
Cambridgeshire	18.0	1.6	2,654	239.8
Cheshire	24.5	1.5	4,932	296.4
Cleveland	17.5	1.6	2,541	238.1
Cornwall	12.6	1.7	2,894	393.5
Cumbria	20.0	2.5	2,660	335.5
Derbyshire	28.6	1.9	5,311	344.5
Devon	31.5	2.0	4,964	316.3
Dorset	17.6	1.8	2,774	280.3
Durham	23.4	2.3	3,222	318.7
East Sussex	19.7	1.9	2,986	290.5
Essex	56.6	2.4	5,652	235.5
Gloucestershire	17.4	2.0	2,504	283.8
Hampshire	49.8	2.0	7,960	325.7
Hereford and Worcester	15.5	1.4	2,573	231.4
Hertfordshire	28.8	1.6	4,488	248.7
Humberside	26.0	1.7	3,298	220.7
Isle of Wight	3.5	1.8	516	265.8
Kent	48.2	1.9	7,122	274.3
Lancashire	48.1	2.0	8,110	344.8
Leicestershire	33.7	2.2	3,793	248.4
Lincolnshire	16.0	1.7	3,047	317.4
Norfolk	20.4	1.8	4,274	377.0
North Yorkshire	19.0	1.6	3,872	230.1
Northamptonshire	22.8	2.1	2,491	233.6
Northumberland	8.4	1.6	1,390	263.2
Nottinghamshire	28.6	1.7	1,803	107.1
Oxfordshire	14.0	1.5	1,703	180.8
Shropshire	13.0	1.9	2,401	343.6
Somerset	13.7	1.8	1,850	244.2
Staffordshire	27.0	1.5	4,894	268.1
Suffolk	16.5	1.6	3,251	312.8
Surrey	32.2	2.0	4,649	285.6
Warwickshire	14.9	1.8	1,977	244.0
West Sussex	17.8	1.6	2,715	249.5
Wiltshire	13.3	1.4	2,841	309.7
England	1,596.9	2.0	217,445	271.2

[1] Children with statements of special education needs maintained by the LEA.

[2] Divisor includes pupils of all ages in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special; independent and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Derived from returns received from LEA's-Special Educational Needs Survey (SEN2). Includes children in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools; independent and non-maintained special schools and children being educated otherwise than in a school.

[4] Not applicable.

Local Education Authority Staff

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* teaching staff and *(b)* non-teaching staff were employed by the local education authorities throughout the United Kingdom and for each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [3626]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff employed by local authorities is collected by a local government management board on behalf of the joint staffing watch group. The table provides information for England as at June of each year. The coverage of these figures does not reflect the 2,500 increase in teacher numbers in maintained schools between January 1994 and January 1995.

Full-time equivalent teaching and non-teaching staff[1] employed by local authorities in England—June 1990 to June 1995

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*[2]
Teaching	482,700	475,100	466,800	392,100	378,000	372,600
Non-teaching[3]	362,400	364,200	360,300	318,200	320,300	262,000

[1] The table includes all manual and non-manual staff whether employed in schools or centrally based. Staff employed by grant-maintained schools are excluded throughout. There was a growth of over 6,000 teaching staff in grant-maintained schools between January 1994 and January 1995. The figures for 1993 to 1995 exclude staff in colleges that transferred to the new FE sector in April 1993.

[2] As a result of changes to the survey form, the 1995 figures are on a different basis from other years. Previously the FTEs were estimated using national statistics of average hours worked. More reliable FTEs are now calculated by local authorities at employee level. Also, staff doing two or more jobs in an authority are now recorded for each job separately. After adjusting the 1994 data to allow for these changes the estimated differences between 1994 and 1995 FTEs are decreases of 3,600 and 5,200, for teaching and non-teaching staff respectively.

[3] Non-teaching staff include educational support, clerical, school meals and premises related staff employed in schools and colleges, together with central services and administration within the education service.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the pilot areas for the trials on the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance; and what is being undertaken in each pilot area. [3799]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 4 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Jobseeker's Allowance trial offices.

Jobseeker's Allowance implementation trials are currently taking place in Employment Service Jobcentres (ESJ) in the following locations:

Exeter, Barnstable, Newton Abbott (all in Devon)

Alnwick, Jarrow (North East)

Porthmadog, Cardiff (Wales)

Norwich (Norfolk)

Madeley (Shropshire)

Cheetham Hill (Manchester)

Goole (Humberside)

Bathgate (Edinburgh)

Additional trials will be undertaken in an ESJ in Tottenham, North London commencing 4th December.

These offices are examining various Jobseeker's Allowance processes under current legislation, including new claims, fortnightly job search reviews, enquiries and change of circumstances. The outcomes from these trials will inform the Jobseeker's Allowance project nationally and locally.

I hope this is helpful.

Publicity

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the expenditure on publicity by her Department in 1994–95 and 1995–96 broken down into spending on *(a)* television, *(b)* radio, *(c)* newspapers and *(d)* other matters; and what is the protected spending on publicity in 1996–97. [3983]

Mr. Robin Squire: Before the merger in July 1995, the Department operated separately as the Department for Education and the Employment Department. We will continue to follow separately funded programmes of publicity until the end of the financial year 1995–96.

Expenditure on publicity by the Department is:

£000

	ED	*DFE*
1994–95		
(a) Television	2,778.3	—
(b) Radio	441.6	—
(c) Newspapers and posters	3,257.8	147.1
(d) Other matters	2,528.4	7,941.2
1995–96 (estimated)		
	2,906.1	—
(a) Television	—	—
(b) Radio	3,376.7	300
(c) Newspapers and posters	1,312.6	5,130
(d) Other matters	—	—

The projected spending on publicity in the 1996–97 public expenditure survey allocation for the Department is £13,040,000. Details on how this will be divided between various forms of publicity have not yet been agreed.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the consultation papers that have been issued by her Department since 31 July, indicating in each case *(a)* the date on which the consultation paper was issued, *(b)* what consultation period was allowed in weeks and *(c)* if the consultation period was subsequently extended and by how long. [4000]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment has issued the following consultation papers since 31 July 1995:

Proposed Amendment to the Teacher Regulations and Guidance on the use of Supply Teachers. Issued on 17 November, consultation period—10 weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1995—Draft Regulations and Circular. Issued on 14 August, consultation period—nine and a half weeks. The period was not extended.

Quality Assurance Regime for Institutions which Redeem Vouchers for Pre-School Education. Issued on 4 September, consultation period—six weeks. The period was not extended.

Removing the Requirement to Publish Statutory Proposals to Establish Nursery Classes in the Maintained Sector. Issued on 26 September, consultation period—four weeks. The period was not extended.

Commercial Borrowing and Asset Disposal by GM Schools. Issued on 10 October, consultation period—six weeks. The period was not extended.

Self-Government for Voluntary Aided Schools. Issued on 27 October, consultation period—four weeks. The period was extended by one week.

Consultation Letter to Industrial Training Organisations, Lead Bodies and Occupational Standards Councils on working relationships with Sector Partners. The aim was to set-up a series of conferences on: 28 November, 11 December, 14 December and 19 December. Issued on 19 October, consultation period—five and a half weeks. The period was not extended.

Consultation Proposals to Allow Easier Access to Schools' National Curriculum Assessments Results. Issued on 30 October, consultation period—six weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

A Common Funding Formula for Grant-Maintained Schools, 1996–97: The Top-slice. Issued on 3 October, consultation paper—four weeks. The period was not extended.

Consultation Paper on Calculating the Primary/secondary Split. Issued on 5 September, consultation period—four weeks. The period was not extended.

Consultation Paper on Standardising the Pupil Count and Pupil Contingency. Issued on 6 October, consultation period—four weeks. The period was not extended.

Consultation Paper on Other Common Funding Formula Issues. Issued on 31 October, consultation period—four weeks. The period was not extended.

Consultation Paper on Proposed Allocation Formula. Issued on 29 November, consultation period—three weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

Consultation Letter on Training for Appeal Committee Members for Admission and Exclusion. Issued on 27 November, consultation period—three weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

Draft Planning Guidance for TECs and Careers Service 1996–97. Issued on 6 October, consultation period—three weeks. The period was not extended.

Consultation Letter on Proposed Regulations Affecting Entitlement to JSA of People Undertaking Voluntary Work While Unemployed. Issued on 11 August, consultation period—six weeks. The period was not formally extended, however, the last response was accepted on 26 September.

Future Arrangements for the Secretary of State to Receive Local Advice and Assistance on the Employment of People with Disabilities. Issued on 9 October, consultation period—12 weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

Criteria for Severely Disabled People entering the Employment Service's Supported Employment Programme. Issued on 25 October, consultation period—14 weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

Local Advisory Arrangements. Issued in October, consultation period—nine weeks. No current plans to extend consultation period.

Draft Leaflet for Parents on School Attendance. Issued on 29 August, consultation period—four and a half weeks. The period was not extended.

Letter Inviting Comments on the Proposed Collection of Exclusion Appeals Data. Issued on 28 September, consultation period—four weeks. This period was not extended.

Letter to Governors of Stratford Schools about use of Powers to Replace First Governors. Issued on 3 November, consultation period—one and a half weeks. The consultation period could have been extended, however, no extension was requested.

Consultation on the Main Proposals Contained in the Report Produced by the North East London Education Association on the Future of the Hackney Downs Schools. Issued on 31 October, consultation period one and a half weeks. The period was not extended.

Unemployment (Waveney)

Mr Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her most recent estimate of the level of unemployment in Waveney; and if she will make a statement on the measures she proposes to take to reduce it. [3845]

Mr. Forth: On 12 October 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of unemployed people in Waveney was 4,580.

The local offices of the Employment Service provide a wide range of programmes to assist jobseekers to find work. Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council provides a range of training programmes for adults and young people, including a programme specific to Waveney offering practical training in skills for the offshore industries. The TEC, in conjunction with the local authority, offers an incentive scheme for those who start up new businesses in the area. These opportunities, together with our overall policy aim of achieving sustainable low inflation growth, are the best way of achieving a reduction in unemployment.

Code of Practice (Consultation)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to draw up a code of good practice on consultation along the lines recommended by the efficiency scrutiny on the administrative burden on schools. [4001]

Mr. Robin Squire: Work on the code of practice is due to start shortly. As my officials need to consult widely on the content, it will not be generally available until next year.

Suffolk Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the accuracy of the published information on the value of Suffolk TEC's contract with the Employment Department in the financial year 1994–95; and if she will make a statement. [4190]

Mr. Paice: The published figure is incorrect. The value of Suffolk TEC's budget in the financial year 1994–95 was overstated by £4.52 million: the correct figure should be £15.6 million. This error was caused by a change to the method by which the TEC's youth credits programme was funded, midway through the year.

This led to a clerical error when part of the budget was double counted. I should stress that this was purely an administrative error and at no time were public funds at risk. The administrative systems have now been changed to ensure that this mistake cannot be repeated.

College Fees

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for the future handling of college fees at the universities of Durham, Kent, Lancaster and York. [4192]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has accepted that the funds paid in college fees to the universities of Durham, Kent, Lancaster and York should be paid to those universities as part of their funding council grant. The constitutional independence of St. Chad's college, St. John's college and Ushaw college from the university of Durham precludes the transfer of college fees in their case. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has been asked to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the annual adjustment of their college fees in future.

Lifetime Learning

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on lifetime learning. [4181]

Mr. Paice: I shall be publishing tomorrow a consultation document on lifetime learning. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Building a culture of lifetime learning is crucial both to sustaining our international competitiveness and to the quality of our national life. It is a shared enterprise between Government, employers, individuals, and education and training providers. The document invites views from a wide range of interested parties by 26 February 1996 on how together we can set a course for achieving the national targets for lifetime learning, building on the progress already achieved.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 5 December 1995

WALES

Chiropody Services, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy of chiropody services provided in Clwyd; and if he will make a statement. [2664]

Mr. Richards: The provision of chiropody services in Clwyd is a matter for Clwyd district health authority. I have made no separate assessment of the adequacy of chiropody services provided there.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the published recommended response time within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3001]

Mr. Hague: The target time for replying to letters from Members of the House is 12 working days. The target time for replying to all other correspondence is 15 working days.

North East Wales Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of funding has been made available to North East Wales TEC for work in townships which have lost steelmaking; and if he will make a statement. [2920]

Mr. Richards: In October 1990 the Welsh Office announced a substantial package of measures to mitigate the effects of the closure of the Brymbo steelworks. This included the allocation of an additional £260,000 to the North East Wales TEC. In addition, it has been able to utilise the resources made available each year by the Welsh Office to support the creation of new businesses and jobs in north-east Wales and to deliver training to enhance the skills of he local labour force. An example of this is the support which the TEC has been able to provide to local employers in establishing the new twin-sited engineering and manufacturing training centre at Yale college, Wrexham, and at Deeside college, Shotton.

Alltami Bypass

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will advance the date of construction of the Alltami bypass; and if he will make a statement. [4017]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Proposals for an Alltami bypass form part of the A494 Mold-Ewloe improvement. This scheme is included in the "longer term consideration" pool of the forward trunk road programme published in the Welsh Office's departmental report, Cm 2815, on 9 March 1995. My right hon. Friend is to announce roads and transport expenditure plans for 1996–97 shortly.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the Resident's Association Western Park, Buckley, to discuss his allocation of housing moneys 1996–97 for the modernisation and repair of social housing. [4019]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans to do so. It is for local authorities to decide how to set spending priorities for their housing stock within the resources available to them.

Long-Term Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many long-term unemployed there are in each of the constituencies in Wales. [3859]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The data requested are available from the NOMIS database, which can be accessed by the staff of the Library of the House.

Buckley Inner Relief Road

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the Buckley, Clwyd inner relief road to begin construction; what is its costs when it will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [4016]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This scheme is the responsibility of Clwyd county council.

Cancer

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people died of cancer in Anglesey, Gwynedd and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what are these figures as a proportion of average United Kingdom figures. [2354]

Mr. Richards: The figures for 1990 to 1994 are given in the table. Data for 1993 and 1994 are provisional. Deaths for 1992 and earlier years represent registrations in each year; from 1993 they represent occurrences in each year. New procedures adopted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for coding cause of death from 1993, and the absence of medical inquiries, mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with those for earlier years. For most conditions, however, including neoplasms, the effects of these changes are small. Further details may be found in OPCS series DH2 for 1993, No. 20, which was published in October 1995. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

The proportions given in the table have been derived by calculating the relevant standardised mortality ratios.

Deaths from malignant neoplasms (ICD[1] 140–208)

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
A: Number of deaths					
Anglesey	226	230	230	224	233
Gwynedd	797	805	773	793	811
Wales	8,439	8,555	8,729	8,747	8,671

Deaths from malignant neoplasms (ICD[1] 140–208)

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
B: Proportion of the United Kingdom (UK = 100)					
Anglesey	106	106	105	104	110
Gwynedd	99	99	94	98	102
Wales	99	99	100	102	102

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Death (9th revision).

Source:

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Oil Spillage

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number and the species of bird that have *(a)* been discovered oiled and *(b)* died as a result of the recent oil spillage in Carmarthen bay, south Wales. [4202]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No complete data are available. Estimates based on information so far received by the Countryside Council for Wales show the following effects:

Species	*Number found*	*Dead*
Common Scoter	323	232
Guillemot	13	7
Razorbill	2	1
Total	338	240

Ministerial Visits

Mr Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many official school visits the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), has undertaken since 1 April; how and when in each case *(a)* the county council, where the school was non-grant maintained and *(b)* the hon. Member in whose constituency the school was located, was informed; and if he will make a statement. [4175]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Six. Arrangements are normally made direct with the school and the convention regarding constituency Members of Parliament is observed.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with the Secretary General of the Arab League the proposal by the Government of Libya to hold a trial in the Hague, under a Scottish judge, under Scottish rules of evidence, of the two Libyans accused of the bombing of Pan AM 103 over Lockerbie. [2208]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December 1995. [2558]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 December. [2559]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will break down the estimates given in his financial statement of the value of the private finance initiative schemes expected to be finalised in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 by sponsoring Government Department. [3780]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The capital value of Departments' private finance initiative schemes expected to be agreed in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* the three years 1996–97 to 1998–99 are set out in the table. These forecasts are based on departmental estimates. The actual sums involved and precise timing of schemes will depend on the nature of the contractual processes.

Illustrative table of capital element of projects

	Agreed prior to 1995–96	*Likely 1995–96*	*Likely 1996–97 to 1998–99*	*Total*
Defence	30	160	560	750
FCO/ODA	0	0	28	28
Agriculture	40	8	35	83
Trade and Industry[1]	0	1	29	30
Education and Employment	0	0	112	112
Transport	1,560	3,800	580	5,940
Environment[2,3]	0	0	130	130
Home Office	192	12	146	350
Legal departments	0	0	89	89
National Heritage	31	17	165	213
Health	100	300	1,800	2,200
Social Security[1]	0	245	118	363
Scotland	60	86	2,084	2,230
Wales	0	22	341	363
Northern Ireland	207	78	327	612
Chancellor's departments	352	31	78	461
Total	2,572	4,760	6,622	13,953

[1] Joint Benefits Agency/Post Office Counters project recorded against Social Security.

[2] Docklands Light Railway.

[3] In addition about £4–5 billion pa of private investment is levered in through housing, urban regeneration and other programmes.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3971]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my Office is part of the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and its agencies. Total numbers of staff can be found in the civil service staff in post summary tables which have been placed in the Library. Staff costs are published in the Cabinet Office departmental report. It is not possible to provide the other information requested without disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ministerial Travel, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many times in the last year he has used London Buses while on official business; [428]

(2) how many times in the last year he has used the London Underground while on official business. [573]

Mr. Lilley: I have occasionally used both London Buses and the London Underground when travelling to and from the Department of Social Security but have not done so this year while on official business.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the Child Support Agency rates regarding the calculation of ex-husband obligations; and if he will make a statement. [2579]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The child support maintenance formula is based on income support benefit rates. The rates in protected income for non-householders' housing costs are based on the non-dependent deductions under housing benefit rules. The relevant amounts will increase form April 1996, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his statement on Wednesday 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *1212–15*.

The formula will continue to ensure that no absent parent is assessed to pay more than 30 per cent. of his net income in current maintenance.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve the client communications of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [2674]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 30 November 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's client communications.

I understand that you may have some specific concerns about a particular case and if that is so I would be happy to look at those for you.

Earlier this year the Child Support Agency reviewed its procedures for dealing with Members enquiries. We looked carefully at our procedures and concluded that not only should we issue a revised set of guidelines to staff on how to deal with enquiries from Members but that we should use those improved guidelines to form the basis of a training brief to raise staff awareness about the important role that MPs play in our business. The training brief is currently being piloted.

The guidelines place the responsibility for providing accurate and comprehensive replies to MP enquiries firmly with the section responsible for that part, or parts, of child support business about which the MP has expressed concern. The guidelines also make it clear that promises of future action and monitoring that action also lies with the section giving that undertaking.

Our business plan makes it clear that we aim to reply to MPs' letters within an average of 20 working days from the date of receipt, with acknowledgments sent within 2 working days. Where a Member contacts one of our Centres by telephone using the specially designated 'MPs hot-line' (set up in late 1993 to meet Members concerns about the speedy resolution of very difficult constituency cases), we aim to return the call within 24 hours with a full explanation made to timescales agreed with the Member or his or her secretary. The time taken to give a full explanation will obviously depend on the individual circumstances of the case but it is important that dialogue continues until the case is cleared to the Member's satisfaction. I would be very interested to know if our procedures are not working properly and are failing to deliver the sort of service we want to offer to MPs.

Where a client contacts one of our centres the call is routed to a team of operators who are trained in all aspects of child support work and who in the vast majority of cases, provide a one stop service to callers. The introduction of these dedicated telephone teams has been very successful, with more than 1 million calls answered since April 1995. The placing of incoming calls to a dedicated section releases staff working in business areas to concentrate on core business activities. In those cases where the team are unable to deal with a particularly complex enquiry then details are taken and passed to the relevant section for a reply. The complexity of our work makes it impracticable for one member of staff to have complete knowledge of every aspect of our business. We do know however, that most of our clients would prefer to have contact with fewer members of staff and we are looking at how best this might be achieved, perhaps by actioning cases within a smaller team of people.

I hope this information is helpful to you, but once again if you have a particular case in mind please do not hesitate to write to me.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public. [3005]

Mr. Burt: There is no published recommended response time for the Department as a whole. The charters of the Benefits, Contributions, Child Support and War Pensions agencies state that these agencies aim to reply to correspondence from the public within 10 working days of receipt.

Maternity and Funeral Expenses

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the definition of the terms "maternity expenses" and "funeral expenses" used in section 138 (1)*(a)* of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Help with maternity expenses and funeral expenses may be given only from the regulated fund. I have today issued additional guidance to social fund officers on the interpretation of the terms "maternity expenses" and "funeral expenses".

The Benefits Agency has issued a bulletin to all district offices notifying them of the new guidance, which will be incorporated in a amendment to the social fund guide as soon as possible.

Details of the guidance have been placed in the Library.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what response he will make to the recommendations of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council regarding disorders of the knee and occupational rhinitis. [4706]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given careful consideration to the recommendations in the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's reports, Cm 2842 and 1843. The Government accept in full the council's recommendation in respect of occupational Rhinitis that the terms of the current prescription should be more precise and brought into line with current scientific thinking. Regulations will be laid to implement the change from March 1996.

The Government note the council's conclusion that there is insufficient scientific evidence available at present to recommend adding disorders of the knee to the list of prescribed diseases for which industrial injuries disablement benefit can be paid.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to receive the report from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council concerning the regulations relating to chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [4070]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on 24 October 1995, *Official Report* col *627*.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning his proposals to limit benefits to people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [3972]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Proposals on social security payments to asylum seekers and other persons from abroad were presented to the Social Security Advisory Committee on 11 October. The committee has carried out a public consultation on these proposals and is now evaluating the responses to that consultation and we expect to receive its report during December. We have also received a number of items of correspondence, both from Members of Parliament and from the public.

State Pension

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is *(a)* the mean and *(b)* the median state pension received by (i) married women, (ii) widows and (iii) single women. [1845]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 24 November 1995]:* The information is set out in the table:

£ per week

	Married women	*Widows*	*Single women*
Median	34.80	60.25	58.16
Mean	36.43	63.00	55.59

Source:
Retirement Pension Biannual enquiry September 1994.
Note:
Marital status is based on the most recent information available to the Department.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will instruct the Sheffield office of the Benefits Agency to withdraw its letter, "Urgent-Benefit Leaving", of 31 October 1995; [3477]

(2) if he will ensure that all applicants for benefit under the urgent case regulations are informed of the provisional nature of the announced changes. [3478]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking for the Benefits Agency's Sheffield office to withdraw its letter "Urgent-Benefit Leaving" of 31 October and if the Secretary of State will ensure that all applicants for benefit under the Urgent Case Regulations are informed of the provisional nature of the announced changes.

The letter issued to certain customers in Sheffield advising them that from 8 January 1996 they would not be entitled to benefit under the Urgent Cases Regulations was issued in error as a result of a misunderstanding by the office of the guidance issued by the Branch responsible for Income Support. The error was discovered and the letter withdrawn within 48 hours. Further guidance has been issued to clarify the position to all District Offices and a letter of apology sent to the customers involved.

As legislation is not currently in place it is not appropriate to advise those customers receiving benefit under the Urgent Cases Regulations of the Secretary of State's proposals as details are subject to change. As soon as the legislation is in place, the Income Support awards for customers affected by the changes will be passed to an Adjudication Officer to consider a review. Customers will then be informed of the Adjudication Officer's decision and their subsequent right of appeal.

I hope this reply is helpful.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Careers Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the estimated cost of the proposed expansion of the Careers Service; and to what that expenditure will be allocated. [3711]

Mr. Paice: Planned expenditure on the Careers Service is set to rise to £201 million in 1996–97 exclusive of VAT—an increase of £49 million against the expenditure in 1994–95. From April 1994, extra funds have been provided for careers guidance for 13 to 14 year olds. From April 1995 further funds were provided to enhance the quality and coverage of careers guidance for young people from age 13 to 18 as well as for the training of careers advisers and careers teachers.

Employment Data

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the percentage of non-employment among adult males with only basic education in 1979 and in 1995; and the same figures for the other Group of Seven member countries; and if she will make a statement. [3624]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

International comparisons on this basis are not available. However, information on International Labour Organisation unemployment rates for those aged between 25 and 64 with qualifications below upper secondary level in 1992 is available in table R21 of the OECD publication, "Education at a Glance", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the percentage of the labour force with only basic education in the United Kingdom in 1979 and in 1995, and the same figures for the other Group of Seven member countries; and if he will make a statement. [3628]

Mrs. Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The international comparisons requested are not available. However, comparisons of labour force participation rates of those with qualifications below upper secondary level in 1992 are available in table C11 in the OECD publication, "Education at a Glance", a copy of which is available in the library.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

British Academy for Sport

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the consultation paper on the British Academy for Sport will be published. [4532]

Mr. Sproat: The Great Britain Sports Council today published the consultation paper on the British Academy for Sport. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House. Copies of the consultation paper are available from the Sports Council at 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H OQP. The purpose of the consultation paper is to promote debate about the details of the structure, siting, management and activities of the academy. The closing date for responses is 31 January 1996. Following this date, the Government wish to encourage application by different groups of sporting, commercial and other public and private interests—possibly in the form of a charitable trust to establish and run the academy. Up to £100 million from the national lottery could be available for capital costs of the academy and, if appropriate, an endowment to provide future revenue costs.

The decision in principle to establish a British Academy for Sport was set out in the policy document, "Raising the Game", published on the 14 July 1995. The academy forms one part of an overall strategy for sport in the United Kingdom, set out in the policy document, for which the other two parts are the restoration of sport in school, with strong emphasis on competitive team games, and the development and strengthening of local sports clubs and their links with local schools.

TREASURY

Valued Added Tax (Utilities)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the privatised utilities which charge VAT on advance charge bills; and what estimate he has made of the revenue raised for public funds from this procedure; [2856]

(2) if he will estimate the revenue raised by the Exchequer from the imposition, by British Telecom, of VAT on advance charge telephone bills. [2857]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Basic VAT law provides that tax is due when a VAT invoice is issued or a payment is received in respect of any taxable supply made by a VAT registered trader, if this happens in advance of delivery of the goods or services concerned. The rule applies to privatised utilities in the same way as to other businesses, and to telephone standing charges in the same way as to any other advance charges. No central records are kept of the numbers of trades or the amounts of revenue involved. The amount of VAT paid by an individual trader is a matter of commercial confidence.

Home Care Agencies

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to public funds of removing VAT on fees charged by private domestic home care agencies. [3619]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* There are no figures available to allow an estimate to be made.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to abolish VAT on fees charged by private domestic home care agencies. [3620]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* Home care services provided by commercial agencies using medically qualified staff are already exempt from VAT. I announced on 9 October that in certain circumstances where agencies used unqualified staff, they need not charge VAT, provided that there is an appropriate measure of supervision by qualified medical professionals. Customs and Excise is currently holding discussions with representatives of the home care industry to agree the details of this change.

Share Ownership

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the value of total share, and their total value, were owned by individuals *(a)* in the latest year for which figures are available and *(b)* in each year since 1970. [4046]

Mrs Angela Knight: The available information is given in the table.

The table is derived from the publication, "Share Ownership, a Report on the Ownership of Shares at 31st December 1994", produced by the Central Statistical Office and published on 4 December 1995. The publication will be available in the House of Commons Library shortly.

Individuals' ownership of shares in companies quoted on the London stock exchange

Year (at 31 December)	*1975*	*1981*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Percentage	37.5	28.2	20.6	20.3	19.9	20.4	17.7	20.3
Value (pounds billion)	16.7	28.0	104.3	90.5	105.3	125.4	141.1	154.6

1. The apparent trend in the series is effected, particularly for the earlier data, by sampling errors and varying degrees of success in the identification of nominee holdings.
2. The series reflect shares held directly by individuals, including those held in personal equity plans, but exclude those held indirectly for example in unit trusts.

EU Budget Contributions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net contribution to the EEC by the United Kingdom for each year from 1990 and up to 2001; and what estimate he has made of the respective contribution made by *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU countries in this period. [1028]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's most recent estimates of the United Kingdom's net contributions to European Community institutions for the financial years 1989–90 to 1994–95, together with the forecast of our contributions up to 1998–99 are set out in the first table. Recent estimates for later years are not available; the Government do not produce such estimates on a regular basis since they are of limited value and need to be treated with particular caution.

The second table sets out indicative net contributions in mecu for all member states for the period 1990–1994. These figures are drawn from the relevant annual report of the European Court of Auditors. The Government do not produce forecasts of the comparative contributions of the member states.

UK net contribution to the EC budget

Year	*£ million*
1989–90	2,452
1990–91	2,185
1991–92	943
1992–93	2,168
1993–94	2,192
1994–95	1,641
1995–96	3,512
1996–97	2,894
1997–98	3,119
1998–99	3,197

Indicative net contribution by Member States

Year	*Belgium*	*Denmark*	*Germany*	*Greece*	*Spain*	*France*	*Ireland*	*Italy*	*Luxembourg*	*Netherlands*	*Portugal*	*United Kingdom*
1990	773.9	–422.5	5,550.4	–2,470.2	–1,711.3	1,840.9	–1,892.5	416.7	60.0	–368.4	–600.8	3,386.9
1991	–416.6	–346.3	8,796.8	–2,926.4	–2,294.6	2,449.5	–2,357.3	1,388.6	–159.7	537.9	–1,516.2	666.9
1992	–165.1	–276.6	9,697.6	–3,604.0	–2,739.6	1,443.6	–2,140.1	504.3	–164.0	829.0	–2,139.9	2.387.8
1993	–59.6	–376.9	11,830.3	–4,136.7	–3,090.4	1,019.6	–2,371.9	1,525.4	–189.6	1,326.6	–2,508.4	3,125.8
1994	309.3	–198.9	13,637.1	–3,851.9	–3,116.6	2,626.4	–1,752.0	2,540.4	–253.7	1,829.9	–1,827.0	1,158.8

Note:
Administration costs are not fully allocated by member states in the Court of Auditors report. Allocation of administrative spending would be likely to increase the receipts of member states, but particularly for Belgium and Luxembourg, and so reduce the member states' net contributions.

Public Duties (Tax Relief)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the individuals for whom exceptional arrangements beyond those indicated in the "Inland Revenue Guide to Benefits and Expenses", booklet 480, applies in connection with their public duties and those of their spouse; how, and under what authority, the additional allowances are arrived at; and if he will make a statement; [331]

(2) if he will list the tax deductions and reliefs in connection with public duties of a taxpayer or of his or her spouse contained in the "Inland Revenue Guide to Benefits and Expenses", booklet 480; and what limit applies to each. [330]

Mr. Jack: The statutory provisions covering tax deductions and reliefs set out in the "Inland Revenue Guide to Benefits and Expenses", booklet 480, apply to employees and officeholders with public duties as much as to others. Section 10 of the booklet explains how expenses incurred by a spouse are treated. There are also statutory provisions to make sure that Members of Parliament qualify for relief on extra expenses they incur in staying overnight away from their only or main home for the purpose of carrying out their duties as Members and on the cost of making trips to certain institutions in the European Union.

Self-assessment (Small Businesses)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of hours per week on average that small businesses will spend on the requirements of the new system of tax self-assessment. [3691]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue undertook very extensive research into the likely impact of the self-assessment changes on the costs to businesses, particularly small businesses, of complying with their tax obligations. The detail of this research is contained in a compliance cost assessment which was published on 29 November 1994. A copy is available in the House Library. It concludes that once the new system has bedded in, costs overall will reduce. The amount will vary from business to business, but it broadly equates with annual savings overall of £125 million to £250 million, after taking account of employer's costs, or between £30 and £60 per year for a typical small business.

Financial Statement and Budget Report

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations led to the inclusion of fewer statistics in table 4.4 of the "Financial Statement and Budget report 1996–97", than in the equivalent table 4A.1 for 1995–96. [3841]

Mr. Waldegrave: In terms of their coverage, both tables 4.4 and 4A.1 of this year's "Financial Statement and Budget Report" are unchanged from the presentation last year. Table 4.4 gives a summary presentation of the forecast of general Government receipts; table 4A.1 gives a more detailed exposition of the short-term forecast of receipts.

Ecofin

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Ecofin Council held on 27 November, giving details of all votes and of all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1973]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* I represented the United Kingdom at the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on 27 November.

The only formal vote taken by the Council was a unanimous decision to adopt a regulation on the European system national and regional accounts, which will come into effect in 1999. The Council agreed to attach to the regulation a recommendation that where data was available member states should provide them from September 1998.

There was no Council support for a request by Germany that the Commission produce a study on the use of a reduced rate of VAT on the sale of agricultural produce as a means of compensating farmers affected by revaluations in the agri-monetary system.

All other issues at the Council were agreed without dissension.

The Council agreed the following: a report on the implementation of the broad economic guidelines; procedural conclusions on the reports by member states on measures being taken to combat fraud against Community funds; and a draft report on employment, jointly prepared by the Economic and Finance Council, the Social Affairs Council and the Commission. All these will be submitted to the Madrid European Council.

The Council discussed the reference scenario for the transition to a single currency, on which the Council will also report to the Madrid European Council. The Council agreed on the principle that fiscal stability after the beginning of the third stage of economic and monetary union was essential and that further work on achieving this will be required.

The Council discussed the arrangements for guaranteeing European investment bank loans to third world countries. The Council agreed that a decision to revise the guarantee system will be taken within twelve months following an EIB—Commission study. During the interim period current guarantee arrangements will continue.

The Council considered the recent defaults, by Georgia, Armenia and Tajikistan on EU loans granted in 1991 as part of a humanitarian aid package to the former Soviet Union. The Council asked the Commission to produce proposals for a grant aid operation from Community funds to resolve this problem.

The Council welcomed progress made by the Commission on an initiative to improve its financial management and working practices.

The Commission also presented the conclusions of a study into the effect of currency fluctuations on the internal market.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all those in his Department who have authority to issue public interest immunity certificates; how many such certificates have been issued in each of the last five years; and what were the main reasons for them. [1431]

Mr. Hanley: A claim to public interest immunity relating to departmental documents or information is normally made by the appropriate Minister. There have been four cases in which certificates were used inter partes in proceedings:

(a) Two certificates signed the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), in June 1991 and January 1992, in respect of a case of unfair dismissal brought in an industrial tribunal by a former FCO member of staff;

(b) Two certificates, signed in September 1992 by the then Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) relating to the Matrix Churchill prosecution;

(c) Two certificates, signed by the then Minister of State, the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) in June 1990 and by the then Minister of State, Lord Caithness, in February 1992, concerning the case of the extradition of Lorrain Osman to Hong Kong; and

(d) One certificate, signed by the then Foreign Secretary the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) in May 1995, in connection with the Ord-Tec appeal.

Algeria

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes in guidance have been given to the British embassy in Algeria regarding applications for political asylum. [3266]

Mr. Hanley: None.

Departmental Land

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the land owned in the United Kingdom by his Department. [3027]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* Land at 245 Warwick road, London W8—0.8 hectares. All other land administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or in the process of disposal is held in the name of the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mrs. Parveen Akhtar

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 6 November, ref. 20802/95. [4111]

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Member's letter of 6 November about Mrs. Parveen Akhtar in Pakistan was sent to the Home Office, rather than the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which would normally deal with correspondence of this type.

The Foreign Office received a copy of the letter on 1 December.

The Foreign Office migration and visa correspondence unit has asked our high commission in Islamabad for details of the case and will send the hon. Member a substantive reply by 8 December at the latest.

Sexual Offences Against Children (Checks)

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures are available for organisations working with children to gain access to the names of British citizens convicted of sexual offences against children in *(a)* European Union member states and *(b)* other countries. [3379]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Organisations working with children in the statutory sector and in parts of the voluntary and private sectors have access to pre-employment criminal record checks on their staff or volunteers. The check will reveal any record that the police may hold indicating that a person has been convicted of a sexual offence against children. This would include any information which had been received about overseas convictions of British citizens. Such information is often, but not always, supplied through Interpol by the authorities in the country of conviction.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Hayes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were employed in the tobacco industry in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1985, *(e)* 1990 and *(f)* at the latest available date. [3982]

Mr. Page: The available information is in the table.

Employment in the tobacco industry in Great Britain[1]

Year	*Thousands*
1971	34.1
1975	34.0
1981	29.9
1984	21.8
1989	11.5
1991	8.7
1993	8.0

Source:

CSO Census of Employment.

Note:

[1] Figures are as at June of each year for 1971 and 1975, and are as at September of each year for 1981 to 1993.

Patent Office

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the contractors who have submitted a bid for the Patent Office accommodation services, dispatch, support services and filestore; if he will make a statement on the criteria to be used to determine whether such bids offer better value for money; and if he will make a statement. [3496]

Mr. Ian Taylor: None of the 12 contractors invited to tender has yet put in a bid for the Patent Office accommodation services, dispatch, support services and filestore. Under the timetable laid down by the EC services directive, bids are not required until early January 1996. The criteria to assess value for money have been sent out in the invitation to tender. They are:

> quality of tenderers' proposal, commitment, monitoring and assurance procedures; tenderers' previous relevant experience; financial, commercial and technical capability; TUPE implications, such as proposals for the future of former civil service staff; recruitment, vetting and training procedures; conformance to Patent Office terms and conditions; overall price and pricing profile.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the time scale for the proposed contracting out of the marketing and information directorate, the London front office and the information technology sections; and how many staff are involved. [3495]

Mr. Taylor: No time scales have yet been set for these projects but the process is likely to be completed by autumn 1996. Up to 80 staff will be involved.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to require any new work undertaken by the Patent Office to be subject to consultation with trades unions regarding the implications for staff; and if he will make a statement. [3497]

Mr. Taylor: It would be the usual practice of Patent Office management to consult staff and their representatives about any new work undertaken by the agency which has major implications for the staff.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria will be used by Patent Office management to assess staff who have applied for voluntary redundancy; what number and grades will be involved; what time limits are applicable; and if he will make a statement about the future of the services currently offered by the Patent Office. [3498]

Mr. Taylor: Under the terms of its framework agreement, the Patent Office operates the Department's policies for retirement and redundancy. In its current voluntary severance exercise, the essential criterion has been the operational requirement of the office—whether there was a continuing need for a post now and in the foreseeable future and whether that post had to be filled by an established civil servant. Forty eight staff in the executive, clerical and support grades have accepted offers of voluntary severance. Sixteen appeals against refusal of severance terms are under consideration. Severance will take effect from 31 June 1996. The exercise is part of the Patent Office's continuing efforts to maintain and improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of its service to customers.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2465]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The Department of Trade and Industry sponsored 116 statutory instruments in the last Session of Parliament. It would be possible only at disproportionate cost to provide the further information requested, especially to identify from this total any cases in which the Government have acted on powers in the relevant EC legislation enabling member states to implement provisions going beyond the minimum standards set out in the directives. The Government's policy is, however, to ensure that implementing legislation imposes least cost and provides greatest certainty consistent with meeting our legal obligations.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2031]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The Coal Industry Act 1994 and the Gas Act 1995 contain provisions relating to the expiry of certain powers.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 introduced a new procedure for making deregulation orders to repeal or amend primary legislation where it imposes burdens which could be removed or reduced without removing necessary protection.

Chief Executive (Post Office)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what final lump sum severance payment was paid to the chief executive of the Post Office on leaving that post. [2889]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* Mr. Cockburn, the former chief executive, received no severance pay on leaving the Post Office and waived any entitlement to salary in lieu of notice. However, he receives an annual pension under the rules of the Post Office staff pension fund—the Post Office staff superannuation scheme—which is based on his length of service, his age and his final salary. Under those rules he receives a lump sum payment equivalent to three times his annual pension. That lump sum payment was £285,542.

DEFENCE

Ashchurch Vehicle Storage Depot

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many "A" vehicles will be stored at his Department's centralised vehicle storage depot at Ashchurch; [3862]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on the local road network of centralising his Department's vehicle storage depot at Ashchurch; what is the maximum weight of Army vehicles using the local roads; and what assessment he has made of the consequences of transport of such vehicles over the Ashchurch road bridge; [3863]

(3) what discussions he has had with the local authority responsible for Newbury on the implications of transporting Army vehicles on the A34 through the centre of the town. [3864]

Mr. Soames: These matters are for the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency, ABSDA, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Brigadier K. J. W. Goad to Dr. David Clark, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency, to respond to your recent Parliamentary Questions regarding the storage and movement of Army vehicles. My responses are detailed below:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with the local authority responsible for Newbury on the implications of transporting Army Vehicles on the A34 through the centre of town".

When large vehicles are to be transported by road, the military authorities, where appropriate, clear the route in advance, with the respective authorities, such as Police, County Highway, British Water Board, British Rail, British Gas, etc. Such arrangements have been in operation, throughout the country, for many years.

As a general policy, we are seeking to increase the use of rail to move 'A' Vehicles but not all are within guage (for example Main Battle Tanks) and are therefore too large for rail movement. These must continue to be transported by road.

"To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many 'A' vehicles will be stored at his Department's centralised vehicle storage depot at Ashchurch."

The current planning figure for the number of vehicles to be stored at Ashchurch is 10106. 'A' vehicles make up a small but important part of this total. The majority of these vehicles will be placed in high density, long-term storage adopting a "leave it alone" policy.

"To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the impact on the local road network of centralising his Department's vehicle storage depot at Ashchurch; what is the maximum weight of Army vehicles using the roads; and what assessment has he made of the consequences of transport of such vehicles across the Ashchurch road bridge."

Ashchurch has close and easy access to the M5 motorway and transportation of vehicles into and out of the depot will have little effect on the surrounding local road network. The largest vehicles that will be using the depot will be Main Battle Tanks. These vehicles with their transporters weigh 102 tonnes. The local authority are aware of this requirement and we do not anticipate any problems in the use of the Ashchurch road bridge.

I trust that my reply has fully answered your questions. If you have any further questions or require further clarification on any of the answers I have given, please contact me.

Hawk Aircraft

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries purchased Hawk aircraft from the United Kingdom in each of the past seven years; and to what military purposes they were deployed. [3643]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Jones) on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *488*.

Royal Irish Regiment (Lisnaskea Base)

Rev. Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the Government's plans for the Lisnaskea Royal Irish Regiment base and St. Angelo's, Enniskillen. [3775]

Mr. Soames: The requirement for bases and installations is kept under continuous review. Following the announcement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary on 2 November that the Fermanagh Roulement Battalion would not be replaced when its six-month emergency tour ended, it was decided that the small number of Royal Irish Regiment soldiers based at the Lisnaskea Royal Ulster Constabulary station should operate in future from the recently refurbished Army base in Clogher. The buildings formerly occupied by these soldiers in Lisnaskea RUC station will, however, be maintained in case they are needed in future. It was also decided that the company of Royal Irish Regiment soldiers based at St. Angelo should in future operate from Grosvenor barracks, Enniskillen. Their former premises at St. Angelo will be demolished.

Rev. Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat posed by terrorists to the Lisnaskea Royal Irish Regiment base and to the people of the area. [3777]

Mr. Soames: The threat posed by terrorists is continually assessed by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The armed forces remain fully committed to, and capable of, providing whatever support the RUC requires.

Weapons Dumps

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all weapons dumped since 1995 west of the Hebrides showing *(a)* the date, *(b)* the amount *(c)* the sources and *(d)* the exact location. [3176]

Mr. Soames: Surviving records give no indication that weapons have been dumped west of the Hebrides since 1965.

Land Mines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new proposals he has to reduce worldwide fatalities caused by land mines; and what new restrictions he intends to put in place to avoid future death caused by mines that have time limited detonators or self destruct. [3644]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We want tighter international restrictions on the use and export of all anti-personnel mines to prevent their indiscriminate and irresponsible use and, thereby, to minimise the dangers posed to civilians. In particular, we are working towards incorporating such restrictions into a strengthened UN weaponry convention, protocol II of which, on mines, is currently under review internationally.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the percentage of United Kingdom spending on defence expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product in each of the past five years. [3645]

Mr. Soames: The percentage of UK gross domestic product spent on defence in each of the past give years is:

1990–91 *Percentage*	*1991–92* *Percentage*	*1992–93* *Percentage*	*1993–94* *Percentage*	*1994–95* *Percentage*
4.0	4.2	3.8	3.6	3.3

Recruitment Costs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average total recruitment cost for each new recruit to the *(a)* RAF, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Army in each of the last five years. [3646]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. David Hart

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Mr. David Hart has declared any financial or other interest in any organisation potentially interested in or able to benefit from the proposed transfer of the Ministry of Defence married quarters' estate to the private sector. [4203]

Mr. Soames: All the independent advisers involved in our work on the transfer of ownership of the married quarters estate to the private sector have given formal undertakings designed to ensure that there is no conflict of interest in their involvement and that they have no financial stake in the outcome of the transaction.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of the involvement of Mr. David Hart in *(a)* the formulation of his proposal to transfer the ownership of the Ministry of Defence married quarters' estate to the private sector and *(b)* discussions about this policy with NatWest Markets. [4204]

Mr. Soames: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said in his answer of 22 March to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), *Official Report,* column *218,* Mr. Hart is one of several independent advisers who have contributed to the development of proposals for the married quarters estate. His involvement has included, from time to time, participation in discussions on the proposed transfer of ownership with Ministers, officials, and others advising on the proposals, including NatWest Markets.

Eurofighter 2000

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to take steps to procure a medium range air-to-air missile for Eurofighter 2000. [4482]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am pleased to announce that we are today inviting competitive tenders for a medium range air-to-air missile for Eurofighter 2000. This weapon—the future medium-range air-to-air missile, FMRAAM—will give EF2000 a formidable beyond-visual-range capability, complementing the advanced short range air-to-air missile, ASRAAM, already on contract. We expect other European countries will join us in the tender assessment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern ireland what are the funding arrangements for the integration of the colleges of nursing and midwifery with the Northern Ireland universities. [2533]

Mr. Moss: It is proposed that the funding arrangements for the integration of the colleges of nursing and midwifery with the Northern Ireland universities will be taken forward within the joint declaration of principles agreed in July 1995 between the national health service executive and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the universities of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards the integration of the colleges of nursing and midwifery with the Northern Ireland universities. [2534]

Mr. Moss: Considerable progress has been made towards the integration of the colleges of nursing and midwifery with the two Northern Ireland universities. The process has, however, taken longer than expected due to the need to clarify a number of issues with the parties concerned. However, my Department and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland expect to make an announcement in the new year. I can assure the hon. Member that I and my Department are committed to securing high quality education and training for nurses, midwives and health visitors in Northern Ireland.

Terrorism

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons convicted since 1974 for terrorist offences have subsequently re-offended on their release from prison. [2898]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on 4 July 1995, *Official Report* columns *157–58.*

University Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *156,* how many Northern Ireland students attend *(a)* Northern Ireland; and *(b)* Republic of Ireland universities; and how many there are in the same academic specialisms referred to in that answer. [3642]

Mr. Ancram: The numbers of Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at Northern Ireland universities in 1994–95 by academic specialism are as follows:

	Northern Ireland Universities
Medicine and dentistry	1,028
Subjects allied to medicine	2,047
Biological sciences	1,795
Veterinary sciences	14
Agriculture and related subjects	264
Physical sciences	1,346
Mathematical/computer sciences	1,991
Engineering and Technology	2,129
Architecture, building and planning	947
Social, economic and political students/law	3,720
Business and administrative studies	4,583
Librarianship and information science	365
Languages	1,022
Humanities	1,124
Creative arts	988
Education	2,010
Combined	1,962
Unknown	9
Total	27,344

In 1994–95 there were 816 Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at universities in the Republic of Ireland. A breakdown by academic specialism is not available.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Cabinet Committees

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the Cabinet committees he *(a)* chairs and *(b)* sits on. [3563]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), *Official Report*, 19 July 1995, column *1005*.

HMSO

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to inform hon. Members of progress on the proposed privatisation of HMSO; and if he will make a statement. [3746]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *447*.

Deregulation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *136*, if he will list the salaries of the staff in the deregulation unit in 1994–95 and 1995–96. [4066]

Mr. Freeman: Details of the deregulation unit's staffing by grade are given in an organogram, form C, which is included as part of the unit's management information system for Ministers—MINIS—for 1994–95 and 1995–96 published by the Department of Trade and Industry, copies of which are in the House Libraries. Details of the salaries for the various grades are listed in the civil service management code which is also available in the House Libraries.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate the deregulation task force has made of the number of regulations and enforcement measures upon which it has made recommendations which were introduced since 1979; and what information his office has received on this matter. [4069]

Mr. Freeman: The deregulation task force made 52 recommendations in its first annual report, of which the Government have accepted 46 in whole or in part. Many of the recommendations were of a general nature or related to an area of regulation rather than to specific regulations or enforcement measures. The task force has not sought to estimate how many of its more specific recommendations concerned regulations or enforcement measures introduced after 1979 as its aim has been to assist the Government in removing unnecessary burdens on business and the voluntary sector regardless of when they were introduced.

Ombudsman (Civil Service Guidance)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he proposes to publish the Office of Public Service guidance for civil servants on the work of the ombudsman as recommended in the first report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of Session 1993–94, HC33. [4112]

Mr. Freeman: The guidance will take the form of a booklet, "The Ombudsman in Your Files". It will be circulated to Departments from 7 December 1995 and I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House at the earliest opportunity.

SCOTLAND

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2365]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As this question relates to a purely operational matter, my right hon. Friend has asked the chief executive of his agencies to write direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Ewart to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about overseas travel.

The Scottish Court Service became an executive agency on 3 April 1995. Since then, no member of staff has travelled abroad on official business.

Letter from K. MacRae to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

In response to the Written PQ which you tabled recently, the Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to provide you with information about overseas travel by staff of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland.

It is not part of the normal business of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to require staff to travel abroad. For financial year 1994–95, therefore, the answer is nil.

I trust this is the information you were seeking.

Letter from Norman MacLeod to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel by staff of executive Agencies, so far as the Scottish Office Pensions Agency is concerned.

None of the staff of this Agency have so far been required to travel overseas on official business.

Letter from Dr. R. K. M. Hay to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Scotland for details of the overseas travel undertaken by staff in his executive agencies in the last financial year. I have been asked to reply in respect of the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency since travel by staff at this Agency is a matter for which I, as Chief Executive, have a delegated responsibility.

The attached list sets out the posts held by officials at SASA who travelled abroad in the course of their work in financial year 1994/95 and the countries they visited. We have provided a total estimated figure for the travel and subsistence costs of these journeys. We do not have easily available information on the travel and subsistence costs per visit as this was dealt with centrally by The Scottish Office on a Department-wide rather than on an individual Agency basis at that time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information either about the cost of overseas travel or the purpose of the journeys undertaken.

The following staff from SASA travelled abroad during the financial year 1994/95

Post held	*Country visited*
Director, SASA	Italy
Deputy Director, SASA	USA France
PSO, Head of Official Seed Testing Station (OSTS)	Netherlands France Germany
HSO, OSTS	Netherlands France
SO, OSTS	Netherlands
SSO, Cereals	Germany Netherlands Italy
PSO, Head of Herbage and Vegetable	Netherlands USA (expenses only)Portugal
SSO, Herbage and Vegetable	Netherlands France Portugal
HSO, Herbage and Vegetable	Italy Netherlands
HSO, Potato	Denmark
PSO, Head of Plant Health	Belgium(x3)
PSO, Plant Health	USA
SSO, Plant Health	Germany
PSO, Head of Diagnostic and Molecular Biology	Netherlands
SSO, Diagnostic and Molecular Biology	Netherlands
HSO, Diagnostic and Molecular Biology	Spain
SSO, Zoology	Belgium
SO, Zoology	Netherlands

The estimated cost of foreign travel and subsistence was £19,000 of which a proportion was reimbursed by the EC.

Letter from P. E. Du Vivier to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply on behalf of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency to your request for information on overseas travel by staff of executive agencies.

So far as SFPA is concerned the information which you have requested for the last financial year is as follows:

SFPA: Foreign Travel 1994/95

Cost	*Country visited*	*Staff post*
£226	Ireland	Director of Corporate Strategy and Resources
£266	Ireland	Legal Affairs Manager
£1,357[1]	Sierra Leone	Director of Corporate Strategy & Resources
£1,357[1]	Sierra Leone	Controller of Air & Sea Operations
£266	Ireland	Chief Executive
£266	Ireland	Director of Operations
£474	Belgium	Head of Enforcement Policy and Procedures
£234	Holland	Fishery Officer I
£234	Holland	Fishery Officer II
£190	Norway	Legal Affairs Manager
£266	Ireland	Director of Operations
£474	Belgium	Chief Executive
£474	Belgium	Director of Operations?
£300	Ireland	Fishery Office I

[1] Travel costs reimbursed by the World Bank.

Letter from Graeme N. Munro to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your recent question about overseas travel by Historic Scotland staff in the last financial year.

I am attaching a table which details the information you have requested. I have included both travel and subsistence costs.

The reasons for travel fall into two main categories: the promotion of Historic Scotland's monuments to the travel trade abroad and participation in specialist international conferences by our professional staff. In a number of cases the cost to the Agency has been mitigated by contributions from other sources (eg where a member of Historic Scotland staff has been invited to give a paper).

All foreign travel has to be approved by me in advance. Before giving approval I satisfy myself that the expenditure can be justified in terms of the Agency's aims and objectives.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Countries visited	*Post held by staff*	*Cost*
Japan and Thailand	Travel Trade Manager	4,800
USA	Travel Trade Manager	3,700
Germany	Travel Trade Executive	2,291
Netherlands	Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments	400
France	Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments	300
Sweden	Inspector of Ancient Monuments	Nil
Ireland	Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments	200
Greece	Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments	Nil
Canada	Inspector of Ancient Monuments	1,300
India	Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments	900
Czechoslovakia	Director, Technical Conservation, Research and Education	1,723
Norway	Director, Technical Conservation, Research and Education	998
Spain	Director, Technical Conservation, Research and	1,280

Countries visited	*Post held by staff*	*Cost*
	Education	
Netherlands	Conservator	424
Canada	Conservator	255
France	Senior Architect	368
Belgium	Senior Architect	Nil
Ireland	Director, Corporate Planning and Resources	327
Ireland	Head of Finance	327
Ireland	Systems Manager	327
Ireland	Accountant	327

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about overseas travel by staff of the Scottish Prison Service during the last financial year.

The information in relation to travel for which claims were processed by the Scottish Prison Service is as follows:

Cost (£)	*Countries visited*	*Post held*
2,200.00	Brazil	Governor in Charge
1,217.43	Canada/USA	Area Director

I myself paid a short visit to the Swedish Prison Service during the year, and a Governor spent time with the Hong Kong Prison Service as part of an exchange arrangement. However, I regret that information on the cost of both those visits and details of any other visits made by Scottish Prison Service staff for whom claims were processed by the Scottish Office, have not been made available to me by the Scottish Office on the grounds that the information is not accessible except at disproportionate cost.

I am sorry I cannot give you a fuller reply.

Letter from Patrick Cadell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your question.

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency (a) the cost, (b) the countries visited and (c) the posts held by the staff involved.

The answers for the Scottish Record Office are as follows:

(a) £7,254 was the sum spent on foreign travel in 1994/95.

(b) Countries visited were Australia, Belgium (EU), Canada, France (including Council of Europe), Greece, Ireland, Italy, Nigeria, Spain, Turkey, and the USA.

(c) This travel was carried out by the Keeper (Grade 5), the Deputy Keeper (Grade 6), and 2 Curatorial Grade 7s.

Letter from Alan Ramage to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary for State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your written PQ asking for information on overseas travel by Agency staff in the last financial year and I can confirm that no member of the Agency travelled overseas in this period.

Algrade Trust

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland further to the Lord Advocate's letter of 24 July 1995, what evidence he has that one of the new trustees of the Algrade Trust has a background in the specialist teaching of people with learning difficulties. [3338]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The evidence comes from an account of the qualifications of the new trustees given by their legal advisers. One of the trustees is Mrs. Ethel Marsh, Dip.C.E. who was head teacher of the James Gillespie school between 1976 and 1993. This lady was the convenor of the primary, nursery and special section of the Lothian Head Teachers Association involving the educational needs for pupils with special learning difficulties.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the investigation of the affairs of the Algrade Trust by the Scottish Charities Office, with special reference to the underspending of money paid to the trust for the care and accommodation of handicapped people; the expenditure by the trust on the purchase of properties and the conveyancing of property purchased with trust funds to other parties. [3339]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Charities Office continues to make inquiries into the past circumstances of the Algrade Trust, including its accounting and expenditure as well as the purchase and conveyance of properties. The nature and extent of these inquiries is such that it will be some time before they are completed and the results are known.

Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers—PIEDA

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions his Department has commissioned PIEDA to carry out educational reports. [3184]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: PIEDA was commissioned in August 1995 to carry out a study of the funding of further education in the islands. The study covers Orkney, Shetland and Lewis where there are existing further education colleges. The study is due to report by the end of 1995. PIEDA has also carried out work in the educational sector in Scotland which has been commissioned by others.

Long-stay Beds

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of long-stay beds in the NHS in Scotland in 1990, broken down to show the numbers for the *(a)* elderly, *(b)* psychiatry, *(c)* learning difficulties and *(d)* chronic young sick, categories; what are the figures under these categories for 1 April; and if he will estimate in these categories the number of available long-stay beds in the NHS in Scotland by (i) 1 April 1998 and (ii) 1 April 2000. [3445]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Future bed numbers in each health board area are a matter for local determination based on a thorough assessment of local health needs.

The information requested for 1990 and 1995 is as follows:

NHS and joint-user and contractual hospitals in Scotland—average available staffed NHS beds; by selected specialty; years ending 31 March

	1990	*1995*
All selected beds	29,218	22,231
Geriatric long stay	9,132	7,442
Psychiatric specialities	14,407	11,034
Learning difficulties	5,283	3,468
Young chronic sick	396	287

1. The figures in the table relate to long stay beds for geriatric and young chronic sick patients, and to total beds for psychiatric and learning difficulty patients. Around 40 per cent. of psychiatric beds and 10 per cent. of learning difficulty beds are used for the care of short stay patients.

2. The figures show information on the average daily number of available staffed beds. This indicates the number of beds which are staffed and are available for the reception of in-patients and day cases.

Minebea Electronics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been paid to Minebea Electronics, Kelburn business park, Port Glasgow, in public grants; and what is the type of grant aid by which such money was given to the company. [2794]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* None. The company has, however, accepted an offer of regional selective assistance. No payments have, as yet, been made; in the event of a payment being made, details of the RSA offer will be published in "Labour Market Trends".

Forestry Planting (Greenlawdean)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be in a position to make a decision about the outstanding forestry planting application at Greenlawdean in Berwickshire; and if he will make a statement. [3564]

Mr. Kynoch: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland visited Greenlawdean on November 13 and has decided not to call for an environmental assessment of the forestry planting proposals.

Asbestos (East Kilbride)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the management of East Kilbride development corporation first became aware of the presence of asbestos in the internal construction of houses in the Telford road area of the new town; and when the board of development corporation was notified of the problem. [4121]

Mr. Kynoch: Officials at the development corporation were formally advised of the presence of asbestos in the corporation's homes in Telford road on 1 February 1995. The board was notified on 14 March 1995.

ENVIRONMENT

Rural Businesses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of rural businesses which have closed in each year since 1990. [2573]

Mr. Clappison: We do not hold information in this form.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion he has had, and with whom, regarding the future development of Battersea power station; and if he will make a statement. [3172]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. Discussions are continuing between Wandsworth council, English Heritage and the owners about the future of the Battersea power station site. The Government are not party to those discussions but would like to see the future development of this important site on the River Thames resolved as soon as possible.

Dorset County Council

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much in monetary and percentage terms Dorset county council has budgeted to overspend or underspend on each of its standard spending assessments for the current year. [3443]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following is the information.

Dorset county council budgeted net revenue expenditure compared to SSA, 1995–96

	SSA £ million	*Budgeted net revenue expenditure £ million*	*Difference £ million*	*Percentage*
Education	198.0	213.5	15.5	7.8
Personal social services	77.6	73.8	–3.8	–4.9
Fire	12.4	14.4	2.0	16.1
Highway maintenance	24.8	26.1	1.3	5.2
Other services	25.4	30.7	5.3	20.9
Capital financing	20.1	0.1	–20.0	–99.5
Total	358.3	358.6	0.3	0.1

Note:

Budgeted net revenue expenditure for the first five SSA blocks include an estimate of capital expenditure charged to revenue account—CERA—calculated by apportioning the total CERA of £27.4 million as reported by Dorset county council, to those SSA blocks in proportion to net current expenditure.

Revenue Support Grant

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much revenue support grant was paid to each metropolitan district for 1994–95; and what was the percentage movement from the previous year. [3198]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

Table to show the 1994–95 RSG for the metropolitan districts, and the percentage change relative to the previous year

Local authority	*1994–95 RSG (£ million)*	*Percentage increase over 1993–94*
Bolton	101.883	5.7
Bury	51.112	20.6
Manchester	273.804	2.4
Oldham	97.549	6.6
Rochdale	90.838	9.9
Salford	100.055	8.3
Stockport	71.991	6.0
Tameside	77.076	8.8
Trafford	67.227	5.6
Wigan	101.827	19.4
Knowsley	93.268	8.0
Liverpool	267.523	–0.3
Sefton	98.886	14.6
St. Helens	69.749	11.4
Wirral	128.889	8.7
Barnsley	72.868	22.4
Doncaster	118.287	14.7
Rotherham	93.795	16.4
Sheffield	197.476	14.8
Gateshead	86.866	14.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	125.898	12.8
North Tyneside	71.868	15.5
South Tyneside	66.138	11.6
Sunderland	130.167	15.8
Birmingham	538.753	–1.1
Coventry	123.711	0.3
Dudley	87.861	13.3
Sandwell	129.213	1.4
Solihull	48.024	5.7
Walsall	110.911	14.9
Wolverhampton	114.446	–6.0
Bradford	242.052	1.8
Calderdale	71.680	8.9
Kirklees	136.948	3.4
Leeds	259.446	11.7
Wakefield	107.079	23.2

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has received from the Commission for the New Towns on the likely effect of his Department's current land sales programme on market prices. [3455]

Mr. Curry: The Commission for the New Towns' strategy for the disposal of land is discussed with it in the context of its corporate plan. It attaches importance to phased release to local markets.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect the pilot scheme for vouchers has on the rate support grant of those authorities taking part in the scheme; in *(a)* the first and *(b)* the second year of its operation. [3267]

Sir Paul Beresford: Authorities taking part in phase 1 of the scheme will receive less revenue support grant because they have a reduced standard spending assessment for education. But if they continue to attract the same number of nursery pupils as in the past, their income from vouchers would equal the reduction in their RSG.

We will take decisions on the second year of the scheme in the light of experience in the first year.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount payable to the chairman of the Health and Safety Executive; and for how many hours a week is his appointment. [3613]

Sir Paul Beresford: The annual salary of the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission is currently £58,456. The appointment is pensionable and reasonable travel and subsistence expenses are payable in connection with commission business. The appointment is for three days a week.

Drinking Water

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has made in pursuit of a derogation for the United Kingdom Government from the obligation in Com(93)680 final to reduce nitrates in drinking water below their natural level. [3491]

Mr. Clappison: The European Commission's proposal for a directive on the ecological quality of water, COM(93) 680 final contains no such requirement in respect of nitrates.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3963]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Cement Kilns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to issue a full reply to the second report of the Environment Select Committee on the burning of secondary liquid fuel in cement kilns HC 479 of Session 1994–95. [3792]

Mr. Clappison: The Government expect to make a full response early in the new year.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of

28 November, *Official Report*, column 557, what reports he has received from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution concerning persistent plume grounding at Castle Cement in Clitheroe; and what assessment he has made of the possible risks to public health in the vicinity. [3790]

Mr. Clappison: Ministers are fully aware of the reported incidence of plume grounding and the investigative monitoring that national physical laboratory carried out on behalf of HMIP. The results of this investigation are being reviewed by the Department of Health.

Boundary Review

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what instructions his Department has given to the Local Government Commission on the review of boundaries of metropolitan areas; and if he will make a statement. [4097]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. We are considering what reviews the commission should undertake in addition to its statutory responsibilities for periodic electoral reviews.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date he now expects to receive the inspector's report on Manchester airport's planning application for a second runway; and if he will make a statement. [3190]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I expect to receive the report by autumn 1996. The public inquiry lasted about nine months and there is a very considerable weight of evidence from the main parties, conservation groups, local residents and business people to evaluate.

Standard Spending Assessments

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the change in standard spending assessment for county councils in England for (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97, identifying the standard spending assessment for education separately and *(b)* the amount of total external support for each county council, together with the percentage change from 1995–96 in order from the highest increase to the lowest. [3927]

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

Local authority	*Change in total SSA 1995–96 (£ million)*	*Percentage change in total SSA 1995–96 (Percentage)*	*Change in education SSA 1995–96 (£ million)*	*Percentage change in education SSA 1995–96 (Percentage)*
Bedfordshire	–1.830	–0.5	0.603	0.3
Berkshire	6.809	1.5	5.788	2.2
Buckinghamshire	–0.104	–	1.762	0.7
Cambridgeshire	4.348	1.2	4.528	2.0
Cheshire	–0.927	–0.2	–1.428	–0.4
Cornwall	5.178	1.9	1.936	1.3
Cumbria	–0.146	–0.1	–0.934	–0.6
Derbyshire	0.994	0.2	1.980	0.7
Devon	10.114	1.7	6.848	2.1
Dorset	3.024	0.9	2.089	1.1
Durham	–0.377	–0.1	0.257	0.1
East Sussex	6.766	1.7	6.404	3.1
Essex	–4.799	–0.5	–1.391	–0.3
Gloucestershire	7.095	2.4	2.198	1.3
Hampshire	–0.814	0.1	2.302	0.5
Hereford and Worcester	4.886	1.4	4.751	2.2
Hertfordshire	9.753	1.6	10.328	2.9
Kent	3.126	0.3	4.416	0.8
Lancashire	7.180	0.9	6.688	1.4
Leicestershire	3.206	0.6	2.919	0.9
Lincolnshire	1.117	0.3	0.614	0.3
Norfolk	–1.500	–0.4	–1.580	–0.7
Northamptonshire	0.947	0.3	1.563	0.8
Northumberland	–1.225	–0.6	–1.980	–1.8
Nottinghamshire	3.214	0.5	3.205	0.9
Oxfordshire	–1.655	–0.5	1.543	0.8
Shropshire	1.230	0.5	1.248	0.9
Somerset	3.656	1.4	3.494	2.5
Staffordshire	3.094	0.5	4.054	1.2
Suffolk	1.835	0.5	3.156	1.6
Surrey	18.146	3.5	16.766	5.9
Warwickshire	1.129	0.4	1.839	1.2
West Sussex	1.649	0.4	3.524	1.6
Wiltshire	3.831	1.2	4.878	2.7
Avon (Old area)	0.094	–	–0.419	–0.1
Cleveland (Old area)	0.262	0.1	0.007	–
Humberside (Old area)	–0.422	–0.1	–0.394	–0.1
North Yorkshire (Old area)	3.784	1.0	3.838	1.7

1. Changes calculated using Adjusted SSAs. The adjusted SSA updates the previous years SSA to take account of changes in function and geographical responsibility, but not data, methodology or control total changes.

2. Due to Local Government reorganisation, Avon CC, Cleveland CC, and Humberside CC have been abolished. The new area of North Yorkshire CC excludes the new area of York Unitary Authority.

Local authority	Change in total SSA 1996–97 £ million	Percentage change in total SSA 1996—97	Change in education SSA 1996–97 £ million	Percentage change in education SSA 1996–97
Bedfordshire	7.987	2.3	8.251	3.9
Berkshire	8.096	1.8	9.042	3.3
Buckinghamshire	8.219	2.1	8.417	3.5
Cambridgeshire	14.232	3.7	11.167	4.9
Cheshire	18.023	3.2	17.024	5.1
Cornwall	8.603	3.0	8.700	5.6
Cumbria	9.896	3.4	9.408	5.8
Derbyshire	20.615	3.9	17.155	5.7
Devon	21.852	3.6	17.422	5.3
Dorset	10.650	2.9	9.509	4.8
Durham	10.206	2.8	9.840	4.8
East Sussex	8.402	2.0	7.264	3.4
Essex	24.652	2.6	26.289	4.9
Gloucestershire	9.505	3.1	9.286	5.3
Hampshire	23.810	2.7	22.701	4.5
Hereford and Worcester	11.752	3.2	9.097	4.1
Hertfordshire	15.730	2.5	15.882	4.3
Kent	22.259	2.3	22.742	4.1
Lancashire	26.606	3.1	26.588	5.5
Leicestershire	17.452	3.2	16.818	5.3
Lincolnshire	15.138	4.3	13.932	7.0
Norfolk	17.826	4.2	15.359	6.7
North Yorkshire (New Area)	13.369	4.2	11.577	6.6
Northamptonshire	12.748	3.6	12.504	6.0
Nottinghamshire	20.518	3.4	18.535	5.3
Northumberland	6.291	3.2	5.950	5.5
Oxfordshire	7.510	2.4	5.951	3.2
Shropshire	8.879	3.7	8.223	6.0
Somerset	8.884	3.4	7.385	5.1
Staffordshire	18.151	3.1	17.324	5.0
Suffolk	13.020	3.6	11.665	5.7
Surrey	10.070	1.8	8.188	2.7
Warwickshire	8.907	3.3	7.850	5.0
West Sussex	7.663	1.9	8.715	3.8
Wiltshire	9.543	3.0	9.017	4.8

1. Changes calculated using Adjusted SSAs. The adjusted SSA updates the previous years SSA to take account of changes in function and geographical responsiblity, but not data, methodology or control total changes.

2. Due to Local Government reorganisation, Avon CC, Cleveland CC, and Humberside CC have been abolished. The new area of North Yorkshire CC excludes the new area of York Unitary Authority.

Local authority	Proposed total external support 1996–97 £ million	Percentage change relative to 1995–96
Lincolnshire	281.307	6.9
Derbyshire	422.515	6.7
Devon	462.854	6.4
Suffolk	280.824	6.2
Somerset	197.322	6.1
Nottinghamshire	486.294	6.0
Shropshire	188.561	6.0
Cumbria	229.105	5.9
Northumberland	156.751	5.9
Warwickshire	197.170	5.8
Dorset	261.525	5.8
Cambridgeshire	300.818	5.8
Northamptonshire	279.661	5.6
Durham	300.380	5.5
Cornwall	219.921	5.5
Hereford and Worcester	274.477	5.5
Gloucestershire	227.468	5.4
Lancashire	694.961	5.4
Leicestershire	432.662	5.3
Staffordshire	466.331	5.2
Cheshire	432.157	5.2
Norfolk	323.785	5.1
East Sussex	311.010	4.9
Hampshire	662.366	4.8
Wiltshire	233.543	4.8
Essex	710.598	4.7
Hertfordshire	458.742	4.6
Kent	744.579	4.3
West Sussex	284.664	4.2
Oxfordshire	230.107	4.0
Surrey	360.818	4.0
Bedfordshire	268.352	3.8
Berkshire	337.796	3.0
Buckinghamshire	288.380	1.4
North Yorkshire (New area)	236.399	—

1. Where total external support is defined as revenue support grant plus Income from non-domestic rates plus SSA reduction grant.

2. No TES figures for 1995-96 are available for the new area North Yorkshire county council, so no percentage change figure shown in the table.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the likely receipts from sale of the Housing Corporation's loan portfolio to the private sector; and what proportion will be re-invested in housing. [4335]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 28 November that he would shortly be appointing financial advisers to carry out detailed investigations into the options for sale and prospective disposal receipts of the corporation's loan portfolio.

In the event of sale, the proceeds would be applied to redemption of the Government's corresponding borrowing from the national loans fund.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the relationship between the figure announced on 28 November for housing associations in 1996–97 and the sum previously announced for the same period; and what assessment he has made as to the effect of the change on the number of homes likely to be constructed. [4336]

Mr. Clappison: As announced on 28 November, the Housing Corporation's approved development programme—ADP—for capital investment by housing associations in 1996–97 is £1,022 million, including £19 million for city challenge schemes. The figure announced last year for the same period was £1,127 million.

The Department's provisional estimates of the lettings from the new approved development programme, compared with the previous year's estimate, is:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Provisional estimate	42,000	37,300	42,900
Previous estimate, 15 December 1994	41,200	41,100	n/a

The current provisional estimates reflect reduced development costs and other factors.

The ADP, together with lettings from other sources, is expected to achieve an average of around 60,000 new social lettings a year over the next three years 1996–97—1998–99.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to *(a)* receive a report and *(b)* make a decision on the proposed redevelopment of the former Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich; [4207]

(2) when he expects the planning inquiry into the redevelopment of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich to be held; and if this conforms to the time scale set out in the inquiries procedure rules. [4206]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local inquiry has been arranged for 23 April 1996. This is seven weeks beyond the recommended time scales but it was the earliest practicable date when a suitably qualified inspector would be available. Once the Government office for London has received the inspector's report, we will issue the decision as quickly as possible.

West Country Development Corporation

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the report by the regional director of the Government office for the south-west on the outcome of his work in respect of the reports that the West Country development corporation commissioned from Coopers and Lybrand on needs and resources in Devon and Cornwall. [4679]

Mr. Curry: I am publishing the regional director's report today and I and the Minister for Trade have had a useful meeting with the chairman and other representatives of the West Country development corporation.

We have listened to the messages from local agencies in the west country.

The regional director's report has explained that while needs in Devon and Cornwall remained substantial benefits are being delivered through increased Government spending, with improvements in many areas.

We have today pledged the Government's continuing commitment to working with agencies in Devon and Cornwall to ensure that the counties' business development and regeneration needs are being met. Devon and Cornwall will benefit from more than £240 million of United Kingdom and European funds aimed at regenerating the local economy over the next few years.

With the Government office and local partners working together in co-operation we shall build on the strengths of Devon and Cornwall to develop a strong and prosperous local economy.

TRANSPORT

M42, Meriden

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has finalised his plans for the future of the M42 motorway in the constituency of Meriden. [2645]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 5 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, if he has finalised his plans for the future of the M42 motorway in the constituency of Meriden.

Following the recent review of the roads programme, we will be concentrating on the section of the motorway in the Meriden constituency ie between junctions 3A and 7, where the greater problems exist. In line with other decisions taken in the review the scheme will no longer contain provision for a fifth lane in each direction between junctions. In taking the scheme forward, we shall take into account the responses to public consultation in June 1994 on the full scheme. We shall also be considering the scope for other reductions in scale.

Severn Bridge Tolls

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the amounts collected in tolls from the Severn bridge for each year since construction for which figures are available in constant 1995 prices; and if he will make a statement. [2171]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 5 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the amounts collected in tolls from the Severn Bridge for each year since construction for which figures are available in constant 1995 prices; and if he will make a statement.

I attach a table listing the amounts collected in tolls from the Severn Bridge for each year since its construction. The first column shows the actual amounts of tolls collected. The second column shows the figures in 1995 prices.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Severn Bridge Amounts collected in tolls

Year	*Amount of toll collected* £	*Figure adjusted to 1995 prices* £
1966–67	329,971	3,210,287.86
1967–68	743,115	7,054,390.70
1968–69	807,934	7,326,345.51
1969–70	873,755	7,514,293.00
1970–71	926,546	8,158,237.53
1971–72	1,000,682	7,394,039.30
1972–73	1,192,836	8,229,375.56
1973–74	1,214,422	7,672,718.20
1974–75	1,208,599	6,583,238,75
1975–76	1,216,512	5,334,405.12
1976–77	1,254,380	4,718,977.56
1977–78	1,242,306	4,033,767.58
1978–79	1,330,837	3,991,180.16
1979–80	2,134,378	5,643,295.43
1980–81	2,757,335	6,179,187.74
1981–82	2,746,407	5,501,053.22
1982–83	2,851,081	5,257,393.36
1983–84	2,843,711	5,016,306.20
1984–85	2,988,316	5,017,382.56
1985–86	5,311,638	8,413,634.59
1986–87	4,395,461	6,729,450.79
1987–88	9,072,594	13,336,713.18
1988–89	10,103,476	14,154,969.88
1989–90	13,609,424	17,692,251.20
1990–91	20,795,558	24,705,122.90
1991–92 (24/4/92)	22,758,261	25,534,768.83
1992	21,991.00	23,794,262.00
1993	34,366,00	36,599,790.00
1994	39,201.00	40,769,040.00

1. The amount shown for 1966–67 relates to tolls collected for the period from 9 September 1966 to 31 March 1967, i.e. approx. 7 months only.

2. The amounts for 1991–92 is for the period from 1 April 1991 to 25 April 1992.

3. The amount shown for the year 1992 relates to tolls collected from 26 April 1992 to 31 December 1992.

4. The Retail Price Index used for adjustment to 1995 prices is the index published for October 1995.

The Government's policy is to ensure that implementing legislation imposes least cost and provides greatest certainty consistent with meeting our legal obligations.

Carriage of Dangerous Goods Regulations

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will re-negotiate with his European colleagues changes in the European agreement on the carriage of dangerous goods by road to enable withdrawal of the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification, packaging and labelling) Regulations 1994 to take place without contravention of EU laws; [3544]

(2) if he will withdraw the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994. [3543]

Mr. Norris: To seek to negotiate the extensive changes in Community legislation and in other international agreements that are implicit in my hon. Friend's questions would be impractical. However, the Health and Safety Commission has just published a consultation document containing a draft of a revised version of these regulations. Any comments on the draft should be submitted to the commission by 1 March 1996.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) for how long the derogation from the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994, set out in the verbal protocol to the Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association of 12 June remains in force; [3546]

(2) if he will instruct the Health and Safety Executive to put in writing the protocol reached with the SMDSA on 12 June regarding derogation from the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994 to the clinical waste management industry. [3545]

Mr. Norris: I am advised that the Health and Safety Executive will be writing before the end of the year to the SMDSA about the current position regarding the transport of clinical waste.

A1 Development Inquiry

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the air quality samples taken at the Ferrybridge junior and infant school used as evidence at the public inquiry into the A1 Ferrybridge to Hookmoor proposals; and if he will make a statement. [3720]

Mr. Watts: The effect of the proposed scheme on air quality was outlined in the air quality report included in the environmental statement published in February 1995. Further information about air quality was published during the public inquiry held between 18 October and 3 November.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what kind of transcript service was used at the public inquiry into the proposed A1 development from Ferrybridge to Hookmore. [3717]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *899*.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the prevailing winds were taken into consideration when assessing the air quality at the Ferrybridge junior and infant school for the purpose of evidence at the A1 Ferrybridge to Hookmoor proposals. [3715]

Mr. Watts: Yes.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration led to the decision to take no samples of particulates by the air quality witness at the public inquiry into the proposals for the A1 Ferrybridge to Hookmoor proposals. [3719]

Mr. Watts: Sampling is not normally carried out for new road schemes. In this case particulate levels have been predicted using the methodology in the design manual for roads and bridges. Estimates of particulates were made at 43 selected properties alongside the new route. All the levels were found to be well within the EC limit.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who decided the length of time allocated to the public inquiry into the A1 Ferrybridge to Hookmoor proposals. [3716]

Mr. Watts: The independent inspector, appointed by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport, on the nomination of the Lord Chancellor, is fully responsible for the conduct and overall length of the inquiry.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the involvement of the Highways Agency in a public inquiry into a major motorway within the terms of the answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *899*. [3718]

Mr. Watts: When my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport announce the intention to hold a public inquiry, it is for the Highways Agency to arrange it, though the conduct of the inquiry remains the sole responsibility of the inspector. Agency representatives would also attend the inquiry to give evidence in support of the proposals.

Road Toll Schemes (Tagging Devices)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what tagging devices are currently being considered for road toll schemes; and how many of them involve radiation emissions. [3751]

Mr. Watts: Three of the consortiums that we have invited to take part in our forthcoming trials offer, as part of their electronic tolling systems, tags which could emit low-level radio frequency transmissions, at levels well below those emitted by, for example, mobile telephones.

Motorway Lighting

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria his Department uses when determining which sections of motorway require lighting. [3203]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Irvine Patnick, dated 5 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what criteria his Department uses when determining which sections of motorway require lighting.

The decision whether to light in a particular case is taken following consideration of a full appraisal of the proposed scheme. This includes an economic assessment of the capital, maintenance and energy costs set against the potential savings as a result of the reduction in night time personal injury accidents, calculated over the life of the lighting scheme. A full assessment of environmental factors is taken into account.

M1 Road Works

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport between what date road works will be removed from the M1 during the Christmas and new year periods; and if he will make a statement. [3201]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Irvine Patnick, dated 5 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, between what dates roadworks will be removed from the M1 during the Christmas and New Year periods; and if he will make a statement.

Roadworks will be removed from the M1 between Junction 38 and 42 from Friday 22 December at 06.00 hrs to Wednesday 3 January at 08.00 hrs.

The works to widen the M1 between Junctions 21 and 21A are continuing and due for completion in March 1996. Three lanes of traffic will be maintained in each direction through the widening works on this section of the M1 from Friday 22 December at 05.30 hrs to Tuesday 2 January at 21.00 hrs.

There are no other roadworks planned on the M1 over the Christmas and New Year period.

British Rail (Noise and Air Pollution)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *53*, on prosecution for noise and air pollution, what was the nature of *(a)* the successful prosecution against British Rail and *(b)* the two abatement notices. [3337]

Mr. Watts: Abatement notices were served on British Rail requiring a reduction in excessive noise at Paddington station, London and at Trafford Park Euro-terminal, Manchester.

The notice served at Paddington required a reduction in the noise created by the engineering work involved in the remodelling of the track layout on the approaches to the station. The use of a tamping machine on one particular night, close to residential premises, led to a prosecution. BR was unable to prove that it had done all that it possibly could to avoid the use of the machine on the night in question and a plea of guilty was entered.

The notice served at Trafford Park related to a new road-rail terminal constructed for channel tunnel freight traffic. The terminal is adjacent to residential properties, the owners of which complained of excessive night time noise after the terminal opened in 1994. In the hearing before the stipendiary magistrate at which the board's appeal against the notice was heard, the board suggested a number of measures to reduce the level of noise received by residents. The board has taken the steps necessary to implement these measures.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the estimated date for submission to his Department of the inspector's report following the planning inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road; and when he expects to be in a position to make a decision and when an announcement on whether the road is to be approved; [3188]

(2) what has been the overall cost of conducting the planning public inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road *(a)* excluding and *(b)* including the fees of the inspector. [3189]

Mr. Watts: Given the length of the inquiry, the report cannot be expected for some time. When it has been received, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport will reach their joint decision as quickly as possible.

The final cost of the inquiry to the Highways Agency is estimated at £1.59 million, of which £210,000 is the fees for the inspector and his team.

Bicycles (Carriage by Rail)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to encourage cyclists to take their bicycles with them when travelling part of their journey by train. [3460]

Mr. Watts: The Department assisted with the production of the Cyclists' Public Affairs Group's document, "Bike and Trains—Opportunities for the New Operators", which explains how train operators can make their services more attractive to cyclists. The document includes advice on the carriage of bicycles on trains and the provision of bicycle facilities at stations.

The franchising director will require franchisees, through the franchise agreement, to carry bicycles where practicable and to ensure that any charges made are reasonable.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2459]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* A total of 107 general statutory instruments were made in the Session 1994–95. Of these, based on data for the first six months of 1995, we estimate that:

> almost 20 per cent. revoked earlier instruments or substituted a more favourable regime for business;
>
> more than 15 per cent. implemented EU or other international obligations including measures to facilitate intermember state trade;
>
> two per cent. facilitated privatisations and competitions;
>
> almost 50 per cent. updated fees and charges, or concern local legislation.

Twelve statutory instruments implemented EC legislation. In implementing the directives, none of these instruments go beyond the minimum standard required.

North West Regional Railways

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects North West Regional Railways Ltd. to be offered by franchise to the private sector. [3948]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director expects to offer the North West Regional Railways franchise to the private sector during 1996 or later.

Leeds Supertram

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his intention to make provision for work to start on the Leeds Supertram in 1996–97; and if he will now announce his approval of the scheme. [4007]

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to provide funding for work on Leeds Supertram to commence in 1996–97; [4189]

(2) if he will announce whether he will approve plans for a Leeds Supertram; and if he will make a statement. [4290]

Mr. Norris: West Yorkshire passenger transport Authority has bid for funding for Leeds Supertram in the 1996–97 local transport settlement. We will be announcing details of the settlement later this month.

Salford Quays and Eccles Metrolink

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much public sector funding will be required to meet the costs of constructing the Salford Quays and Eccles Metrolink extension. [3953]

Mr. Norris: Greater Manchester Passenger Transport authority has yet to obtain powers under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for the extension of Metrolink between Salford Quays and Eccles. GMPTA have bid for funding for the extension as far as Salford Quays in the 1996–97 local transport settlement. We will be announcing details of the settlement later this month.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Pre-sentence Reports

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the proportion of cases where the recommendation in the pre-sentence report was adopted by the magistrates courts during 1994 for each ethnic category. [3653]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available. The available information for 1993 was published in tables 15C, 15.7 and 15.8 of "Probation Statistics England and Wales 1993," a copy of which is in the Library.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

16. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from national health service trusts about budgetary constraints. [2188]

Mr. Horam: None. National health service trusts are no longer given budgets, but earn their income from providing services to purchasers of health care. The level of income a trust receives is subject to contractual negotiation with purchasers each financial year.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that national health service trusts retain flexibility over whether or not to contract out specific services. [2185]

Mr. Horam: The only requirement on trusts is to market test catering, domestic and linen-laundry services at regular intervals. Otherwise it is for individual trusts to decide which services to market test, and when, in order to reflect local circumstances and needs.

In-patients

17. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of in-patients treated by Warwickshire trusts or equivalent areas in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1993. [2189]

Mr. Horam: Warwickshire national health service trusts admitted 69,091 in-patients in 1993–94, rising to 70,077 in-patients in 1994–95.

Source: SD2A; KP70 return.

Redundancy and Retirement

18. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary for Health what guidelines his Department is giving regarding redundancy payments and retirement packages in the national health service. [2190]

Mr. Malone: Arrangements for redundancy and premature retirement for national health service staff employed in health authorities and NHS trusts on national terms and conditions of service are set out in sections 45 and 46 of the General Whitley Council handbook. Guidance on severance payments for general and senior managers on short-term rolling contracts was issued in circulars HSG(94)18 and TEL(94)3. Staff employed on NHS trust terms and conditions of service will be covered by their trust's contractual terms.

Guidance on early retirement for NHS pension scheme members was issued in circular HSG(95)25. Additionally, a guide covering pension entitlement on redundancy and early retirement has been issued by the NHS Pensions Agency to all NHS pension scheme members. More specific information is available in the booklet "Early Retirement". Copies of all documents are available in the Library.

Hip Replacements

19. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hip replacement operations have been carried out by the national health service on patients over the age of *(a)* 90, *(b)* 95 and *(c)* 100 years in the last five. [2191]

Mr. Horam: The information is in the table:

Hip replacements and other arthroplasty operations of the hip

Year	*Age 90–94*	*Age 95–99*	*Age 100 and over*
1989–90	1,325	374	40
1990–91	1,866	463	45
1991–92	1,942	454	51
1992–93	2,122	426	72
1993–94	2,226	492	29

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics.

Hip operation codes—shortlist code WC1 and WC3.

OPCS4R codes W37–W39, W46–W48.

Prescription Charges

20. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total income from prescription charges in 1994–95. [2192]

Mr. Malone: The total income from prescription charges in 1994–95 including income from the purchase of prepayment certificates was £287 million.

NHS Private Sector Purchasing

21. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent by the national health service on buying services from the private sector in the last four years. [2193]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

28. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount is estimated to be spent by the national health service in 1995–96 on purchasing care from the private sector. [2200]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Private Sector Nurses

22. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement of the number of nurses currently working in the private sector. [2194]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the publication "Private hospitals, homes and clinics registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984", which contains numbers of staff in post for non-national health service establishments. Copies of this publication are available in the Library.

Doctors and Dentists

23. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors and dentists undertake national health service work at the most recent count; and what was the equivalent figure in 1979. [2195]

Mr. Malone: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *199*.

Hospital Wards

24. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he is making towards the

establishment of a choice between single sex and the mixed wards for all hospital patients; and if he will make a statement. [2196]

Mr. Horam: It is for the trusts and health authorities to decide for themselves how to use the resources available to them. The national health service executive has commissioned a survey of the current position on mixed-sex wards and will consider what action, if any, is required when the report of that survey is received.

Edgware General Hospital

25. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the regional and district health authorities to announce the replacement facilities due at Edgware general hospital, to compensate for the closure of the accident and emergency department in 1997; and if he will give the outline arrangements agreed with his Department. [2197]

Mr. Malone: The health authority is undertaking consultation on detailed proposals for the facilities to be provided at Edgware hospital. Decisions will be made in the new year.

United Leeds Hospital Trust

26. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the United Leeds hospital trust budget deficit. [2198]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust, Mr. David Hall, for details.

Waiting Times

27. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made to reduce the number of patients who have to wait over one year for treatment. [2199]

Mr. Horam: Excellent progress has been made in reducing the number of patients who wait more than a year for treatment. In September 1990 there were 202,740 people waiting over one year compared with 28,204 in September 1995.

Elderly People

29. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that elderly people receive the same entitlement to national health service care irrespective of where they live in the country. [2201]

Mr. Bowis: We have made it clear that elderly people throughout the country should receive national health service care on the basis of clinical need.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring his Department has undertaken of public and private domiciliary care. [2184]

Mr. Bowis: We take a continuing interest in the welcome growth, innovation and quality of domiciliary care services.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has to ensure registration of private domiciliary care. [2186]

Mr. Bowis: Our current review of regulation and inspection of social services will consider whether statutory regulation should be extended to domiciliary care.

Regional Health Authorities

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates have been made of the savings resulting from the abolition of regional health authorities. [2187]

Mr. Malone: By 1997–98, total annual savings from the abolition of regional health authorities are expected to be around £100 million. A further £50 million has also been saved from the creation of single health authorities at local level. These substantial savings will be retained by the national health service and reinvested in patient care.

Isles of Scilly Community Health Services

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future for community health care on the Isles of Scilly. [3454]

Mr. Horam: The then Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave approval for the Isles of Scilly community health services to integrate into Plymouth Community Services NHS trust from 1 April 1996.

NHS Trusts (Finance)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what levels of surplus or deficit each national health service trust returned in each year since its inception giving the figures by region; [3246]

(2) how many trusts recorded *(a)* surpluses and *(b)* deficits in each region in each year since 1991–92. [3247]

Mr. Horam: The information will be placed in the Library.

Smoking and Drug Addiction (Children)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total Department of Health budget for smoking and drug addiction among children in each of the last five years. [3764]

Mr. Bowis: The tables show the amounts spent by the Health Education Authority, on behalf of the Department of Health, on teenage anti-smoking programmes over the last five years, funding provided to health authorities for drug misuse services and expenditure on drug and solvent publicity for all age ranges. Activities relating to smoking and drug addiction among children are also included within other programmes undertaken by the Department of Health, the Health Education Authority and health authorities but specific costings are not available.

Funding for HEA's teenage smoking programme

Financial year	*Amount spent on teenage smoking work £*
1991–92	£1,746,000
1992–93	752,000
1993–94	864,000
1994–95	863,000
1995–96	880,000

Funding for drug misuse services

Financial year	*Funding to health authorities to provide treatment services for drug misusers £ Million*
1991–92	16.999
1992–93	20.043
1993–94	24.371
1994–95	25.498
1995–96	26.748

In addition, £1 million has been provided in 1995–96 specifically to develop services for young people at risk from drug misuse.

Drug and solvent publicity

Year	*£*
1991–92	3,924,413
1992–93	4,965,023
1993–94	5,296,284
1994–95	4,443,396
1995–96	[1]4,871,000

[1] Estimate.

Autologous Blood Transfusion

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to develop an autologous blood transfusion service. [3771]

Mr. Horman: We recognise the value of autologous transfusion for those patients for whom the procedures are applicable. In appropriate cases it can provide a useful supplement to the supply of blood for voluntary donors which the National Blood Service supplies to our hospitals. The medical profession is aware of autologus transfusion and advice is available from medical staff of the National Blood Service and hospital consultant haematologists. Selection of patients for this procedure has to be undertaken with extreme care to avoid any possible clinical risk to that patient.

Meningitis

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of meningitis have been notified in each of the health districts of West Yorkshire in each year since 1990. [3695]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table.

Notifications of meningitis and meningococcal menningitis in West Yorkshire, by local authroity districts, 1990–94

	1990		*1991*		*1992*		*1993*		*[1]1994*	
	All meningitis	*Meningococcal*	*All menigitis*	*Meningococcal*	*All meningitis*	*Meningococcal*	*All meningitis*	*Meningococcal*	*All meningitis*	*Menigococcal*
Bradford	35	13	74	18	31	13	19	11	16	5
Calderdale	10	9	12	6	5	2	7	4	6	3
Kirkless	20	8	14	2	19	10	19	10	20	11
Leeds	43	12	55	9	41	12	24	11	30	16
Wakefield	29	7	30	8	18	6	15	6	13	3

[1] 1994 figures are provisional. Information is not available at district health authority level.

GP Commissioning Group

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to finance any general practitioner commissioning groups. [3757]

Mr. Malone: This is for local determination. General practitioners involved in commissioning groups act as advisers to health authorities. It is for health authorities to secure appropriate advice in purchasing, as in other matters.

Out-patients

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his current estimate of the percentage of out-patients seen within 30 minutes; and what assessment he has made of the reliability of the data on which this figure is based. [3762]

Mr. Horam: At 30 September 1995, nationally, 89 per cent. of patients were seen within 30 minutes of their out-patient appointment.

In 1994–95, as part of the national health service performance tables exercise, the Audit Commission found that 93.6 per cent. of trusts' monitoring systems designed to collect the data for this standard were satisfactory.

General Practitioner Consultations

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the average annual number of consultations per general practitioner in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1994; [3754]

(2) what was the total number of general practitioners consultations in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1994. [3756]

Mr. Malone: The information is contained in table 21 on page 56 of the departmental report of the Department of Health and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, published in 1995, copies of which are available in the Library.

Nitrates in Drinking Water

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what re-assessment he has made of the research published by his

Department in CMO(85)14 on the relationship between nitrate levels in water and cancer incidence. [3489]

Mr. Horam: CMO(85)14 gave advice on the health effects of nitrates in drinking water and concluded that although a theoretical risk of a relationship between nitrate and cancer remained, the epidemiological evidence as a whole gave no support to the suggestion that nitrate was a cause of cancer of the stomach, or other organs. Since 1985 there has been no good evidence for changing this advice and this is supported by evaluations made bythe Committee on the Medical Aspects of the Contamination of Air, Soil, and Water in 1988, the World Health Organisation in 1993 and the National Research Council in the United States in 1995.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the report of the King's Fund Institute on the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital. [3749]

Mr. Malone: None. It will be considered, with other options put forward, by Sir Ronald Grierson's team, which is looking at ways of making the best use of the Smithfield site.

Medical Records

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to investigate the extent of access to patients' medical records, computer and written, in hospitals and general practice by non-authorised persons. [3766]

Mr. Horam: Protection of medical records is the responsibility of the organisation which holds them. Breach of confidentiality is a disciplinary matter. Guidance has been issued to national health service organisations drawing their attention to the laws which protect patient confidentiality, the most recent being, for computer records, the NHS top level security policy 1992. Further guidance affecting both computer and manual records is to be published shortly.

Down's Syndrome

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue instructions to health authorities and consultants working for the national health service that no treatment is to be denied to patients on the grounds that they have Down's Syndrome. [3525]

Mr. Horam: National health service treatment is available to everyone on the basis of clinical need. The Department of Health issued guidance in 1992 on health services for people with learning disabilities (mental handicap), HSG(92)42, which made it clear that people with learning disabilities have the same rights of access to NHS services as everyone else.

Long-term Care

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to introduce equivalent disregard in respect of long-term domiciliary care subject to those proposed for long-term care in residential and nursing care homes. [3772]

Mr. Bowis: None. It would not be directly relevant to domiciliary care.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whom he has consulted and whom he intends to consult on the operation of the long-term care package announced in the Budget; [3993]

(2) if he will list the representations his Department has received over the long-term care package announced in the Budget; and if he will list those *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals which he intends to retain as consultants on the operation of the scheme. [3996]

Mr. Bowis: I have received no representations on these matters following the Budget statement. The consultation will be as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Further details will be given in due course.

Hospital Meal Times

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives to health authorities and trusts regarding making the times of meals for patients in hospital approximate to normal domestic times; what representations he has had on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [4011]

Mr. Horam: The Department's recently issued "Nutrition Guidelines for Hospital Caterers" commends Patients Association advice that meals should be served at times which reflect the normal eating patterns of the majority of patients and should be eaten in a relaxed and unhurried atmosphere. Availability of food should be adjusted, where necessary, to allow for patients' day treatments, post-operative hunger or lack of appetite, and where admission is made outside ward meal times. The period between the last meal of the day and the following breakfast should not normally exceed 14 hours and a supper drink and snack should also be available, where appropriate.

Reproductive Health and Population Policies, Republic of Ireland

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* assessment of and *(b)* contributions to his Department he has made regarding the public consultations about reproductive health and population policies currently taking place in the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [3990.]

Mr. Horam: None.

Heart and Lung Disease

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female deaths from (i) lung cancer (ICD 162), (ii) heart disease (ICD 410-414) and (iii) chronic obstructive lung disease (ICD 490-492) occurred in each region in 1993. [3980]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table.

The numbers of death occurring in 1993 that were due to malignant neoplasm of the trachea, bronchus and lung (ICD[1] 162), ischaemic heart disease (ICD[1] 410-414) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (ICD[1] 490-496) are shown for each sex by regional health authority (England) and Wales.

The figures are provisional.

Regional health authority	Malignant neoplasm of trachea, bronchus and lung (ICD 162)		Ischaemic heart disease (ICD 410-414)		Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (ICD 490-496)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Northern	1,722	948	5,444	4,790	1,193	902
Yorkshire	1,588	851	6,165	5,243	1,300	950
Trent	2,210	988	7,822	6,303	1,640	1,038
East Anglian	790	377	3,160	2,513	599	317
North-west Thames	1,163	643	4,168	3,531	972	613
North-east Thames	1,474	763	5,087	4,272	1,206	671
South-east Thames	1,546	852	5,332	4,769	1,314	772
South-west Thames	1,125	601	4,060	3,625	959	623
Wessex	1,153	559	4,916	3,914	927	561
Oxford	864	435	2,941	2,416	703	405
South Western	1,200	632	5,512	4,486	1,070	587
West Midlands	2,235	970	8,272	6,734	1,896	1,140
Mersey	1,196	678	3,947	3,475	880	695
North Western	1,955	1,004	7,059	6,246	1,711	1,355
Wales	1,390	624	5,260	4,429	1,089	704

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

General Practice Locums

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *614*, on NHS staff if he will provide comparable information on general practitioner locums. [4289]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available.

Physiotherapy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation to grant a charter to the physiotherapist profession. [2432]

Mr. Bowis: The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy was incorporated by royal charter in 1920.

Medial and Surgical Posts

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current structure of medical and surgical posts. [2557]

Mr. Malone: The main hospital career grades are consultant, associate specialist and staff grade. Other career grades are clinical assistant and hospital practitioner.

The training grades are pre-registration house officer, senior house officer and, for doctors in higher specialist training, registrar and senior registrar. The new specialist registrar grade, which replaces the existing registrar and senior registrar grades, is being launched in December 1995 in the specialties of general surgery and radiology, and from April 1996 in all other specialties.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *608*, on the support of local clinicians for the provision of clinical or clinical support services by PFI partners, if he will list the clinicians who will be consulted; what criteria he will use to judge the support of local clinicians; how he will determine that he has gained local clinician's support; if he will consult the local British Medical Association and other professional associations; and if he will make a statement. [4113]

Mr. Horam: Gaining staff support, including the support of clinicians, for any proposal for capital development is the responsibility of trust management. This is true whether the development is to be procured through the private finance initiative, or is to be publicly funded. The capital investment manual, copies of which are available in the Library, emphasises the need to involve staff, including clinicians, in the process of developing a business case for capital investment. The full benefits of capital investment can be realised only through the co-operation of staff, and evidence that this will be forthcoming is one of the factors the NHS executive considers before giving its approval for a capital development.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on health services for patients in the Bexley and Greenwich health authority area as a result of delay in fully commissioning the new Queen Elizabeth hospital, Woolwich; [4209]

(2) what discussion he has had with the Bexley and Greenwich health authority and the Greenwich Healthcare NHS trust regarding the decision to call in the planning application in respect of the former Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich; and if he will make a statement; [4211]

(3) if he will make a statement on the progress of the private finance initiative in respect of the conversion of the Ministry of Defence's former Queen Elizabeth military hospital to the NHS Queen Elizabeth hospital, Woolwich; [4213]

(4) what assessment he has made of the possible changes in the planned time scale of building works at the former Queen Elizabeth military hospital as a result of the

decision of the Secretary of State for the Environment to call in the planning application; [4208]

(5) when he expects the Queen Elizabeth hospital, Woolwich, to be fully operational; [4210]

(6) what assessment he has made of the effect upon Greenwich district hospital of delay in completing adaptation works to the former Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich. [4212]

Mr. Malone: Greenwich Healthcare national health service trust is managing the development of the Queen Elizabeth hospital as the main hospital for Greenwich and Woolwich, taking account of the need to explore private finance and the statutory planning process. The trust and the local health authority will ensure that safe and effective services continue to be provided during the transitional period.

Southend Health Authority

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the relative underfunding of the Southend health authority; and if he will make a statement. [2180]

Mr. Malone: In 1996–97 we plan to give South Essex health authority, which includes Southend, a real terms increase of nearly £11 million, which is the biggest real terms increase to any health authority in the country.

This shows our commitment to bring South Essex health authority to its weighted capitation target as soon as possible.

Registered Homes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on closures of private residential care homes. [2785]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 November 1995]*: The Department collects information on individual residential care and nursing homes registered under the terms of the Registered Homes Act 1984 at 31 March each year and, for 1993–94, on residential care homes opened or closed by comparison with the previous 31 March.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide information about the number of homes registered and deregistered under the Registered Homes Act 1984 by local authority area within each region for each of the last five years. [2784]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 November 1995]*: Information is not held centrally in the form requested.

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part-time and (ii) full-time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the Medicines Control Agency, (2) the Good Practice Monitoring Authority, (3) the Medical Devices Directorate and (4) the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [2749]

Mr. Horam: *[Pursuant to his reply, 28 November 1995, c. 605–8]*: I regret that the answer given by my predecessor contained incorrect information about the annual income of the Medicines Control Agency and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. An amended table is as follows:

	Annual income (£ million) Fees	Annual income (£ million) Charges	Annual income (£ million) Fines	Total number of staff employed Part-time	Total number of staff employed Full-time	Department's contribution to annual running costs (£ million)
1992–93						
Medicines Control Agency	21,328	nil	nil	—	[1]349	nil
Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority	0.140	nil	nil	4	4	[2]—
Medical Devices Agency	[3]0.402	nil	nil	n/a	n/a	4.851
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	[4]0.647	nil	nil	1	15	0.922
1993–94						
Medicines Control Agency	23,796	nil	nil	—	[1]374	nil
Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority	0.147	nil	nil	4	4	[2]—
Medical Devices Agency	[3]0.483	nil	nil	[6]6	[6]162	5.714
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	[4]0.907	nil	nil	1	18	[5]1.173
1994–95						
Medicines Control Agency	25,389	nil	nil	—	[1]399	nil
Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority	0.159	nil	nil	3	4	[2]—
Medical Devices Agency	1.229	nil	nil	[7]7	[7]165	11.392
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	[4]0.794	nil	nil	1	23	[5]1.353

Notes:

[1] Part-time and full-time staff numbers counted as full-time equivalent. Breakdown not readily available.

[2] Authority is staffed by DH officials and full annual running costs are net from the DH Vote.

[3] Figures are fees/receipts.

[4] Fees are offset against the Departmental contribution. The Authority does not get fees plus contribution.

[5] Figure includes contributions from other Territorial Departments.

[6] Figures at 1 April 1993.

[7] Figures at 1 April 1994.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Travel, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many times in the last year he has used *(a)* London Buses and *(b)* London Underground while on official business. [377]

Mr. Howard: None.

Home Office Asylum Division

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the establishment of the Home Office asylum division *(a)* at the present time, *(b)* on 1 January 1995, *(c)* on 1 January 1994, *(d)* on 1 January 1993, *(e)* on 1 January 1992, *(f)* on 1 January 1991 and *(g)* on 1 January 1988. [559]

Mr. Kirkhope: A breakdown of the establishment of the Home Office asylum division is given in the table. The information is based on the staff in post figures for 1 October of each year in question.

Home Office asylum division: staffing

	Asylum determination screening and appeal	*Policy and training*	*Senior staff and management*	*Issue of travel documents*	*Fingerprinting*	*Total*
1 November 1995	628	17	28	38	12	723
1 October 1994	533	14	25	50	16	638
1 October 1993	475	18	24	50	16	482
1 October 1992	414	17	23	28	—	482
1 October 1991	210	23	18	19	—	270
1 October 1988[1]	57	—	—	20	—	77

[1] The asylum division was formed in April 1991. Before that date, asylum determination staff were part of B1 division.

These figures represent an approximate breakdown of the divisional staffing levels by function.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the civil service grades of those employed solely in processing applications for political asylum, the numbers of such staff in each grade and the average cost in salary and administration costs of a member of staff for each grade. [4073]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the following table. The information is based on staffing costs for 1995–96. It relates only to staff employed in the asylum division whose work relates primarily to asylum case processing. These staff have some other responsibilities, such as dealing with applications for family reunion.

The table does not include the cost of the time spent by staff in the immigration service in interviewing asylum applicants and in considering and taking enforcement action in relation to applicants who are liable to deportation or removal.

	Asylum casework	*Screening fingerprinting*	*Appeals*	*Cost per grade per annum*	*Admin cost per grade per annum*
Grade 5	0.25	0	0	63,768	5,336
Grade 6	0.75	0	0	52,932	5,336
Grade 7	2.5	0	0	46,200	5,336
Senior Executive Officer	18	1	0.5	32,076	5,336
Higher Executive Officer	61	3	1	26,268	5,336
Executive Officer	237.5	10	3	19,308	5,336
Assistant Identification Officer	0	7	0	19,320	5,336
Administrative Officer	129	51	20.5	15,948	5,336
Administrative Assistant	75.5	32.5	20.5	11,328	5,336

Administration costs

Includes all non-pay running costs and other apportioned indirect costs (e.g. accommodation, personnel and registry costs).

Local Government

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Acts of Parliament, including Consolidation Acts, affecting local government which have been introduced by his Department since January 1994. [43]

Mr. Howard: The relevant Acts are as follows:

The Sunday Trading Act 1994

The Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is to advertise for a new Director General of the Prison Service; and what qualities he will seek in the successful applicant. [3082]

Mr. Howard: I shall make an announcement in due course.

Police Numbers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were in post *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each county of England in each year since 1990. [2899]

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table below:

Police strength in England between 1990 and 1995

As at 31 December

Police force	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	[1]*1995*
Avon and Somerset	3,059	3,072	3,065	3,034	3,017	2,986
Bedfordshire	1,064	1,090	1,119	1,168	1,113	1,116
Cambridgeshire	1,186	1,239	1,265	1,266	1,268	1,254
Cheshire	1,898	1,867	1,901	1,873	1,906	1,950
City of London	796	809	805	884	887	869
Cleveland	1,485	1,477	1,492	1,414	1,435	1,430
Cumbria	1,189	1,183	1,197	1,185	1,185	1,143
Derbyshire	1,751	1,706	1,810	1,790	1,793	1,762
Devon and Cornwall	2,867	2,876	2,920	2,908	2,878	2,872
Dorset	1,272	1,280	1,318	1,292	1,287	1,272
Durham	1,364	1,378	1,377	1,389	1,356	1,376
Essex	2,884	2,878	2,917	2,947	2,921	2,897
Gloucestershire	1,158	1,178	1,148	1,140	1,167	1,142
Greater Manchester	7,010	6,975	7,055	7,047	6,984	7,026
Hampshire	3,170	3,177	3,287	3,270	3,252	3,307
Hertfordshire	1,659	1,679	1,688	1,679	1,686	1,704
Humberside	1,989	2,016	2,033	2,028	2,042	2,025
Kent	2,988	3,039	3,106	3,182	3,116	3,100
Lancashire	3,199	3,205	3,209	3,140	3,194	3,195
Leicestershire	1,784	1,808	1,834	1,838	1,838	1,860
Lincolnshire	1,205	1,198	1,191	1,203	1,208	1,164
Merseyside	4,679	4,605	4,656	4,663	4,678	4,536
Metropolitan Police	28,152	28,126	27,812	27,605	27,611	27,395
Norfolk	1,394	1,419	1,426	1,434	1,408	1,391
Northamptonshire	1,144	1,156	1,203	1,181	1,171	1,160
Northumbria	3,528	3,460	3,586	3,589	3,595	3,610
North Yorkshire	1,379	1,382	1,408	1,333	1,313	1,310
Nottinghamshire	2,342	2,334	2,329	2,337	2,331	2,314
South Yorkshire	2,984	2,989	3,000	3,015	3,026	3,041
Staffordshire	2,193	2,185	2,172	2,202	2,214	2,190
Suffolk	1,195	1,203	1,237	1,216	1,204	1,158
Surrey	1,654	1,681	1,674	1,667	1,672	1,656
Sussex	2,984	2,969	2,980	2,977	2,924	3,020
Thames Valley	3,706	3,722	3,833	3,894	3,878	3,760
Warwickshire	1,014	1,005	1,002	1,025	1,036	982
West Mercia	2,022	2,028	2,060	2,056	2,037	2,008
West Midlands	6,881	6,893	6,952	6,968	6,996	7,078
West Yorkshire	5,276	5,143	5,070	4,988	5,037	5,122
Wiltshire	1,157	1,212	1,262	1,273	1,256	1,236
Total for England	118,661	118,642	119,399	119,100	118,920	118,422

[1] As at 30 September 1995, the latest available figures.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the total number of police officers in service at present; and what is the starting date of the three-year period for the recruitment of additional police officers; [4032]

(2) what is the date and number of police officers which forms the base on which the additional officers will be recruited in pursuance of the Prime Minister's recent announcement. [4023]

Mr. Maclean: As at 31 March 1995 the total number of police officers in England and Wales was 127,222. The basis on which the additional funding for the extra officers is to be built will be the total police strength in forces at 31 March 1996. Funding for the additional officers announced by the Prime Minister will be available from 1 April 1996.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional officers the Government expect police forces to recruit in 1996–97. [4024]

Mr. Maclean: This is a matter for chief constables and police authorities. An extra £20 million has been available in 1996–97. This is sufficient to enable chief constables to recruit 1,000 additional officers by the end of 1996–97 if they choose to do so.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost, over the next three financial years, of recruiting 5,000 additional officers to the police service in England and Wales. [4025]

Mr. Maclean: A total of £180 million—£20 million, £60 million, and £100 million—is being made available over the next three financial years. This is sufficient provision to enable chief constables to recruit 5,000 more constables over the period.

Departmental Targets

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the published recommended response times within which his Department is expected to reply to letters from the public.

Mr. Howard: There is no published overall target for responding to letters from the public because of the diverse nature of the Department's work. Individual units and agencies are, however, required to set clear targets for the time taken to deal with letters from the public, and to monitor performance against those targets. The targets set range from five to 30 working days.

Money Payment Supervision Orders

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation service officers in England and Wales are currently engaged in the supervision of money payment supervision orders; and how many of such staff were engaged in that work for each of the years between 1985 and 1993. [3436]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally and is not readily available.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretay of State for the Home Department how many money payment supervision orders were successfully completed during 1994; and in how many cases the fine was remitted in part or whole. [3435]

Mr. Maclean: There were 4,077 terminations of money payment supervision orders during 1994. In 1,563 cases payment was completed, and in 292 cases payment was remitted by the court.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many money payment supervision orders have been made by courts in England and Wales to date in 1995. [3433]

Mr. Maclean: The latest estimated figures show that 1,600 persons commenced money payment supervision orders between January and June 1995.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases the defendant was *(a)* over 21 and *(b)* under 20 years in respect of all money payment supervision orders made by the courts in England and Wales, for the latest year available. [3434]

Mr. Maclean: The table gives the available information.

Number of persons commencing supervision by the probation service under a money payment supervision order by age on commencement, England and Wales 1994

Age on commencement	*Number of persons*
Under 20	806
20–21	478
Over 21	2,415
All ages	3,699

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many money payment supervision orders have been made by each petty sessional division in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years. [3432]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available.

Underwater Search and Recovery

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces have dispensed with their underwater search and recovery units. [3377]

Mr. Maclean: I understand that Cheshire constabulary, North Wales police, Merseyside police and Greater Manchester police have amalgamated their resources to form a single regional unit and that the Cleveland constabulary and the Gloucestershire constabulary made arrangements with neighbouring forces or private contractors.

Hunting (Policing Costs)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to permit chief constables at their discretion to recover the costs of police attendance at fox and stag hunts. [3208]

Mr. Maclean: Public order policing at these events falls within the normal law enforcement duties of the police.

Funding for costs incurred by the police in discharging their duty to enforce the law is provided jointly by central and local government.

Clandestine Filming

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to prevent the sale or publication of video or film footage generated by clandestine cameras without the specific and written permission of the subjects of those pictures. [3256]

Mr. Maclean: The Government condemn the irresponsible use of closed circuit television footage for commercial gain. We strongly recommend that all CCTV systems adopt locally developed codes of practice which specify who has access to the images that they capture and for what purpose. Most public CCTV systems have done so. All schemes receiving Government funding for CCTV are required to put in place such codes as a condition of grant. The Home Office guidance booklet, "CCTV—Looking Out For You", contains advice on how to adopt a code of practice and the issues that it should cover.

Racially Motivated Crime

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of racially motivated crimes reported during 1994; and how many led to *(a)* prosecution and *(b)* conviction. [3650]

Mr. Maclean: Figures for the total number of racially motivated incidents recorded by the police are now collected on a financial year basis. The most recent figures available are those for 1993–94 which were given on 24 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *330*. The definition of a racial incident includes any incident reported to the police which contains any allegation of racial motivation, whether a crime or not. Information about prosecutions and convictions is not collated nationally.

The figures for 1994–95 should be available shortly.

Irish Republic Citizens

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the rights given to citizens of the Irish Republic in the United Kingdom that are not given to the citizens of other countries; and which of these rights are reciprocated by the Republic of Ireland for United Kingdom citizens. [3526]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were on remand in England and Wales in each year since 1990. [3509]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 5 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, how many prisoners were on remand in England and Wales in each year since 1990.

The information is contained in Table one of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, issue 8/95 'The Prison Population in 1994'. A copy of the bulletin is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of prisoners on remand were subsequently acquitted in the last year for which figures are available; [3511]

(2) what percentage of defendants on bail were subsequently acquitted during the last year. [3518]

Mr. Maclean: The latest available figures are published in tables 8.6, 8.9 and 8.10 of the 1994 issue of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", Cm 3010. The figures quoted in these tables should be taken as broad estimates only, due to data quality problems.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the time prisoners spend on remand awaiting trial. [3523]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are anxious to ensure that prisoners spend as little time as possible on remand awaiting trial. The number of cases awaiting disposal at the Crown court has been reduced this year through increased numbers of sitting days. Plea and directions hearings, which encourage active case management by the judiciary, are being introduced through a rolling programme and will extend to all Crown court centres in England and Wales by early next year. The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill, introduced in another place on 27 November, contains provision to invite a defendant to indicate his plea before magistrates decide whether the trial should proceed in the magistrates court or the Crown court. This, together with the sentence discount provisions enacted in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, should enable a greater proportion of appropriate business to be retained in the magistrates courts and thereby reduce delay.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the change in the overall prison population between 1992 and 1994 was the result of changes in the numbers of remand prisoners. [3510]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Pearson to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 5 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office to reply to your recent Question asking, what percentage of the change in the overall prison population between 1992 and 1994 was the result of changes in the numbers of remand prisoners.

The information on the prison population by type of prisoner is contained in Table one of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, issue 8/95 'The Prison Population in 1994', a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Between 1992 and 1994, the prison population increased by 2,977 from 45,817 to 48,794. During the same period, the remand population rose by 2,267 from 10,090 in 1992 to 12,357 in 1994. This amounted to 76 per cent of the rise in the total population.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time a prisoner serves on remand; and what the average length of time was in each year since 1990. [3512]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 5 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking about the average length of time a prisoner serves on remand; and what the average length of time was in each year since 1990.

Information for the years 1990 to 1993 is given in Table 2.1 of Prison Statistics, England and Wales 1993 (Cm 2893), a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Estimates for 1994 are given in the attached table.

Estimated average time spent in custody for remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in 1994[1] by sex:

Type of custody	*Estimated average number of days in custody[2]* *Male*	*Female*
Untried[3]	59	44
Convicted[4]	34	29

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Estimated from number of receptions and average population in 1994.

[3] Time spent in custody before conviction.

[4] Time spent in custody after conviction before sentence.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the total number of defendants in each ethnic category who were *(a)* bailed by magistrates courts or Crown courts during (i) 1989 and (ii) 1994 and (b) remanded in custody during (iii) 1989 and (iv) 1994. [3648]

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data held centrally by my Department does not identify the ethnic origin of those bailed or remanded in custody. Information, which is available only for the last five years, on the ethnic group of prison receptions on remand is given in the tables.

Prison remand receptions by ethnic origin[1] England and Wales 1990

Year	Total	White	West Indian, Guyanese, African	Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi	Chinese, Arab, mixed origin	Unrecorded
1990	60,174	50,471	6,171	1,354	1,331	847

[1] A new classification for ethnic origin was introduced in 1992. It is congruent with that used for the census of population. Data for 1990 is shown separately as the classification prior to 1992 is not directly comparable with that in later years.

Prison remand receptions by ethnic origin[1], England and Wales 1994[2]

Year	Total	White	Black	South Asian	Chinese and other Asian	Unrecorded
1994[2]	68,414	57,420	7,937	1,512	553	992

[1] A new classification for ethnic origin was introduced in 1992. It is congruent with that used for the census of population. Data for 1990 is shown separately as the classification prior to 1992 is not directly comparable with that in later years.

[2] Provisional figures.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of defendants on bail committed an offence while on bail during the last year. [3517]

Mr. Maclean: Statistics on offending on bail are not collected at present on a national basis. However, a review of more localised studies was given in Home Office Research Paper No. 65 "Offending while on bail: a survey of recent studies". More up-to-date figures are given in a 1994 report of the Hampshire police and probation service and show that 14 per cent. of persons given bail committed an offence during a period of police or court bail.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail hostels have closed since the beginning of 1994. [3519]

Mr. Sackville: Twelve.

Health and Safety Offences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration has been given to setting up special police units to deal with health and safety crime; and if he will make a statement. [3611]

Mr. Maclean: The primary responsibility for the enforcement of health and safety legislation rests with the Health and Safety Executive. Procedures already exist for liaison between HSE, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service where appropriate.

The introduction of specialised police units would be an operational matter for chief officers of police.

Probation Orders

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of offenders who were supervised by the probation service on statutory orders in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995; and how many belonged to an ethnic minority. [3661]

Mr. Maclean: The readily available information relates to commencements. There is no information available for 1989 and the information relating to 1993 was published in the 1993 issue of "Probation Statistics England and Wales", tables 15.1—15.6 1994–95, Information will be published in "Probation Statistics England and Wales 1994" in the new year.

Gaming Act Reform

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish his consultation paper on the reform of the Gaming Act. [3697]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are reviewing the present controls on bingo clubs and casinos as part of the Government's deregulation initiative. The review is well advanced and we hope to consult on proposals soon.

Stop and Search

Ms Janet Anderson : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were stopped and searched by (1) the Metropolitan police and (2) all other police forces in England and Wales; and, of these, how many were *(a)* arrested, *(b)* cautioned, *(c)* charged and *(d)* convicted in (i) 1989 and (ii) 1994, broken down by ethnic background and gender. [3688]

Mr. Maclean: The available information on persons stopped and searched and the number of arrests resulting is published annually in table 1 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Operation of certain police powers under PACE", copies of which are in the Library.

No information is available centrally on the number of persons cautioned, charged or convicted, or on their gender.

Details of the ethnic group of those stopped and searched during 1993–94 was given in the reply to a question from the hon. Member for Tottenham

(Mr. Grant) on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *844*. Similar statistics for 1994–95 should be available shortly.

Ethnic Minority Prisoners

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many defendants in each ethnic category were sentenced to a period of custody; and what percentage of each group were sentenced without a pre-sentence report in 1994. [3649]

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data held centrally by my Department does not identify the ethnic origin of those sentenced, nor whether a pre-sentence report was prepared.

Hong Kong (Key Person Scheme)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by profession or civil service department the number of heads of household in Hong Kong who have applied for right of abode status in the United Kingdom under the 50,000 key person scheme. [3506]

Mr. Kirkhope: Following is the breakdown of principal beneficiary applications as at 26 November 1995. In cases not yet decided, applicants may be allocated to a more appropriate class.

	Applications
Entrepreneurs class	903
Sensitive service class	3,238
Disciplined service class:	
Correctional services department	1,396
Custom and excise service	813
Fire service department	1,822
Immigration service	1,468
Independent commission against corruption	258
Government flying service	23
Royal Hong Kong Police	5,325
Royal Hong Kong military services corps	840
Royal Hong Kong navy	186
General occupational class:	
Managers and administrators	25,046
Business professionals	2,972
Business associate professionals	12,086
Accountants and auditors	5,249
Accounting associate professionals	1,849
Engineers and related professionals	7,088
Architects, planners and surveyors	2,058
Engineering associate professionals	6,628
Information science professionals	4,541
News editors and journalists	702
Medical doctors	2,630
Physical and life science professionals	396
Nurses and midwives	4,034
Other medical professionals	818
Health associate professionals	1,777
Legal professionals	1,867
Legal associate professionals	693
Teaching professionals (post-secondary)	1,110
Educational administrators	961
Other teaching personnel	7,806
Computer equipment controllers	347
Life science technicians	78
Physical science technicians	241
Social work professionals	900
Statistical assistants	202
Translators and interpreters	417
Total	108,768

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how may heads of household in Hong Kong have applied for right of abode status in the United Kingdom under the scheme offering 50,000 full British passports to key officials in the colony. [3503]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 26 November this year, 108,768 principal beneficiary applications had been received. This figure includes invalid, ineligible and withdrawn applications and repeat applications from some of those unsuccessful in the first tranche of the scheme.

Vehicle Removal Charges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to regulate charges for those vehicle towing services formerly provided by the police. [3655]

Mr. Maclean: There are no plans to set specific charges for vehicle recovery by garage operators who carry out this function under contract schemes which are run by managing agents on behalf of certain police forces.

A statutory charge for the removal of vehicles, currently £105, is prescribed under the Removal, Storage and Disposal of Vehicles (Prescribed Sums and Charges etc.,) (Amendment) Regulations 1993. The police are entitled to charge this sum for the removal of any vehicle which is parked in breach of local traffic regulation orders, or which is causing an obstruction or danger, or which is broken down or abandoned without lawful authority.

Police Funding

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the additional cash for police authorities announced in the Budget he estimates will be taken up with *(a)* pension costs, *(b)* pay increases and *(c)* additional recruitment of police officers and their training. [4059]

Mr. Maclean: The extra provision for police authorities announced in the provisional settlement for 1996–97 includes *(a)* £79.9 million for the estimated increase in police pension costs between 1995–96 and 1996–97; *(b)* £123.6 million for the estimated requirement to fund pay increases and *(c)* £20 million to enable the police service to employ 1,000 additional constables by the end of 1996–97.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the cash needed to meet the pension costs for police authorities in England and Wales in respect of police officers and retired police officers in 1996–97 additional to those of *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1994–95. [4058]

Mr. Maclean: The additional provision required to fund police pension costs estimated by the Government Actuary's Department in 1996–97 is *(a)* £79.9 million more than the equivalent estimate for 1995–96 and *(b)* £149.1 million more than for 1994–95.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the money for additional recruiting of police officers is *(a)* not treated as a separate item and *(b)* subsumed in the increase in total police spending of around 4 per cent. shown in Home Office press release 267/95 of 28 November. [4033]

Mr. Maclean: Home Office press release 267/95 of 28 November dealt with overall planned expenditure for Home Office services announced as part of the Chancellor's unified Budget. Section 3 of the draft Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1996–97, which my right hon. and learned Friend placed in the Library on 30 November, sets out the proposed allocation of police grant, including the additional funding for extra police officers.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will give the cost in man-hours and money for promoting the Asylum and Immigration Bill in the current Session. [4075]

Miss Widdecombe: At a rough estimate, work on the Bill is likely to take up 8,000 man-hours in the Home Office, at a cost of £210,000. This does not include work on the Bill by other interested Departments.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to this letter of 6 November, ref. 20807/95. [4110]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have written to the hon. Member today.

Crime Prevention Agency

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the new Crime Prevention Agency announced in his speech of 12 October. [4677]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend announced the details of the new Crime Prevention Agency on 22 November. The agency will subsume the National Board for Crime Prevention, the Home Office crime prevention unit and the Home Office crime prevention centre.

The work of the agency will be overseen by an agency board which will be an advisory non-departmental public body. I will chair the agency board.

Other members of the agency board are:

Jack Acton: Director, Home Office Crime Prevention Centre

Peter Batchelor: Chair, Vehicle Crime Prevention Group; formerly Executive Director Sales and Marketing, Vauxhall Motors

Ken Pease: Professor of Criminology, University of Huddersfield

David Quarmby: Chair, Retail Action Group for Crime Prevention; Joint Managing Director J. Sainsbury plc

Nick Ross: Broadcaster and journalist

John Stevens: Chief Constable, Northumbria Police: Chair, Association of Chief Police Officers Crime Prevention Sub-Committee

Anthony Tisdale: Councillor and Chair, Surrey Police Authority

Nigel Whiskin: Chief Executive, Crime Concern.

The terms of reference of the agency board are as follows:

The board is appointed by my right hon. and learned Friend and will:

(i) act as the managing board for the Home Office crime prevention unit and the Home Office crime prevention centre;

(ii) co-ordinate the activities of all the key players in crime prevention by:

ensuring their representation on the board; developing stronger links between each other; and maintaining links with other organisations;

(iii) initiate, develop and promote innovative ideas to help prevent crime and reduce the fear of crime by:

following up new research;

identifying good practice; and

ensuring guidance and advice is available;

(iv) work with the police, local authorities, business, industry, the voluntary sector, the community and other to target specific types of crime or crime situations by:

setting up groups to examine specific issues, such as the retail group and the vehicle crime group,

supporting other groups with similar aims;

(v) ensure that all sections of the community have the opportunity to be involved in crime prevention by:

encouraging the spread of partnerships such as neighbourhood watch, street watch, etc;

promoting youth involvement; and

publicising effective community activity;

(vi) offer advice to Ministers on the major strategic and policy implications relating to these issues and on other effective crime prevention strategies.

CCTV Challenge Competition

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to announce a further closed circuit television challenge competition. [4678]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend announced a new closed circuit television challenge competition on 22 November. A total of £15 million has been made available in the financial year 1996–97 to fund CCTV schemes in England and Wales. Partnerships are invited to bid for a share of this money. A copy of the bidding guidance, which gives information on how to make a bid and details of the criteria by which the bids will be assessed, has been placed in the Library. Copies have also been sent to chief constables, local authorities, police authorities and others who have expressed an interest. The closing date for bids is 29 March 1996.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce fixed-time appointments for asylum applicants attending interviews at the asylum screening unit; what is the average waiting time for persons attending for interviews at the asylum screening unit; and what proportion of them have to wait more than *(a)* one hour, *(b)* two hours, *(c)* three hours and *(d)* four hours. [3270]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* There are no plans to introduce fixed-time appointments for asylum applicants attending interviews at the asylum screening unit. Information about average waiting times is not available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collected on those countries which operate white lists of countries excluded for the purpose of asylum seekers and refugee status; if he will publish details of the lists operated by other EC countries; what discussions he has held with his EC counterparts about the effectiveness of such lists and their harmonisation throughout the EC; what parliamentary procedures he intends to use to allow debate and decision on deletion from and addition to such lists; and if he will make a statement. [3683]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* Comprehensive information is not available, but our understanding is that Denmark, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands are among the European Union countries which operate procedures based on designation of countries of origin in which there is, in general terms, no serious risk of persecution. Our regular contacts with counterparts from these countries support our view that a designation power would improve our asylum procedures. There are no proposals to harmonise designation lists in the European Union.

Under clause 1 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, designation orders would be laid before Parliament under the negative resolution procedure. The list of designated countries would be subject to amendment by the same procedure.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (i) cases were lodged with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each of the last three years and (ii) staff were employed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board during each of the last three years; and what was *(a)* the average time taken to complete each case and *(b)* the average time taken to respond to an initial application. [3740]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The latest published figures are given in the board's third annual report, Cm 2849, copies of which are held in the Library. Paragraph 3.1 shows that 61,400 applications were received in 1991–92, 65,977 in 1992–93 and 73,473 in 1993–94. Paragraph 3.12 gives information about the time taken to resolve cases and shows, by way of example, that 49 per cent., 57 per cent., and 70 per cent. of cases were resolved within 12 months in the three years respectively. Similar data for 1994–95 will be published shortly.

The average staff complement in the three years was 380, 387 and 430, and currently stands at 480. The board advises that historical data on the time taken to acknowledge initial applications is not available, but the current average is six days.

British Transport Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further discussions his Department has had with the Department of Transport on extending the jurisdiction of the British Transport police; what conclusions were reached; and if he will make a statement. [2887]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 787.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 December 1995

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Ferranti/ISC

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has concerning the progress of inquiries, indictments and prosecutions in the United States of America in cases concerning the collapse of Ferranti/ISC. [4242]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office has been informed by the authorities in the USA that James Guerin was sentenced on 10 June 1992 to 15 years in prison. Since that date six other defendants have entered guilty pleas but have yet to be sentenced. Five of those defendants have entered co-operation agreements with the US Government in relation to a trial currently scheduled to commence in January 1996. Other defendants remain outside the jurisdiction of the US courts.

Crown Prosecution Service

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Attorney-General, what was the total staff establishment of the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales by each grade; and how many *(a)* in total and *(b)* from each grade were from an ethnic minority in (i) 1989 and (ii) 1995. [3651]

The Solicitor-General: Information of the ethnic origin of Crown Prosecution Service staff in each grade is not available for 1989. The earliest available comprehensive breakdown of staff in post by grade and ethnic origin is August 1991, following the Department's first ethnic monitoring survey of all staff. The tables therefore provide the total staff establishment and numbers of ethnic minority staff in each grades as at (i) 31 August 1991 and (ii) 30 September 1995.

(i) Crown Prosecution Service
Departmental staff in post by grade and ethnic origin

			White		*Ethnic minorities*		
Grade	*Total staff*	*Total returns*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage return*
Grade 1 to 6	254	213	209	98.1	4	1.9	83.9
Grade 7	36	26	26	100.0	0	0.0	72.2
PCP	538	351	340	96.9	11	3.1	65.2
SCP/SLA	587	345	324	93.9	21	6.1	58.8
CP	410	225	207	92.0	18	8.0	54.9
SEO/SIO	116	90	90	100.0	0	0.0	77.6
HEO/LIB	310	249	244	98.0	5	2.0	80.3
LTR	116	34	30	88.2	4	11.8	29.3
EO/SPS/TYPM/SM3	1,189	883	848	96.0	35	4.0	74.3
AO/PS/SGB1	1,276	925	842	91.0	83	9.0	72.5
AA/TYP/SGB2	814	577	525	91.0	52	9.0	70.9
Total	5,646	3,918	3,685	94.1	233	5.9	69.4

1. The figures for each grade includes staff on temporary promotion.
2. The figures for grade 1 to 6 were not broken down by individual grades in 1991.

(ii) Crown Prosecution Service
Departmental staff in post by grade and ethnic origin

30 September 1995

			White		*Ethnic minorities*		
Grade	*Total staff*	*Total returns*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage return*
Grade 1	1	1	1	100.0	0	0.0	100.0
Grade 3	5	5	5	100.0	0	0.0	100.0
Grade 4	13	13	13	100.0	0	0.0	100.0
Grade 5	42	41	40	97.6	1	2.4	97.6
Grade 6	187	175	172	98.3	3	1.7	93.6
Grade 7	44	39	38	97.4	1	2.6	88.6
PCP	545	459	445	96.9	14	3.1	84.2
SCP/SLA	1,255	1,040	950	91.3	90	8.7	82.9
CP	233	203	180	88.7	23	11.3	87.1
SEO/SLA	105	97	97	100.0	0	0.0	92.4
HEO/LIB	297	264	258	97.7	6	2.3	88.9
LTR	102	67	62	92.5	5	7.5	65.7
EO/SPS/TYPM/SM3	1,327	1,207	1,130	93.6	77	6.4	91.0
AO/PS/SGB1	1,430	1,260	1,130	89.7	130	10.3	88.1
AO/TYP/SGB2	964	767	692	90.2	75	9.8	79.6
Total	6,550	5,638	5,213	92.5	425	7.5	86.1

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3838]

The Attorney-General: The Departments for which I am responsible have no capital expenditure included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year. Use of the PFI is considered for projects where appropriate. It is not possible to say how much expenditure is likely to be financed under the PFI over the next five years.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3805]

The Attorney-General: To date, the Law Officers' departments have not used the private finance initiative for the funding of any schemes. However, use of the PFI is being considered for future projects where appropriate.

PRIME MINISTER

Swiss Visit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister what was *(a)* the date and *(b)* the purpose of each visit paid by his predecessor to Switzerland between 1979 and 1990; and if he will list the engagements undertaken. [4361]

The Prime Minister: My predecessor has visited Switzerland on an official basis only once. She paid the first ever official visit to Switzerland by a British Prime Minister in office on 20–21 September 1990. The purpose of the visit was to discuss Swiss relations with the European Community, European Security Architecture and the Gulf crisis.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what representations he has received from the Government of the United States concerning the Scott inquiry; [4360]

(2) what representations either written or oral he has received from the Government of Switzerland concerning the Scott inquiry; [4362]

(3) what representations he has received from the Government of Belgium, either orally or in writing, concerning the Scott inquiry. [4243]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

HEALTH

Influenza Vaccine

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many flu vaccinations have been given *(a)* so far this year and *(b)* in the same period last year. [3767]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of influenza vaccinations given at any point of time is not available. The total number of doses of influenza vaccine distributed so far this influenza season is just over 6 million. Comparable data for the previous year are not available, but 6.1 million doses were eventually distributed by the end of the 1994–95 influenza season.

Special Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the cost of care in medium secure units for patients discharged from special hospitals; and what are the arrangements for the financing of this continuing care; [356]

(2) how many patients from special hospitals are expected to be discharged in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997; and how many of those are Birmingham residents; [3534]

(3) what impact the discharge of patients from special hospitals will have on the availability of places at Reaside medium secure unit. [3535]

Mr. Bowis: District health authorities are responsible for meeting the costs of care for special hospital patients who require continuing health care including care in conditions of medium security. The costs of such care will depend on the facilities provided and the clinical needs of the patient.

Information on the district of residence of special hospital patients and the anticipated number of discharges from the three special hospitals is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Special Hospitals Service Authority which is responsible for managing the special hospitals, about these matters.

The impact of special hospital discharges on medium secure units is a matter for consideration by the managers of each unit and the health authorities that purchase its services.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority region the number of *(a)* deaths from and *(b)* suspected cases of Creutzfeldt Jakob disease expected in each of the last five years. [3663]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of deaths and referrals in each regional health authority from 1 May 1990 to 30 November 1995 will be placed in the Library.

Hepatitis C

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned *(b)* evaluated as to the effectiveness of alpha-interferon in the treatment of hepatitis C. [3760]

Mr. Horam: The national health service standing group on health technology has identified the evaluation of the use of alpha-interferon in the treatment of hepatitis C as a top priority for research. The standing group's recommendations include work to assess the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of alpha-interferon in the early treatment of hepatitis C, and its use in the prevention of relapse. In addition the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, is currently considering a proposal for research on one particular aspect of the treatment of hepatitis C. My Department is also considering further research priorities relating to hepatitis C.

Meningitis

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have resulted from meningitis in each health district of West Yorkshire in each year since 1990. [3696]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table.

The deaths data up to 1992 for England and Wales represent the number of deaths registered for each year while deaths from 1993 represent the number of deaths which occurred in each year. Also, new procedures for coding cause of death from 1993, and the absence of medical inquiries, mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with earlier years. For most conditions however, including all meningitis, these effects are small. More details may be found in "OPCS Series DH2" for 1993, which was published in October 1995; copies of which are available in the Library.

Deaths from meningitis in each local authority district in West Yorkshire, 1990–1994

	Bradford	*Calderdale*	*Kirklees*	*Leeds*	*Wakefield*
1990	3	1	3	4	0
1991	4	3	3	10	3
1992	8	1	2	5	3
1993	7	1	3	7	2
1994	5	3	3	2	1

Information is not available at district health authority level. (ICD codes for Meningitis are 013.0, 036.0, 047.0, 047.1, 047.8, 047.9, 049.0, 049.1, 053.0, 0.72.1, 091,8, 094.2, 320, 322).

Prescriptions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what fee appliance contractors get for the provision of an appliance under the NHS; what fee a pharmacist gets for the provision of a similar appliance under NHS provision; what consideration has been given to altering the system; and if he will make a statement. [3612]

Mr. Malone: Appliance contractors are paid between 15.8 per cent. and 25 per cent. of the cost of the appliance depending on the volume dispensed plus a fee of between 2p and 78p depending of the type of appliance. Pharmacy contractors are paid a basic fee of either 85p or 94.6p plus and additional fee of between 69p and £1.97, according to the type of appliance and its cost. Pharmacy contractors can also be paid a professional allowance once they reach a monthly threshold of prescriptions dispensed and an additional fee for every expensive items. The Department keeps these systems of payment under review.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the tobacco industry on advertising by means of *(a)* press advertising, *(b)* outdoors (billboard) advertising, *(c)* shop front and point of sale advertising and *(d)* direct mail in 1994–95. [3981]

Mr. Horam: Information provided by the tobacco industry to assist in monitoring the voluntary agreement on tobacco products advertising and promotion is commercial in confidence.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into the effects of the voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. [3978]

Mr. Horam: The Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Adverting and Sponsorship—COMATAS—was established to monitor both the voluntary agreement on tobacco products' advertising and promotion and the voluntary agreement on sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies in the United Kingdom. This committee reports annually on the progress and operation of the voluntary agreements. The eighth report of COMATAS was published on 18 July this year, and copies are available in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the documents agreeing the type and level of service to be provided by the healthcare group under the PFI to South Buckinghamshire NHS trust. [4082]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 4 December at columns *43–44*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3827]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (iii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3815]

Mr. Horam: The private finance initiative will further develop our excellent record of co-operation with the private sector and ensure new national health service capital schemes are provided promptly and run efficiently, for the benefit of all NHS patients. Before any PFI scheme with significant expenditure consequences for the NHS is approved, a business case is produced a demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of the proposal and assess the public spending implications. Approval to PFI schemes is given only if the business case demonstrates that a PFI approach increases the cost-effectiveness of the scheme for the NHS and if any expenditure implications are affordable to NHS purchasers. The specific information requested is not available centrally.

Oral Contraceptives

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the difference in cost to the NHS between the licensed morning-after pill and the pharmacologically equivalent oral contraceptive; and if he will make a statement. [4106]

Mr. Malone: Information on the prices of oral contraceptives, including the morning-after pill, is in the latest edition of "British National Formulary", copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many executive directors of NHS trusts received annual salaries of more than £90,000 and £100,000 in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; and if he will list each trust giving an annual salary of more than £100,000 to its executive directors in each of these years. [4458]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 28 November at column *604*.

Chiropody

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when an announcement will be made regarding access by state registered chiropodists to a restricted group of prescription only medicines, following the submission of proposals by the chiropodists' board of the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine earlier this year. [3279]

Mr. Bowis: This proposal is currently being considered.

Draft Medicines Advice Leaflet "MAL 8"

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what date the revised medicines advice leaflet, "MAL 8" draft 3, dated 30 October, was forwarded to *(a)* the British Herbal Medicine Association and *(b)* the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy; and if he will make a statement on the treatment of these organisations in respect of his policy regarding consultation with the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy; [4114]

(2) if he will list all those organisations which have so far been consulted about the medicines advice leaflet, "MAL 8", draft 3, dated 30 October; and if he will list the dates of meetings which officials of his Department have had with each of those organisations. [4115]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency—MCA—has discussed the contents of Leaflet MAL 8 with the Aromatherapy Trades Council—ATC—the British Herbal Manufacturers' Association—BHMA—the Cosmetic Toiletry and Perfumery Association—CTPA—the Council for Responsible Nutrition—CRN—the Health Food Manufacturers' Association—HFMA—the Natural Medicines Association UK Ltd.—NMA—and the Proprietary Association of Great Britain—PAGB.

The MCA met the ATC, BHMA, CTPA, HFMA, NMA and PAGB on 6 September and again, with the exception of the CTPA, on 19 September. The agency met the CRN on 5 October, and the HFMA for a third time on 21 November.

"MAL 8" provides non-statutory guidance to industry and trade associations on whether a product is medicinal. The draft of "MAL 8" dated 30 October was sent on 6 November to the BHMA and other manufacturers' trade associations. It was not sent to the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy—SPNT—or to other non-manufacturing bodies. The SPNT is amongst those organisations which would be consulted by the MCA on statutory issues.

Road Traffic Act Charges

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the procedure for trusts being reimbursed for the treatment of patients injured in road traffic accidents. [4343]

Mr. Horam: The level of charges is periodically reviewed.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of claims made by all NHS hospitals in real terms under section 157 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 in each of the last five years; and what estimate he has made of the relationship between the amount claimed and the amount that could be claimed if all claims were submitted by every trust. [4341]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of claims is not available centrally. All national health service hospitals are empowered to collect charges under section 157 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Intensive Care Units

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of high dependency units and intensive care units in each NHS region in each of the last five years. [4340]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Colostomy Bags

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to restrict the present list of colostomy bags available on the NHS or their availability on the NHS or their availability free of charge to patients. [4347]

Mr. Malone: None. People who have a permanent fistula are exempt from prescription charges, and this includes people who use colostomy bags.

Road Traffic Accidents

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost to the NHS in each of the last five years of treating patients with injuries resulting from road traffic accidents. [4342]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in each of the last five years for injuries caused by road traffic accidents. [4344]

Mr. Horam: The information available centrally is shown in the table. This information covers only admissions to hospital.

External cause of admission—motor vehicle traffic accidents (Code E810-E819)

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Ordinary admissions	36,214	34,532	26,229	30,056	29,783
Day cases	258	288	221	237	325

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.

Ultrasound

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of hospitals do not use ultrasound scans while carrying out amniocentesis on pregnant women. [4338]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the miscarriage risk of amniocentesis *(a)* with and *(b)* without ultrasound; and if he will make a statement. [4339]

Mr. Horam: The Department has not made any estimates of the miscarriage risk with or without ultrasound of amniocentesis.

This is a clinical matter and as such a matter for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. The Department of Health has asked the RCOG to consider this issue.

Health Information Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the issue of HSG(92)91 to health authorities; and what information is to be collated by this guidance; [4232]

(2) what information is retained by his Department in respect of HSG(92)91; [4233]

(3) if the appropriate bodies within the national health service have supplied the information they are obliged to under HSG(92)91; and what action his Department has taken in respect of those authorities not complying with this guidance. [4234]

Mr. Horam: HSG(92)21, issued in March 1992, required regional health authorities to establish a health information service for the public in their region from 1 April 1992, accessible by an 0345 telephone line. In January 1993, these regional services became the national health information service, accessible by the public through an 0800 telephone line. All regional health authorities established a service and continue to run them as required by the guidelines.

The health information service is required to provide information about local services, patients charter standards, waiting times, common diseases and conditions, how to complain about NHS services and maintaining and improving health.

The Department holds information about the cost of and numbers of calls to the health information service.

Revised guidelines, HSG(95)44, issued on 18 September 1995, supersede HSG(92)21 and should be implemented by health authorities from April 1996.

Unregistrable Children's Homes

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to representatives of placing local authorities about communicating concerns about poor practice in unregistrable children's homes to area local authorities. [4283]

Mr. Bowis: LAC(93)16, copies of which are available in the Library, advises that authorities placing children in homes in a different area must inform the geographical authority about the placement and that authority should inform themselves about the welfare of those children.

The guidance "Working Together Under the Children Act 1989" issues to local authorities advises that where abuse by a member of staff in a children's home is suspected the local social services department should be informed immediately.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4235]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table:

	Total number of visits	*Total number of visits abroad*	*Visits abroad as a percentage of total number of visits*
Secretary of State for Health	14	Nil	—
Minister of State for Health: Mr Malone	24	1	4.2
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State: Mr. Sackville/Mr. Horam	27	1	3.7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State: Mr. Bowis OBE	32	1	3.1
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State: Baroness Cumberlege CBE	35	Nil	—

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total amount paid in legal aid; what was the total amount of *(a)* individual recipients and *(b)* other recipients in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [4039]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Unfortunately, in the time available, it has not proved possible to collate the required data. I shall write to the hon. and learned Member as soon as possible.

Bailiffs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will introduce powers to prevent bailiffs from seizing assets in excess of 1000 per cent. of the original debt. [3467]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A debtor aggrieved by irregularity in the execution of a warrant, which can include excessive seizure, has a right to sue for damages. Further regulation of bailiffs is being considered in the context of the review of the organisation and management of civil enforcement agents.

Financial Penalties (Enforcement)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the working group on the enforcement of financial penalties was set up by his Department; what were its terms of reference; and who constitutes the membership. [3431]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The first meeting of the working group on the enforcement of financial penalties was on 19 May 1995. Its terms of reference are urgently to identify ways of improving the enforcement of financial penalties, including fines, compensation orders and confiscation orders, so as to reduce the level of financial penalties in arrears and the level of write-offs, and in particular: to establish the true level and nature of financial penalties in arrears; to promote the identification and wider application of "good practice" in the enforcement of financial penalties, taking note as appropriate of the work of the inspectorate in this area; to recommend procedural, administrative or legislative changes which would improve the enforcement of financial penalties; and to conduct or sponsor further research, if necessary, into the enforcement of financial penalties.

The membership is as specified in the written answer of 19 July 1995, *Official Report,* column *1300,* except for the addition since that date of a representative of the metropolitan stipendiary magistrates.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions a warrant of distress under section 76 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 was applied for in the case of those defendants who were jailed for fine default during 1994. [3439]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions an application was made to the High Court or county court for enforcement under section 87 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, in cases of those defendants who were jailed for fine default during 1994. [3440]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3816]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: For the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service and the Public Trust Office, no such schemes have yet been approved.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current year and the next five financial years. [3839]

Mr. Evans: For the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service and the Public Trust Office, it is forecast that the capital expenditure to be sought from the private sector within the private finance initiative will be nil in 1995–96, £10 million in 1996–97, £29 million in 1997–98, £35 million in 1998–99, £27 million in 1999–2000 and £28 million in 2000–01. There are also 49 magistrates' court building schemes planned for the next five financial years, for which local authorities will need to seek private finance.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EU Agriculture Council

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 29 and 30 November; and if he will make a statement. [4847]

Mr. Hogg: This meeting of the Council took no formal decisions.

The Council again considered the Commission's proposal to alter the calculation of the additional set-aside that farmers are required to make, in the following year, when the regional base area for arable crops has been exceeded. Other member states were prepared to accept a package of amendments to the proposal, one of which was that additional set-aside of less than 1 per cent., should not apply in 1996. I made clear that I did not support this element, because it would illogically discriminate against farmers in areas where the additional requirement fell just the other side of the line.

There was a further discussion of the Commission's proposal for changes to the support system for fruit and vegetables. The Council reached no conclusions and will return to the subject at its next meeting.

In response to questions the Agriculture Commissioner, Mr. Fischler, confirmed that he intended to submit his report on the treatment of veal calves in time for the Council's next meeting.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the certificate of competence scheme for the purchase of organophosphorus sheep dips. [4848]

Mrs. Browning: Following advice from the Veterinary Products Committee, new restrictions on the sale of organophosphorus sheep dips were introduced in 1994. A requirement that such dips may be purchased only by persons holding, or employing someone who holds, a certificate of competence in their use came fully into effect on 1 April this year. I have now set in hand a review to assess the effectiveness of the scheme. The views of a wide range of interests are currently being sought on this land and other aspects of the use of organophosphorus sheep dips. A copy of the consultation letter and circulation list is being placed in the Library of the House.

The Veterinary Products Committee will be asked to review the results of the consultation and I expect to receive the further advice of the VPC early next year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part-time and (ii) full-time: and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the Agricultural Wages Board, (2) the Wine Standards Board, (3) the plant health and seeds inspectorate, (4) the sea fisheries inspectorate, (5) the Animal Health Act inspectors and veterinary inspectorate, (6) the egg marketing inspectorate, (7) the fatstock inspectorate, (8) the horticultural marketing inspectorate, (9) the terrestrial radiological inspectorate, (10) the fisheries radiological inspectorate, (11) the fisheries disease inspectorate and (12) the milk and dairies inspection under ADAS. [2752]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* The information is as follows:

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
1. Agricultural Wages Board			
Fees and charges	Nil	Nil	Nil
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£140,000	£175,000	£203,647
Staff numbers	Nil	Nil	Nil
The above running cost figures include the cost of secretarial support provided by MAFF of	£88,401	£94,103	£104,477

The board does not employ staff.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
2. The Wine Standards Board			
Fees and charges	Nil	Nil	Nil
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£159,000	£284,000	£296,000
Staff numbers	13	13	13

This body is an NDPB, outside the central running cost regime.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
3. The Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£717,793	£524,854	£530,638
Fines	Nil	£1,500	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£2,820,980	£3,166,293	£3,367,492
Staff numbers	115	110	105

Inspection charges aim to cover the relevant costs of the plant health and seeds inspectorate and other services which contribute to the chargeable services.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
4. The Sea Fisheries Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	Nil	Nil	Nil
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£2,215,000	£2,788,000	£2,864,000
Staff numbers	95	117	117

Records of fines imposed by the inspectorate are not readily accessible and in the time available it has not been possible to obtain the necessary details.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
5. The Animal Health Act Inspectors and Veterinary Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£1,674,897	£1,838,261	£1,492,415
Fines	n/a	n/a	n/a
MAFF contribution to running costs	£1,674,897	£1,838,261	£1,492,415
Staff numbers	88	76	48

The inspectorate has no powers to impose fines. The courts do this but in the time available it has not been possible to access the records. The question relates to animal health inspectors and the veterinary inspectorate. No structure of this nature exists in MAFF. Therefore, it is assumed the question refers to those parts of the "Animal Health and Veterinary Group" which carry out functions of a similar nature. Fees and charges are set to recover the full cost of the service.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
6. The Egg Marketing Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	Nil	Nil	Nil
Fines	£4,418	£11,680	£7,354
MAFF contribution to running costs	£1,450,000	£1,470,000	£1,100,000
Staff numbers	35	35	37

Fines are administered by courts as the Inspectorate has no powers to impose fines. In the time available it has not been possible to access the relevant records.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
7. The Fatstock Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£494,547	£458,097	£390,987
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£428,314	£481,276	£480,069
Staff numbers	12	12	10

No fines are imposed. The Intervention Board Executive Agency commissions the work. Fees and charges aim to achieve full cost recovery.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
8. The Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£231,678	£252,000	£258,000
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£231,678	£252,000	£258,000
Staff numbers	3	4	6

The fees above are payments from the IBEA for enforcement work on CAP in England and Wales and work for the London commodity market exchange for potatoes. The fees above are set to recover the full cost of the Inspectorate.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
9. The Terrestrial Radiological Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£1,379,110	£1,526,663	£1,535,375
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£1,379,110	£1,526,663	£1,525,375
Staff numbers	12	11	13

Fees and charges are set to recover the full cost MAFF incurs in providing this service. Only Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, an agency of the DOE, can impose fines.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
10. The Fisheries Radiological Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£1,855,130	£2,274,724	£2,086,609
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£1,855,130	£2,274,724	£2,086,609
Staff numbers	32	35	35

Fees and charges are set to recover the full cost MAFF incurs in providing this service. Fines are imposed by HMIP as above.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
11. The Fish Disease Inspectorate			
Fees and charges	£2,111	£821	£606
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£534,638	£1,239,853	£1,326,678
Staff numbers	10	21	23

Fees relate to ad-hoc additional services for export certification as requested by the exporter. No charge is made for domestic or European Union certification. The inspectorate has no powers to impose fines. Staff figures in the respective years include 5, 12 and 13 administrators engaged in other parts of the fish health programme, including diagnostic work on import licensing.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
12. The Milk and Dairies Inspection under ADAS			
Fees and charges	£1,348,330	£1,267,496	£1,341,440
Fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
MAFF contribution to running costs	£1,804,560	£1,384,757	£1,392,426
Staff numbers	29	28	27

1. Staff numbers shown above include full-time and part-time employees (full-time equivalents).
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
3. Except where full cost recovery is indicated, "MAFF's contribution to running costs" shown above represents cash costs of pay and work related personal expenses.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that full consultation takes place on the draft animal transportation guidelines; and if he will make a statement. [3178]

Mrs. Browning: The consultation package on the new EU rules on animal welfare during transport was sent to some 600 interested organisations and individuals on 23 October. It was drawn up on the basis of preliminary discussions with the major interest groups; we are having further meetings and discussions as the consultation process progresses. Further public consultation will take place on the legal texts which will be drawn up after the present exercise concludes on 15 December.

Frogs' Legs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries of origin of frogs' legs imported by the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and if he will make a statement on the import by the United Kingdom of frogs' legs from Bangladesh in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994. [3204]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *225–26*. There were no imports of frogs' legs direct from Bangladesh into the UK during 1993 and 1994 or into the EU countries from which the UK imported frogs' legs in 1993 and 1994.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Spanish-owned but British-registered fishing vessels were prevented from fishing in United Kingdom waters under the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 now overturned by the European Court; what action was taken against those vessels; how many were subsequently *(a)* tied up in Britain, *(b)* tied up in Spain, *(c)* transferred to Spain to continue fishing and *(d)* sold to other owners; what investigation has he made into each vessel's claim for compensation; and what records each will be required to produce to substantiate that claim. [3689]

Mr. Baldry: Some 150 vessels were removed from the UK fishing vessel register in 1989. About 95 of these vessels have returned to the UK register or have had their licences placed on other UK-registered vessels. Detailed information is not held on the whereabouts of those vessels which have not returned to the UK register.

The issue of whether compensation is payable to vessels removed from the register is awaiting a ruling by the European Court of Justice. The Advocate General, in his opinion of 28 November, was of the view that national Governments are liable to pay damages to individuals where the legislature has passed a national law which is incompatible with Community law, provided that the obligation imposed on the state from which the individual's right is derived is clear. The Advocate General's opinion is not binding, however, and we must await the ruling of the court itself. If the court took a similar view to the Advocate General it would be for the UK courts to determine its application in individual cases.

Nitrate Levels (Lettuces)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the research by Aberdeen university on nitrate levels in lettuces. [3490]

Mrs. Browning: This study at Aberdeen university on the metabolism of dietary nitrate in man is funded by the Ministry and started earlier this year. Preliminary results indicate that nitrate in the diet, which derives mainly from leafy green vegetables, including lettuce, may play a significant role in protecting the body from infection by pathogenic organisms. A full assessment of this work will be made on its completion.

Monkfish

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to amend the United Kingdom quota for monkfish to take account of the practicalities of fishing in the English channel. [4013]

Mr. Baldry: For 1996 I propose to support an increase in the total allowable catch and hence the UK quota for monkfish in International Council for the Exploration of the Seas area VII. This includes the English channel.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3817]

Mr. Boswell: Several projects are currently being assessed for their potential but no schemes have so far been agreed under the private finance initiative.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3822]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97", which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

ENVIRONMENT

Health Care Waste

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will instruct his officials to hold discussions with the Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association in respect of the definition of hazardous health care wastes; [3549]

(2) if he will instruct his officials to have discussions with officials at the Department of Transport to ensure that the definition of infectious waste applied to the transport of infectious waste is identical to the definition of infectious waste applying to the disposal of infectious waste; [3550]

(3) if he will ensure that the waste management paper No. 23 to be implemented in 1996 will specify that hazardous health care waste should be interpreted to include only notifiable disease waste. [3548]

Mr. Clappison: I know that the Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association is concerned lest developments in the regulation fo health care wastes might damage its members' business. The association can at any time initiate new discussions with my Department. The association may also wish to comment on the Health and Safety Commission's draft revised version of the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994. Consultation among Departments would depend to some extent on the nature of the association's concerns. But since I wish to minimise inconvenience to business and to ensure proper arrangements for environmental protection and health and safety, my Department will in any case consult further with the Department of Transport. If alterations in the UK statute were the right course, that would be done in the normal way: waste management papers cannot alter statute or the rules of statutory interpretation.

Employment Medical Advisory Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff were employed in the employment medical advisory service of the Health and Safety Executive in *(a)* 1980 *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* each of the last five years. [3610]

Sir Paul Beresford: The table shows the number of staff employed by the employment medical advisory service of the Health and Safety Executive in *(a)* 1980 *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* each of the last five years.

Year
(1 April)

1980: 145.5

1985: 106.5

1991: 93.5

1992: 100

1993: 108

1994: 98.5

1995: 78.34

Village Halls

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the number of village halls in England *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* at present. [3947]

Mr. Clappison: I understand from Action with Communities in Rural England that the number of village halls in England was *(a)* 8,350 in 1979 and *(b)* 8,600 at present.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to increase the resources available to fund capital projects for charitable village halls. [3946]

Sir Paul Beresford: The White Paper on Rural England published by my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in October recognised the important role village halls play in small communities. My Department has recently agreed that the Rural Development Commission should increase to £1.15 million the amount it will make available to communities for the construction, renovation or improvement of village halls and community centres during 1995–96.

In many cases, funding for capital spending on village halls is administered by the local parish or town council. To fund capital spending a council may use any revenue funds or capital receipts that are available to it or may choose to borrow. The Local Government Act 1972 requires parish and town councils to apply for a specific borrowing approval from the Secretary of State. Borrowing approvals are subject to an overall national limit for each financial year. The national limit for England in 1995–96 was increased to £6.195 million. The national limit for 1996–97 will be announced next February.

Fur Imports

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to implement European regulation 3254/91; [3916]

(2) if he will list the countries which under the European Regulation 3254/91 are banned from importing certain furs to the European Union. [3917]

Mr. Clappison: Under EC regulation 3254/91, use of the leghold trap has been banned in the European Union since 1 January 1995. The ban on the import of certain furs was postponed until 1 January 1996. The college of Commissioners intends to submit proposals to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament seeking postponement of the import ban. We will consider these when we see the details.

Local Authority Attendance Allowances

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the percentage change in attendance allowances between 1995–96 and 1996–97 for each local authority in England; and for each local authority, which political party is in control. [3796]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department neither collects nor holds information in respect of attendance allowances set by local authorities.

Government Offices

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the budget for each regional Government office in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what is to be the budget for 1996–97. [4318]

Sir Paul Beresford: Detailed information about the budgets for the Government office in each region in 1994–95 and 1995–96 is provided in "GO MINIS 1", copies of which were placed in the Library in July. The budgets for 1996–97 have not yet been agreed.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of refugees who will be in need of accommodation following the implementation of the social security orders in January; and what provision he has made to provide emergency accommodation for such refugees. [4074]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* Following implementation of the Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Regulations 1995, asylum seekers who apply for asylum after entering the United Kingdom, and those whose applications for asylum have been refused, will have no entitlement to social security benefits and will be expected to make their own arrangements for accommodation while they are in this country. Asylum seekers who meet the statutory homelessness criteria will continue to be eligible for assistance under the homelessness legislation.

Under provisions in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, currently before Parliament, the Secretary of State would have the power to specify by order classes of persons requiring leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom who would not be eligible for assistance under the homelessness legislation, and classes of persons who would not be entitled to be allocated council accommodation. We intend to use these powers to align the entitlement to public housing assistance of persons who require leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, including asylum seekers, with their entitlement to social security benefits.

Persons who are granted refugee status, or exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom, will continue to be entitled to public housing assistance.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral statement on last year's local government finance 30 November, *Official Report*, columns *1333–39*, if the increased resources for education announced by her Majesty's Government will be included in the standard spending assessments for financial year 1996–97; and how many councils who are also local education authorities will have increases in their revenue support grant that will permit them to expand their annual resources on education without reducing the levels of other services provided in 1995–96 or increasing the amount of council time levied in that year. [4178]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* Education standard spending will increase by 4.5 per cent. in 1996–97. The provisional capping criteria will allow all authorities to increase their spending in line with the increase in their education SSAs. Aggregate external finance, which includes revenue support grant and is not hypothecated, will increase by 2.8 per cent., as against an increase in total standard spending, excluding the provision for local government reorganisation, of 3.1 per cent.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the likely reduction in private funding in housing through the private finance initiative as a result of the reduction in funding to housing associations announced in the recent Budget. [4334]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* An estimate of the private finance which is expected to be attracted by the Housing Corporation's approved development programme will be available in late January, when the programme has been finalised.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3825]

Sir Paul Beresford: The projected figures for the years 1995–96 to 1998–99 are set out in the table. Estimates for subsequent years are not yet available.

Year	*Forecast private finance (£ billion)*
1995–96	4.5
1996–97	6.0
1997–98	6.0
1998–99	5.0

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been wholly funded within the public sector. [3820]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment and its sponsored bodies attracted around £4 billion in private investment in support of its programmes in 1994–95 and expects to increase that figure in 1995–96. This will assist the delivery of a very large number of projects, most notably ones relating to housing, inner cities and regeneration. It is not practicable for the Department to collect detailed information on each project being advanced under private financing arrangements.

Yorkshire Water

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received over the last year from individuals and organisations expressing concerns about the ability of Yorkshire Water to supply water, and its investment programmes; and what action he or his officials have taken following such representations. [4214]

Mr. Clappison: A number of representations have been received over the past year from interested parties about various aspects of Yorkshire Water's activities. The Government have announced a review of the lessons to be learnt from this summer's drought and of the action to be taken to enable a sensible balance to be struck between customers' expectations and costs of providing the service and protecting the environment.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what dates in the last year he, other Ministerial colleagues or officials have met *(a)* representatives of Yorkshire Water and *(b)* the director of Ofwat or Ofwat officials to discuss matters relating to Yorkshire Water; [4215]

(2) how many representations and on what dates he has received from Ofwat over the past three years, about the ability of Yorkshire Water to supply water to all its customers during periods of drought; and on what dates he or his officials made contact with Yorkshire Water about such representations; and if he will make a statement. [4216]

Mr. Clappison: Ministers have met Yorkshire Water officials on several occasions over the year. There is frequent contact between officials and the Director General of Water Services and his officials. No representations have been made by Ofwat to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment about Yorkshire Water.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will establish an independent public inquiry into all aspects of Yorkshire Water; [4217]

(2) what plans he has for encouraging Yorkshire Water to invest more in infrastructure to enable it to move water within the region and to repair leaks and maintain pipes. [4218]

Mr. Clappison: A public inquiry would not be appropriate. The performance of Yorkshire Water is a matter for the Director General of Water Services, who has already written to the company about various aspects of its operations.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4226]

Mr. Curry: I undertook 17 ministerial visits between 6 July and 1 December this year, of which one involved travelling outside the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State undertook 29 visits, of which seven involved travelling outside the UK. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, Earl Ferrers, undertook 10 visits, of which two involved travelling outside the UK. The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency, my hon. Friend the Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones) undertook 20 visits, of which three involved travelling outside the UK. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sir Paul Beresford) undertook 16 visits, none of which involved travelling outside the UK. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) undertook 20 visits, of which three involved travelling outside the UK.

DEFENCE

Rucker Report

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to publish the Rucker report on the guarding of MoD establishments; [3333]

(2) what consultations have so far taken place on the Rucker report. [3334]

Mr. Soames: Details of our proposals for the future of Defence police and guarding structures are being published today. Copies of the consultative document are being sent to staff associations and trade unions. Copies will also be placed in the Library of the House.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the charter of transport facilities for British troops being deployed to Bosnia. [4351]

Mr. Soames: No transport facilities have been chartered to move British troops to Bosnia as this task is being undertaken by the RAF's air transport force. Two US Navy ships have been chartered to move the equipment for United Kingdom forces. Other shipping will be chartered as necessary.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions have been given to the members of the armed forces serving in Bosnia who are in situations where alleged war criminals are present. [4352]

Mr. Soames: UNPROFOR troops are not mandated to arrest individuals indicted for war crimes by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. NATO is actively examining how the peace implementation force can help the work of the tribunal, although its principal tasks will be monitoring the ceasefire and the separation forces.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the rules of engagement for British troops participating in the Bosnian peace implementation force. [4350]

Mr. Soames: It is not our policy to comment in detail on rules of engagement. However, I can confirm that United Kingdom troops will operate under NATO rules of engagement which will be consistent with the requirement for self-defence and will ensure that they can carry out their mission effectively.

Defence Cost Study Reports

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles of each defence cost study report. [4357]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is contained in the Ministry of Defence memoranda "Front Line First" of 14 July 1994 and "Front Line First—A Year On" of 30 June 1995. Copies of both are available in the Library of the House.

Cannabis

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the recruitment of personnel who have a criminal record for using cannabis; and if he will make a statement. [4353]

Mr. Soames: All applicants to the armed forces who have a conviction for the sale, possession or abuse of controlled drugs are deemed to be unsuitable for military service.

Experimentation with class B "soft" drugs, such as cannabis, is not a bar to entry to the armed forces in itself, but the attitude to drugs is of prime importance. A young person who has used cannabis on a one-off basis will not be automatically rejected.

Personnel Statistics

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees there are in *(a)* the armed forces, *(b)* Ministry of Defence civilian staff, *(c)* Ministry of Defence agencies and *(d)* Ministry of Defence contractorised agencies. [4355]

Mr. Soames: Regular service and civilian personnel strengths are given in table 2.1 of "UK Defence Statistics 1995", a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. Personnel numbers in Defence agencies are given in table 2.20 of the same publication.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4241]

Mr. Soames: Ministers carry out many visits in the course of their official duties. During the period in question the numbers of official visits overseas by Defence Ministers were as follows:

Secretary of State: 7
Minister of State (Armed Forces): 4
Minister of State (Defence Procurement): 2
Under-Secretary of State: 1.

Some of these visits involved more than one country.

Army Recruitment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions he has taken to improve his Department's recruitment for the British Army. [4354]

Mr. Soames: We are conducting a vigorous campaign to increase recruiting to the British Army and plan to spend an additional £5 million on recruit advertising in this financial year. We are also reviewing the planned number and location of Army careers offices to take account of the need for increased recruiting. These recruiting initiatives are matched by additional retention incentives to encourage soldiers to stay longer in the Army. We are also considering other ideas for recruitment to the armed forces.

Armed Service Pensions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently in receipt of armed service pensions. [4356]

Mr. Soames: As at 31 October 1995, pensions were being paid to 319,251 people under the anned forces pension scheme.

Ministry Police

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the annual report on the MoD police, for what reasons a shortfall of 195 posts in the Ministry of Defence police has occurred. [3335]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A manning deficit was maintained by the chief constable to reflect known base closures and anticipated manpower reductions resulting from base security reviews at the time the 1994–95 annual report was published.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3960]

Mr. Soames: Budget-holders throughout the Ministry of Defence have delegated authority to engage external advisors, on a paid consultancy basis or otherwise, to conduct independent reviews of aspects of the Department's work. Information on such studies is not collected centrally, and the details requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information relating to individuals employed by the Department are contained in the civil service staff post summary tables, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Individuals employed by the Department are engaged in assisting the Department to attain its aims and objectives as set out in the departmental report.

Territorial Army

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Territorial Army and Army Reserve are to be called out for service with NATO implementation force in former Yugoslavia. [4836]

Mr. Soames: Following further planning work, a requirement for about 460 TA and Army reservists has been identified in the UK's contribution to the NATO implementation force. In order to allow a margin for those who prove to be medially unfit or otherwise unsuitable for service, I have authorised the call-out of up to 550 members of the Territorial Army and Army Reserve. All are volunteers for the operation. They will report to the infantry training centre, Catterick for medical screening, and selection and acceptance into service. Those who deploy will undertake refresher training before joining their units.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Station Detainees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the levels of morbidity and mortality of detainees in police stations, for each of the last five years for which information is held. [4036]

Mr. Maclean: The available information held centrally relates to deaths of persons occurring within police stations. The information, which excludes the Metropolitan police district, is given in the table. Statistics for deaths occurring within the Metropolitan police district are produced by the force on a financial year basis and published in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, copies of which are available in the Library.

Number of deaths occurring within police stations England and Wales (excluding MPD)

Year	*Number of deaths*
1990	19
1991	21
1992	15
1993	15
1994	17

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what clinical and therapeutic guidelines are in place for the care of detainees in police stations with opiate withdrawal; and if he will make a statement. [4035]

Mr. Maclean: The Department of Health has issued guidelines for the clinical management of substance misusers in police custody, which have been distributed to all police forces.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are in place outlining standards of health care to which detainees in police stations are entitled; and if he will make a statement. [4034]

Mr. Maclean: The code of practice for the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by police officers—code C—issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 sets out, among other things. the arrangements for the medical care of detained persons in a police station. The British Medical Association in conjunction with the Association of Police Surgeons has produced guidance for police surgeons on the health care of police detainees.

Police Surgeons

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police surgeons were approved under section 12 of the Mental Health Act 1983, for each of the last ten years for which figures are available. [4037]

Mr. Maclean: Police surgeons are employed by individual police forces. No information is held centrally on the numbers approved under the Mental Health Act.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3814]

Mr. Howard: Two projects have been contractually agreed under the private finance initiative.

The estimated costs to public funds are as follows:

£000

Schemes contractually agreed	*(a) Capital*	*(b) Revenue (per annum)*
(i) Under the PFI		
Police National Network	[1]—	[2]not available
Gatwick Immigration Detention Centre	[1]—	[3]987
(ii) If the projects had been wholly public sector funded:		
Police National Network	12,000	13,000
Gatwick Immigration Detention Centre	15,000	[3]0

[1] The initial capital cost to the contractor of the PNN is believed to be of the order of £10m (with an estimated full cost over 5 years of some £50 million), and of the Gatwick Centre £12m.

[2] Police forces purchase usage of the network from public funds, and the value will vary with demand.

[3] The current contract relates only to the provision of the Centre. A separate operating contract is to follow.

1. Under both scenarios, preparatory costs will/would have been incurred within my Department.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3828]

Mr. Howard: Private sector capital expenditure in this financial year is expected to be £20 million. For future years. I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been granted asylum on appeal in each of the last 20 years. [4038]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information for 1994 on the outcome of appeals of people who had been refused asylum—including those initially granted exceptional leave to remain—is given in table 8.3 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Not all people whose appeals are allowed or referred back to the Secretary of State are granted asylum; some appeals allowed by adjudicators are reversed by the tribunal and others which were dismissed are subsequently granted asylum or exceptional leave to remain.

Approximately 100 people are estimated to have been granted asylum after appeal in 1994. Information prior to 1994 is not available.

Arrest Warrants

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many warrants of arrest for non-payment of compensation were issued in each police authority in the latest year for which latest information is available; if he will give the numbers of these warrants which were not executed; and how many were subsequently re-issued. [4282]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not held centrally.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4225]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is as follows:

	Total visits	*Visits abroad*	*Percentage*
Home Secretary	69	5	7.2
Baroness Blatch	17	0	0
Ann Widdecombe	25	3	12
Mr. David Maclean	26	0	0
Mr. Nicholas Baker (to 17 October)	5	1	20
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (from 17 October)	4	0	0

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) joined the Department on 28 November 1995 but did not make any ministerial visits between then and 1 December 1995.

Correspondence

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston dated 29 August. [4529]

Mr. Howard: I wrote to the hon. Member about the case of Mr. Paul Malone today.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many more people aged 65 years or over would qualify for the mobility component of disability living allowance, at the higher and lower rate, respectively, if the age limit were removed; how many of them would be receiving attendance allowance or disability living allowance under the existing rules; how many people aged 65 years or over, by five year age groups, are now receiving the mobility component at the higher and lower rate respectively. [2739]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) recipients aged over 65 receiving the mobility component

Age	*Higher rate*	*Lower rate*
65–69	185,600	12,200
70–74	81,100	None
75–79	22,500	None
80+	2,700	None
All	291,900	12,200

Source:

Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. sample (31 August 1995).

Estimate extra number of people likely to qualify for the DLA mobility component if the upper age limit were removed

Higher rate	*Lower rate*
2,000,000	60,000

Notes:

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000, they are speculative and subject to very substantial margins of error.

2. Insufficient information is held to estimate how many of these people would be receiving DLA or AA under existing rules.

Source:

DLA statistics May 1995, OPCS Disability Survey 1985, Government Actuaries Department population projection 1992.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3810]

Mr. Burt: The first award of a PFI contract for the replacement of the national insurance recording system was made in April 1995. Costs from public funds will not arise until the system has been developed and successfully delivered to the Department. The total value of the project based on the public funded option is estimated at £150 million.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3832]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Information Helplines

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been *(a)* the costs of establishing, operating and publicising the information helplines established by his Department and *(b)* the number of calls made to each of these lines since their establishment. [4448]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on 3 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *960–61*.

Such further information as is available is as follows

DSS HEADQUARTERS

Number of calls

January 1995–December 1995: 64,151

The telephone costs for the public enquiry office cannot be distinguished from overall telephone costs for the building from which they operate.

The annual staffing costs are £60,000.

Benefits Agency

Freeline (free phone)

Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 14 November 1995: 2.7 million

Annual cost of call charges: £1.1 million

Annual running costs (staff): £4.9 million

Benefit Enquiry Line (free phone)

Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995: 0.9 million

Annual cost of call charges: £0.75 million

Annual running costs (staff): £2.72 million

Family Credit Advice Line (full rate)

Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995: 2.2 million

Annual cost of call charges: nil

Annual running costs (staff): £1.6 million

Disability Living Allowance Line (subsidised)

Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995: 2 million

Annual cost of call charges: £0.072 million

Annual running costs (staff): £1.62 million

Note:

The Pension Advice line (now Pensions Direct) which had been included in the last answer is not considered as solely an information enquiry line. The line is a dedicated service offering a facility for customers to notify change of circumstances.

Contributions Agency

Breakdown of figures for the Social Security Advice Line (SSALE) which were not available in March are as follows:

Number of calls

April 1994 to March 1995: 225,124

April 1995 to November 1995: 216,391

The operating costs for 1994–95 were £240,558. During this financial year the accommodation occupied by SSALE in Glasgow underwent a major refurbishment including the installation of new telecommunications systems. The cost of this work amounted to £145,000.

War Pensions Agency

Number of calls

January 1995–December 1995: 452,780

Costs of establishing the technical system in 1992 were £114,941 and the annual maintenance cost is £9,700.

The Helpline number appears on all agency publicity including leaflets and posters. It is therefore difficult to quantify costs specific to Helpline.

Child Support Agency

Number of calls

1 June 1994–1 December 1995: 901,517

The individual cost of publicising the national enquiry line—NEL—is not available. Publicity information concerning NEL is contained within other CSA publicity material. The cost of operating NEL in 1994–95 was £1,123,895.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the results of the call back survey carried out by his Department into customer satisfaction with the operation of his Department's inquiry line; what action his Department took in response to the findings of this survey; what organisation carried out this survey; and how much was paid to that organisation. [4457]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: During the last 12 months no external call back surveys have been undertaken in respect of departmental helplines.

Internal surveys are commonplace and customer reaction is analysed and fed into the strategic planning process with a view to further enhancing customer service.

Frozen Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which benefits that have never been uprated since their introduction were not uprated in his recent statement; and what are his reasons for freezing them. [4123]

Mr. Heald: The following benefits have not been uprated since they were introduced: widow's payment, Christmas bonus and age addition to retirement pension.

Widows payment is only one part of widow's benefit. Widow's pension and widowed mother's allowance have been uprated regularly. Although the Christmas bonus has not been uprated, it is now paid to a wider target group of around 13 million people. Similarly, to increase the retirement pension age addition would be a poor use of resources. Pensioners over 80 who receive an income-related benefit will gain from the increase in higher pensioner premium. From April 1996 the value of this premium will be £25.90 for a single person and £37.05 for a couple.

Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors underlie his policy in respect of uprating *(a)* lone parent premium, *(b)* one parent benefit, *(c)* earning limit for invalid care allowance and *(d)* social fund cold weather payment. [4124]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This year's uprating statement combines further measures to control the growth of Social Security spending with action to strengthen work incentives.

The lone parent premium and one parent benefit will not be increased in April 1996. The aim over time is to bring the benefits which go to lone parent families more in line with those that go to couples with children. Lone parents will benefit from the increases that go to all families next year.

Invalid care allowance will be uprated along with other benefits next year. The earnings limit will be kept under review.

Social fund cold weather payments are intended to give extra help to particularly vulnerable people for higher heating costs as a result of a sustained period of very cold weather. Payments increased from £6 to £7 from 1 November 1994 to reflect the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. The Chancellor announced on 8 December 1994 that they would increase again from £7 to £8.50 from 1 November 1995. This is a 40 per cent. increase since April 1994.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4220]

Mr. Lilley: The information is set out in the table:

Minister	*UK visits*	*Foreign visits*	*Percentage that were foreign visits*
Mr. Lilley	6	1	17
Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish	7	–	–
Mr. Burt	21	1	5
Mr. Evans	10	–	–
Mr. Mitchell	8	–	–
Mr. Heald	10	1	10

Invalidity Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total cost of the invalidity benefit resulting from injuries caused in road traffic accidents in each of the last five years. [4345]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect on the national insurance fund, over the next five years if all those with an appropriate personal pension and an annual income of less than £10,000, were to opt back into SERPS. [4463]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Great Britain

Year	*Savings to the national insurance fund (£ million)*
1995–96	0
1996–97	400
1997–98	400
1998–99	350
1999–2000	350

Notes:

1. It has been assumed that the £10,000 is a fixed cash amount each year and earnings and prices assumptions are consistent with the recent 1995 Budget Statement.

2. Currently, the rebate paid to a personal pension account is based on class 1 reckonable earnings between the lower earnings limit and the upper earnings limit. The rate of rebate is 4.8 per cent. of these band earnings plus 1 per cent. of band earnings for those aged 30 and over.

3. From April 1997, the APP rebates will become age-related. Because the Secretary of State has not yet determined the level of these rebates, the amounts shown in the table have been calculated by using the rates in the Government Actuary's recent consultative note.

4. Because the rebate in respect of a year's earnings is not paid into the personal pension account until the following year, there is no effect on the first year of the above table.

5. The figures have been rounded to the nearest £50 million.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Employees (Sickness)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many days off sick were taken by employees in the private sector in *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94 and *(e)* 1994–95 indicating (i) the total figures and (ii) the average for each employee. [3507]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The following information is available from the labour force survey for the number of days lost per week through sickness absence by employees in the private sector.

Great Britain (not seasonally adjusted)

Quarter	*Days lost per week in quarter* Total (millions of days)	*Days lost per week in quarter* Per employee (days)
Spring 1994	2.1	0.13
Spring 1995	2.2	0.14

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the organisations and governments consulted by Her Majesty's Government in compiling the British submission to the World court on the legality of nuclear weapons. [3988]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. and learned Friend the then Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), on 28 February 1994, column *547*, and 14 June 1994, column *405*.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many EU governments gave evidence to the World Court on the legality of nuclear weapons; how many asked the court to rule that they were legal; and how many asked the court to refuse to answer the question. [3989]

Mr. Davis: Eight EU Governments made written statements in relation to the requests for advisory opinions by the World Health Organisation and the UN General Assembly; four Governments also made oral statements. Six argued that the court should not answer the requests, five further arguing, on the substance, that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is not prohibited as such under international law. Copies of the written statements will be placed in the Library of the House. Transcripts of the oral statements can be obtained from the International Court of Justice.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3967]

Mr. Hanley: *(a)* In answering this question the Department has used the definition of consultancy as set out in the efficiency scrutiny on the Government's use of external consultants.

For the year 1994–95 the diplomatic wing spent £76,887 on management consultants. The ODA spent £847, 545 on consultants assisting on management issues.

More detailed information on individual contracts and the previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(b) The Department does not hold information on outside organisations in the form requested. Invoices from outside organisations are not broken down to distinguish between provision of services and goods. Therefore the information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(c) Information on individuals employed by the Department can be found in the civil service staff post summary tables. These can be found in the House Libraries. The purpose of their employment is to assist the Department to attain its aims and objectives as set out in the departmental report. The costs of employing individuals can be found in the departmental report.

European Commission (London Office)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff are employed at the London office of the European Commission. [2989]

Mr. David Davis: This information is available from the European Commission office at:

No. 8 Storey's Gate

LONDON

SW1P 3AT

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what authority the London office of the European Commission produces and circulates pro-European Union information, with particular reference to circulation to schools; and if he will make a statement. [2990]

Mr. Davis: The Commission office in London produces and circulates information about the European Union on its own authority. Resources for Commission activities are agreed by the Council and European Parliament, acting as the budgetary authority.

Egypt (Islamic Terrorists)

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Egypt concerning the activities of Islamic extremists based in London; and if he will make a statement. [3973]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed this with the Egyptian Government during his visit to Cairo on 10 to 11 November. We are concerned at the unwelcome presence of foreign extremists in the United Kingdom who abuse our traditional freedoms. We are in close contact with a number of foreign Governments who share our concern. Any evidence of violations of UK law will be passed to the police for action.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3821]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *694*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3826]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97, which was laid before the House on 28th November 1995.

Reflections Group

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the text of the final revision of the report of the reflections group to be considered at the European Council in Madrid on 15 to 16 December to be *(a)* published and *(b)* widely available in the United Kingdom. [4469]

Mr. David Davis: The final report of the study group was finalised on 5 December. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. The report has been deposited for parliamentary scrutiny. Copies of the report are available on request from the European Union Department (Internal) in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the report is available on the Internet from http://www.fco.gov.UK.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Papers

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the

House of Commons Commission, if discussions have yet been concluded on a new long-term agreement with Her Majesty's Stationery Office for the printing and publication of House documents, as referred to in his written answer of 17 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *237*; and what the consequences of that agreement will be for the sale prices of *Hansard* and other House papers. [4090]

Mr. Beith: The Commission has now approved the terms of a new supply and service agreement between the House and HMSO, which will take effect on 1 January 1996. As a result, the House will no longer purchase its documents from HMSO at the face price but instead will make block payments based on production costs. The level of these block payments will be re-negotiated annually, in accordance with principles set out in the agreement. In calendar year 1996 the block payments will total £11,969,000, which is broadly similar to the total sums paid to HMSO by the Vote Office and other House Departments in respect of the documents in question in each of the previous two years.

The financial settlement for 1996 also provides for the following reductions in the sale price of House documents:

Daily *Hansard*: £5 instead of £7.50

Select Committee Reports: 20 per cent. reduction on current price scales

Bills: 10 per cent. reduction on current price scales

Weekly Information Bulletin: £1.50 instead of £2.30

Standing Committee *Hansards* will in future be priced on a scale according to page content, with a maximum price of £5 compared with the current fixed price of £7.50.

The reduction in the price of the weekly *Hansard* from £22 to £12, which was announced in my answer of 17 May and came into effect on 6 June, will continue to apply.

Mr. Thompson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what consideration the House of Commons Commission has given to the possible safeguards that might be required to protect the future provision of printing services to Parliament in the event of the privatisation of HMSO? [4091]

Mr. Beith: The Commission and the Finance and Services Committee have been giving the most active consideration to these matters and I hope to be able to give a more detailed reply to the hon. Member shortly.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3838]

Mr. Willetts: The Government's metropolitan telecommunications service is already largely provided by the private sector, which owns much of the infrastructure. The Office of Public Service hopes to involve private finance further in the provision of the software used by Government Departments. This could involve capital expenditure of some £1.5 million in 1996–97.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3804]

Mr. Willetts: The Cabinet Office—including the Office of Public Service—HMSO and the Central Office of Information have not yet approved any schemes under the private finance initiative.

Photocopiers

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many new photocopiers his Department has *(a)* purchased and *(b)* leased since July 1995; and at what cost. [4291]

Mr. Willetts: Since 1 July 1995 the Cabinet Office and its agencies have purchased one additional photocopier at a cost of £895 and leased 18 photocopiers, 11 of which replaced existing machines, at a rental cost £50,799 per annum.

In the same period, HMSO and the Central Office of Information purchased four photocopiers, two of which replaced existing machines, at a cost of £17,817 and leased 14 to replace existing machines at a rental cost of £31,570 per annum.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which bodies are covered by the citizens charter. [4855]

Mr. Freeman: The citizens charter applies to all public sector bodies and privatised regulated utilities where there is an element of monopoly.

The Director General of Telecommunications is charged with a statutory duty to promote the interests of consumers. The Director General has advised me that a genuinely competitive market is developing for telecommunications. For these reasons, I no longer regard BT as falling within the scope of the charter programme.

TREASURY

Employment (East Midlands)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total number of *(a)* full-time and part-time jobs and *(b)* full-time and part-time temporary jobs in the east midlands region, together with a breakdown of occupations. [4071]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The latest available information is shown in the following table.

Employees in East Midlands region: spring 1995 (thousands)[1]

Occupation	Full-time All	Full-time Not permanent	Part-time All	Part-time Not permanent
Managers and administrators	221	[2]—	20	[2]—
Professional occupations	120	[2]—	24	11
Associate professor and technical occupations	114	[2]—	26	[2]—
Clerical, secretarial occupations	178	12	70	[2]—
Craft and related occupations	208	[2]—	12	[2]—
Personal protective occupations	83	[2]—	82	[2]—
Sales occupations	67	[2]—	74	[2]—
Plant and machine operatives	185	10	22	[2]—
Other occupations	66	[2]—	79	[2]—
Total	1,243	48	409	48

[1] Not seasonally adjusted.

[2] — denotes less than 10,000 in cell.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3835]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97", and, which has been laid before Parliament on 28 November 1995.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3807]

Mr. Jack: PFI payments are for service delivery, not capital procurement. They comprise a mixture of charges for capital and revenue. Value for money is ensured through the competitive process. It is not always commercially appropriate to disclose a public sector comparator, nor to place undue reliance on illustrative calculations. Guidance on public sector comparators is contained in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the guidance his Department issues to each Government department and agency regarding procurement from SMEs. [3928]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The following guidance has been issued:

> "Size may be relevant to the selection of tenderers, but only insofar as it is necessary to assess whether or not the job is within their capability. Once that assessment has been made, relative size is likely to be less significant than skills, efficiency, experience and reliability— characteristics relevant to value for money but just as likely to be found in small firms as in large and particularly relevant in the procurement of services."

The central unit on procurement has also issued a series of best practice guidance, much of which is relevant to procurement from SMEs. Copies of these guidances have been placed in the Library. In addition, CUP has written to all major Departments asking them to provide examples of their procurement literature on access for small firms to Government business. This is currently being reviewed. CUP will then circulate to Departments the best examples relevant to SME needs.

Fuel Duty

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham, (Mr. Bottomley) of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *537*, on fuels, if he will give the same figures updated to account for the Budget measures; and if he will list the figures for natural gas used as a road fuel, *(a)* before and *(b)* after the Budget. [4061]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The following updated figures are based on the pre-Budget average retail selling prices adjusted to reflect the actual duty changes announced in my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget statement:

Post Budget pricing policies may not mirror the duty changes precisely

	RSP p/litre	Total tax as percentage of RSP	Excise duty as percentage of RSP	VAT as percentage of RSP	Excise duty p/litre	VAT p/litre
Leaded	61.29	78.72	63.83	14.89	39.12	9.13
Super unleaded	62.02	70.20	55.30	14.89	34.30	9.24
Unleaded	55.06	77.19	62.30	14.89	34.30	8.20
Diesel	55.51	76.68	61.79	14.89	34.30	8.27
City diesel	54.9	77.37	62.48	14.89	34.30	8.18
LPG auto	39.1	50.93	36.04	14.89	14.09	5.82

The following figures for compressed natural gas are based on a maximum retail price as at 28 November 1995; I am advised that suppliers' post-Budget pricing policy has not yet been determined.

Compressed natural gas (CNG)	RSP p/kilo	Total tax as percentage of RSP	Excise duty as percentage of RSP	VAT as percentage of RSP	Excise duty p/kilo	VAT p/kilo
Pre-Budget	56.4	73.65	58.76	14.89	33.14	8.40
Post-Budget	56.4	64.84	49.95	14.89	28.17	8.40

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4221]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have made seven ministerial visits, all of which were abroad.

The Paymaster General has made four visits, of which two were abroad. The Financial Secretary has made four visits and the Economic Secretary has made three visits, none of which was abroad. The Chief Secretary has made no visits.

Share Ownership

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the adult population owned one or more shares *(a)* in the latest year for which figures are available and *(b)* in each year since 1970. [4028]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* The information sought is not available for the years 1970–78 or 1980–86. Data for the remaining years are set out in the table:

Year	*Percentage of adults owning shares*
1979	7
1987	19
1988	20
1989	20
1990	24
1991	25
1992	22
1993	22

Landfill Tax

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what analysis he has made of the effects of the proposed landfill tax on the house building industry in Scotland; and if he will make a statement; [3931]

(2) what analysis he has made of the effect of the proposed landfill tax on the construction industry; and if he will make a statement; [3930]

(3) what analysis he has made of the effect of the proposed landfill tax on the house building industry; and if he will make a statement. [3932]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In developing proposals for a landfill tax, the Government have had regard to the effects of the tax upon all sectors of the economy. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated that the tax should not impose extra costs on business overall, and that the revenue raised will be used to make compensatory reductions in employers' national insurance contributions. The main rate of employer NICs will be reduced by 0.2 per cent. in 1997–98. Moreover, businesses that are successful in reducing the amount of waste sent for landfill disposal by making alternative waste management arrangements may reduce their overall costs of landfill.

Single-parent Families

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children have been in single-parent families where the parent is unemployed in each of the last five years. [4109]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* The following information is available from the "Labour Force Survey".

Great Britain (not seasonally adjusted)

Quarter	*Number of children aged 15 or under with single parent who is ILO unemployed*
Winter 1993–94	246,000
Winter 1994–95	231,000

European Single Currency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the time needed to introduce a single currency after a decision has been made to introduce it. [2770]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The European Monetary Institute, in its report on the changeover to the single currency published on 14 November 1995, considered that a period of up to three years would be required to introduce single currency notes and coins after the start of the third stage of economic and monetary union. It considered that the period between the decision to move to a single currency and the start of the third stage would need to be about one year in length. The Government believe that these are probably reasonable estimates of the lengths of time required, bearing in mind the necessary legal and practical steps, although the actual times would depend on many factors.

Under protocol 11 annexed to the EC treaty, the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of Economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the United Kingdom of adopting the single currency. [2769]

Mrs. Knight: If the United Kingdom participates in the third stage of economic and monetary union, there will be transitional costs to business and public authorities, associated with the changeover to the single currency.

These potential costs would be one of the factors that would need to be taken into account, at the appropriate time, when the Government make their assessment of whether it is in the United Kingdom's interest to join a move to the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Under protocol 11 annexed to the EC treaty, the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of Economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

City Diesel

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the short-term cost of reducing tax on city diesel by 2p a litre. [3730]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The estimates of the revenue effects of a 2p tax reduction for city diesel will be extremely sensitive to assumptions about current market shares, other low-sulphur products, and how quickly supplies of city diesel could respond to increased demand.

Ways and Means Advances

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the outstanding Ways and Means advances from the Bank of England to the Government at the end of each financial year since 1978. [4327]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The outstanding Ways and Means advances from the Bank of England to the Government at the end of each financial year since 1978 is shown in the table.

Outstanding ways and means advances from the Bank of England

Date	*Balance outstanding (£000s)*
31 March 1978	3,487,280
31 March 1979	5,435,540
31 March 1980	3,026,435
31 March 1981	3,450,705
31 March 1982	908,040
31 March 1983	1,983,009
31 March 1984	Nil
31 March 1985	Nil
31 March 1986	Nil
31 March 1987	2,707,405
31 March 1988	4,638,116
31 March 1989	6,255,987
30 March 1990	5,962,854
28 March 1991	6,918,245
31 March 1992	7,187,231
31 March 1993	3,062,154
31 March 1994	6,750,812
31 March 1995	15,904,279

The increase in 1995 follows a change in the funding rule in 1994 to include gilt sales to the banking sector, and a one-off corrective adjustment.

Monetary Aggregates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the velocity of circulation and the increases or decreases in *(a)* M3, *(b)* M4, *(c)* M0 and *(d)* the rate of inflation for each year since 1975. [4331]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The velocity of circulation of the monetary aggregate is calculated as a ratio—GDP divided by the stock of the relevant monetary aggregate.

M3 is no longer compiled as a monetary aggregate. Stock and velocity of circulation figures for M0 and M4 are shown in table 6.2 of the CSO monthly publication *Economic Trends.* Data on the RPI and the underlying rate of inflation—RPI excluding mortgage interest payments—are shown on table 3.1 in *Economic Trends. Economic Trends* is available from the House of Commons Library.

National Grid

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount of the expected rebate to domestic consumers arising from the sale of the national grid which will be accounted for by reduced VAT *(a)* per customer and *(b)* in total. [3389]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* Eligible customers will each receive a net rebate of £50.56 from the regional electricity companies and as a consequence the amount of VAT on their bills will be reduced by £4.04. For the comparatively small number of customers who use pre-payment meters or tokens a VAT-inclusive refund of £54.60 will be made. The total reduction in VAT revenue resulting from the rebates will be approximately £87 million.

Personal Tax Allowances

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make it his policy to allow an additional personal tax allowance to a woman whose husband is permanently disabled and who has a dependent child; [3621]

(2) if he will make a statement on the additional personal tax allowance currently available to a man whose wife is disabled and who has a dependent child indicating the considerations underlying the reasons why the same facility is not allowed to a woman in the same circumstances. [3622]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The additional personal allowance for husbands with totally incapacitated wives dates from a time when social security provision for the disabled was much less comprehensive than it is now. The Government believe that, in general, it is much better to help both men and women with disabled partners through the social security system than through tax reliefs, and a generous range of social security benefits are available today.

European Union Contributions

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sum of money has been allocated in the recent Budget as the United Kingdom's gross contribution to the EU. [4049]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* UK contributions to the EC are reflected in the public expenditure plans in net rather than gross form. The figures for net payments to European Community institutions for the financial years 1995–96 to 1998–99 are set out in table 6.6 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" (House of Commons No. 30). The corresponding estimates of the UK's gross contribution after abatement, along with the figure for net payments, are as follows:

£ million

Year	*UK gross contribution after abatement*	*Net payment to EC institutions*
1995–96	7,668	2,894
1996–97	7,734	2,304
1997–98	7,858	2,496
1998–99	7,926	2,498

Further details will be published in my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's next departmental report.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

New Year's Eve (Trafalgar Square)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to change the arrangements for boarding up the fountains in Trafalgar square for the new year's eve celebrations. [4915]

Mr. Sproat: Since 1983, when the decision was taken to board up the fountains in Trafalgar square on new year's eve on the ground of public safety, the policing of the event has altered significantly with a great emphasis on the use of police cordons. For the past two years the police have cordoned off the central area of Trafalgar square including the column and fountains. I have therefore decided—in consultation with the police—not to board up the fountains for this new year's eve celebrations.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in her Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4223]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have undertaken 55 ministerial visits between 6 July and 1 December, none of which were overseas.

The Minister of State, has undertaken 17 ministerial visits in the same period, 5.8 per cent. of those were overseas.

Lord Inglewood has undertaken 71 ministerial visits, of which 19.7 per cent. were overseas.

TRANSPORT

Midland Main Line

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the data in respect of the punctuality of trains on the midland main line from January 1994 to date on a monthly basis. [3565]

Mr. Watts: The data requested is shown in the table:

Percentage of trains "on time"[1] on Midland Mainline[2]

Year/period[3]	*Percentage*
1994	
1	86.3
2	81.9
3	90.9
4	92.3
5	96.1
6	92.8
7	85.6
8	92.4
9	89.6
10	88.9
11	83.6
12	91.6
13	88.0
1995	
1	91.9
2	89.4
3	92.0
4	93.0
5	91.2
6	93.2
7	86.9
8	87.1
9	92.3
10	94.0
11	88.9

[1] Arriving within 10 minutes of the scheduled time.

[2] The figures relate to all services on Monday to Saturday inclusive.

[3] Data are supplied for successive four-week periods rather than monthly.

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution regarding increases in fuel duty; [4404]

(2) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the duty on unleaded petrol; [4391]

(3) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution relating to the present net level of support for public transport; [4371]

(4) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution of a Government contribution towards the operating costs of companies carrying freight by water; [4395]

(5) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the annual excise duty on cars; [4406]

(6) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on a cradle to grave for vehicle recycling; [4390]

(7) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on incentives to operators of heavy vehicles in urban areas to use natural gas powered vehicles; [4409]

(8) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution in respect of vehicle excise duty on heavy vehicles; [4366]

(9) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on grants for transferring freight from road to coastwise shipping; [4394]

(10) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the EC directive on fuel prices; [4405]

(11) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the introduction of a levy on fuel purchase by airlines; [4392]

(12) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the criteria for the public contribution to railway costs; [4372]

(13) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on modifications to the tax rules relating to company cars; [4407]

(14) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on applications for grants in support of trans-European transport networks; [4398]

(15) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on European legislation on dimension for containers and bodies for use in intermodal transport; [4363]

(16) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution regarding EC legislation on the annual duty paid by operators of heavy goods vehicles; [4399]

(17) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on regional planning conference; [4419]

(18) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on thresholds for the major pollutants; [4427]

(19) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the sale of unleaded super premium petrol; [4368]

(20) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the results of the monitoring of PPG 13's effectiveness be published and that any amendment required be made without delay; [4415]

(21) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order be reviewed; [4423]

(22) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the programme of strengthening bridges to carry 40-tonne lorries should be scaled down; [4431]

(23) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on pay-at-the-pump schemes; [4408]

(24) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution relating to decisions to introduce road pricing schemes; [4393]

(25) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on advertising the environmental and safety effects of driving styles; [4367]

(26) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on cycling facilities; [4432]

(27) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the rules of procedure governing inquiries into trunk road proposals and compulsory purchase orders; [4381]

(28) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on supplementing recent guidance on land use policies and the land use implications of transport policies; [4416]

(29) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on suitable sites for new wharves and rail depots; [4424]

(30) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the permitted benzene content of petrol; [4369]

(31) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on safe cycle routes in urban areas; [4377]

(32) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of royal commission on environmental pollution on forms of collaboration similar to the London air quality network unit; [4428]

(33) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on

environmental pollution on the use of barriers to absorb and deflect sound; [4385]

(34) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on eligibility for insulation grants under the Land Compensation Act 1973; [4412]

(35) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that regional planning conference and Government regional offices should jointly assess long-distance routes; [4420]

(36) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the environmental assessment of tolling proposals; [4379]

(37) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on decision making on transport policy; [4383]

(38) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the duties of local authorities in respect of air quality; [4410]

(39) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on charging developers for external costs of induced traffic; [4418]

(40) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the consultative forum established under the fifth environment action programme; [4426]

(41) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on noise certification standards for new aircraft; [4375]

(42) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that all significant planning applications should contain an analysis of the transport implications; [4422]

(43) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the Government maintain restrictions on access by heavy goods vehicles to Greater London; [4430]

(44) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the development of electric power for public transport, fleet vehicles and small vehicles; [4387]

(45) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on information from manufacturers about the combustion products of fuel additives; [4414]

(46) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that local authorities should provide networks of safe pedestrian routes; [4433]

(47) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on planning conditions for coastal super-quarries; [4382]

(48) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on air quality targets for specific planning area; [4417]

(49) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the committee of green Ministers publish periodical reports; [4425]

(50) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on collaboration with the oil industry and vehicle manufacturers in respect of specifications for cleaner fuels; [4370]

(51) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on a noise levy at airports; [4374]

(52) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on research into the possible effects of supersonic aircrafts on the stratosphere; [4378]

(53) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that urban authorities adopt a presumption against access for heavy good vehicles over 17 tonnes; [4429]

(54) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on environmental assessment of roads proposals; [4386]

(55) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that guidance on development control be based on the principle of preventing exposure of noise levels which exceed proposed targets; [4413]

(56) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution for a right of appeal by third parties against decisions contrary to up-to-date development plans; [4421]

(57) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that the Government should work with regional planning conferences, passenger transport authorities or passenger transport executives and the private sector on parking strategies; [4376]

(58) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution that trunk roads should be part of local authority structure plans; [4380]

(59) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on comparative studies of bypasses and traffic management measures; [4384]

(60) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the qualifying level for insulation grants; [4411]

(61) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on joint council meetings of environmental and transport Ministers; [4397]

(62) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on research into the health effects of transport-related pollutants; [4389]

(63) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on bus lanes and bus priority schemes in urban areas; [4365]

(64) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on legislation to allow impoundment of illegal operators' vehicles; [4364]

(65) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the environmental assessment of measures to promote competition in air services in Europe; [4373]

(66) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on fuel cell research; [4388]

(67) what response he has made to the recommendation in the 18th report of the royal commission on environmental pollution on the transport implications of Government Departments' legal and policy responsibilities. [4396]

Mr. Norris: Decisions on the Government's response will be taken in the light of the national debate on transport policy.

Forth Bridge

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Health and Safety Executive to produce its report into the structural condition of the Forth bridge. [4436]

Mr. Watts: I understand that HSE hopes to be able to publish its report early in the new year.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4219]

Sir George Young: The details of visits, excluding attendance at EC Transport Councils, are as follows:

	Total number of visits	*Of which, number abroad*
Secretary of State	15	—
Minister for Railways and Roads	17	3
Minister for Local Transport, Road Safety and Transport in London	15	2
Minister for Shipping and Aviation	11	1

Cones Hotline

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many calls have been made to the cones hotline in each calendar month since its establishment; how many calls have been under the remit of the cones hotline; how many calls have resulted in cones being removed from the public highway; how much it has cost his Department to operate the hotline; what changes he plans to make to its operation; what assessment he has made of it; and if he will make a statement. [4435]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 6 November at column *759*, which answers most of the points that he has raised. My Department does not have a record of the number of calls made to the cones hotline in each calendar month since its establishment in June 1992, but information from the Highways Agency on the number of calls made each month this year is as follows:

Date	*Number*
Cones hotline	
January 1995	900
February 1995	750
March 1995	450
April 1995	1,100
May 1995	1,000
June 1995	1,050
July 1995	800
August 1995	300
Highways Agency information line	
September 1995	800
October 1995	1,150
November 1995	1,250

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 50 calls.

Rail Accidents

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents involving fatalities and serious injury to passengers there have been *(a)* on the railway network and *(b)* within the ScotRail network in each of the last five years. [4439]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate maintains records of accidents. The tables show the information requested.

Fatal and Major Injuries to Passengers

All railway network[1]

Year	*Fatal*	*Major injury*
1990	37	224
1991	8	92
1991–92	31	192
1992–93	18	238
1993–94	16	205
1994–95	17	204

Scotland only[1]

Year	*Fatal*	*Major injury*
1990	0	27
1991	0	3
1991–92	2	25
1992–93	1	27
1993–94	1	27
1994–95	1	19

Notes:

1990 calendar year.

1991 covers the 1 January 1991 to 31 March 1991.

1991–92 onwards periods are in the financial year 1 April to 31 March.

[1] Excludes metropolitan and minor railways.

Oily Waste Discharges

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the ports in the United Kingdom that do not have oily waste discharge facilities available to vessels. [4200]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 14 June 1995 at column 532.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many aerial surveillance sorties were flown to check for oil spillages around the United Kingdom coast in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* in 1995 to date; [4199]

(2) if he will list those vessels that have since the publication of the Donaldson report been *(a)* identified discharging oily wastes illegally at sea and *(b)* prosecuted for those offences; and what fines have been imposed. [4197]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 6 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about aerial surveillance to check for oil spillages and vessels which have been identified as discharging oily wastes illegally at sea.

The number of aerial surveillance flights to check for oil spillages around the United Kingdom coast were as follows:

Year	*Ship patrol flights*	*Oil rig patrol flights*	*Operational flights*	*Total*
1993	91	57	77	225
1994	98	57	54	209
1995[1]	120	53	65	238

[1] To 30 November.

Since May 1994 the Agency's Marine Pollution Control Unite (MPCU) has identified 47 vessels as possibly being responsible for illegal discharges. These were referred for Port State Control inspections and of the 47 identified cases, 27 are currently open, 19 have been closed, either because no offence was committed or because of lack of evidence, and one has been prosecuted.

The prosecution resulted in the master of the JENCLIPPER, being fined £4,000 in October 1995 for the illegal discharge of engine washings. In the absence of conclusive evidence the names of the other vessels cannot be released.

Prosecutions are also brought by other organisations including local authorities, port and harbour authorities and environmental bodies. Further information is contained in annual reports prepared by the Advisory Committee on Pollution of the Sea (ACOPS). Copies are available in the House of Commons' Library.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he plans to implement the Donaldson report recommendation that the cost of the use of oily waste reception facilities in ports should be included in harbour dues; [4201]

(2) if he will introduce a system of waste auditing in ports to improve the enforcement of discharge limits for oily wastes from shipping. [4198]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 1 and 2 November at columns *309* and *466.*

Peakes Parkway

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been lent to Humberside county council and its successor authorities for the construction of the Peakes parkway in all its stages and what is the *(a)* duration of the loan and *(b)* the annual interest charge in percentage and cost terms to date. [4332]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The total financial support that my Department has given to Humberside county council for Peakes parkway is £8.287 million—£2.869 million of transport supplementary grant and £5.418 million in the form of borrowing approvals. The amount to be allocated to the scheme in 1996–97 will be announced later this month as part of the local transport settlement.

The Government do not specify either the duration or interest rate of any loans that result from borrowing approvals issued to local authorities. These are matters for the local authorities concerned.

Road Fatalities (Children)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* compare and *(b)* make a statement on the changes by category of road death, of those killed under the age of 15 years between *(a)* 1983 and 1985 and *(b)* 1992 and 1994. [3786]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

The total number of children killed fell in both periods, although at a slower rate between 1992 and 1994. Reduction in casualties for the most vulnerable categories, pedestrians and cyclists, continued in the second period but in-car casualties increased. I regard further improvements in child road safety as a high priority.

Road deaths in Great Britain: children under 15 years of age by road user type: 1983–85 and 1992–94

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*Average 1983–85*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*Average 1992–94*
Pedestrians	360	333	305	333	170	153	147	157
Pedal cyclists	87	96	66	83	38	33	34	35
TWMV	1	1	4	2	3	3	3	3
Car	77	84	69	77	50	75	74	66
PSV	3	1	2	2	1	4	4	3
LGV	2	2	4	3	3	1	2	2
HGV	1	2	5	3	1	1	0	1
Other	5	2	2	3	2	0	1	1
Total	536	521	457	505	268	270	265	268

Railtrack

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that Railtrack is expending fully the receipts from track access charges on the maintenance and renewal of rail infrastructure and buildings; [3470]

(2) what is the total sum collected in track access charges from each of the train operating companies by Railtrack; and what proportion of the track access charges so collected have been expended on the maintenance and renewal of rail infrastructure and buildings to date in each train operating company's area of operation; [3465]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that Railtrack is undertaking the work necessary to achieve prescribed standards of track and signal system maintenance, with special reference to the renewal of such infrastructure assets by modern equivalent forms. [3473]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is not required to expend income from track access charges only on the maintenance and renewal of rail infrastructure and buildings. Railtrack does not publish income figures by train operators, as I explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), *Official Report*, 28 November 1995, column *549*.

Access charges for the period 1995–96 to 2000–01 have been approved by the regulator at a level which takes into account the extent of Railtrack's proposed renewal programme. The overall level of charges has been set with regard to Railtrack's total renewals expenditure, including major renewal projects, across the entire network. The nature and priority of projects is a matter for railtrack's commercial and operational judgment.

The Rail Regulator will satisfy himself that Railtrack does not increase its profits by reducing expenditure on the renewal of assets below the level needed to deliver its obligations to operators, or compromise the maintenance of safety standards.

Track access charges are not only used to cover the maintenance and renewal of rail infrastructure and buildings. Railtrack does not publish income figures by train operator, as I explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North on 28 November.

Tree Surgery

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had regarding delays in paying small business contractors for tree surgery and felling along trunk roads; if his Department has a time target for such payments; and if he will make a statement. [4012]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 6 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what representations he has had regarding delays in paying small business contractors for tree surgery and felling along England's trunk roads, if his Department has a time target for such payments, and if he will make a statement.

I am not aware of any representations regarding delays in paying small contractors for tree surgery and tree felling on trunk roads but if you have a particular case in mind, and can let me have details, I will investigate.

I am, however, very conscious that good cash flow is the life blood of many small businesses and that late payment is a common cause of concern in many industries. I am particularly aware of the problem of late payment of specialist engineering sub-contractors by main contractors and since 1992 we have included "prompt payment" provisions in our contracts in an effort to speed up the flow of payments. Unfortunately, these measures have had little beneficial effect and we are currently looking at other ways in which the problem might be tackled within our policy of having a single point of contractual responsibility whenever possible

As for direct payments to contractors, the Highways Agency and its predecessor organisations have earned a good reputation for timely payment within the periods provided for under the terms and conditions of our contracts—generally 30 days from receipt of demands for payment. That is a reputation which I am determined to preserve.

Chiswick Flyover

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has *(a)* to close and *(b)* restrict traffic over the Chiswick flyover in the medium term. [3851]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 6 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Local Transport and Road Safety and Transport in London, Mr Steven Norris, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has *(a)* to close and *(b)* restrict traffic over the Chiswick flyover in the medium term.

My reply related to work to the M4 elevated section which extends from Junction 1 (east of Chiswick roundabout) to Boston Manor playing fields.

The M4 elevated section is closed in one direction on a six weekly cycle eight times a year to enable routine maintenance to be undertaken safely. We are taking advantage of these closures to replace leaking joints.

Essential work to replace bearings at the Boston Manor Viaduct is scheduled to commence in March 1996 and expected to last for 4/5 months. Much of this will be carried out without the need for closures. A limited number of full carriageway night time closures at weekends and partial night time carriageway closures from Monday to Thursday will be required.

Investigations to prepare a programme of repairs to the M4 elevated section are ongoing. It is expected that most, if not all of the ensuing works will be able to be completed without daytime closures of the M4 during the working week. However they will require night time closures of the motorway.

Details of works and their likely impact will be published well in advance to advise local residents and to allow road users to plan their journeys.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the number of road fatalities associated with drink driving, identifying those who were drunk drivers or riders, for each of the last 16 years. [3788]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

Estimate of deaths in drink related road accidents in Great Britain, 1979–94

Year	All deaths in drink-related road accidents	Of which drivers or riders over limit
1979	1,640	850
1980	1,450	780
1981	1,420	730
1982	1,550	840
1983	1,110	600
1984	1,170	580
1985	1,040	550
1986	990	520
1987	900	480
1988	790	420
1989	810	440
1990	760	400
1991	660	360
1992	660	350
1993	540	300
1994 (provisional)	510	320

A drink driver accident is defined as one where one or more of the drivers involved refused to give a specimen or failed either (i) a breath test by registering over 35 microgrammes of alcohol per 100 ml of breath, or (ii) a blood test by registering more than 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 ml of blood. The above figures are adjusted to allow for the fact that not all drink-drive accidents are detected.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the number of dead, drunk pedestrians in each of the last 16 years. [3787]

Mr. Norris: There is no legal definition of a drunk pedestrian. However, the table shows estimates of the numbers of pedestrians killed in road accidents who were over the legal limit for driving.

Estimated number of pedestrians over the legal drink-drive limit killed in road accidents: Great Britain: 1979–94

Year	Deaths
1979	570
1980	490
1981	360
1982	420
1983	450
1984	420
1985	360
1986	480
1987	490
1988	410
1989	440
1990	460
1991	360
1992	380
1993	330

Coroners' data for 1994 are not yet available.

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures will be taken by his Department to implement the recommendations contained in the second report of the Transport Select Committee for Session 1993–94, HC 173-I, on the privatisation and deregulation of the Department of Transport agency work, page 14, paragraph 46. [3922]

Mr. Norris: The Government have made clear the importance they attach to ensuring the continued independence of the Transport Research Laboratory. In assessing bids for the whole of TRL, full consideration will be given to the proposals of prospective purchasers for ensuring that the laboratory's independence is safeguarded in the private sector.

The Government intend to sell TRL only to reputable purchasers and will be seeking assurances from prospective purchasers about their ability to meet obligations to staff transferring to the new organisation.

North West Regional Railways Ltd.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total value of the assets transferred to North West Regional Railways Ltd. [3949]

Mr. Watts: The total value of net assets transferred to North West Regional Railways Ltd. was £9,649,000.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost to North West Regional Railways Ltd. of leasing the railway stations at *(a)* Nelson and *(b)* Colne from Railtrack. [3950]

Mr. Watts: Individual station lease charges are commercially confidential between Railtrack and the station operator concerned.

Waste Pharmaceuticals

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will modify the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification, Packaging and

Labelling) Regulations 1994 to allow the transport of waste pharmaceutical in containers of up to 60 litres in volume. [3547]

Mr. Norris: These regulations permit small receptacles of waste medicines to be exempted from certain transport provisions providing they are amalgamated in packagings of not more than 30kg in total. Any suggestion that such goods may be carried safely in larger receptacles should be made known to the Health and Safety Commission before 1 March 1996 in response to the current consultative document on the revision of the regulations.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years; [3834]

(2) if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3808]

Mr. Watts: The amounts and timing of capital expenditure on PFI projects are subject to competition. Our current estimate for 1995–96 is around £330 million; estimates for the next three years are given in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1996–97; no estimate of such capital expenditure has been made beyond the survey years.

As to public sector contributions to PFI transport schemes, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave to him on 28 June at column *262* and 7 November at column *265*. Financial details of individual schemes, including the level of on-going revenue payments from the public sector to the private sector over the contract period, are commercially confidential. The Department applies a value-for-money test to all its procurement decisions, including procurement under the private finance initiative.

WALES

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all NHS trusts *(a)* as of 30 November and *(b)* with effect from 1 April 1996. [4068]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

(a) NHS Trusts in Wales as at 30 November 1995:

Pembrokeshire NHS Trust
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust
Powys Health Care NHS Trust
Glan Hafren NHS Trust
Gwent Community Health NHS Trust
Llandough Hospital and Community NHS Trust
Bridgend and District NHS Trust
Swansea NHS Trust
Llanelli/Dinefwr NHS Trust
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust
South and East Wales Ambulance NHS Trust
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust
Derwen NHS Trust
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust
Gwynedd Community Health NHS Trust
Rhondda Health Care NHS Trust
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust
Velindre NHS Trust
East Glamorgan NHS Trust
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust
University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS Trust
University Dental Hospital NHS Trust
West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust
Glan-y-Môr NHS Trust (Shadow running until 1 April 1996)

(b) Trusts from 1 April 1996

The three remaining directly managed units in Wales, the Merthyr/Cynon health unit, the Rhymney Valley health unit and the Hensol health unit have submitted applications to acquire Trust status from April 1996. Three months public consultation on the applications commenced 25 September 1995. If these applications are successful, the Rhymney Valley Health Unit will be absorbed into the existing Glan Hafren NHS Trust, the Hensol Health Unit will merge with the existing Bridgend and District NHS Trust and the Merthyr/Cynon Health Unit will become the new North Glamorgan NHS Trust.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the consequences of rail privatisation in respect of Wales, and if he will make a statement. [2921]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Privatisation is designed to improve the quality of infrastructure and rail services in Wales.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the date of impoundment of the Cardiff bay barrage will be conditional upon the prior provision of adequate alternative bird reserves being completed and in place as covered in the letter of 2 November from the Welsh Office regional development division to Mr. D. Gould. [3724]

Mr. Hague: The date of impoundment of the waters of Cardiff bay is not conditional upon completion of bird reserve compensation measures. However, the intention is to complete the bird reserve before the start of impoundment.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest number of general practitioner fundholders in each county in Wales; how many applications to set up schemes are outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [4009]

Mr. Richards: There are 146 GP fundholding practices in Wales:

Clwyd: 21
Dyfed: 21
Gwent: 21
Gwynedd: 11
Mid Glamorgan: 11
Powys: 12
South Glamorgan: 24
West Glamorgan: 25.

A further 66 practices are preparing to start fundholding from next April.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total administrative costs of running general practitioner fundholding schemes in each year since the inception of the schemes. [4008]

Mr. Richards: Reimbursement to general practitioner fundholders in respect of expenses covered by management allowances since the inception of the scheme is as follows:

	£ million
1990–91	0.112
1991–92	0.518
1992–93	1.677
1993–94	3.055
1994–95	3.759

Smoking

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning smoking in public buildings in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [3856]

Mr. Richards: In December 1991, the Government published a non-statutory code of practice on smoking in public places, aimed at everyone with responsibility for monitoring the indoor environment of buildings frequented by the public. It suggests how exposure of the public to environmental tobacco smoke can be minimised, and provides guidance on suitable smoking policies for public places.

The Government believe that the voluntary approach has a greater chance of success than legislation because no-smoking policies produced in response to public pressure are more likely to be accepted and observed.

School Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the head teachers of John Summers high school, Elfed high school, Connah's Quay high school, Castell Alun high school, St. David's high school, and Hawarden high school to discuss his allocation of moneys and other resources for the next financial year. [4020]

Mr. Richards: It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities. I suggest the schools pursue this matter with the relevant local authority.

Health Authorities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all health authorities with effect from 1 April 1996. [4067]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) on 2 November 1994 *Official Report*, columns *1139–40*. by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Wales.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3806]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 November 1995 at column *808*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3836]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4227]

Mr. Hague: I and my Ministers undertake regular ministerial visits. I have made 38 ministerial visits to Wales, including three trips abroad, in this period.

The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) has carried out 48 visits, including two abroad.

The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) has carried out 48 visits, including one abroad.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inward Investment

21. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new initiatives his Department intends to take to encourage inward investment in towns and cities that are not assisted areas and do not benefit from EU objective 2 status. [2620]

Mr. Eggar: The Government continue to support inward investment through my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau, the national agencies and regional development organisations. In recent years the number of regional development organisations in England has increased from five to eight with only the south east and eastern regions not currently covered, though IBB generated enquiries are dealt with by the Government offices. The IBB and RDO's work closely with English Partnerships whose role includes the development of vacant or derelict land in towns and cities to bring them back into productive use.

Trade With India

22. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trade with India. [2621]

Mr. Nelson: Trade with India has increased by some 50 per cent. in both directions in the past three years. United Kingdom exports to India amounted to £1.5 billion in the 12 months to the end of September this year. UK imports from India in the same period amounted to £1.3 billion. The Indo-British Partnership—set up following the Prime Minister's visit to India in 1993—has contributed greatly to the strengthening of trade relations between the UK and India.

Manufacturing Output

23. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in manufacturing output in the past 12 months. [2622]

Mr. Page: Manufacturing output in the three months to September was 1.2 per cent. higher than a year earlier. Manufacturing output is forecast to grow by 2.5 per cent. next year.

Small Businesses

25. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of small businesses survive longer than three years. [2624]

Mr. Page: Official estimates of survival rates are available for businesses registering for VAT. These show that around 60 per cent. of businesses remain on the VAT register for at least three years.

29. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small firms went out of business in the last quarter for which figures are available. [2628]

Mr. Page: There are no figures on the total numbers of small firms which go out of business each quarter. Figures are available on the number of firms which go out of businesses because of insolvency. In the third quarter of 1995 there were 3,919 company insolvencies and 6,736 individual insolvencies in England and Wales, on a seasonally adjusted basis.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those measures that his Department has taken to assist small businesses since 1979. [2617]

Mr. Page: A complete outline of the range of initiatives introduced is published in the annual report "Small Firms in Britain". Copies of the 1995 report are in the Library of the House.

Manweb

26. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had on behalf of consumers about the Scottish Power bid for Manweb from the North of Scotland Electricity Consumers Committee. [2625]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No such representations have been received on behalf of consumers.

Support for Businesses

27. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department provides for businesses in the south-west. [2626]

Mr. Nelson: My Department provides a wide range of services for businesses in the south west, including Business Links, a competitive advisory board and two regional supply offices. In addition, £14.4 million of regional selective assistance has been offered to companies in the south-west generating over £104 million of investment and 3,000 jobs.

Export Competitiveness

28. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve the competitiveness of Britain's manufacturing exporters to world markets; and if he will make a statement. [2627]

Mr. Nelson: Through overseas trade services my Department offers exporters an enhanced package of support. The Government's commitment and proposals for improving the competitiveness of British industry are set out in the two White Papers on competitiveness, "Helping Business to Win" and "Forging Ahead" published in 1994 and 1995.

Balance of Payments

30. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the balance of payments position in the year ending October 1995 *(a)* with members of the European Union, *(b)* with non European Union countries and *(c)* in total in the United Kingdom's trade with the rest of the world. [2629]

Mr. Lang: Information on the balance of payments, in total, is published quarterly by the Central Statistical Office. First Release, CSO(95)207, gave information up to the second quarter of 1995. Geographic breakdowns of the balance of payments are available annually; the latest results were published by the Central Statistical Office in October 1995 issue of "Economic Trends". Both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Coal Industry

31. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent meetings he has had with both sides of the mining industry to discuss output and conditions in British coal mines. [2630]

Mr. Page: My ministerial colleagues and I meet representatives of the coal mining industry as necessary.

Technology Foresight Programme

32. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implementation of the technology foresight programme. [2631]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Action to take forward the technology foresight programme is proceeding on a broad front. The foresight panels are pursuing vigorous programmes of dissemination. The chief scientific adviser has reconstituted the steering group, making strategic appointments which reflect the group's new focus on dissemination and implementation. The DTI is promoting foresight through Government regional offices and industry divisions. Several other Government departments are taking forward relevant foresight priorities. Numerous trade associations and professional bodies are taking forward foresight with their members. The foresight challenge competition has attracted an impressive response from industry and academia. The Government will publish a progress report shortly.

Internet

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements are being made to link the Internet to schools and libraries; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [2633]

Mr. Ian Taylor: It is estimated that close to 2,000 schools are already linked to the Internet. My Department has supported an industry-led scheme not only to link 60 schools in a pilot scheme, but to focus and channel the vast amount of material available on the worldwide web so that it can help teachers deliver the national curriculum. The total cost of the "Schools On Line" pilot, which runs through to easter 1996 is around £1 million, of which 50 per cent. comes from the companies and 50 per cent. from DTI. There are also projects involving the Internet in the superhighways for education initiative announced on 13 November.

The Director General of Telecommunications will be issuing a consultative paper in December on the future of the universal service obligation. One possibility is that the level of universal service for schools could be raised to cover a specified level of connection to the information superhighway, using a fund compatible with the operation of a competitive market.

As for public libraries, this is an issue for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. I understand it is being considered as part of the wider public library review about which there will shortly be a statement.

Future Large Aircraft

35. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement concerning his Department's commitment to the future large aircraft. [2634]

Mr. Eggar: The Government's position regarding the future large aircraft programmes remains as set out in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Defence on 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *823*.

My Department is supporting the MoD's work to ensure the appropriate conditions are met to enable the United Kingdom to rejoin the programme. My Department is also seeking to help secure the best conditions for United Kingdom industry's participation through its own contacts with Governments and industry, at home and abroad.

Textile Industry

36. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings he has recently held with representatives of the textile industry to discuss the future of the industry. [2635]

Mr. Eggar: In March this year I held just such a meeting with senior management representatives of a range of textile and clothing companies. We discussed competitiveness issues which influence the future prospects of these sectors and on which the Department is supporting the industries' own efforts to improve performance.

The President of the Board of Trade, other DTI Ministers and I have also since had various other contacts throughout the year with organisations and companies operating in the textiles and clothing sectors which have provided additional opportunities to discuss such issues.

Information, Broadcasting and Entertainment Technologies

37. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the changes required in the regulatory regime to take account of the convergence of the information, broadcasting and entertainment technologies. [2636]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are committed to a policy of regulatory stability combined with sensible evolution. The Government are mindful that the growing convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and information services might require a similar convergence in the regulatory structure. While, it would be premature at present to promote changes in regulatory structures, the Government continue to monitor developments closely, and to work with the multi-media industry advisory group and others in industry to agree the best way forward.

Electronics Industry Prices

38. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to regulate prices in the electronics industry. [2637]

Mr. Ian Taylor: None.

Science and Technology Expenditure

39. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the planned percentage change in Government expenditure in real terms on science and technology in the science and engineering base, and, net of launch aid, in the rest of the Department of Trade and Industry between 1993–94 and 1997–98. [2638]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The percentage change in Government expenditure in real terms on science and technology in the science and engineering base through the science budget—that is excluding the contributions from the Education Departments, which are not yet known—between 1993–94 and 1997–98 is +1.3 per cent.

The equivalent figure for the rest of the Department of Trade and Industry, net of launch aid, is not yet available as relevant expenditure plans for forward years have not yet been determined. Full details of the breakdown will appear in the next "Forward Look" of Government-funded science, engineering and technology due to be published in May 1996.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new plans he has to apply research in nanotechnology to industrial uses. [2618]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are committed to innovation and the application of research across the full range of technologies, including nanotechnology. It is for the research councils, universities, academics and industry to take forward specific projects where appropriate making use of one of the many Government schemes encouraging research collaboration.

South Western Electricity

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from the National Consumer Council on behalf of consumers about the bid for South Western Electricity by Southern Company. [2623]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No such representations have been received on behalf of consumers.

Electricity Industry

Ms Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the *(a)* disadvantages and *(b)* benefits of the restructuring of the electricity industry for the consumer. [2632]

Mr. Eggar: Electricity privatisation has provided the electricity companies with the right incentives to become vigorously competitive commercial enterprises, while independent regulation has brought an end to political meddling. The consumer is benefiting through: prices which—net of tax—are some 7 per cent. lower in real terms in both the domestic and industrial markets, with further reductions to come including a one-off rebate of £50 for domestic electricity customers of the regional electricity companies in England and Wales arising from the flotation of the national grid, and other reductions arising from tightened price controls and the forthcoming reduction in the fossil fuel levy; guaranteed standards of performance for tariff customers, with compensation if those standards are not met; new codes of practice on such matters as services for the elderly and disabled; and the opportunity to complain to an independent regulator—the Director General of Electricity Supply—and for those complaints to be investigated by the Office of Electricity Regulation. Many consumers have already been given the right to shop around for their electricity supplier, and in 1998 this right will be extended to all consumers including over 20 million in the domestic sector.

Private Office Staff

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, how many staff were employed in each Minister's private office; what were the salary costs of each office, in each year since 1979 at present prices; and if he will list the number of people employed, and their salary costs, in the press office in each year since 1979. [4060]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* Below are details of the number of staff employed in Minister's private offices—figures for the former Department of Energy are not available prior to 1 April 1985. Disaggregated salary costs are not available prior to 1994–95. The total salary costs in 1994–95 were £952,000.

	Staff in post 1 April 1980
Department of Industry	
Secretary of State	12
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	4
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Department of Trade	
Secretary of State	11
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	4

	Staff in post 1 April 1981
Department of Industry	
Secretary of State	12
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	4
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Trade	
Secretary of State	8
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	4
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	4

	Staff in post 1 April 1982
Department of Industry	
Secretary of State	12
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Trade	
Secretary of State	8
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	4

Department of Industry	*Staff in Post 1 April 1983*
Secretary of State	13
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Trade	
Secretary of State	7
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	4
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5

Department of Trade and Industry	*Staff in post*
1 April 1984	
Secretary of State	13
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
1 April 1985	
Secretary of State	13
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Energy	[1]35
1 April 1986	
Secretary of State	15.5
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Energy	[1]41
1 April 1987	
Secretary of State	17.5
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	4
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Energy	[1]36.5
1 April 1988	
Secretary of State	12
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	11
Minister of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Department of Energy	[1]38
Secretary of State	12
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	9
Minister of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Department of Energy	[1]39.5
1 April 1990	
Secretary of State	13
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Department of Energy	[1]29
1 April 1991	
Secretary of State	14
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Department of Energy	[1]27
1 April 1992	
Secretary of State	13
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Department of Energy	[1]26
1 April 1993	
President of the Board of Trade	14
Minister of State	7
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	7
1 April 1994	
President of the Board of Trade	13
Minister of State	8
Minister of State	5
Minister of State	6
Minister of State	7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	7
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	5.5
1 April 1995	
President of the Board of Trade	15
Minister of State	7
Minister of State	7
Minister of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State	6

[1] Disaggregated information is not available for the Department of Energy which merged with the Department of Trade and Industry in April 1992.

For information on the Department's press office I refer the hon. Member to a previous answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 17 September 1993, *Official Report*, column *988*. The total number of staff employed on 1 April 1995 was 30.

The estimated current annual salary cost of the press office is £777,000. Comparable figures for previous years could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Employee-owned Companies

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all employee-owned companies. [4029]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* I understand that there is no information available which would enable me to do so.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the percentage, and total turnover, of United Kingdom companies that are employee owned. [4030]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* I understand that there is no information available that would enable me to make such estimates.

Investment

Mr. Bennett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what change was recorded in total investment between the second quarter of 1995 and the third quarter of 1995. [2602]

Mr. Oppenheim: Whilst total investment fell by 2 per cent. over this period, it rose by 6.5 per cent. over the previous two years and by 31 per cent. since 1979.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3809]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Although my Department has identified a number of proposals for the period 1996–97 to 1998–99, no scheme has yet been agreed.

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3833]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and the Budget Report 1996–97", which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995 and, for the current financial year, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my predecessor on 7 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *705.*

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4230]

Mr. Lang: My duties and those of my Ministers involve a large number of visits in the United Kingdom. Ministers in my Department have made 37 trips overseas in the period 6 July to 1 December 1995.

Estimated Funding

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the estimated funding of the *(a)* National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, *(b)* National Consumer Council, *(c)* Gas Consumer Council, *(d)* Post Office Users National Council, *(e)* POAC, *(f)* Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, *(g)* DTI's consumer safety programme and *(h)* Central Rail Users Consultative Committee for each year from 1993–94 at 1995 prices, together with the percentage change (i) per annum and (ii) since 1993–94, including the 1996–97 figure following the November Budget statement. [4080]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Most of the information requested is as follows. Figures are shown for Citizens Advice Scotland as well as the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. The 1996–97 allocations have not yet been determined. Since April 1994 the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee has been the responsibility of the Office of the Rail Regulator.

Table of Expenditure on Consumer Protection (at 1994–95 prices)

	1993–94	*1994–95*		*1995–96*		
	Outturn £000	*Outturn £000*	*Percentage change from 1993–94*	*Allocation £000*	*Percentage change from 1994–95*	*Percentage change from 1993–94*
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux[1]	12,140	11,916	–1.8	11,597	–2.7	–4.5
Citizens Advice Scotland[2]	1,483	1,456	–1.8	1,417	–2.7	–4.5
National Consumer Council[3]	2,965	2,473	–16.6	2,302	–6.9	–22.4
Gas Consumers' Council[4]	2,936	2,774	–6.5	2,729	–0.5	–7.0
Post Office Users' Councils and POACs[5]	820	714	–12.9	659	–7.7	–19.6

Table of Expenditure on Consumer Protection (at 1994–95 prices)

	1993–94	*1994–95*		*1995–96*		
	Outturn £000	*Outturn £000*	*Percentage change from 1993–94*	*Allocation £000*	*Percentage change from 1994–95*	*Percentage change from 1993–94*
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	164	161	–1.8	165	+2.5	+0.6
Consumer Safety	1,074	729	–32.1	824	+11.5	–23.3

[1] The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux received £336,000 in 1993–94, and £436,988 in 1994–95 in supplementary grant.

[2] Citizen Advice Scotland received £33,000 in 1993–94 and £79,736 in 1994–95 in supplementary grant.

[3] The National Consumer Council received £228,000 in 1993–94, and £291,879 in 1994–95 in supplementary grant

[4] The cost of the Gas Consumers' Council is almost entirely recovered from British Gas

[5] This covers expenditure by POUNC, POACs and the Post Office Users' Councils and Advisory Committees on Telecommunications for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the Consumer Safety unit's report on carbon monoxide accidental fatal and non-fatal poisonings from domestic appliances in the United Kingdom and EU. [4081]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The two reports on accidental fatal and non-fatal poisonings from carbon monoxide due to faulty domestic heating appliances within the UK and EU will be published on 8 December, and copies of the reports will be placed in the Library of the House. Copies are available on request from the Department's Consumer safety unit.

Manufacturing Employment

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which Labour Government since 1965 jobs in manufacturing fell at the rate of 700,000 a year, as indicated in his oral answer of 1 November to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-east (Mr. Purchase) *Official Report* column 297; and what information he has on the number of jobs in manufacturing in each year since 1965. [1617]

Mr. Oppenheim: Manufacturing employment under the last labour Government fell by 680,000. That is a rate of 136,000 a year.

Manufacturing output also declined by 0.5 per cent. a year for 1974 to 1979. Since 1979 it has increased by 0.7 per cent. a year.

EU Retex Grant

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further assistance he proposes for textile areas to promote diversification. [2614]

Mr. Page: The Government have secured 32 mecu of European Retex grant for a programme for textile areas including, for the first time, parts of London and the Scottish Borders. The aim of the programme is to promote the economic diversification of these areas. I expect that the European Commission will adopt the GB Retex programme later this month.

Staff Training

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has undertaken on the effects on the performance of businesses of financial management training for managers. [3929]

Mr. Page: My Department recognises the importance of training for all staff, not just managers and its potential effect on competitiveness. A research report published by the DTI and the CBI—"Competitiveness—How the best UK companies are Winning" showed that winning companies train and develop all staff at all levels. It also showed that improved company performance is dependent on a range of factors, it can rarely be attributable to improvements in one particular facet of management.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to establish a central management information service for the business links programme. [3935]

Mr. Page: The Department has a contractual requirement that business links must provide through the training and enterprise councils, quarterly management information on business links activities.

Business links partnerships are also required to establish as soon as reasonably practical, a database common to all the partners recording all business links related contacts with individual companies.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the core services of the business links network. [3938]

Mr. Page: A number of core services lie at the heart of business links. These include:

an enquiry and information service;

personal business advisers;

help for start ups and micro business;

diagnostic services;

Business links also provide direct access to 11 categories of specialist advice and support including: marketing, finance, exports, management, training, technology and design.

A copy of the "Business Links Service Guide" can be found in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what common database software is used by business links. [3936]

Mr. Page: The Business Links IT strategy group defines the overall IT strategy for business links. As the business links are independent commercial companies it is the responsibility of the individual business link to specify what core software and systems they require to support their business. There is therefore no single common database software in use.

Individual business links partnerships are however required to establish a clear commitment to record in a common database all contact information made by any of the partners where that contact relates to business links activity. This will provide the partners with a complete picture when dealing with customers of the business links.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what specifications the IT unit has set out for business links systems. [3937]

Mr. Page: The business link IT strategy group—made up of the national partners, business links and DTI—determined the approach to be taken by business links in defining and developing their IT systems. They defined minimum mandatory standards in the areas of common core databases, client management systems core data, electronic mail, data protection and system security. These mandatory requirements and additional advisory material have been circulated to all business links partnerships as a series of documents known as OSSIT papers.

The DTI IT unit does not however provide detailed specifications for business links IT systems. It is the responsibility of individual business links partnerships to define the technical specification of the solutions to their particular business requirements.

Company Voluntary Arrangements

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many company voluntary arrangements there have been *(a)* in total and *(b)* for firms with fewer than 200 employees in each financial year since the Insolvency Act 1986. [3939]

Mr. Oppenheim: The total number of company voluntary arrangements in each financial year since the Insolvency Act 1986 is shown in the table. Information by size of business is not available.

Company Voluntary Arrangements in England and Wales Registered at Companies House

(financial year data April to end March)

Financial year	*Number of CVAs*
1987–88	26
1988–89	52
1989–90	54
1990–91	75
1991–92	129
1992–93	67
1993–94	196
1994–95	281

Source:
Companies House.

Business Starts and Closures

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* business start-ups there were and *(b)* small businesses closed in the last year for which figures are available in each parliamentary constituency. [3933]

Mr. Page: There are no available figures on the numbers of business starts and closures in each parliamentary constituency. Estimates of numbers of VAT registrations and deregistrations by local authority district are published annually. A copy of the most recent figures "VAT Registrations and Deregistrations, County and District Analysis 1992–1993" is in the Library of the House.

Business Link London

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the London business links to begin. [3934]

Mr. Page: Business link London opened for commercial trialling in July 1995. It provides a common enquiry and information services across London. Businesses can contact business link London by telephoning its freephone number 0800 997998.

Plans for local access have been developed by eight local partnerships. Of these, six have been approved by my Department and their hub operations have opened for business. The remaining two are expected to follow early in 1996.

British Coal

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the remaining senior executives of British Coal and the cost to public funds of their salaries. [4092]

Mr. Page: There are currently two full-time members of the British Coal Corporation, Mr Neil Clarke—Chairman and Mr Philip Hutchinson. Their salaries of £240,000 and £95,000 are paid by British Coal.

Mr. Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the current number of employees of British Coal; [4088]

(2) what is the cost to the Exchequer of maintaining the remaining workforce and accommodation still required by British Coal for the six months following the establishment of the Coal Authority. [4089]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for British Coal.

EU Telecommunications Council

Mr. Trend: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council on 27 November. [4941]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I represented the United Kingdom at the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 27 November.

The Council reached political agreement on a decision on a series of guidelines for Trans-European telecommunications networks, and on a Decision for a 65 million ecu programme to stimulate development of the European multi-media content industry—INFO 2000 programme—though in both cases adoption of a common position awaits the European Parliament's opinion. The council also adopted a number of items without discussion, and details of these are listed in the Council press release which is deposited in the Library of the

House. These included the final adoption of the resubmitted directive applying open network provision to voice telephony.

The presidency gave a progress report on discussion of a draft directive on interconnection in telecommunications. A policy debate followed on two draft Commission directives on mobile and personal communications, and full competition in telecommunications markets. The Council agreed unanimous conclusions calling on the Commission to take account of the positions expressed by the Council and member states before adopting the directives.

There was also a policy debate on a draft directive on the development of Community postal services, and on a draft Commission notice on the application of the treaty competition rules to the postal sector. The Council agreed unanimous conclusions on the draft Notice calling on the Commission to delay its publication until agreement had been reached on the directive, but to publish by the end of 1996.

The Commission made brief presentations on: two draft directives on licensing of telecommunications services, and to adapt the open network provision directives 90/387/EEC and 92/44/EEC to a competitive environment; two draft decisions on satellite personal communications, and on a programme for the promotion of multi-lingualism in the information society, and on a Communication on directories in a competitive environment. The Commission also reported on the progress of multilateral negotiations in the World Trade Organisation on basic telecommunications.

No votes were taken on the substantive items in the agenda of the Council.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecoms Council, held on 27 November giving details of all votes and all decisions which were determined by unanimity or without dissension. [1971]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council. Details of votes on all points are recorded in the Council press release referred to in my reply.

World Trade Estimate

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of Britain's share of *(a)* world trade in manufactured goods and *(b)* world trade in services for each year since 1975. [4402]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is provided in the table.

UK percentage share of world exports of manufactured goods and services

	Percentage value share of services[1]	*Percentage value share of manufactures*[2]	*Percentage volume share of manufactures*[2]
1975	9.9	7.1	8.3
1976	9.1	6.6	8.0
1977	8.8	6.9	8.0
1978	8.6	6.7	7.5
1979	9.0	6.7	6.9
1980	8.8	7.0	6.7
1981	8.2	6.2	6.1
1982	7.6	6.1	6.2
1983	7.4	5.6	5.9
1984	7.3	5.3	5.8
1985	7.7	5.5	5.9
1986	7.7	5.4	5.9
1987	7.7	5.6	6.0
1988	7.4	5.7	5.8
1989	6.8	5.6	5.8
1990	6.6	5.9	6.0
1991	6.0	5.8	5.8
1992	5.7	5.6	5.7
1993	5.4	5.3	5.5
1994	n/a	5.4	5.5

Note:

Over the time period 1975–94 volume shares will better reflect changes in composition and relative prices. But volume share of world trade in services is not readily available.

Sources:

[1] Derived from data published in IMF "Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook", Part 2, various editions.

[2] Derived from data published in the OECD "Economic Outlook".

SCOTLAND

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many informal approaches his Department has received from companies seeking payments under regional selective assistance in each financial year since 1979–80. [1717]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* Statistical records of informal approaches to the Department are not kept.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what tightening of the procedures in relation to the payment of regional selective assistance his Department made during the last 18 months; [1719]

(2) what section within his Department has responsibility for monitoring companies who have been awarded regional selective assistance; and what procedures are used by this section to monitor these projects. [1724]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* Responsibility for the monitoring of projects which have been awarded regional selective assistance lies with the investment assistance division of the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. When a company is made an offer of RSA, it is issued with an offer letter which sets out the conditions against which RSA will, assuming the offer is accepted, be payable. Throughout the term of each offer of assistance, and prior to any payment of grant, company progress reports are obtained which have been certified by independent accountants. These allow the division to check that the conditions upon which payment of grant depends have been met. These progress reports are supplemented, as necessary, by the division's own monitoring visits and investigations. The

Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Welsh Office, has within the last 18 months reviewed its monitoring procedures to ensure that straightforward cases are not handled with unnecessary complexity while higher risk cases are accorded appropriately full attention.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money his Department offered to companies in regional selective assistance for each financial year since 1979–80; and what proportion of these amounts were fully paid by his Department. [1734]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Year of acceptance	*Value of offers accepted (£ million)*	*Of which total paid (£ million)*	*Proportion paid to date (percentage)*
1979–80	32.2	27.1	84
1980–81	31.0	23.0	74
1981–82	29.9	22.5	75
1982–83	50.4	39.2	78
1983–84	38.3	34.1	89
1984–85	70.7	55.2	78
1985–86	58.6	44.6	76
1986–87	34.6	26.9	78
1987–88	56.2	37.6	67
1988–89	49.8	34.7	70
1989–90	76.3	50.2	66
1990–91	173.5	99.5	57
1991–92	52.3	36.2	69
1992–93	72.3	43.0	59
1993–94	126.8	51.6	41
1994–95	113.0	22.7	20

1. This table refers to the year an offer was accepted. Payments in respect of an offer will normally be spread over several years.

2. For the most recent years, some offers are still live and further payments may be made in respect of these.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to disclose fully the amounts of money actually received by companies from his Department in regional selective assistance. [1720]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The amount of an offer made to a company, where the offer is over £75,000, is published in "Labour Market Trends" following the first grant payment. It is not intended to depart from this practice.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make it is policy to instruct his Department to make a new appraisal of the effectiveness of the regional selective assistance scheme; [1721]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of awards made by his Department under the regional selective assistance scheme; [1722]

(3) what specific measures and sources of funding are available to his Department to support economic development in Scotland. [1723]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The Government's chief role in supporting economic development is to promote a stable low-inflation economic environment. Within that context, the Scottish Office is responsible for a number of measures which support economic development. For example, it sponsors and funds Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise; it encourages inward investment and export promotion through its two joint bureaux with Scottish Enterprise, Locate in Scotland and Scottish Trade International; and it offers grant assistance to encourage industrial investment in the assisted areas.

Regional selective assistance is the principal such grant assistance scheme. The scheme operates throughout Great Britain, under the direction of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office. Periodic evaluations are made by the independent consultants of the scheme's effectiveness throughout Great Britain. Because of the nature of the RSA scheme there is frequently a period of some three to five years between an application for grant being made and the assisted project being completed, therefore such evaluations have to be undertaken some years in arrears. The most recent evaluation was "Regional Selective Assistance 1985–1988: An Evaluation by PA Cambridge Economic Consultants" published by HMSO in July 1993. This evaluation concluded that RSA was an effective means of raising the level of employment in the assisted areas of Great Britain and that the scheme during the period 1985–88 had resulted in the creation of between 700,000 and 1 million additional job years at a net cost to the Exchequer of between £500 to £700 per job at 1990 prices. It also concluded that the operation of RSA during the period 1980–88 had reduced the assisted areas unemployment rate by about one percentage point compared with what would otherwise have been the case. A further evaluation will be carried out in due course.

Prison Population

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the present prison population in Scotland and in each of the past five years. [2539]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E.W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Norman Hogg, dated 6 December 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question relating to the present prison population in Scotland and in each of the past five years.

On Friday 17 November 1995 the prison population was 5,717.

The table below shows the average daily prison population for each of the past five years.

Average daily population for 1990–94

1990: 4,724

1991: 4,839

1992: 5,257

1993: 5,637

1994: 5,585.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what record he keeps of the number and dates of meetings he has with the heads of agencies which report to him. [3084]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Internal records are maintained for all formal meetings between my right hon. Friend and the heads of his agencies.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2462]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* In the last Session of Parliament the Scottish Office sponsored 193 statutory instruments; information on how many of these constituted a new rule or regulation could be obtained only at disproportionate cost; five of the 193 were introduced to implement European Directives; none of these amplifies the minimum standards set out in an original European directive.

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part-time and (ii) full time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the river purification boards, (2) Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate, (3) the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency and (4) the Meat and Livestock Commission for Scotland. [2747]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information available to me is set out in the tables. The level of detail requested is, for some of the bodies, greater than that routinely held and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

The information given for the Meat and Livestock Commission relates to the Great Britain-wide non-departmental public body for which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is the sponsor Department. There is no separate commission for Scotland.

Table 1: River Purification Boards (RPBs)

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income[1]			
fees	361,597	481,558	not yet available
charges	2,932,512	3,107,622	not yet available
fines[2]	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff employed			
all staff[2,3]	368.7	389.7	not yet available
Scottish office contribution to running costs	Nil	Nil	Nil

[1] Information is a summary covering all 7 of the mainland RPBs and is taken from annual reports. Audited accounts not yet available for 1994–95.

[2] RPBs do not levy or collect income from fines.

[3] Staff numbers are maintained on the basis of full-time equivalents.

Table 2: Her Majesty's Industrial Pollution Inspectorate (HMIPI)

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income			
fees and charges[1]	764,942	1,085,853	685,447
fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff employed			
full time	31	34	34
part time	1	3	3
Scottish Office contribution to running costs	100 per cent.	100 per cent.	100 per cent.

[1] HMIPI do not separately identify fees and charges nor do they levy or collect income from fines.

Table 3: Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency (SFPA)

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Income			
fees	Nil	Nil	Nil
charges	Nil	Nil	Nil
fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff employed			
full time	260	260	263
part time	10	12	12
Scottish Office contribution to running costs	100 per cent.	100 per cent.	100 per cent.

SFPA do not receive income from fees, charges or fines.

Table 4: Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC)

	1993	*1994*	*1995*
Income			
fees	9,977,000	9,278,000	8,444,000
charges	28,663,000	29,646,000	32,256,000
fines	Nil	Nil	Nil
Staff employed			
all staff	737	637	541
Scottish Office contribution to running costs	Nil	Nil	Nil

1. Information from annual reports which are prepared on the basis of a calendar year.
2. MLC do not receive income from fees, charges or fines.

Playing Fields

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many playing fields are currently under threat of development; [3847]

(2) how many playing fields have been sold off since 1981; [3848]

(3) what estimate he has made of the value of playing fields that have been sold off since 1981; [3849]

(4) what estimates he has made of the area of playing fields that have been sold off since 1981; [3850]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information on the redevelopment or disposal of playing fields in Scotland is not held centrally. I have however asked the chairman of the Scottish Sports Council to write to the hon. Gentleman with any information held by the council on these matters. I have asked to see a copy of the letter.

Highland Council for Decentralisation

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funds were given to the Highland Council for decentralisation; how these funds were bid for; if other new unitary councils were invited to bid for funds for decentralisation; and if he will make a statement. [3493]

Mr. Kynoch: The shadow Highland council has been given a capital allocation of £275,000 towards its accommodation needs arising from local government reorganisation. These resources are intended to enable the council to provide public access facilities in remote communities and will also assist the council to maximise the effective use of existing property.

All shadow unitary authorities were invited to submit bids in respect of their accommodation needs arising from reorganisation and capital allocations of around £9 million have now been given to 21 shadow authorities and the Strathclyde police board. No restrictions were placed on the scope of bids and decisions on allocations were taken on the basis of the relative needs of individual councils, within the limits of the available resources.

Water Charges

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he is making for the collection of revenue for the water and sewerage authorities in Scotland; what payment is to be made to any councils involved in collection; who will be responsible for pursuing those in arrears with payment; and if he will make a statement. [3494]

Mr. Kynoch: The collection of non-domestic and metered charges is a matter for the new water and sewerage authorities. With regard to domestic unmeasured water and sewerage charges, my right hon. Friend will require the unitary councils to bill and collect these on behalf of the new water and sewerage authorities in 1996–97. An order will be made under section 79 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 requiring this work to be done.

We are presently consulting local authorities, new water authorities and the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council among others on the practical arrangements. These include proposals for calculating the amount the local authorities will be required to hand over to the new water and sewerage authorities and for payment to the local authorities for the work they will do. The consultation period expires on 31 December. I have arranged for copies of the consultation document to be placed in the Library of the House.

When local authorities are required to do this billing and collection work, the recovery of charges is a matter for them. Summary warrant powers will be available to them.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3831]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97", which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3811]

Mr. Kynoch: The following table lists completed PFI projects and agreed projects within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland and their estimated capital value. The health sector projects are the responsibility of the relevant health boards and trusts and figures are not available centrally for estimated revenue costs or to allow a comparison between estimated PFI and public sector capital costs.

Scottish Office PFI projects completed or agreed (ie contracts let).

Project	*Estimated capital value (£ million)*
A—Completed	
Lanarkshire Health Board: 60 elderly care beds	1.5
Lanarkshire Health Board (Bellshill): care beds	2.8
Dundee Teaching Hospitals Trust: SMAC analyser equipment	0.3
Grampian Health Board (Spynie Hospital, Elgin): 25 beds	1.1
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust (Aberdeen City Hospital): 60 beds	n/a
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust beds for mentally ill: 3–18 beds	n/a
Greater Glasgow Health Board (Darnley) 120 care beds	3.5
Greater Glasgow Health Board (Ruchill): 120 beds	3.8
Greater Glasgow Health Board (Rutherglen): 180 beds	5.0
Greater Glasgow Health Board (Shettleston): 120 beds	3.3
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust: CT and MRI scanners	2.2
Skye Bridge crossing	23.6
B—Agreed (i.e contracts let)	
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board: care beds	3.8
Lothian and Forth Valley Trusts: clinical waste disposal	5.0
Lothian HB: Western General Hospital Molecular Medicines Centre	5.3
Lothain Health Board: clinical genetic services	0.8
Northern Trusts: clinical waste disposal	5.0

NHS Trust Executives

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what travel allowances have been paid to senior executives of *(a)* each NHS trust in Scotland; and *(b)* each health board in Scotland; in the last four financial years. [4447]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance his Department has issued to NHS trusts or health boards relating to the travel allowances which should be available to the senior executives of these bodies. [4446]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Travel allowance for senior executives of an NHS trust is a matter for the trust itself. For senior executives on national terms and conditions, travel allowance provisions of the "General Whitley Council Handbook" will apply.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise expect to introduce new disclosure arrangements for themselves and their subsidiary local enterprise companies relating to assistance offered to companies by the local enterprise companies; [4450]

(2) how much in total the directors of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and each local enterprise company have declared in beneficial interests for each financial year since their establishment; and what percentage this represented of the operational expenditure of each of the local enterprise company. [4449]

Mr. Kynoch: These are operational matters for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of both bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Water Authorities

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he has issued to the water authorities in Scotland on the subject of conflicts of interest between their business and personal interests and their membership of the water authorities. [4454]

Mr. Kynoch: The instrument of appointment signed by members required them to notify the Secretary of State of interests which might be prejudicial to their appointment. Members are also required by the provisions of schedule 7 to the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 to disclose at a meeting of the water authority any interests which might prejudicially affect consideration of matters being dealt with by the authority to which they have been appointed.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what tendering procedure was used by his Department in awarding the contract for drafting the property transfer orders for the new water authorities in Scotland. [4453]

Mr. Kynoch: To assist outgoing councils and the Central Scotland Water Development Board in the drafting of the transfer schemes required under section 91 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, the Scottish Office let two contracts: the first was to draw up a model transfer scheme and the second was to liaise with councils and the board on the preparation of schemes and to evaluate the content of submitted schemes.

Both contracts were let by competitive tender. For the first, six firms were invited to tender from which the Babtie Group was chosen. For the second contract expressions of interest, were sought by advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Thereafter, 13 firms were invited to tender and the contract was awarded to the Babtie Group.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he is proposing in respect of payments of water rates by the new unitary councils to the new water authorities in Scotland; what procedures he will put in place to resolve disputes between the water authorities and the unitary councils over the levels of payments; and what plan he has to allow unitary councils to be billed by the water authorities in advance for water rates. [4443]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend will require the unitary councils to bill and collect unmeasured domestic water and sewerage charges on behalf of the new water and sewerage authorities in 1996–97. A copy of the consultation paper setting out our proposals is available in the Library of the House. The consultation period ends on 31 December. The billing and collection of other water and sewerage charges is a matter for the new water and sewerage authorities.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what personal interests have been declared by members of the new water authorities; and what procedures there are for public scrutiny of these interests. [4455]

Mr. Kynoch: No member of a water authority has declared any interest within the terms of schedule 7 to the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. Each of the new water authorities is presently considering the issue of public scrutiny of any declarations of interests. The West of Scotland Water Authority has agreed interim standing orders which provide for the public inspection for a register of members' interests.

Emergency Response Trains

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations his Department has made to Railtrack in respect of its recent decision on the deployment of emergency response trains on the rail network; and if his Department was consulted on this matter. [4441]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The deployment of emergency units is entirely a matter for Railtrack and there is no requirement to consult the Scottish Office.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education Funding

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will give the amount in cash terms by which *(a)* the funding from her Department changed per pupil in Derbyshire between 1994–95 and 1995–96 and *(b)* the funding allocated by Derbyshire county council to each school changed, per pupil, over the same period. [2216]

Mr. Robin Squire: The standard spending assessment for Derbyshire increased by £11 or 0.6 per cent., per primary pupil and decreased by £101 or 4.2 per cent., per secondary pupil between 1994–95 and 1995–96. In percentage terms, this is broadly in line with national figures.

A table will be placed in the House of Commons Library showing the change over the same period in funding per pupil allocated by Derbyshire county council to each school maintained by the local education authority.

School Meals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost of school meals in each local education authority in England and Wales. [3707]

Mrs. Gillan: Information on the cost of school meals in schools in England has not been collected centrally since 1993.

The cost of school meals in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average cost of school meals in England has been for each year since 1978. [3706]

Mrs. Gillan: Information on local authorities' charging arrangements, which was collected centrally between January 1990 and 1993, is shown in the table:

School meals charging arrangements[1] in maintained schools in England 1990–1993

Position as at January each year

	Pence per day Primary		*Pence per day secondary*	
Year	*Fixed[2] charge*	*Authorised[3] spend*	*Fixed[2] charge*	*Authorised[3] spend*
1990	62	63	65	74
1991	73	75	78	82
1992	83	88	89	94
1993	92	92	96	103

[1] 1993 data collected from maintained schools. Data for earlier years collected from local education authorities.

[2] The fixed charge is the charge for a standard meal in schools operating dining centres.

[3] The authorised spend is the amount allowed for each pupil receiving a free meal in schools operating a cash cafeteria service.

Information Technology

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools now have access to a qualified computer technician. [3846]

Mr. Robin Squire: Technical support is provided by a range of public and commercial contractors and is a matter for individual schools. Surveys recently carried out do not differentiate between general and computer technicians.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers in United Kingdom schools have knowledge of, and the ability to use, computers. [3915]

Mr. Squire: The competencies set out in departmental circulars 9/92 and 14/93 require all newly qualified teachers to be able to make constructive use of information technology. The Teacher Training Agency is targeting the use of IT to improve pupils' achievements as a national priority area for the continuing professional development of teachers.

Details of staff trained in the use of information technology in schools in England are contained within the Department's statistical bulletin 3/95, reporting on a survey in March 1994. This indicates that seven in 10 staff in primary schools had undertaken one or more short in-service training courses in the use of IT. In secondary schools, 32 per cent. of teachers had received initial awareness training in the use of IT; 24 per cent. had attended one additional short in-service course; a further 27 per cent. of teachers had attended more than one additional short in-service course.

Information about schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State concerned.

Unemployment Benefit

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action the Government plan to take to remove obstacles to people who wish to study or train while remaining unemployed and claiming benefit. [4093]

Mr. Paice: The rules for unemployed people who wish to study or train while claiming benefits will be updated when Jobseeker's allowance is introduced on 7 October 1996.

Certain unemployed people, in particular those who have been unemployed for six months or more, will continue to be eligible to train full or part-time under training for work. Participants on TFW receive an allowance instead of benefit, and so are not subject to the benefit tests of availability or actively seeking employment.

As now, full-time students will not generally be able to claim JSA. People receiving JSA will be able to study part-time, as long as they meet the entitlement conditions, which include being available for and actively seeking employment. This carries existing arrangements. Courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council are not defined as full or part-time. For JSA purposes, therefore, courses funded in whole or in part by the FEFC will be considered to be part-time if they are of no more than 16 guided learning hours per week. There will be no change in higher education, where the distinction between full and part-time remains, or in other sectors.

Unemployed people claiming JSA will be able to undertake full-time, employment-related courses for up to two weeks a year with the prior agreement of the Employment Service. They will not have to be available for or actively seeking employment while on the course.

These new rules on part-time study will provide more clarity and are designed to allow the same number of people to study part-time while unemployed and receiving benefit as do so under the current rules.

Assisted Places

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *101*, if she will make a statement on the procedures in place to cross-check the income of parents seeking help under the assisted place scheme with other Government-held records. [4196]

Mrs. Gillan: Schools participating in the assisted places scheme administer means testing within the regulations and guidance provided by the Department. Parents are required to supply to the schools full corroborative documentary evidence of their income, for example, by means of a P60 or schedule D tax assessment. Schools are expected to satisfy themselves that it is complete and accurate, and may ask parents to obtain written confirmation from the Inland Revenue or other source where necessary. The Department conducts regular audit surveys of random samples of parental income assessments carried out by participating schools to check compliance with the regulations and guidance.

Training for Work

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number of training for work programme participants in each month of 1995 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by standard region; and what was the number of training for work programme participants regarded as special needs trainees in the same periods and regions. [4317]

Mr. Paice: August 1995 is the latest month for which figures are available. It is only possible to estimate the percentage of starts by special needs trainees, not the actual numbers. The information available is given in tables 1 and 2:

Training for Work England and Wales and Regions 1995 up to August

Special Needs Groups by Region[1]

	Starts[2] *during January–March 1995*			*Starts*[2] *during April–June 1995*		
	People with disabilities	*Literacy/numeracy problems*	*English for speakers of other languages*	*People with disabilities*	*Literacy/numeracy problems*	*English for speakers of other languages*
South East	15	4	2	15	7	1
London	10	5	4	10	10	5
Eastern England	13	4	1	15	4	1
South West	17	5	1	17	7	2
West Midlands	18	4	1	15	4	1
East Midlands	18	5	1	16	4	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	18	8	2	15	8	2
Greater Manchester[1]	17	9	4	16	8	3
North West[1]	14	7	2	13	7	1
North East	17	7	1	13	7	1
Wales	14	5	1	14	4	1
England and Wales	16	6	2	15	7	2

Notes:

[1] The regional breakdown here differs from the standard Government Office regions, in that the TECs covered by the new North West and Merseyside regions are shown under the previous North West and Greater Manchester regional definitions. The database does not cover Scotland.

[2] The database gives information on those starting in a given time period. In order for there to be sufficient records to give reliable estimates, the figures are given for quarters rather than individual months. April–June 1995 is the latest available quarter.

Source:

TFW national starts database.

Training for Work Great Britain and regions 1995 up to August

Number of participants in each period by region

	Number in training as at[1]								
	1 January	*30/27 January*	*26/24 February*	*26/31 March*	*23/28 April*	*21/26 May*	*18/30 June*	*16/28 July*	*13/25 August*
South-east	7,600	8,400	8,500	7,300	5,900	5,600	5,300	4,600	4,000
London	16,000	16,600	16,800	11,700	10,100	10,900	10,700	10,200	9,500
Eastern England	7,000	7,400	7,600	6,700	6,000	6,000	5,500	4,800	4,600
South-west	8,600	8,700	8,300	7,400	6,500	6,500	6,400	5,900	5,500
West Midlands	10,900	11,700	11,700	10,400	8,100	7,800	7,400	6,800	6,400
East Midlands	8,100	8,300	8,400	8.000	6,400	5,900	5,700	5,500	5,300
Yorkshire and Humberside	14,000	14,200	14,700	13,200	10,000	9,600	9,000	7,900	7,500
Merseyside	6,700	7,200	8,000	8,500	6,300	5,800	5,600	5,300	5,500
North-west	10,700	11,000	11,600	10,500	9,000	8,300	7,800	7,500	7,400
North-east	10,800	11,200	11,400	10,500	8,600	8,300	8,000	7,600	7,600
England	99,800	105,100	106,700	94,400	77,000	74,600	71,400	66,200	63,200
Wales	9,500	10,100	9,800	8,600	6,700	6,300	6,100	5,100	4,800
Scotland[2]	n/a	14,400	14,600	14,400	14,100	13,800	13,600	13,100	12,800
Great Britain	n/a	129,600	131,000	117,300	97,800	94,700	91,200	84,400	80,700

Notes:

[1] The first date shown is for England and Wales, the second is for Scotland.

[2] In Scotland information is collected over 12 periods not 13 as in England and Wales.

Source:

TEC management information returns, the Welsh Office, the Scottish Office.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what surplus or loss each training and enterprise council made in 1994–95 on their turnover. [3702]

Mr. Paice: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *655*. This shows the surpluses or losses for each of the training and enterprise councils in England. The information has been extracted from TECs' statutory accounts for 1993–94. Information for 1994–95 will be available at 31 January 1996 by which date all TECs are required to have lodged their accounts.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount available in 1995–96 to TECs by way of performance-related funding; and what was the performance-related funding target for small firm training loans to have been awarded in respect of each TEC. [3704]

Mr. Paice: The total amount of funding for the 1995–96 performance-related funding competition for TECs has yet to be determined, but is customarily 2 per cent. of eligible programme budgets for the following year. The 1994–95 competition resulted in awards totalling nearly £20 million. Targets for small firms training loans of some 1,300 were planned as a component of the 1995–96 competition, but following representation from the TEC national council that the targets were unrealistic I have agreed to withdraw this element of the competition, if all TECs in a region agree.

Skills League Table

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the United Kingdom's current position in the World Economic Forum's skills league table. [3703]

Mr. Forth: Out of the 48 countries covered in the World Economic Forum's "World Competitiveness Report, 1995", the UK was ranked 20th in respect of the availability of competent senior managers and skilled labour. However, the forum's findings are based on limited statistical evidence and put Japan well below the Philippines.

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many employers, and of what size, currently hold investor in people status; and what these constitute as a percentage of all employers of that size *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by region. [4237]

Mr. Paice: At 8 October 1995, 2,631 employers in the United Kingdom were recognised as investors in people. Of these, 743 were companies with over 200 employees; 1,888 with under 200 employees.

The percentage of organisations in England recognised as investors in people is:

(a) 8.5 per cent. of those with over 200 employees.

(b) 0.15 per cent. of those with under 200 employees.

Training and enterprise councils have counted the number of companies employing over 200 who are likely to be eligible for investors in people. Figures for companies employing under 200 are currently based on the latest published census of employment figures which counts numbers of workplaces.

The regional breakdown for England, as a percentage of those organisations in each region with over 200 employees and under 200 employees respectively, is as follows:

Percentage

	Over 200 employees	*Under 200 employees*
Eastern	7	.05
East Midlands	9	.15
London	3	.05

Percentage

	Over 200 employees	*Under 200 employees*
Merseyside	11	.19
North West	9	.17
Northern	9	.16
South East	10	.09
West Midlands	10	.15
Yorkshire/ Humberside	9	.18
South West	17	no baselines available

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3819]

Mrs. Gillan: The Employment Service has procured a personnel system under the private finance initiative. There are no associated capital costs to public funds. The revenue cost to the Employment Service is £3.2 million over the seven-year life of the contract.

The Employment Service could not have obtained the expertise within the public sector so no estimate has been made.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3824]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97", which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Youth Training

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for the latest year available for *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* regionally of those young people who started youth training in (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995 what percentage completed the course (1) without gaining a qualification and (2) subsequently registered unemployed. [4292]

Mr. Paice: The available information is given in the table. The table covers those who completed their training in 1994, as many of those young people who started youth training in 1994 and 1995 have yet to complete their course.

Youth training—England and Wales and regions 1994
Leavers who completed their agreed course of training

Per cent.

	Not gaining a qualification or credit towards one	*Unemployed*
Northern	21	25
Yorkshire and Humberside	25	16
North-west	28	15
Greater Manchester	25	12
West Midlands	24	14
East Midlands	28	14
South-west	24	11
South-east	28	12
Eastern	23	12
London	29	19
England	25	15
Wales	32	18
England and Wales	26	15

Note:

The proportion of leavers who sign on as unemployed is not available from the follow-up survey; the table reports the proportion of leavers who declared themselves to be unemployed six months after leaving the programme.

Source:

YT National Follow-up Survey.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in her Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4224]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is in the table:

Minister	*Total number of visits*	*Visits abroad*	*Percentage visits abroad*
Secretary of State	18	0	0
Mr. Forth	17	2	12
Lord Henley	20	1	5
Mr. Paice	19	3	16
Mr. Squire	33	1	3
Mrs. Gillan	18	3	17

NORTHERN IRELAND

"Make It Back Home"

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Make It Back Home project was launched by the Local Enterprise Development Unit; in what countries it was advertised; how many applications have been made to date from each such country; and how many persons have been assisted and at what total and average cost *(a)* to date and *(b)* to the end of the period in which grant assistance will be paid to those currently accepted under the scheme. [3456]

Mr. Ancram: LEDU launched its first "Make It Back Home" campaign in 1987 under the name "Success in the West" and advertising subsequently took place in the following countries:

United States of America

United Kingdom

Canada

Hong Kong

New Zealand

Australia.

Applications received so far are as follows:

Country	*Number of applications received*
United Kingdom	89
United States of America	17
Australia	2
Canada	6
Saudi Arabia	1
Republic of Ireland	3
Total	118

A total of 90 companies have been assisted to date with a total funding commitment of £938,544.

The total cost of assistance actually paid to date is £699,358 with an average cost per project of £7,770.

The average cost, once all moneys committed to these 90 companies have been paid will be £10,428 per project.

Job Creation

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost per job created in *(a)* manufacturing industry, *(b)* the service industry and *(c)* retailing in the last five years in Northern Ireland the current year to date; and what has been the cost to public funds in each category. [3458]

Mr. Ancram: Information on costs per job is not currently available in the form requested. The Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit are currently each carrying out work to establish meaningful measurements in this difficult area.

The hon. Gentleman may, however, find useful the related information on employment and financial assistance contained in the latest IDB and LEDU annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been created by inward investment in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years and the current year to the latest available date in *(a)* manufacturing industry, *(b)* the service industry and *(c)* retailing in each council area in Northern Ireland. [3463]

Mr. Ancram: Information on job creation is not available in the form requested. The table gives details of all inward investment job promotions in each council area in Northern Ireland for the years 1990–91 to 1994–95 and for those agreed and announced in the current year up to 29 November.

IDS job promotions 1990–91 to 29 November 1995

District council area	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96 to 29 November 1995*
Antrim	65	—	660	250	579	—
Ards	—	—	21	—	—	—
Armagh	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ballymena	7	—	120	—	—	—
Ballymoney	—	—	—	—	—	—
Banbridge	—	—	—	—	—	—
Belfast	977	390	150	420	67	190
Carrickfergus	—	—	—	—	255	—
Castlereagh	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coleraine	—	—	—	—	60	—
Cookstown	—	—	—	—	—	—
Craigavon	—	—	35	—	509	—
Derry	—	28	934	46	481	500
Down	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dungannon	—	—	—	257	—	—
Fermanagh	63	12	—	—	—	118
Larne	—	—	—	—	—	—
Limavady	—	—	—	314	—	—
Lisburn	—	—	—	212	—	1,358
Magherafelt	22	—	—	—	—	—
Moyle	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newry and Mourne	155	—	—	129	18	—
Newtownabbey	5	—	—	681	—	—
North Down	—	—	—	—	—	—
Omagh	—	—	25	—	—	—
Strabane	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	1,294	430	1,945	2,309	1,969	2,166

University of Ulster Campus

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors underlay the delay in the publication of the Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers report into the proposed university of Ulster campus at Springvale; when it will be published; what was its cost; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy. [3182]

Mr. Moss: The factors associated with the delay in the publication of the PIEDA report include the complexity of the assignment and the need for extended consultation with Government officials and education interests. The final report is expected by the end of 1995 and a decision about publication will then be taken. The cost of the economic appraisal to date is £82,263. No assessment of the adequacy of the assignment can be made until the final report has been received and considered.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* elected representatives and *(b)* community activists whom PIEDA consultants consulted in drawing up their report into the proposed university of Ulster campus. [3183]

Mr. Moss: PIEDA consulted with three elected representatives from Belfast city council. They did not though consult any community groups as part of their assignment.

Inward Investment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the firms from outside Northern Ireland which have made investments in Northern Ireland in *(a)* manufacturing industry *(b)* service industry and *(c)* for other purposes indicating where each firm's operations are located in Northern Ireland, the total investment made in respect of each firm and the amount of grant given from public funds to each firm, the percentage of the total investment this represents or as much of such information as is readily available to him for each of the last two years and the current year to the latest available date. [3469]

Mr. Ancram: Information on investments is not available in the form requested. Details are available for externally-owned companies which have accepted offers of selective financial assistance from the Industrial Development Board for manufacturing and tradeable services projects. They are set out in the tables.

1993–94—Accepted Offers—externally owned companies

Company name	*IDB assistance offered £'000s*	*Total investment £'000s*	*Per cent. contribution*
Rothmans Int Plc	200	995	20
Braidwater Spinning Co. Ltd.	50	465	11
ESS Automotive Ltd.	1,566	3,750	42
BCO Technologies (NI) Ltd.	6,581	15,139	43
Sheppard Group Ltd.	146	915	16
Du Pont (UK) Ltd.	800	11,870	7
CFM Group Ltd.	1,198	5,820	21
Charles Bell (1963) Ltd.	130	425	31
The Prudential Assurance Co. Ltd.	144	615	23
Lee Apparel (UK) Ltd.	931	4,128	23
Crestacare (NI) Ltd.	40	138	29
Finlay Hydrascreens (Omagh) Ltd.	576	1,631	35
Schrader Electronics Ltd.	831	2,378	35
Scottish Seafoods Ltd.	244	893	27
Valence Technology BV	25,625	147,200	17
Adria Ltd.	3,095	8,535	36
Courtaulds Textiles (Holdings) Ltd.	1,033	4,168	25
MKF (UK) Ltd.	2,815	10,440	27
Benelux Manufacturing (NI) Ltd.	10,440	36,600	29
Seagate Technology (Ireland)	1,581	3,514	45
Daewoo Electronics UK Ltd.	5,690	17,000	35
Chambernet (UK) Ltd.	23	59	39
Allied Bakeries Ltd.	143	953	15
DDL Incorporated	450	1,813	25
Training and Business Group (Overseas)	150	312	48
CCA Electronic Ltd.	4,360	9,460	46
CV Home Furnishing Ltd.	537	2,029	26
Shorts Brothers Plc	1,270	12,715	10
Spanboard Products Ltd.	542	4,151	13
Spence Bryson	180	477	38
Unidare Plastics Ltd.	880	2,843	31
Michelin Tyre Plc	1,804	7,215	25
Total	74,325	318,646	23

1994–95—accepted offers—externally owned companies

Company name	*IDB assistance offered £'000s*	*Total investment £'000s*	*Percentage contribution*
Transtec Foundries Ltd.	4,158	14,946	28
Courtaulds Textiles—(Holdings) Ltd.	818	4,138	20
Ford Motor Co. Ltd.	3,645	15,462	24
Golden Vale Plc	2,500	12,509	20
C V Apparel Ltd.	486	1,800	27
Lucas Stability Electronics Ltd.	495	2,932	17
Allen Industrial Ltd.	226	543	42
Smurfit Corrugated Cases Ltd.	3,000	16,080	19
John Cleland & Son Ltd.	343	3,200	11
ABC Laboratories (Europe) Ltd.	1,805	2,937	37
Polystar (Ireland) Ltd.	600	2,388	25
NACCO Materials Handling (NI) Ltd.	4,600	6,331	73
Lurgan Fibre Ltd.	930	5,682	16
Glen Mouldings Ltd.	1,259	4,710	27
Perfecseal Ltd.	1,442	3,806	38
BKS Surveys Ltd	25	184	14
Polarcup Ltd.	2,090	9,321	22
Bass Holdings Ltd.	948	3,132	30
Deahwa Metal Ltd.	2,928	7,004	42
Fujitsu Fulcrum Telecommunications Ltd.	1,760	3,624	49
Raelbrook (Group) Ltd.	25	580	4
Webtech (NI) Ltd.	532	1,773	30
British Telecommunications Plc	453	1,072	42
Schrader Electronics Ltd.	162	631	26
Real Software (NI) Ltd.	138	310	45
Seagate Technology (Ireland)	11,200	60,026	19
Rusch Manufacturing (UK) Ltd.	900	2,768	33
Michelin Tyre Plc	3,000	11,850	25
Glenbrook Foods Ltd.	375	2,006	19
Northern Telecom (Northern Ireland) Ltd.	752	3,625	21
Walter Alexander & Co. (Belfast) Ltd.	136	701	19

1994-95—accepted offers—externally owned companies

Company name	IDB assistance offered £'000s	Total investment £'000s	Percentage contribution
Dalgety Spillers Foods Ltd.	84	467	18
Radix Telecom Ltd.	4,676	19,084	25
Daewoo Electro Components (UK) Ltd.	3,816	9,218	41
Northern Bank Factors Ltd.	367	1,351	27
Harris Laboratories Ltd.	401	2,088	35
Daewoo Electronics UK Ltd.	5,243	14,869	35
Grand total	65,598	252,148	26

Students

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors led to the increase in students attending institutions of higher education in the Republic of Ireland who were awarded maintenance grant by boards in Northern Ireland cited in his answer of 3 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *500*; what was the cost for the most recent year for which figures are available; and what is his estimate of the growth of these numbers in 1996. [3542]

Mr. Ancram: Students from Northern Ireland can choose to study in the Republic of Ireland or any other country of the European Community. The increase in the number of students attending in the Republic of Ireland reflects this freedom of choice.

In the 1994–95 academic year some £2.2 million was expended by the education and library boards on means-tested maintenance and some £3.1 million on tuition fees in respect of those students.

The current estimate of the number of higher education students from Northern Ireland attending institutions in the Republic of Ireland in the 1995–96 academic year whose tuition fees will be paid by education and library boards is 2,000.

Irish Language

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the population of Northern Ireland his Department estimates (*a*) have knowledge of and (*b*) regularly use the Irish language. [3532]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1991 census of population contains the most recent information on knowledge of the language. This indicates that 9.5 per cent. of those aged three and over had some ability in Irish. The 1991–92 continuous household survey shows that, of those people sampled who had some knowledge of the language, 1 per cent. of those aged 16 to 69 and 3 per cent. of those aged 3 to 15 used it in the home on a daily basis.

Agricultural Income

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the gross income for each sector of Northern Ireland agriculture in cash and constant prices for each of the last 10 years. [3461]

Mr. Ancram: Aggregate income estimates for each sector of agriculture are not available. The table provides details of total income from farming in Northern Ireland as a whole for each year from 1985 to 1994, in current prices and in real terms in index number form.

Total income from farming in Northern Ireland, 19685–1994

	Current prices £ million	Real terms (Index 1990 = 100)[1]
1985	116.1	115.3
1986	90.4	86.7
1987	146.0	134.6
1988	169.4	14[illegible]9
1989	192.0	156.4
1990	134.3	100.0
1991	176.8	124.3
1992	212.5	144.1
1993	248.3	165.8
1994	303.3	197.6

[1] Deflated by the retail prices index.

Labour Statistics

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the number of (*a*) full-time and (*b*) part-time employees in Northern Ireland in (i) manufacturing industry, (ii) the service industry and (iii) retailing in each of the last five years; and what his projections are for the next two years. [3457]

Mr. Ancram: The information available is as follows:

	Manufacturing		*Services*		*Retail distribution*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
March 1995	96,990	5,940	271,090	144,410	30,730	29,610
September 1994	97,430	5,920	270,430	139,050	31,040	28,380
September 1993	95,780	6,060	267,740	132,510	30,060	26,560
September 1991	99,390	5,450	266,590	119,320	30,390	23,680

No official projections of employment are made. Figures for September 1995 are not yet available. No figures are available for 1990.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

2. The full-time/part-time breakdown of employees in employment is available for each of the last three years from the Quarterly Employment Survey and prior to this on a biennial basis from the Census of Employment.

Housing

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's selection criteria in non-priority cases to enable people who have recently moved from other parts of the United Kingdom to be eligible for housing earlier than in accordance with present residence requirement. [3537]

Mr. Moss: In June 1995 a working group was established comprising representatives from the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to review the Housing Executive's housing selection scheme and to make recommendations. It is planned to issue the group's findings and any proposed changes, for consultation, by the summer of 1996. It would be inappropriate to make changes to the present criteria pending the outcome of that review.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Irleand what returns the Housing Executive has made to the Inland Revenue over the last three financial years; and if he will list payments of housing benefit made to private landlords indicating how many different landlords were involved and how much benefit in total was specified. [3541]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has annually provided the Inland Revenue with details of all landlords in receipt of direct payments of housing benefit.

The exact number of landlords to whom direct payments have been made is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The estimated number of landlords and the actual amount of benefit paid in each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Estimated number of landlords*	*Total payments made to landlords*
1992–93	5,000	29,086,050.88
1993–94	5,500	36,234,396.67
1994–95	6,000	43,783,407.12

Claimant Travel Regulations

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the rules and declarations applying to those on unemployment benefit and/or income support who wish to travel within Northern Ireland or visit *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* the Republic of Ireland and *(c)* another EU country; what assessments he has made of *(a)* the degree of compliance with and *(b)* the adequacy of the rules; and what proposals he has to change them. [3539]

Mr. Moss: Unemployed people claiming unemployment benefit and/or income support and travelling within Northern Ireland and Great Britain must remain available for work with an employer and take reasonable steps each week to find such work.

Generally, unemployment benefit and income support are not payable outside the United Kingdom and this applies to people visiting the Republic of Ireland as for other European Union countries. The only exception for unemployment benefit is that, under European Community law, benefit can continue to be paid for up to three months to unemployed nationals of a member state going to another member state specifically to seek work.

Certain people on income support who are not in the employment field may go outside the United Kingdom and retain their entitlement for up to four weeks.

All claimants are required to declare any relevant change of circumstances, including absence from their usual address.

There is no indication that the current rules are not being complied with or are inadequate. The same rules apply throughout the United Kingdom and there are no plans at present to change them.

Punishment Beatings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many punishment beatings have occurred *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each month since the twin ceasefires; and how many have been committed by each side. [3533]

Sir John Wheeler: The total number of so-called punishment beatings carried out in the 14 months since 1 September 1994 is 223. The Royal Ulster Constabulary has attributed these to Republican and Loyalist groups as follows:

Month	*Loyalist*	*Republican*	*Total*
September 1994	1	8	9
October 1994			
1–13	1	2	3
14–31	3	3	6
November 1994	5	7	12
December 1994	6	6	12
January 1995	6	10	16
February 1995	8	11	19
March 1995	3	7	10
April 1995	2	4	6
May 1995	12	14	26
June 1995	4	13	17
July 1995	11	18	29
August 1995	5	12	17
September 1995	4	12	16
October 1995	4	21	25
Total	75	148	223

Drainage Culverting

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the last 10 drainage culverting operations of his Department, indicating the criteria used for choosing those particular sites, the cost per metre and the results of the value for money assessment that was made. [3540]

Mr. Ancram: The last 10 drainage culverting operations of the Department of Agriculture are listed, together with the reason for the works and cost per metre. Culverting works are only undertaken on watercourses which have been designated by the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland and if they are necessary *(a)* for flood alleviation purposes, *(b)* to provide drainage infrastructure for new development, or *(c)* there are structural defects or hydraulic inefficiencies in existing culverts.

All projects are subject to environmental impact assessment and economic appraisal and are only undertaken if the assessed benefits to society exceed the cost of the works.

Watercourse name	*Reason for works*	*Cost per metre £*
1. Killyliss Drain, Dungannon	Structural defect in culvert	110
2. Berry Stream, Kilkeel	Infrastructure for new development	430
3. Urney Road Extension, Strabane	Infrastructure for new development	160
4. Bell's Hill Drain, Castledawson	Infrastructure for new development	500
5. Skeoge, Londonderry, Phase III scheme	Structural defect in culvert and infrastructure for new development	2,700
6. Jubilee Terrace, Coleraine	Infrastructure for new development	280
7. Blaney Millrace, Enniskillen	Flood alleviation	220
8. Doogary Drain, Omagh	Infrastructure for industrial development	200
9. Park Road, Strabane	Infrastructure for new development	250
10. Strangford Road, Downpatrick	Infrastructure for new development	820

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3812]

Sir John Wheeler: No schemes under the private finance initiative, announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1992, have been approved in Northern Ireland to date.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3830]

Sir John Wheeler: It is estimated that the following amounts, rounded to the nearest £10 million, will be levered in from the private sector:

	£ million
1995–96	60
1996–97	50
1997–98	80
1998–99	80
1999–00	n/a
2000–01	n/a

The information for 1996–97 onwards is also published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 December 1995

TRANSPORT

Lorries

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many 41-tonne lorries have been licensed since 1 April. [3369]

Mr. Norris: The information specifically requested is not available. The closest equivalent information is that a total of 241 lorries with maximum revenue weight over 40 tonnes but not over 44 tonnes have been newly registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, in the period from 1 April to 30 September 1995.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of the use of 41-tonne lorries on road bridges; and how many bridges currently need to be strengthened. [3371]

Mr. Watts: No assessment has been made of the use of 41-tonne lorries.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3417]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 6 December, column 277.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3418]

Mr. Watts: None.

Track Access Grant

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list details of the outstanding track access grant applications before him and state in respect of each *(a)* the date received and *(b)* when he expects to give his decision. [4076]

Mr. Watts: There are eight track access grant applications currently under consideration. They were received between November 1994 and July 1995. The details are commercially confidential.

We are seeking further material information from the applicants.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4246]

Mr. Norris: None.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4273]

Mr. Norris: Seven including the mobile telephones fitted in the four official cars used by Ministers.

North-West Regional Railways Ltd.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the stations leased by other operators from which North West Regional Railways Ltd. is to buy access, indicating the annual cost. [3951]

Mr. Watts: North West Regional Railways purchases access from other operators at the following stations:

Station	*Operator*
Appleby	Regional Railways North-East
Armathwaite	Regional Railways North-East
Bidston	Mersey Electrics
Birmingham International	Inter City West Coast
Birmingham New Street	Railtrack
Carlisle	Inter City West Coast
Crewe	Inter City West Coast
Deighton	Regional Railways North-East
Dent	Regional Railways North-East
Ellesmere Port	Mersey Electrics
Etruria	Regional Railways Central
Garsdale	Regional Railways North-East
Hellifield	Regional Railways North-East
Horton in Ribblesdale	Regional Railways North-East
Huddersfield	Regional Railways North-East
Hunts Cross	Mersey Electrics
Kidsgrove	Regional Railways Central
Kirby	Mersey Electrics
Kirkby Stephen	Regional Railways North-East
Lancaster	Inter City West Coast
Langwathby	Regional Railways North-East
Lazonby	Regional Railways North-East
Littleborough	Regional Railways North-East
Longport	Regional Railways Central
Macclesfield	Inter City West Coast
Manchester Piccadilly	Railtrack
Mirfield	Regional Railways North-East
Ormskirk	Mersey Electrics
Oxenholme	Inter City West Coast
Preston	Inter City West Coast
Ribblehead	Regional Railways North-East
Settle	Regional Railways North-East
Sheffield	Inter City Midland Main Line
Smithy Bridge	Regional Railways North-East
Southport	Mersey Electrics
Stafford	Inter City West Coast
Stockport	Inter City West Coast
Stoke on Trent	Inter City West Coast
Todmorden	Regional Railways North-East
Wakefield Kirkgate	Regional Railways North-East
Wakefield Westgate	Inter City East Coast
Walsden	Regional Railways North-East
Warrington Bank Quay	Inter City West Coast
Wigan North Western	Inter City West Coast
Wolverhampton	Inter City West Coast

Details of individual operators' station leasing charges are commercially confidential.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Charter of Court Users

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints he has received against judges *(a)* in total and *(b)* for not complying with the charter for court users in the last five years in (i) the north-west as a whole and (ii) in the Merseyside area; and if he will make a statement. [3975]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: This information is not available in the form requested. Records relating to complaints received centrally about the personal conduct of judges have been kept only since March 1992. Since that date, 62 such complaints regarding judges sitting on the northern circuit have been received. Information on complaints relating to judicial decisions is held by the Court Service, which has received centrally 297 such complaints since it was established on 1 April 1995. Information on complaints relating to judicial decisions broken down on a regional basis could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The charter for court users, which came into effect on 1 September 1995, sets out the standards court users can expect from the administration of the Court Service. It does not therefore apply to the work of the judiciary.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements are made to ensure that judges comply with the charter for court users. [3976]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Eddie Loyden, dated 7 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the judiciary and the Charter for Court Users.

The Charter for Court Users sets out the standards court users can expect from the administration of the Court Service. It does not therefore apply to the work of the judiciary.

Judiciary (Ethnic Origin)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of the judiciary in England and Wales were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995. [3652]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The ethnic origin of candidates for judicial appointment was not collected prior to autumn 1991, so the available information may not be complete. There are no readily available records for 1989. The earliest readily available and current figures for full-time and part-time judiciary are set out in the table.

	November 1992		*November 1995*	
Judiciary	*Total number of judiciary*	*Ethnic minority origin*	*Total number of judiciary*	*Ethnic minority origin*
Full-time Judiciary				
High Court Judges	82	0	95	0
Circuit Judges	480	3	514	5
District Judges	257	0	339	2
Part-time Judiciary				
Recorders	784	7	897	13
Assistant Recorders	475	8	341	9
Deputy District Judges	—	—	718	11
Stipendiary Magistrates	—	—	92	1
Acting Stipendiary Magistrates	—	—	87	3
Full-time Chairmen of Industrial Tribunals	—	—	81	2
Part-time Chairmen of Social Security	—	—	178	5
Full-time Chairmen of Social Security Appeals Tribunals	—	—	45	1
Part-time Chairmen of Social Security Appeals Tribunal	—	—	458	10

Magistrates Courts

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total staff establishment of magistrates courts in England and Wales by grade; and how many *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each grade were from an ethnic minority in (i) 1989 and (ii) 1995. [3614]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Returns from 104 of the 105 magistrates courts committees in England and Wales showed that in 1995 there was a total of 11,083 staff, of whom 436 declared they were from an ethnic minority. A breakdown by grade is in the table.

There are no figures available for 1989. There was no requirement to keep such figures at that time.

Total staff by grade by ethnic origin

	Ethnic origin			
Grade	*White*	*Ethnic minority*	*Unknown*	*Total*
Administrative division	4,080	165	200	4,445
Clerical Division	940	79	246	1,265
Committee Secretariat	205	3	12	220
Court Clerks Division	1,370	68	73	1,511
Justices' Clerks	200	0	5	205

Total staff by grade by ethnic origin

	Ethnic origin			
Grade	*White*	*Ethnic minority*	*Unknown*	*Total*
Other	597	54	70	721
Deputy Justices' Clerks Division	325	17	28	370
Principle Admin Division	604	17	35	656
Trainee Court Clerks Division	203	12	6	221
Ushers	1,374	21	75	1,470
Total	9,898	436	750	11,084

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3228]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 December. [3230]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Australian Aboriginal Artifacts

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have received since 1980 for assistance from the Government of Australia or the state government of Western Australia or any of their agencies, in respect of the alleged removal, contrary to Australian law, of aboriginal artifacts from or through the Broome area of Western Australia; what action was subsequently taken in response to each request; and if he will make a statement. [4180]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none. Further examination of the government archives could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Alfred Hartmann

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister whether, on what occasion and for what purpose, he or his predecessor Baroness Thatcher has met Dr. Alfred Hartmann. [4528]

The Prime Minister: I do not recall having met Dr. Hartmann, nor am I aware of any meeting between my predecessor and Dr. Hartmann.

Ministers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the number of Ministers by rank in each Department of State, excluding law officers; and if he will provide the corresponding figures for the outgoing Government in 1965. [4751]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter of public record.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister how many Ministers are in the Department of Trade and Industry now and how many were in the then Board of Trade in 1965; what are the numbers of officials in the Department by rank from assistant secretary upwards in 1979 and at the present time; and what plans he has for reducing the number of Ministers in the Department. [4752]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter of public record. I have no intention of reducing the number of Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those occasions on which his predecessor notified the Crown between 1979 and 1990 of her intention to visit Switzerland. [4560]

The Prime Minister: In accordance with "Questions of Procedures for Ministers", it is normal practice for all Cabinet Ministers to notify the Crown of their intention to make an official foreign visit.

TREASURY

Taxation (Cigarettes)

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax revenues raised in each of the last five years from the illegal sale of cigarettes to children. [3776]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* Data on smoking prevalence among schoolchildren are available from surveys conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in four years since 1990. The sample size for each survey is very small, so estimates for individual years are considered unreliable. Combining the results of the four surveys gives a best estimate of the order of £100 million raised per year in excise duty and VAT from sales of cigarettes to children under 16 or smoked by such children but purchased legally by others.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3954]

Mrs. Angela Knight: For *(a)* consultants and *(b)* outside organisations, those employed by the Department since 1992 with total contract value which are given in a table which I am placing in the Members' Library. To obtain information before 1992 on actual payments made and to give the purpose of employment in each case would entail disproportionate cost.

With regard to *(c)*, the total number of staff employed in the Treasury and their cost can be found in the civil service staff in post summary tables which are also available in the Library. It would entail disproportionate cost to list the purposes of employment, but staff are employed to meet the aim and objectives of the Treasury. These are set out in the departmental report which is in the Library.

Tax Legislation (Revision)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultation he plans in respect of his proposed revision of the wording of the technical tax law; and if this review will cover all existing tax laws. [3684]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The proposal to rewrite existing tax legislation, which my right hon. and learned Friend announced in his Budget, would proceed on the basis of full consultation with the representative bodies and taxpayers generally. It would cover most of the primary legislation on Inland Revenue taxes.

Further details of this rewritten proposal will be given in the Inland Revenue's report under section 160 of the Finance Act 1995, which we hope to lay before Parliament on 12 December 1995, and in its background paper that will be published on the same day.

Earnings

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £2.50, *(b)* £3, *(c)* £3.50, *(d)* £4, *(e)* £4.50 *(f)* £5, *(g)* £5.50 and *(h)* more than £6 per hour, including and excluding overtime in (i) the east midlands and (ii) the United Kingdom. [4072]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Information available from the new earnings survey is provided in the table.

Hourly earnings, all employees on adult rates pay not affected by absence: April 1995

	Percentage earning	
	East Midlands	*Great Britain*
Including overtime		
<£2.50	1.5	1.6
<£3.00	3.6	3.3
<£3.50	10.2	8.7
<£4.00	19.0	15.8
<£4.50	27.5	23.1
<£5.00	35.0	30.4
<£5.50	43.2	37.7
<£6.00	49.1	55.4
Excluding overtime		
<£2.50	1.6	1.6
<£3.00	3.8	3.4
<£3.50	10.7	9.1
<£4.00	19.9	16.5
<£4.50	29.0	24.2
<£5.00	36.4	31.4
<£5.50	44.6	38.8
<£6.00	47.7	54.3

Valuation Office (Stockport)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will provide information on who has been consulted about the proposed closure of the valuation office in Stockport; [4286]

(2) when he expects the consultation on the proposed closure of the valuation office in Stockport to be completed; [4284]

(3) if he will make available the responses to the consultation on the proposed closure of the valuation office in Stockport. [4285]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Consultation has recently commenced with members of staff and their trades unions and will also be conducted with national representatives of the valuation profession and other bodies with an interest in the future of the Valuation Office review.

Consultation is expected to be completed by summer 1996 and the outcome announced in due course.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4250]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* A total of four mobile telephones belonging to Treasury Ministers have been cloned during the past 12 months of which two were cloned within the last six months. No Treasury Ministers' mobile telephones were cloned beyond 12 months ago. The Chief Secretary has had his mobile telephones cloned three times and the Economic Secretary once.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4249]

Mrs. Knight: There are 12 mobile telephones available for use by Treasury Ministers and their private offices.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3422]

Mr. Jack: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of PFI policy and offer us the opportunity to refine further the process of implementation. The lessons so far are most recently set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy has been placed in the Members' Library.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3421]

Mr. Jack: Information on forward commitments, including those in respect of schemes under the private finance initiative, is held by Departments. Payments for service procurement through PFI schemes are taken into account as part of Departments' current costs in their overall spending plans; those for the next three years are published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report, 1996–97", laid before Parliament on 28 November 1995.

Church Commissioners' Accounts

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the instructions which have been given to Binder Hamlyn on the nature and the manner of the audit it should carry out on the Church Commissioners' accounts. [4589]

Mr. Jack: The letter of engagement between Binder Hamlyn and the Church Commissioners has not yet been finalised, but I will write to the hon. Member once this has been done and the Treasury has approved the arrangements.

Public Sector Financial Balances

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the predicted and actual public sector financial deficit or surplus for each financial year since 1979. [4329]

Mr. Waldegrave: Forecasts of the public sector financial balances are published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Outturns of the public sector financial balance are available from the Central Statistical Office databank, series AABE.

Forecast and outturn figures for the public sector financial balance

£ billion

Source	*Period*	*Forecast*	*Outturn*
FSBR June 1979	1979–80	–7.2	–8.2
FSBR March 1980	1980–81	–6.9	–11.8
FSBR March 1981	1981–82	–6.3	–5.5
FSBR March 1982	1982–83	–6.6	–8.7
FSBR March 1983	1983–84	–8.9	–11.7
FSBR March 1984	1984–85	–8.5	–13.7
FSBR March 1985	1985–86	–9.8	–8.1
FSBR March 1986	1986–87	–12.2	–8.2
FSBR March 1987	1987–88	–9.4	–1.9
FSBR March 1988	1988–89	–1.4	8.3
FSBR March 1989	1989–90	7.3	2.4
FSBR March 1990	1990–91	2.6	–3.1
FSBR March 1991	1991–92	–11.3	–18.6
FSBR March 1992	1992–93	–30.9	–45.0
FSBR March 1993	1993–94	–55.2	–49.9
FSBR November 1989	1994–95	–41.3	–40.5
FSBR November 1994	1996–96	[1]–25.6	—
FSBR November 1995	1996–97	–25.4	—

[1] Published in the Revised Tables, January 1995, following the decision to leave the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power at 8 per cent., and the further Budget measures announced on 8 December 1994.

Finance Bill

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Finance Bill will be published; and if he will make available to hon. Members the customary notes on the Bill's clauses. [5078]

Mr. Jack: The Finance Bill will be published on Thursday 4 January 1996. The notes on the Bill's clauses will be placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House that day. In addition, the Treasury will be making the notes available to the public.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Clock Tower

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what estimate has been made of the angle at which the clock tower of the Palace of Westminster varies from the perpendicular; and what variation has occurred over the last 20 years. [3797]

Mr. Ray Powell: The Accommodation and Works Committee has a specialist adviser on geotechnical engineering whose brief includes advising the Committee on the adequacy of London Underground's arrangements to prevent damage to the Palace of Westminster and other parliamentary buildings during the construction of Westminster underground station and the Jubilee line extension. The Parliamentary Works Directorate also employs an independent firm of surveyors to monitor many movements of the Clock Tower.

The advice from both these sources is that London Underground Ltd., is taking appropriate and sufficient measures to control any damaging movements caused by excavation work for the Jubilee line extension project. The clock tower currently slopes from the vertical by approximately 1 in 4,000 and is affected by Thames tidal movement and changes in ambient temperature.

Video Conferencing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what assessment has been made or is planned in respect of possible reduction of the costs of overseas visits by the Select Committees through the use of video conferenicng. [4179]

Mr. Beith: Select Committees have used video conferencing as a means of gathering evidence on two occasions on an experimental basis. The matter has already been reported on by the Procedure Committee and the arrangements for, and cost of, video conferencing as a means of taking evidence are currently under review by the Liaison Committee; other domestic Committees may wish to be consulted. It is therefore too early to judge what part video conferencing could play in evidence gathering by Select Committees or any effects which its adoption might have on expenditure on overseas visits.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Space Policy

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made with the proposal made at the United Kingdom space policy seminar at Surrey university in September for publication of a space policy document. [4802]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Yesterday I issued a discussion document on United Kingdom space policy and I am inviting comments.

The documents examines UK strengths and opportunities in space science, telecommunications, earth observation and launchers. It looks at projects in the European Space Agency and other international organisations. My aim is to bring together the results of this consultation exercise, with more detailed work being carried out at the British national space centre in discussion with industry and the academic world, in the form of a forward plan for UK involvement in space activities by next summer.

Copies of the discussion document are being placed in the Library of the House and I am sending a copy to each participant at the Surrey seminar.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3419]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Although my Department has a number of PFI projects under consideration, none has been finally agreed and no revenue commitments have been made.

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3420]

Mr. Taylor: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative within my Department will not result in changes to policy on the PFI, which have been set out by the Government. Those schemes that have been agreed, however, represent the application of PFI policy and the lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

Anti-tank Mines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what export control procedures apply to (i) the export of anti-tank mines without self-destruct mechanism or (ii) the export of remote delivery systems for anti-tank mines. [4324]

Mr. Oppenheim: The export of all anti-tank mines and related equipment and accessories is controlled under the Export of Goods (Control) Order. Such goods cannot be exported without a licence from the Department of Trade and Industry issued after consultation within Government. Any applications for an export licence for such equipment would be considered against strict established criteria on a case-by-case basis in line with our international commitments.

Libya (UN Sanctions)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact on British *(a)* trade and *(b)* industry of the United Nations sanctions against Libya; and if he will place in the Library the information passed by his Department relating to evasion of sanctions by Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, South Korea and Spain. [2890]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The United Nations sanctions against Libya are selective. They prohibit in particular supply and export of arms, aviation supplies and certain oil industry equipment in which the United Kingdom is strongly competitive. It is not possible to say what is the precise effect of the sanctions on UK trade and industry, but one sign of the resilience of our trading position is that exports to Libya in 1995 will exceed £200 million.

My Department has passed no information to the UN sanctions committee, the body responsible for co-ordinating matters including evasion of sanctions.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4267]

Mr. Lang: There are 14 mobile telephones available in the DTI for the use of Ministers and their private offices. In addition, each ministerial car is fitted with a cellular telephone.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy of his Department in respect of making grants available to companies where directors have had previous bankruptcies. [2304]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* Where a director of a company applying for a grant from the Department is known to have previously been bankrupt but is now discharged or has been given permission by the bankruptcy court to be a director, this would not automatically rule out acceptance of the grant application but it is a factor that would be taken into account in considering the viability and probity of the applicant company. Where a director was found to be an undischarged bankrupt who was not entitled to be a director of a company, this would be grounds for considering prosecution of the director and would be likely to lead to rejection of the company's grant application.

Rom Data Corporation

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the purpose of the meeting between an official of his Department and Mr. Brad Shephard on 29 October 1993; and if he will make a statement about the outcome of this meeting; [2384]

(2) by which hon. Members, and on what dates, his Department was contacted about the Rom Data Corporation, Falmouth; [2299]

(3) if he will make a statement about the results of his inquiries into the background of the directors of the Rom Data Corporation, Falmouth, before he made a grant to them; and if those inquiries revealed evidence of former bankruptcies of any of the directors; [2301]

(4) what information about the financial history of Mr. John Dawson was revealed by his inquiries into the directors of the Rom Data Corporation; [2305]

(5) what action he has taken against the directors of the Rom Data Corporation, Falmouth; and if he will make a statement. [2300]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* As indicated in my reply of 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *711*, the Department is currently conducting inquiries into the circumstances of the regional selective assistance given to the Rom Data Corporation. I will report when these are completed.

Business Start-ups

Mr. Macshane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of new businesses started up by year and region since 1990. [4709]

Mr. Page: The best indicator of regional trends in business start-ups is given by figures on VAT registrations. Annual numbers of registrations for 1990 to 1994 are given in the table.

VAT registrations 1990–94

Thousands

Region	*1990*	[1]*1991*	*1992*	[2]*1993*	[2]*1994*
South East	95.7	81.9	74.2	79.1	78.9
East Anglia	8.5	7.5	6.4	6.8	6.6
South West	20.2	17.4	15.6	15.9	15.7
West Midlands	19.1	16.6	15.8	15.6	15.5
East Midlands	15.4	13.5	12.1	12.3	12.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	17.1	15.1	13.6	13.6	13.3
North West	24.0	21.0	19.2	17.7	17.4
North	8.3	6.9	6.2	6.3	6.4
Wales	10.2	8.4	7.5	7.2	7.2
Scotland	16.3	13.9	12.7	12.6	12.8
Northern Ireland	4.3	3.7	3.7	4.0	3.9
United Kingdom	239	206	187	191	190

Notes:

[1] Includes an adjustment for effect of change in the VAT threshold in the 1991 budget.

[2] Includes an adjustment for effect of change in the VAT threshold in the November 1993 budget.

Following the threshold change in 1991, figures for 1992 to 1994 are not comparable with the figures for earlier years.

ISCT Ltd.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiry his Department has initiated or plans concerning the activities of any directors of the Ferranti-ISC subsidiary ISCT Ltd.; and what action his Department has taken as a result. [5619]

Mr. Oppenheim: ISC Technologies Ltd. went into administrative receivership on 1 December 1993. Returns under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 were submitted by the administrative receivers on 25 May 1994.

No disqualification proceedings or other action has been taken or is proposed by the Department on present information.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to initiate disqualification proceedings against former directors of the Ferranti-ISC subsidiary ISCT Ltd. through which the fraud against that parent company was perpetrated; and if he will make a statement. [4358]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* ISC Technologies Ltd. went into administrative receivership on 1 December 1993. Returns under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 were submitted by the administrative receivers on 25 May 1994.

No disqualification proceedings have been taken or are proposed by the Department.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what inquiries he has initiated regarding the position of beneficiaries of the pension fund of the former Ferranti-ISC fund; what action he has taken to protect the position of the beneficiaries; and if he will make a statement. [4359]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The assets of the Ferranti-ISC group of companies are being dealt with by joint administrative receivers, without the involvement of the Department, who report that after payment in full of the preferential creditors and the banks' claims as first ranking secured creditors, a payment to the pension fund on account of its second ranking secured claim for £15 million may be possible. The major part of the pension fund is not affected by the receivership and is protected for its beneficiaries.

Newerthill

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations or inquiries he has received from the Government of Australia or any of its agencies, or from any Australian state authority or agency about the activities of the United Kingdom registered company Newerthill or any of its subsidiaries; and if he will make a statement. [4245]

Mr. Nelson: There is no United Kingdom registered company with the name Newerthill. We have received no representation or inquiries about Newerthill or any other similarly named company to which the question might possibly relate.

Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what inquiries he has caused to be made into whether the Export Credits Guarantee Department issued guarantees to financial institutions resident in the United Kingdom possibly involved in financial trade with Iraq contrary to the Government's guidelines; what were the results of such inquiries; and what subsequent action he has taken or proposes to take. [4244]

Mr. Nelson: I know of no such cases.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons he does not publish figures for United Kingdom share of main manufacturing countries exports in table D1 of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistic", and if he will *(a)* publish up to date figures in the *Official Report* and *(b)* include the figures in future editions of the MRETS.

Mr. John M Taylor: The series were temproarily discontinued when MRETS was suspended, following introduction of Intrastate, during 1993–94. With the rebasing of United Kingdom volume series using 1990 weights it is necessary to rebase the volume of manufactured exports for the main manufacturing countries as a whole. This work is continuing and the series will be reinstated as soon as possible.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the share of the domestic market taken by *(a)* imported manufactured goods and *(b)* imported services for each year since 1975. [4401]

Mr. Nelson: Consistent information for each year since 1975 is not available. The following estimates are derived from input-output tables which were published every five years prior to 1989.

Imports as a percentage of home demand

Year	*Manufacturing industry*	*Services*
1974	23.7	7.2
1979	25.3	6.1
1984	31.7	6.2
1989	36.0	3.9
1990	36.4	3.7
1991	35.8	3.4
1992	37.6	3.3
1993	40.4	3.3

The 1992 standard industrial classification has changed the definition of manufacturing industry. The new definition includes the manufacture of coke ovens, mineral oil processing and nuclear fuel processing and excludes mining and quarrying of materials other than coal. The table takes account of these major changes but there may still be some definitional differences between 1992 and earlier figures.

The figures only include direct trade. Services provided locally as a result of overseas direct investment are not included in these figures.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations led him to cease publication of figures for United Kingdom export unit values for manufactures which have been published in table 2.15 of "Economic Trends" after the third quarter of 1994. [4557]

Mr. Oppenheim: The publication of UK export unit values of manufactures has not been discontinued. Table 2.15 of the November "Economic Trends" contains figures up to the first quarter of 1995, the latest quarter for which unit value indices based on $US denominated exports are available from the International Monetary Fund.

Redundancies

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for redundancies in his Department. [3708]

Mr. Lang: The outcome of the public expenditure survey for the running costs of my Department means that to help to achieve the required rundown in staff numbers a voluntary early retirement-severance scheme is being launched immediately.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the *(a)* written and *(b)* oral evidence given by Her Majesty's Government to the International Court of Justice in respect of the legality of nuclear weapons. [3986]

Mr. David Davis: The International Court of Justice decided on 30 October that submissions in respect of the nuclear weapons advisory opinions should be open to the public. Accordingly, copies of our written and oral statements have been placed in the Library of the House.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 and 5 December. [5284]

Mr. David Davis: The A points listed in document 12202/95—which will be deposited in the Libraries of the House as soon as it is available—were adopted except for item 24 which was withdrawn by presidency.

The Council took note of the European Parliament resolutions in document 11507/95 PE-RE-79. A copy of this document will be deposited in the Libraries of the House as soon as it is available.

The Council agreed that the presidency should write to the Prime Minister of Estonia confirming receipt of that country's application for membership of the European Union.

The Council discussed preparations for the European Council at Madrid.

The Council agreed that the conference on economic assistance to the Palestinians should be postponed to 9 January.

The Council discussed the draft MEDA regulation, covering aid to countries in the Mediterranean region.

The Commission presented a recommendation for a Council decision on renewal of the San Jose dialogue between the EU and central America. This was remitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further discussion.

The Council confirmed that the Commission should continue to negotiate a new agreement with Switzerland on the basis of its existing mandate.

The Council adopted conclusions on former Yugoslavia and agreed on the appointment of a deputy to Mr. Bildt in Sarajevo. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Ministers of France and of Germany briefed the Council on the forthcoming London, Paris and Bonn conferences.

The Council adopted a further common position on Nigeria, covering measures additional to those in the common position of 20 November. The new common position provides for further visa restrictions, the expulsion of military personnel in Nigerian diplomatic missions in the EU and interruption of sporting contacts. The Council undertook to consider further measures in the absence of progress in Nigeria.

The Council discussed a draft mandate for a trade and co-operation agreement with South Africa.

The Council discussed the draft new technical assistance to the Commmonwealth of Independent States—TACIS—regulation but agreed to defer further consideration until the Italian presidency.

The Council agreed a position paper on the March 1996 Asia/Europe meeting to be used as a basis for EU discussion with the Asian side in the run-up to the meeting.

The Council approved conclusions endorsing the broad lines of the Commission's communication on long-term relations between the EU and China.

The Council gave its political approval, by qualified majority, to a deal negotiated with the US, Canada and Australia on compensation—as required by article XXIV.6—of the general agreement on tariffs and trade for tariff increases resulting from EU enlargement.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3395]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *694*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3396]

Mr. Hanley: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of PFI policy and offer us the opportunity further to refine the process of implementation. The lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy is available in the Members' Library.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4265]

Mr. Hanley: The Department has four mobile telephones and four car telephones exclusively for the use of Ministers.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4266]

Mr. Hanley: The then Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham, (Mr. Hogg), has his car telephone cloned twice: in October 1994 and June 1995. New numbers were allocated on both occasions.

A programme is under way to replace Ministers' analogue telephones with digital units which will reduce the risk of cloning.

BBC World Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the change in real terms since 1994–95 to his Office's funding to the BBC World Service. [4739]

Mr. Hanley: Foreign and Commonwealth Office funding to the BBC World Service through grant in aid decreased in real terms by 0.67 per cent. between 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what restrictions apply to the award of sponsorship rights to potential participants in any use of the private finance initiative of the BBC World Service; [4756]

(2) what plans he has to allow the BBC World Service to take *(a)* advertising or *(b)* finance from overseas Governments or agencies. [4757]

Mr. Hanley: Under the terms of its current licence and agreement, the BBC is prohibited from broadcasting sponsored programmes. It would also need to seek agreement to accept advertising from any source or take finance from overseas Governments or agencies. Subject to the overriding requirements of safeguarding its impartiality, we would look at any proposals the World Service might make constructively, bearing in mind the increasing use of local rebroadcasting partnerships to reach audiences more effectively.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the BBC World Service's capital budget the reduction in funding announced on 28 November represents. [4755]

Mr. Hanley: The reduction in funding for 1996–97 amounts to 19.3 per cent. of the World Service's capital budget, but this takes no account of the opportunities presented by the private finance initiative.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the BBC World Service as to which transmitters will be affected by the reduction in the funding of the BBC World Service; and to what extent; [4763]

(2) to what extent the private finance initiative can be applied to overseas projects of the BBC World Service; [4759]

(3) what consultations he has had about the consequences of the reduction in the BBC World Service's budget; [4754]

(4) what monitoring he has carried out as to the effect on programme services of the reduction in funding to the BBC World Service; with what result; and if he will make a statement; [4762]

(5) if the private finance initiative will be applied to improvements in existing projects of the BBC World Service; [4758]

(6) what recommendations he has made to the BBC World Service as to the areas of transmission in which economies should be made. [4760]

Mr. Hanley: We hold regular discussions with the BBC World Service, about its plans and priorities. I shall be meeting the managing director of the World Service shortly. Detailed talks on funding for the next three-year period will start in the New Year.

It is for the World Service to judge the best deployment of transmitters. Audibility has been vastly improved as a result of a £166 million investment programme. A further new relay station is being built in Thailand at a cost of £29 million.

The private finance initiative offers the World Service opportunity to involve private sector finance and expertise and may, in principle, be applied to projects overseas as well as in the United Kingdom. Projects which are already contractually committed are not affected.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what propoition of the BBC World Service budget for transmitters and satellite distribution is already contractually committed. [4761]

Mr. Hanley: Over 70 per cent. of the BBC World Service's capital budget for 1995–96, and all of the operating budget line, for transmitter and satellite distribution is already contractually committed.

Guatemala

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that no training will be offered by the United Kingdom to Guatemalan police officers until the peace process has been fully implemented in Guatemala. [4520]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No. Our limited assistance to the Guatemalan police is designed to encourage high standards, including proper respect for human rights.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Guatemalan Government about the human rights situation in Guatemala with particular reference to the latest report of the United Nations human rights verification mission, MINUGUA. [4521]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As I informed the House on 19 October, *Official Report*, columns *305–306*, the British ambassador in Guatemala takes every appropriate opportunity to express to the authorities our concerns about human rights abuses, including problems identified in MINUGUA's third report to the UN Secretary-General.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Guatemalan Government to ensure that the trial of the Guatemalan soldiers accused of the massacre of former refugees in Xaman on 5 October is carried out in a fair and proper judicial manner. [4522]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In its statement on 12 October the European Union called for the punishment of those guilty of the massacre and expressed support for the measures announced by President de Leon Carpio to deal with the incident. The Guatemalan authorities are well aware of the need for a proper trial of those accused.

European Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current status of the economy of each member state of the EC in relation to each of the convergence criteria for European monetary union in the Maastricht treaty. [160]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The question of which countries fulfil the necessary conditions for adoption of the single currency will be decided by the Council, meeting in the form of Heads of State or of Government. The latest Commission forecasts, released on 22 November 1995, provide information on the current status of each member state. The forecasts are available in the House of Commons Library.

DEFENCE

Anti-tank Mines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of anti-tank mines *(a)* possessed by or *(b)* in the process of being procured by the United Kingdom armed forces have self-destruct mechanisms. [4315]

Mr. Arbuthnot: All anti-tank mines in service with the multiple launch rocket system phase II and JP233 will self-destruct after a pre-set time, once deployed. No other in-service anti-tank mines have self-destruct mechanisms. It is our established policy, for security reasons, not to reveal information relating to stock levels of munitions held.

I recently announced on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *768*, our intention to purchase a vehicle-launched scatterable mine system. All the mines to be procured for VLSMS will have a self-destruct mechanism. We are currently procuring any other anti-tank mines.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the UK possess the means remotely to deliver anti-tank mines; and if the MLRS system is equipped remotely to deliver anti-tank mines. [4325]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes. Both the multiple launch rocket system phase II and JP233 are capable of delivering anti-tank mines remotely. I recently announced on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *768*, our intention to purchase a vehicle-launched scatterable mine system, which will also be capable of delivering anti-tank mines remotely. All these systems utilise mines which self-destruct after a short laid life.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3818]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *666*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3414]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government's defence policy is as stated in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995", Cm 2800.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3413]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *666*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3823]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Capital expenditure on the PFI commitments in 1995–96 is forecast to be nil. Figures for later years are published in table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97". Projections are not currently available for years beyond 1998–89.

Merchant Vessels

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the name of every merchant vessel and its country of registration chartered by his Department for *(a)* exercises and *(b)* military support and re-supply operations since the beginning of 1995. [4579]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Vessels chartered for exercise

Vessel name	*Flag*
Arroyofrio Dos	Spanish
Dana Minerva	Danish
Condock V (Twice)	German
King of Scandinavia	Danish
Winston Churchill	Danish
Condock III	German
Wloclawek	Polish
Arcade Eagle (Twice)	Spanish
Parkhaven	Maltese
Dana Corona	Danish
Goya	Spanish
Prince of Scandinavia	Danish
Mercandian Senator	Danish
Norbay	British
Norcape	Dutch
Belvaux	Panamanian
Villars	Swiss
Feederteam	Maltese
Arcade Falcon	Norwegian
Marianne Danica	Danish
Sine Boye	Danish
Lyn	Danish
Italica	Italian

Vessels chartered for support

Vessel Name	*Flag*
Kapitan Mezentsyev	Ukrainian
NDS Atlantic	Dutch
Neptune Olympic (Twice)	Greek
Mercandian Senator	Danish
Dana Hafnia	Danish
Yuriy Maksaryov	Ukrainian
Petro Mersey (Three times)	British
Petro Fawley (Twice)	British
Rotesand	German
Flex Installer	Bahamian
Dubalti	Latvian
Marine Explorer	British
Fionan of Skellig	Irish
Northella	British
Oil Mariner	British
Stena Constructor	Bahamian
OTS Yeoman	British
Maersk Ascension	British
Kommander Subsea	British
Discovery	British
Aquamarine	Liberian
Ottaviano	Italian
Ravello	Italian
Nordica	Finnish
Anfitrite	Italian
Sidsel Knutsen	Norwegian
Cargo Master	Canadian
Kondor	Ukrainian
St. Brandan	British
Celtic RoRo	Bahamian
Sea Bird	Danish
Pietersgracht	Dutch
Lion	Danish
Condock III	German
Condock V	German
Stevnsland	Antiguan
Rosen	Danish
Arneb	German
Jens Munk	Danish
Arcade Falcon	Norwegian
Maersk Gannet	British

Territorial Army

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of members of the Territorial Army who will be called up to serve *(a)* as part of the implementation force in Bosnia and *(b)* elsewhere in the next months. [4569]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 6 December 1995, *Official Report,* column *244.*

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tasks are to be assigned to members of the Territorial Army as part of the implementation force in Bosnia. [4570]

Mr. Soames: Most members of the Territorial Army and Army reserve who are being called out to serve with the implementation force will fill war establishment posts in regular army units, primarily headquarters and signal units, military police companies and logistics units

Fire Training Establishments

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all his Department's fire training establishments in the United Kingdom; how many *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian personnel are currently (i) employed and (ii) being trained at these establishments giving the duration of the training; and what have been (1) the average running costs and (2) the annual maintenance costs of each establishment in each of the last five years. [4170]

Mr. Soames: The Department's only single role fire training establishment is the MOD fire service central training establishment at RAF Manston, where there are 27 civilian and 23 military established posts. The number of personnel being trained depends on which courses are being run; this year's figures show that there have been 834 civilian and 326 military students, and since the CTE was reorganised in 1991, 3,728 civilians and 1,230 military personnel have attended courses there. The duration will depend on the course, of which there are some 20, covering every aspect of fire training. The MOD FSCTE is a lodger unit at RAF Manston, thus disaggregating the running and maintenance costs for the centre from the overall station costs can be done only at disproportionate cost.

The Department also has other training establishments where fire training can be part of the course structure. These are the school of flight deck operations at the royal naval air station Culdrose; the nuclear biological and chemical defence school at HMS Excellent; the Plymouth command NBCD school at HMS Raleigh; and the school of logistics, royal logistics training group at Deepcut. Additionally, some MOD personnel attend specialist fire safety courses at such training centres as the Home Office school at Moreton-in-Marsh.

Where active fire cover is provided at MOD establishments, facilities for continuation training are provided. Moreover, the MOD has task training integrated across the board. All military and civilian personnel are given the appropriate fire fighting training as part of the Department's duty of care.

Theft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to his Department of theft by *(a)* military personnel and *(b)* civilian personnel in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [4564]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The figures are as follows:

Year	*Theft by service personnel £000s*	*Theft by civilians £000s*
1985–86	125.2	49.0
1986–87	0.0	0.0
1987–88	24.1	222.1
1988–89	0.0	150.0
1989–90	0.0	19.7
1990–91	2.0	581.8
1991–92	4.3	0.0
1992–93	1.4	39.0
1993–94	183.8	126.7
1994–95	35.5	272.7

These figures are expressed in gross terms and they make no allowance for subsequent recoveries.

There are wide fluctuations from year to year and no obvious trend, but we are far from complacent and have taken a range of preventive measures.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* military personnel and *(b)* civilian personnel have been (i) charged and (ii) found guilty of theft in his Department in each of the last five years. [4566]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

	Service		*Civilian*	
Year	*Charged*	*Guilty*	*Charged*	*Guilty*
1990–91	10	10	10	10
1991–92	3	3	0	0
1992–93	1	1	9	3
1993–94	11	5	18	11
1994–95	9	7	28	19

Court Martial System

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his proposals for the reform of the court martial system. [5077]

Mr. Soames: We have undertaken a review of the court martial system as part of our preparations for the Armed Forces Bill which was introduced recently.

As a result, we are including in the Bill proposals to reform aspects of the court martial system, while enabling it to continue to meet the armed forces' requirement to administer discipline firmly but fairly. I am today putting a note setting out the detail of these proposals in the Library, and copies will be available in the Vote Office. The main features of the changes are as follows: there will be changes in the formal part played in court martial proceedings by the military chain of command. Its functions, such as settling charges, responsibility for the prosecution and appointing court martial members, will remain in the services but generally be independent of the chain of command; there will be an enhancement of the part played at court martial by the judge advocate, who is similar in many ways to a judge in a civilian court; the right for defendants to choose to have their cases tried by court martial, rather than dealt with summarily by the commanding officer, will be extended; access to the courts martial appeal court, which is composed of senior civilian judges, will be extended, to enable it to hear appeals against sentence as well as against conviction.

This last proposal is already included in the Armed Forces Bill. Amendments to the Bill to address the other proposals which require legislation will be tabled shortly.

The court martial system has served the services very well over the years. We believe that the proposals represent a major improvement to the present system and will enable it to continue to fulfil its purpose for a long time to come.

Defence Contracts

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts that his Department has with *(a)* Junghans, *(b)* Borletti and *(c)* Raufoss over the last five years; and if these companies are permitted to bid for current procurement contracts. [3865]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* As my predecessor stated on 23 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *309*, and as has been confirmed on several occasions since, my Department will not be placing any new contracts with the firms concerned until all the facts relating to the Foxley case have been fully investigated. Details of contracts placed with Raufoss and Junghans in the last five years are given below. All these contracts have been completed. No contracts have been placed with Borletti in the last five years, but one contract has been placed with the division of Fiat which acquired Borletti's interests. This contract is due to complete in 1996.

Company	*Store*	*Date*	*Value (£000s)*
Raufoss	27mm Ammo	7 January 1991	233
	25mm Ammo	25 February 1991	24
	12.7mm Ammo	29 October 1991	5
	20mm Ammo	16 July 1992	11
	Rocket Warheads	2 September 1993	1,200
	Ammo Testing	5 October 1992	8
	Rocket Warheads	11 September 1992	342
	Study into Non-ricochet Ammo	27 October 1993	155
Junghans	Fuze L127A3	2 October 1992	589
Fiat (Borletti Division)	Fuze L85A2	20 March 1991	2,088

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of all the submissions received from the Department of Health, NHS executive, health authorities and NHS trusts in response to the "Front Line First" proposed changes to defence medical services. [4462]

Mr. Soames: Three formal submissions were received from the NHS in response to the defence costs study 15 consultative document. Copies of these submissions will be placed in the Library of the House.

Rosyth Naval Base

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on negotiations on the sale of Rosyth naval base to Rosyth 2000; and if he will ensure that commercial operations will be in place from 1 January 1996. [3647]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Negotiations with the preferred bidder, Rosyth 2000 Ltd., a consortium of leading Scottish businesses, are under way. Commercial operations on a small scale are likely to be developed from 1 January 1996, with an anticipated date of transfer from military to civilian use on 31 March 1996.

Mr. Fouad Uzzourni

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions since 1980 Ministers or officials of his Department have met Mr. Fouad Uzzourni since 1980; and what was the purpose of the meetings. [4191]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am not aware of Ministers or officials in my Department having met a Mr. Fouad Uzzourni.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4274]

Mr. Soames: There are nine digital global systems for mobile communications mobile telephones in the Ministry of Defence which may be used by Ministers.

Army (Establishment)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of *(a)* the Gurkhas and *(b)* the Royal Irish Regiment are included in the figure given for the strength of the Army on paragraph 507 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995". [4574]

Mr. Soames: The figure included some 4,000 Gurkhas and 850 general service personnel of the Royal Irish Regiment. It excluded full and part-time soldiers of the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service).

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned establishment in April 1996 of *(a)* the Gurkhas and *(b)* the Royal Irish Regiment. [4575]

Mr. Soames: The planned establishment for the Gurkhas at April 1996 is around 4,000; for the Royal Irish Regiment (General Service) 850, and for the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service) 3,300 full-time soldiers and 2,400 part-time soldiers.

Implementation Force (Bosnia)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what inoculations against chemical and biological weapons British troops being deployed as part of the implementation force have received; [4578]

(2) what assessment has been made of the implications for the implementation force of the potential use of chemical and biological weapons in Bosnia; [4576]

(3) what instructions have been issued to the implementation force regarding the potential use of chemical and biological weapons in Bosnia. [4577]

Mr. Soames: My Department has examined all aspects of the potential threat to the implementation force from chemical and biological weapons. All necessary measures are being taken, though it would not be appropriate to go into detail.

Ambulance

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the replacement order for his Department's ambulances. [4568]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The assessment of the competition to purchase ambulances for the Army is not yet complete. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to make a statement at this stage.

Starstreak Missile

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the development of the Starstreak missile for the attack helicopter. [4572]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The United Kingdom is currently participating in the first phase of a United States programme to examine the feasibility of using a variant of the Starstreak high velocity missile, which recently entered service with the British Army in the ground-to-air role as an air-to-air missile fro Apache. This phase will culminate in the middle of next year in trials in the US to demonstrate safe release of Starstreak from a US Army AH-64A aircraft. Subject to the satisfactory outcome of these trials, further phases on a co-operative basis are planned.

Mortar Shells

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies supplying his Department with 81mm illuminating mortar shells. [4573]

Mr. Arbuthnot: There is no current contract for 81mm illuminating mortar rounds. The most recent contract, for which deliveries ended in December 1993, was with the Italian company, Simmel Difesa.

Attack Helicopter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the decision to place the contract for the helmet and associated avionics for the Army attack helicopter out to tender was taken; what companies are bidding for this contract; what is the total value of this contract; and what plans his Department had made for the manufacture of the helmet prior to that decision. [4580]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The possibility of an improved helmet and sighting system to replace the current, first generation US Army integrated helmet and display sighting system was identified by Westland Helicopters in its attack helicopter bid. As part of the selection process, it was decided to proceed with this option. As prime contractor, Westland has been tasked to hold a sub-contract competition for this equipment and will issue an invitation to tender early in the new year. The value of the contract will be dependent on the chosen system.

Army Technical Support Agency

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his Department's decision on the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency on to one main site; when he originally anticipated making this announcement; and what factors underlay the delay. [4563]

Mr. Soames: I intend to announce our proposals shortly. This will be followed by a period of consultation.

We originally intended to announce our proposals earlier this year but had to examine in detail more potential sites than had first been anticipated.

Military Communications Satellites

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for further orders for military communications satellites. [5076]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Subject to the successful completion of contractual negotiations, we intend to place an order worth more than £100 million Matra Marconi Space UK Ltd., for a third Skynet 4 stage 2 communications satellite. The stage 2 satellites will start coming into service from 1998. The Skynet 4 stage 2 programme will enable us to maintain dedicated satellite communications into the next century for British forces deployed throughout the world, in theatres as diverse as Bosnia, the middle east and the Falkland Islands. Such a capability is of great importance to mobile operations, including those of the joint rapid deployment force, where military units may be in range of reliable terrestrial communications. The planned order will also provide substantial further work for the British space industry.

Departmental Vacant Dwellings

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Ministry are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Cambridgeshire. [4764]

Mr. Soames: My Department owns the following vacant dwellings in these parliamentary constituencies in Cambridgeshire:

	Number
Huntingdon	552
South-east Cambridgeshire	8
South-west Cambridgeshire	54

A total of 478 properties in Huntingdon have recently been handed back by the United States Air Force. Of these, 193 are surplus to requirements and will be sold while the remainder will be retained to house a squadron returning from overseas. In south-west Cambridgeshire, 42 of the vacant properties are awaiting sale. Information on the number of properties vacant for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how any dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Devon and Cornwall. [4554]

Mr. Soames: My Department owns the following vacant dwellings in these parliamentary constituencies in Devon and Cornwall.

	Number
North Devon	120
Exeter	8
Plymouth Devonport	340
Plymouth Drake	4
Plymouth Sutton	65
Torridge and West Devon	8
North Cornwall	65
St. Ives	98
South East Cornwall	13

A total of 152 vacant quarters in Plymouth, Devonport, and 91 vacant quarters in St. Ives are in the process of being sold. A further 52 vacant quarters in Plymouth, Devonport have been identified for leasing to Plymouth city council. One hundred and twenty vacant quarters in north Devon and 50 in north Cornwall are being held for unit deployments. Information on the number of properties vacant for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultancies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultancies his Department has placed in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [4571]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Properties

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of his Ministry's properties there are on *(a)* the Dale Road estate, Haverfordwest an *(b)* the Trafalgar Road estate, Haverfordwest; [4736]

(2) what are his plans for the disposal of his Ministry's housing at the Trafalgar Road estate, Haverfordwest and the Dale Road estate, Haverfordwest; [4738]

(3) if he will list those parts of his Ministry's housing at *(a)* Dale Road estate and *(b)* Trafalgar Road estate, Haverfordwest, which the private sector has expressed an interest in buying; [4737]

(4) how many of his Ministry's properties at *(a)* the Dale Road estate, Haverfordwest, and *(b)* Trafalgar Road estate, Haverfordwest, are currently vacant. [4735]

Mr. Soames: My Department owns the following properties on the estate mentioned at Haverfordwest:

	Stock	*Vacant*
Dale Road estate	188	85
Trafalgar Road estate	253	93

The properties on the Trafalgar Road estate are surplus to our long-term requirements and we are currently negotiating to sell 216 of them to a housing association. The remaining 37 will probably be offered for sale to service personnel through the services' discount scheme. The vacant properties on the Dale Road estate are being held for a unit returning from Germany. In common with other parts of the married quarters estate in England and Wales, these married quarters may be transferred to the private sector as part of the proposal announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *810-11*.

ENVIRONMENT

Smoke Detectors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons the Smoke Detectors Act 1991 has not fully been brought into force; and when he intends to fully bring it into force. [197]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Section 1(2) of the Smoke Detectors Act 1991 requires all new dwellings to be fitted with one or more smoke detectors in such a manner as to make adequate provision for the early detection of the outbreak of fire in the dwelling. I do not intend to bring the Act into force because its provisions would simply duplicate measures introduced under the Building Regulations 1991 for smoke alarms to be fitted in new dwellings.

Council Tax

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average council tax bill in each English standard planning region in the latest year for which figures are available. [4296]

Sir Paul Beresford: The average headline council taxes —band C, two adults— for the area in each English standard planning region in 1995–96 are as follows:

Region	£
Northern	602
North West	628
Yorkshire and Humberside	561
East Midlands	562
West Midlands	545
East Anglia	498
South East	505
London	512
South West	530
England	541

Amounts shown are headline taxes, before transitional relief and council tax benefit/rebates after capping.

Ealing Council

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reserves are currently held by Ealing council; what were the equivalent figures for *(a)* 1 April 1994 and *(b)* 1 April 1990; and if he will make a statement. [4169]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department has recently conducted a survey of the general fund revenue reserves held by local authorities during 1994–95. The results show that the London borough of Ealing held about £36.9 million in revenue reserves at 1 April 1994, of which about £11.8 million were unallocated, the remainder being earmarked for specific purposes or held on behalf of schools under local management of schools schemes.

At the time of the survey, Ealing expected its revenue reserves on 1 April 1995 to be £36.4 million, of which £3.9 million would be unallocated, £2.5 million held on behalf of schools, and £30 million held in other earmarked reserves.

Figures for 1 April 1990 are not available on a comparable basis.

Public Local Inquiries

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the time scale for inquiries under the Town and Country Planning Act recommended in the inquiries procedure rules; and if he will make a statement on the Planning Inspectorate's ability to meet this time scale. [4205]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* The provision of information on public local inquiries is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the inspectorate's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from James Greenfield to Mr. John Austin-Walker, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State asked the Chief Planning Inspector to reply to your question about the timescale for inquiries under the Town and Country Planning Act recommended in the Inquiries Procedure Rules, and the Planning Inspectorate's ability to meet this timescale. Mr. Shepley is away from the office at this time, and I am writing on his behalf.

In the case of planning appeals and planning applications called-in for the Secretary of State's decision, the Inquiries Procedure Rules state that the inquiry shall be not later than 20 weeks or 22 weeks respectively after the relevant start date for the case, unless such a date is impracticable. Generally, the earliest possible date for an inquiry to be arranged is about 14 weeks after the relevant date (16 weeks or more for called-in applications), allowing the parties adequate time to submit and exchange statements and prepare proofs of evidence within the recommended timescales.

There is a general delay in arranging dates for these inquiries caused by the need to provide Inspectors for development plan inquiries. The Planning and Compensation Act 1991 required mandatory district wide plans to be published by local authorities, so that future development control decisions were made in accordance with the plans, unless material considerations indicated otherwise. Ministers expectations were that all plans would be in place, by the end of 1996. Extra Inspectors have been recruited, but are undergoing an extensive training programme before they become fully effective.

Within the Inspectorate's published Business Plan there are a number of performance targets, many of which are measured against the time taken to complete 80% of our caseloads. The latest statistics show that during September, 80% of the dates for inquiries proposed by the Inspectorate to the parties were made within 40 weeks of the relevant dates. The earliest date proposed was made in week 18, and the latest date in week 51. The average waiting time for an inquiry date was 35 weeks.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3399]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 December 1995, *Official Report,* column *239.*

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3400]

Sir Paul Beresford: The policy aim of the PFI is to improve the quality and quantity of capital projects within whatever level of public funding is available at a given time. The agreement of specific schemes under the private finance initiative will not result in changes in the policy.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Departments have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4260]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information we have received from service providers suggests that in the last 18 months one of the mobile/car telephones allocated for the use of Ministers and their private offices has been cloned. The phone was one allocated for use by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4259]

Sir Paul Beresford: Thirteen car/mobile telephones are allocated for the use of Ministers and their private offices.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the total external support available to Buckinghamshire county council from business rates and revenue support grant for each financial year since 1990–91 to 1996–97; and if he will make a statement; [4695]

(2) if he will list the total external support available to *(a)* Aylesbury Vale district council, *(b)* Wycombe district council and *(c)* Chiltern district for each financial year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement. [4696]

Sir Paul Beresford: Between 1990–91 and 1992–93 redistributed non-domestic rates and revenue support grant were paid only into the collection funds operated by billing authorities. These payments supported expenditure incurred by both the billing authority and also by any precepting authorities. There is therefore no data for those years in respect of Buckinghamshire CC, and the figures for the district councils are not comparable with those for later years. The figures from 1993–94 onwards are given.

Non-domestic rates are redistributed to each authority on a per head basis. RSG is calculated as the difference between its standard spending assessment and the sum of the income from its council tax—assuming that its tax was set at the council tax for standard spending for that type of authority—and its share of the distributable amount non-domestic rates. At national level, the change in the amount of RSG reflects change in each of these elements. The differential increases in RSG between authorities will reflect changes in assessed need, function—in particular the changed arrangements for police funding in 1995–96—and in the size of their own tax base.

£ thousand

	Revenue support grant	*Non domestic rates*
Buckinghamshire County Council		
1993–94[1]	174,081	131,508
1994–95[1]	192,144	121,802
1995–96[2]	166,086	118,192
1996–97[2] (provisional Settlement)	153,407	134,972
Aylesbury Vale District Council		
1993–94	4,385	5,199
1994–95	4,186	4,846
1995–96	3,831	5,069
1996–97 (provisional settlement)	2,893	5,376
Wycombe District Council		
1993–94	3,505	5,626
1994–95	4,263	5,192
1995–96	3,903	5,400
1996–97 (provisional settlement)	2,860	5,754
Chiltern District Council		
1993–94	0	3,149
1994–95	982	2,912
1995–96	834	3,037
1996–97 (provisional settlement)	584	3,234

[1] Including funding for Buckinghamshire's share of Thames Valley Police.

[2] Excluding funding for police.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what impact the reduction in the amount of the area costs adjustment has had on the levels of standard spending assessment and total external support for 1996–97 for *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council, *(b)* Aylesbury Vales district council, *(c)* Chiltern district council, and *(d)* Wycombe district council; and if he will make a statement. [4694]

Sir Paul Beresford: The changes proposed to the area cost adjustment factors for 1996–97 reflect information from the 1994 new earnings survey showing a narrowing of the cost differentials between authorities in London and the south-east and authorities elsewhere.

We estimate that had we used the factors which were used in the 1995–96 settlement, proposed SSAs for the authorities would have been higher by approximately the following amounts.

	£ million
Buckinghamshire County Council	2.23
Aylesbury Vale District Council	0.07
Chiltern District Council	0.06
Wycombe District Council	0.07

The authorities' total external support would also have been higher by approximately the same amounts.

Warwickshire Funding

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total funding made available to Warwickshire in 1995–96; and what it was in each of the three previous years. [4837]

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1992–93 redistributed non domestic and revenue support grant were paid only in the collection funds operated by billing authorities. These payments supported expenditure incurred by both the billing authorities and also by any precepting authorities. Data concerning total funding in 1992–93 are therefore not comparable with those for later years. The figures from 1993–94 to 1995–96 are given.

Non-domestic rates are redistributed to each authority on a per head basis. Revenue support grant is calculated as the difference between its standard spending assessment and the sum of the income from its council tax—assuming that its tax was set at the council tax for standard spending for that type of authority—and its share of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates. Revenue support grant and specific grants declined in 1995–96 because of the establishment of the new Warwickshire police authority.

Warwickshire County Council

£ thousand

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Revenue support grant	94,197	106,115	96,582
Non domestic rates	100,626	92,801	89,737
Specific and special grants inside AEF	36,834	37,907	12,563
Specific and special grants outside AEF	30,601	35,104	24,261
Total funding	262,258	271,927	223,143

HOME DEPARTMENT

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3409]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has entered into two contractual agreements under the private finance initiative.

The estimated revenue commitment per year for the police national network service is not available. Individual police forces' purchase usage of the network from public funds, but the value during the lifetime of the scheme will depend on demand. The contract is for five years.

The lease for the Gatwick airport immigration detention facility is for 25 years. Rental is £987,000 per annum fixed for the next five years. After this period the rental will be re-negotiated. There will also be a separately negotiated management contract.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3410]

Mr. Howard: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of the PFI policy and offer us the opportunity further to refine the process of implementation. The lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy is available in the Library.

Fine Enforcement

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of his discussions with the Lord Chancellor about the impact of the scheduled transfer of responsibility for the system of fine enforcement. [3974]

Mr. Maclean: The Lord Chancellor and my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important to remove from the police the administrative work relating to enforcement of warrants which divert them from more essential police work. There has been an exchange of correspondence about the timing of the proposed transfer of responsibility for the enforcement of certain categories of warrants from the police to the magistrates courts. The matter is now the subject of judicial review.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4257]

Mr. Howard: Six.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4258]

Mr. Howard: The number of detected instances of cloning of Ministers' official mobile telephones in my Department during *(a)* the last six months; *(b)* the previous six months; and *(c)* the six months before that were zero, two and zero respectively.

The mobile telephones issued to the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he was serving as Minister of State in my Department, were cloned.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if answers to questions tabled by hon. Members which fall within the responsibilities of executive agencies of his Office are submitted to Ministers for approval before publication in the *Official Report.* [4740]

Mr. Howard: It is the normal practice for Ministers to see the proposed replies to questions tabled by hon. Members which fall within the responsibility of chief executives of Home Office executive agencies before they appear in the *Official Report.*

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out for each of the last 10 years for which information is available *(a)* according to country of origin the number of applications for asylum from those seeking to enter the United Kingdom from abroad together with the number accepted and *(b)* the number of applications for asylum from those already in the United Kingdom together with the number accepted. [4516]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the number of asylum applications made and decisions taken, by location of application, for the years 1992 to 1994, is given in tables 4.1 to 4.3 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994" issue 15/95. Similar information on asylum applications for the years 1998 to 1991 is given in table 2.2 of issues 13/93 and 12/92 of the same publication. Copies of all issues of this bulletin are available in the Library. An equivalent breakdown of decisions prior to 1992 is not available.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers appealed against the initial decision on their claims in 1994; and what percentage of the total of those whose claims were initially rejected this represented. [4236]

Mr. Kirkhope: In 1994, there were 16,500 initial decisions to refuse asylum. During the same year, 10,580 appeals against the refusal of asylum were lodged with the Home Office. However, some of these appeals will have been made against decisions which were taken at the end of 1993 and some of those applications who were refused may have exercised more than one right of appeal. For these reasons, an accurate appeal rate cannot be calculated.

Terrorism (Exclusion Orders)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to establish a wholly independent authority to consider exclusion orders under prevention of terrorism legislation; and if the persons so appointed will be subject to official secrets legislation in respect of the information provided to them. [4523]

Mr. Howard: Independent persons have been appointed to consider exclusion orders since the prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974 was introduced. The European Court of Justice has ruled that the method of appointing the independent advisers is satisfactory. They are subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in cases where recommendations to exclude persons under the prevention of terrorism legislation are not approved by the wholly independent persons appointed to consider such cases. [4524]

Mr. Howard: The Secretary of State is not bound by legislation to accept the advisers' recommendations. Responsibility for national security results rests ultimately with the Secretary of State. However, in recent years, advisers' recommendations have generally been accepted. These recommendations have by no means always supported exclusion orders, which have sometimes been revoked accordingly.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the procedures to be followed by the wholly independent persons appointed to consider recommendations for exclusion under prevention of terrorism legislation with particular reference to the rights of persons being excluded learning of the nature of the evidence offered against them. [4525]

Mr. Howard: The adviser will offer the individual concerned an interview, either in Northern Ireland or in the British embassy in Dublin. Legal representation is permitted. The adviser will have access to the documentation on the basis of which a recommendation for exclusion has been made. The adviser will submit a report to the Secretary of State who then makes a final decision.

Exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974 relate to the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism, or travel for those purposes; details are highly sensitive and could not be divulged without prejudicing the fight against terrorism. That is why any individual may make representations to an independent adviser, and all cases are subject to further oversight as part of the annual review of the operation of the prevention of terrorism Act.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been excluded from the mainland of the United Kingdom under prevention of terrorism legislation; and on what basis he has concluded that none of them will be entitled to compensation. [4526]

Mr. Howard: Four hundred and forty-one people have been excluded from Great Britain or the United Kingdom since the introduction of this legislation in 1974. Differentiation between those excluded from Great Britain and those excluded from the United Kingdom since 1974 could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

To claim compensation, an individual would have to show that he had suffered loss as a direct result of the failure to follow procedures deemed necessary by the European Court of Justice. There is no evidence to support this in any of these cases, since the Court has called into question the process, rather than the fact, of exclusion. In many instances, the decision to exclude was subsequently backed up by an independent adviser who had had a chance to interview the individual.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he had made of the cost of providing a wholly independent review of persons considered for exclusion under protection of terrorism legislation. [4527]

Mr. Howard: An independent review process already exists. Each individual who is excluded is offered the opportunity to make representations to an independent adviser. The European Court of Justice judgment in Gallagher concerned the point at which the reference should be made to an adviser. We are currently considering its implications.

Church Commissioners

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretay of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held with *(a)* the Church Commissioners and *(b)* the General Synod on the desirability of the commissioners ceasing to be covered by exempted status in respect of their supervision by the Charity Commissioners. [4591]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Racism and Xenophobia

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his reasons for objecting to the proposed EEC draft joint action concerning action to combat racism and xenophobia. [4562]

Mr. Kirkhope: As currently drafted, the joint action would require us to change our law so as to criminalise certain forms of behaviour which are not currently offences in the United Kingdom or to derogate from the principle of dual criminality as regards judicial co-operation in respect of those forms of behaviour. United Kingdom civil and criminal law responds in a balanced way to the real mischiefs of which there is currently evidence in this country. The Government are committed to protecting people from threats, abuse and insults based on their race; and we are working towards a solution which will allow all 15 member states to agree a European Union instrument on this subject.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what number of illegal immigrants have been granted bail in each of the last 36 months; and what requirement they must meet in order to receive social security payments. [4593]

Mr. Kirkhope: Statistics are not available on immigration offenders granted bail. The other information requested is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people *(a)* entered the country illegally and *(b)* were apprehended entering the United Kingdom illegally by (i) lorry, (ii) small boat and (iii) light aircraft, in each of the last 36 months. [4592]

Mr. Kirkhope: There are no official estimates of the number of people who have entered the United Kingdom illegally. The number of illegal entrants detected in each of the last three years for which statistics have been published are:

1992: 5,658

1993: 5,778

1994: 7,389 (provisional).

Information about the means by which these people entered, claimed to have entered or attempted to enter illegally is not maintained centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations underlay his decision not to issue a White Paper before publishing the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [4561]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend made a full statement on 20 November, *Official Report*, columns *335–38*, in which he explained the need for this proposed legislation.

Police (Costs)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how he proposes to implement and monitor the recruitment of 5,000 additional police officers; [4031]

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure that chief constables do not use their share of the cash for recruiting additional police officers for normal recruiting to replace wastage, or for other purposes. [4026]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* The Government are providing sufficient funding to allow an additional 5,000 police officers to be recruited over the next three financial years. The additional funding is to be allocated separately to police forces. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary will introduce a mechanism to monitor the use by forces of the extra funding.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of the average total annual cost of employing *(a)* a police officer for a year and *(b)* an additional police constable and what is the average cost of employing a new recruit to the police service including the cost of training and other costs during the first full year of employment. [4027]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* The most recent estimate of the average total annual cost of employing a police officer is £42,000. The figure was calculated on the basis of total expenditure and total police strength of provincial forces in England and Wales.

Data on the average annual cost of employing a police constable are not collected centrally.

The estimated average costs of employing an additional probationer constable in 1996–97 are shown in the table:

Cost of a probationer constable	*Outside London* £	*London* £
Estimated salary	16,117	16,117
London Weighting	—	1,398
London Allowance	—	1,011
Earning Related National Insurance Contributions	1,251	—
Earning Related National Insurance Contributions	—	1,424
Estimated training expenses	2,000	2,000
Estimated cost of uniform	370	370
Total	19,738	22,320

Human Genetics Report

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take in response to data protection issues raised in the third report of the Science and Technology Select Committee, of Session 1994–95, on "human genetics: the Science and its Consequences", HC 41. [3918]

Mr. Sackville: The Government will be responding to the Select Committee in due course.

Police (Speaking Engagements)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* instructions are issued to serving police officers of superintendent rank and above, concerning invitations to speak at meetings where (i) the invitation is by virtue of being a serving police officer and (ii) the meeting is arranged by a political organisation. [4005]

Mr. Maclean: Regulation 9 and schedule 2 of the Police Regulations 1995 prohibit a police officer from taking an active part in politics. This provision does not necessarily preclude an officer from accepting an invitation to speak at a political or other gathering.

Data Protection

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement on the review of the Data Protection Act 1984. [3920]

Mr. Sackville: I expect to announce the outcome of the "prior options" study of the office of the Data Protection Registrar shortly. Work on the implications of the European Union data protection directive is in progress. I expect to publish a consultation paper in due course.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Social Security on the extension of data protection legislation. [3919]

Mr. Sackville: I have had no such discussions with my right hon. Friend.

Police (Sandown Racecourse)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily or hourly rate charged for and paid to police officers at the Sandown racecourse exhibition. [3785]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the decision to deploy police at this event was an operational one and as such no charges will be made to the organisers of the exhibition. The rates of pay for the individual officers involved are not readily available. I regret that the estimated additional total police cost for this operation given in my reply to a question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 27 November, *Official Report, 467*, was miscalculated. I understand that the correct total figure if £2,100.

Police (Brightlingsea)

Sir Alan Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on complaints about the policing of demonstrations against animal exports at Brightlingsea. [3789]

Mr. Maclean: The investigation of individual complaints against police officers is a matter for the chief constable and the Police Complaints Authority. I understand that 112 complaints have been received, and that none of the 68 so far dealt with has been substantiated. The report of the inquiry supervised by the Police Complaints Authority noted that on the whole officers had shown considerable constraint. I commend the chief constable of Essex police on a very successful operation in extremely difficult policing circumstances.

Regional Crime Squads

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of HM inspectors' reports on the inspections carried out of the South and West Wales, the South West and North West and the South East regional crime squads during 1994–95. [3992]

Mr. Maclean: Copies of these reports are already in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Health Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names of the general managers, chairs and board members and their correspondence addresses for each of the health boards in Scotland. [1187]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* As the information requested is lengthy, I have arranged for copies of the lists to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department had with the officials of Greater Glasgow and Borders health boards relating to their under-drawing of their budgets for 1994–95; and what representations their boards have made in relation to these surpluses being carried forward into the current financial year. [4470]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Officials in my Department have had frequent discussions with officials of Greater Glasgow and Borders health boards relating to under-drawing of budget for 1994–95 and these discussions are continuing. The final amounts to be carried forward into the current financial year have not yet been agreed but the boards have made representations seeking to maximise the carry-forward amounts within the normal operating rules. The final figures will be determined soon.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the budgets for 1995–96 for each of Scotland's health boards; and if he will indicate for each board the percentage charge on the budgets for 1994–95. [4471]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Health board	*£ thousand*		*Percentage*
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*Increase*
Argyll and Clyde	210,398	217,764	3.50
Ayrshire and Arran	171,635	179,208	4.41
Borders	53,658	56,502	5.30
Dumfries and Galloway	75,331	80,587	6.98
Fife	157,148	164,276	4.54
Forth Valley	124,511	128,711	3.37
Grampian	225,961	233,520	3.35
Greater Glasgow	484,605	495,402	2.23
Highland	99,118	103,318	4.24
Lanarkshire	241,124	254,676	5.62
Lothian	343,583	356,919	3.88
Orkney	10,377	10,924	5.27
Shetland	11,196	11,571	3.35
Tayside	198,080	203,865	2.92
Western Isles	18,150	18,838	3.79
Total	2,424,873	2,516,081	3.76

Note:

The figures report basic revenue allocations which are based on weighted capitation requirements with adjustment for moves to funding parity. Additionally Boards receive allocations for capital charges and to meet a range of service specific costs. These include, for example, the costs of nurse education and training, the additional costs associated with the teaching of doctors and such allocations reflect actual costs and will vary from Board to Board.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column *318*, how much of the surpluses in the budgets for 1994–95 of Borders health board and Greater Glasgow health board were not transferred to the current financial year's budget for these boards. [4473]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisional figures provided in the previous answer of 23 November have still to be finalised and therefore no transfer of funding to the health boards has yet taken place. It is anticipated, however, that all of Borders health board's surplus will be transferred but that £1.837 million of Greater Glasgow health board's surplus will not be transferred as this element relates to a ring-fenced capital allocation underspend which is not available for carry-forward purposes.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names of the chief executives, chairs and executive and non-executive directors and the trust correspondence addresses for each of the NHS trusts currently in operation in Scotland. [1188]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* As the information requested is lengthy, I have arranged for copies of the lists to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the budget for each of Scotland's NHS trusts for the 1994–95 financial year indicating the surplus or deficit declared by each NHS trust; and if he will list the budget for each NHS trust for 1995–96 indicating the percentage change against the previous financial year. [4472]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the tables. The surplus-deficit and total income figures for each trust in 1994–95 have been taken from the 1994–95 NHS trust annual accounts. The 1995–96 total income figures have been taken from the latest financial monitoring returns provided by each trust.

NHS Trust Income for 1994–95 and 1995–96

Trust Name	*1994–95 Income*	*1995–96 Income*	*Percentage Difference*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	123,084	130,078	5.38
Angus NHS Trust	40,874	40,003	–2.18
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust[1]	—	29,579	—
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	59,168	59,705	0.90
Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust[1]	—	25,494	—
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust[1]	—	30,174	—
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	15,308	15,542	1.51
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	47,655	70,188	32,10
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	39,798	41,384	3.83
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust[1]	—	40,860	—
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	58,211	58,229	0.03
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	114,524	120,128	4.67
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	53,711	53,185	–0.99
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	85,132	83,328	–2.16
Edinburgh Sick Childrens' NHS Trust	27,091	27,771	2.45
Falkirk and District NHS Trust	36,970	37,052	0.22
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	81,677	80,825	–1.05
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust[1]	—	10,280	—
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	119,729	124,824	4.08
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	135,767	128,628	–5.55
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	152,023	147,365	–3.16
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	48,705	48,063	–1.34
Highland Communities NHS Trust	52,258	47,917	–9.06
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	39,095	38,103	–2.60
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	46,759	46,630	–0.28
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust[1]	—	84,851	—
Law Hospital NHS Trust	45,318	46,247	2.01
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust[1]	—	32,192	—
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	53,356	56,035	4.78
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	26,107	28,838	9.47
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	75,018	76,766	2.28
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	58,057	58,356	0.51
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	38,217	38,507	0.75
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	52,108	53,707	2.98
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	69,419	68,716	–1.02
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	50,653	50,588	–0.13
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	157,192	153,817	–2.19
Scottish Ambulance Service NHS Trust[1]	—	72,893	—
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	46,955	46,148	–1.75
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	81,170	88,007	7.77
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	40,741	41,279	1.30
Stobhill NHS Trust	66,459	69,762	4.73
Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	59,298	63,743	6.97
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	113,090	127,156	11.06
West Lothian NHS Trust	66,652	68,100	2.13
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	75,258	78,068	3.60
Yorkhill NHS Trust	55,747	56,366	1.10
Total	2,608,354	2,995,477	12.92

[1] These are 4th wave Trusts and became operational on 1 April 1995. Figures for Cental Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust include those for Royal Scottish National Hospital NHS Trust which dissolved on formation of the new Trust on 1 October 1995.

Surplus/Deficit declared in 1994–95

Trust Name	*Surplus/Deficit*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	1,466
Angus NHS Trust	896
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	883
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	319
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	214
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	433
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	1,120
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	990
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	1,215
Edingburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	2,332
Edingburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	230
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	985
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	1,365
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	2,559
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	2,799
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	1,701
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	625
Highland Communities NHS Trust	592
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	699
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	731
Law Hospital NHS Trust	877
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	936
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	139
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	1,713

Surplus/Deficit declared in 1994–95

Trust Name	*Surplus/Deficit*
Pert and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	1,449
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	1,292
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	815
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,634
Royal Alexander Hospital NHS Trust	860
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	2,850
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	516
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	1,345
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	824
Stobhill NHS Trust	1,190
Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	–5,646
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	2,233
West Lothian NHS Trust	989
West General Hospitals NHS Trust	1,061
Yorkhill NHS Trust	925
Total	38,156

Notes:

1. Figures for Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust include those for Royal Scottish Nation Hospital NHS Trust which dissolved on formation of the new Trust on 1 October 1995.
2. The deficit recorded by Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust was due to revaluation of the Royal Samartian Hospital prior to its disposal.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all NHS trusts *(a)* as of 30 November 1995 and *(b)* with effect from 1 April 1996. [4052]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on 19 July 1995 at column *1534*. The fourth wave of NHS trust hospitals in Scotland became effective on 1 April 1995. There are no plans to establish any further NHS trusts in Scotland.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the last 10 years the amount lost to Greater Glasgow health board due to progress towards Scottish health authorities "Priorities for the Eighties" parity. [3914]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Greater Glasgow health board has been, and still is, overfunded against its weighted capitation target. The table below details the board's moves to parity and the amount by which they remained over-funded against their weighted capitation target for the past 10 years.

£ million

Year	*Parity move*	*Remainder overfunded*
1985–86	–2.106	12.326
1986–87	–3.499	14.922
1987–88	–3.780	15.218
1988–89	–4.016	16.494
1989–90	–6.660	18.916
1990–91	–7.223	30.515
1991–92	–13.000	21.264
1992–93	–11.000	17.657
1993–94	–3.234	17.443
1994–95	–9.665	18.326
1995–96	–9.355	13.057

Police (Speaking Engagements)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* instructions are issued to serving police officers of superintendent rank and above, concerning invitations to speak at meetings where (i) the invitation is by virtue of being a serving police officer and (ii) the meeting is arranged by a political organisation. [4006]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Regulation 4 and regulation 1 of the Police (Scotland) Regulations 1976 prohibit a police officer from taking an active part in politics but do not preclude an officer from accepting an invitation to speak at meetings arranged by political organisations.

Sterilisations

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Scotland are sterilised annually, by standard census age group. [4103]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of sterilisations performed annually from 1990–1994 on Scottish NHS in-patients and day cases is given in the table.

Sterilisations of NHSiS Patients by Age and Sex, 1990–1994

	Under 20	*20–24*	*25–29*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45+*	*All ages*
1990								
Males	5	91	1,137	2,325	1,732	767	325	6,382
Females	17	624	2,494	2,788	2,046	875	125	8,969
Both Sexes	22	715	3,631	5,113	3,778	1,642	450	15,351
1991								
Males	1	86	993	2,129	1,637	713	266	5,825
Females	8	608	2,468	3,074	2,135	858	142	9,293
Both Sexes	9	694	3,461	5,203	3,772	1,571	408	15,118
1992								
Males	1	71	961	2,154	1,715	765	333	6,000
Females	27	663	2,517	3,108	2,272	825	155	9,567
Both Sexes	28	734	3,478	5,262	3,987	1,590	488	15,567
1993								
Males	1	68	907	2,296	1,760	828	299	6,159
Females	19	535	2,364	3,078	2,294	832	181	9,303

Sterilisations of NHSiS Patients by Age and Sex, 1990–1994

	Under 20	*20–24*	*25–29*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45+*	*All ages*
Both Sexes	20	603	3,271	5,374	4,054	1,660	480	15,462
1994								
Males	—	67	895	2,344	1,914	842	359	6,421
Females	23	461	2,169	3,081	2,303	847	150	9,034
Both Sexes	23	528	3,064	5,425	4,217	1,689	509	15,455

Data includes hospital in-patients, day cases and those sterilised after pregnancy or abortion.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3403]

Mr. Kynoch: The Skye bridge involves no revenue commitment on the part of the Government. Figures for the revenue costs of the schemes completed or agreed so far in the health sector are not available centrally.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3404]

Mr. Kynoch: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of PFI policy and offer the opportunity to further refine the process of implementation. The lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy is available in the Library.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4271]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no instances of the cloning of hand portables but official vehicles used by Scottish Office Ministers when in London were cloned in December 1994, May 1995, twice, and in June 1995.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4272]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No Minister has a mobile telephone for his exclusive use but Ministers' private offices have a total of six. In addition, official vehicles used by Ministers are fitted with car phones.

Scottish Valuation Advisory Council

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he will obtain advice pertaining to rating valuation after the demise of the Scottish Valuation Advisory Council next year. [5285]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I wish to continue to receive objective advice concerning rating valuation in a manner appropriate to today's needs and circumstances. I am therefore establishing, with effect from 1 April 1996, a non-statutory advisory body, the Scottish Valuation and Rating Council, which will be smaller than the former advisory council but composed of members representing a similar breadth of interests and experience.

The council's remit will be to advise the Secretary of State for Scotland on any matter pertaining to valuation and rating, including evaluation of representations and recommendations made to him, the identification of issues requiring consideration, and advice in the preparation of legislation.

I am happy to announce that the hon. Lord Clyde has agreed to accept appointment as the first chairman of this council. The appointment of other members will be announced at a later date.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2029]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* There were no such provisions in recent legislation. However, major reviews have been carried out on MAFF legislation relating to areas such as milk marketing, agricultural tenancies and food law. These have resulted in the abolition of the milk marketing scheme and the introduction of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995, under which landlords and tenants entering new tenancies will be able to agree terms which reflect their own particular needs. By 1 January 1996, we expect to repeal or simplify a series of national measures relating to food composition and food additives.

Overgrazing

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* sheep and *(b)* breeding ewes have been removed in each less-favoured area to meet requirements to prevent overgrazing. [3224]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The overgrazing provisions of the livestock premium schemes do not force farmers to remove animals from the less-favoured areas of the UK. They restrict the subsidy payments to farmers who continue to graze animals in excess of notified numbers on overgrazed land.

In England, notifications have been issued to 33 farmers, and over 8,500 sheep and about 400 breeding cows will have to be removed from overgrazed land if the graziers' livestock subsidies are to be unaffected by overgrazing penalties. Responsibility for the implementation of overgrazing provisions of the livestock subsidy schemes in other parts of the United Kingdom falls to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3415]

Mr. Boswell: While several projects are currently being assessed for their potential, no schemes have so far been agreed under the private finance initiative.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3416]

Mr. Boswell: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of the PFI policy and offer us the opportunity to further refine the process of implementation. The lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance initiative panel, and a copy is available in the Members' Library.

Fish Discards

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has of the weight and value of fish accidentally caught by United Kingdom-based fishing vessels which under current quota arrangements have to be thrown back; and what proposals he has in respect of this matter. [4010]

Mr. Baldry: Rates of discarding vary greatly between the various sections of the UK fleet due to the fact that the number of small fish entering the fisheries each year is itself highly variable. Discard rates in the haddock and whiting fisheries can be in the region of 50 per cent. by weight of the catch if there are large numbers of small fish present. Discard rates in the larger species fisheries such as cod are very substantially less than this. The impression gained of discard practices by scientific observers is that relatively low volumes of fish are discarded for quota reasons.

The problem is a Community-wide one and needs to be addressed on a Community level. I am determined to have a thorough reappraisal of discarding and technical conservation measures and I shall be pressing in the Fisheries Council for a concerted effort on this in 1996.

Tuna

Mr. Morely: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (1) if he has received a copy of the interim report of the observer programme, conducted on the United Kingdom drift net fishery for albacore tuna in the summer of 1995, under contract to his Ministry; if he will make a statement on the results; if he will place a copy of the report in the Library; [4040]

(2) if he will make the results of the observer programme of the United Kingdom tuna drift net fishery available to the European Commission, and to the members of the Council of Fisheries Ministers, prior to their next meeting on 21 December; [4041]

(3) if he will make a statement on results of the observer programme of the United Kingdom tuna drift net fishery in respect of *(a)* the by-catch of dolphins and other species and *(b)* the adequacy of current EU regulations, limiting drift nets to 2.5 km in length, to protect non-target species. [4045]

Mr. Baldry: We have just received and are studying an interim report by the sea mammals research unit of the Natural Environment Research Council on the UK's 1995 tuna drift net fishery. I will place a copy in the Library of the House together with the Ministry's analysis of it. The report will also be made available to the Council of Ministers and the European Commission.

Drift Net Fishing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban high seas drift nets in EU waters and by EU vessels at the next Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting. [4042]

Mr. Baldry: The European Commission's Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries has twice examined the science relating to drift net fishing by EU vessels and concluded that there is no justification for a ban. My policy will continue to be based on the science, including an interim report just received from the sea mammals research unit.

School Milk Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the consumption of milk in *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* primary schools, of EU subsidies on milk in secondary schools and on milk in school catering. [3381]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* We do not keep detailed figures on the consumption of subsidised milk in different categories of school. We estimate, however, that of the total expenditure under the EC school milk scheme in the United Kingdom, direct consumption in secondary schools accounts for about 15 per cent. and use as an ingredient in meals in both primary and secondary schools accounts for about 17 per cent.

Alport Dale

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *533* (1) on what date English Nature lodged its formal objection to Forest Enterprise's proposals for Alport dale; and on what date his Department was informed of the formal objection; [4276]

(2) on what dates the two letters objecting to the proposals by Forest Enterprise, for Alport dale were received by the Forestry Authority; and on what dates his Department was informed of the letters. [4278]

Mr. Boswell: The two letters objecting to the proposals by the Forest Enterprise for Alport dale were received by the Forestry Authority on 7 June and 15 August, and English Nature's formal objection was received on 17 August. The Forestry Commission reports directly to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on forestry matters in England.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Fine Art Commission

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will place in the Library the report of Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield into the Royal Fine Art Commission, together with his conclusions. [3666]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* Sir Geoffrey's report will be placed in the Library when we have completed the necessary consultations with other interested Departments and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has come to conclusions on the recommendations. I hope this will be early in the new year.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many mobile telephones there are available in her Department for the use of Ministers. [4253]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage has three mobile phones and two car phones available for the use of Ministers.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in her Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within her Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4254]

Mr. Sproat: None of the mobile phones used by Ministers or officials in my Department has been cloned.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3408]

Mr. Sproat: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of the PFI policy and offer the opportunity to refine further the process of implementation. The lessons learnt are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by the Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much capital expenditure is forecast to be included in the private finance initiative for the current financial year and the next five financial years. [3829]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report, 1996–97", which was laid before the House on 28 November 1995.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue costs to public funds (i) under the PFI and (ii) estimated to have been incurred had the scheme been funded wholly within the public sector. [3813]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The central Government contributions to the capital costs of projects so far agreed under the private finance initiative are as follows:

	£ million
Royal Armouries, Leeds	[1]20.0
Hampton Court catering	0.3
Dell Restaurant, Regents Park	0.14
Lido, Hyde Park	0.3
Car Parking, Regents Park and Hyde Park	None
British Library IT equipment	None

[1] Over financial years 1992–93 to 1997–98.

There are no continuing revenue costs. Indeed projects (2) to (5) above have generated, and will continue to generate, a positive annual return.

All the projects were appraised in the normal way against other options, including wholly public funded alternatives, and represented best value for money.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3407]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 7 November 1995 at column *717* for the value of the initial and continuing public sector contributions to, and returns from, projects so far approved under the private finance initiative. The annual profile of these contributions and returns is as follows:

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Royal Armouries, Leeds	1.5	2.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	1.5
Hampton Court catering	—	—	0.3	[1]+0.17	Positive annual return expected	
Dell Restaurant, Regents Park	—	—	—	0.14	Positive annual return expected	
Lido, Hyde Park	—	—	—	0.3	Positive annual return expected	
Car Parking, Regents Park and Hyde Park	—	—	—	+0.275	Positive annual return expected	
British Library IT equipment	—	—	–	—	—	—

[1] Positive figures indicate that projects generate income rather than requiring continuing revenue support.

Today

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what date her Department first learned about the possible closure of *Today* newspaper; and what communications her Department had about this matter with News International. [4556]

Mr. Sproat: My Department first learned about the possible closure of *Today* on Thursday, 16 November. My Department has not discussed any issues raised by the closure with News International.

Sports Sponsorship

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the amount spent by tobacco companies on sport in each year since 1992 under the terms of the voluntary agreement. [3965]

Mr. Sproat: The latest figures available for the amount spent by tobacco companies on sports sponsorship are: £10,403,000 in 1992–93, and £7,576,000 in 1993–94.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total amount spent on sports sponsorship from all sources for each year since 1992. [3977]

Mr. Sproat: According to published reports, the total amount spent on sports sponsorship in the United Kingdom is estimated to have been £239 million in 1992, £250 million in 1993, and £265 million in 1994.

Partnership Funding

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to allow the Sports Council to fund up to 100 per cent. of the capital project costs in the most economically deprived areas. [3784]

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council can already make more substantial grant offers to schemes which are unable to raise the indicative 35 per cent. partnership funding. However, demonstrating the financial commitment of other parties to a project is a powerful expression of support for the scheme. Partnership funding means that more assistance can be offered to a larger number of applicants.

Library Provision (Somerset)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the outcome of her Department's investigation of Somerset county council's library provision; what representations her Department has had on this subject since last January 1995; and if she will make a statement. [4015]

Mr. Sproat: Discussions between my officials and those of Somerset county councils continue, and I hope that it will be possible to resolve outstanding issues. I have received a small number of letters, principally from Somerset library users, about the situation.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, if she will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by her Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3969]

Mr. Sproat: My Department was established in April 1992 and took on responsibility for funding its own consultancies in August 1992.

To list those consultants employed by my Department and its agencies and indicate their individual purposes would incur disproportionate costs. I am able to provide details of the total annual expenditure on outside consultancies incurred by my Department and its agencies during the last three financial years.

1992–93: £4,239,207

1993–94: £6,003,317

1994–95: £2,746,028.

To list all those outside organisations employed by my Department and its agencies with an indication of their individual purpose would require a large exercise, incurring disproportionate costs.

For individuals employed by my Department, I refer the hon. Member to the copies of the civil service staff post summary tables, copies of which can be found in the House Libraries. These individuals are employed to assist the Department and its agencies to achieve their aims and objectives as set out in the annual departmental report.

Red Hot Television

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what factors have led to the delay in concluding the case before the European Court of Justice between Her Majesty's Government and the broadcaster, Red Hot Television; and when she expects the case to be concluded. [3987]

Mr. Sproat: The case has been unable to proceed because the first and second applicants do not have solicitors on the record and the third applicant cannot be traced. The papers are at present before a judge of the Queen's Bench divisional court in London with a view to concluding the matter.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Widows' Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the implementation of the provisions of the Pensions Act 1995 that affect war widows' pensions. [3191]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for John Sheppard, the acting chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Sheppard to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 5 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the implementation of the provisions of the Pensions Act 1995, that affect War Widows Pensions.

It was estimated that there would be in the order of 16500 awards of War Widows Pension under these provisions. As at 1 December, 11152 claims have been received. Decisions have been made in 6834 cases, of which 2229 have been notified and 1487 pensions paid. It is expected that the exercise will be completed by March.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Invalidity Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total amount of money in each of the last five years claimed back by the Benefits Agency from insurance companies in relation to invalidity benefit paid as a result of injuries caused by road traffic accidents. [4346]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 6 december 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for the total amount of money in each of the last five years claimed back by the Benefits Agency from insurance companies in relation to invalidity benefit paid as a result of injuries caused by road traffic accidents.

The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	*Amount (£ million)*
1990–91	0.44
1991–92	3.16
1992–93	6.86
1993–94	12.49
1994–95	18.99

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Social Fund

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants to the social fund have been turned down on the grounds of ability to pay by year and by region since the fund's inception; and what percentage of the total applying this figure represented in each case. [2083]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The figures requested are set out in the tables.

Year	*Total number of applications*	*Numbers refused on the grounds of inability to repay*	*Numbers refused as a percentage of applications*
Great Britain			
1988–89	1,749,000	15,020	0.85
1989–90	2,299,000	22,270	0.96
1990–91	2,317,000	27,053	1.17
1991–92	3,098,000	37,213	1.20
1992–93	3,519,000	45,491	1.29
1993–94	3,673,000	44,179	1.20
1994–95	3,744,000	12,303	0.33
Scotland and northern territory			
1991–92	1,071,689	13,711	1.28
1992–93	1,152,777	17,368	1.50
1993–94	1,200,819	12,979	1.08
1994–95	1,241,496	2,873	0.23
Wales and central territory			
1991–92	1,118,867	10,455	0.93
1992–93	1,274,702	14,545	1.14
1993–94	1,298,118	14,589	1.12
1994–95	1,304,981	4,223	0.32
Southern territory			
1991–92	907,155	13,047	1.44
1992–93	1,091,903	13,578	1.24
1993–94	1,173,511	16,611	1.42
1994–95	1,197,571	5,207	20.43

Information by region prior to the creation of the Benefits Agency in April 1991 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Executive Agencies (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of his executive agencies for the last financial year in respect of overseas travel by staff of the agency *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the countries visited and *(c)* the posts held by the staff involved. [2357]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Cost of overseas travel—April 1994 to March 1995

	£
Benefits Agency	871,753
Child Support Agency	432,941
Resettlement Agency	10,980
Contributions Agency	36,618
War Pensions Agency	13,224
Information Technology Services Agency	240,563

The principal countries visited, in order of the greatest number of journeys undertaken, were:

Luxembourg
Republic of Ireland
Belgium
France
The Netherlands
Switzerland
Australia
United States of America
Germany.

Fine Defaulters

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions a deduction in income support was applied for in cases of those defendants who were gaoled for fine default in 1994. [3441]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested is not available.

Housing Benefit

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefits were claimed in Bournemouth in 1989–90 and 1994–95. [3442]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is set out in the table.

Average number of housing benefit recipients in the Bournemouth local authority area during 1989–90 and 1994–95

Year	*Number of recipients*
1989–90	11,900
1994–95	15,500

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly caseload counts.

Notes:

1. Figures refer to the number of benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The figure for 1989–90 excludes those recipients of rate rebate only.
3. Figures are an average of the four quarterly caseload counts taken in May, August, November and February of the above financial years.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3401]

Mr. Burt: The Department has agreed one project to date under the private finance initiative, to develop a new national insurance recording system. Revenue costs for each year of the agreed contract have not yet been finalised and are commercially confidential.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3402]

Mr. Burt: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative has not resulted in changes to policy. Agreed schemes represent the application of the PFI policy and offer the opportunity to further refine the processes involved. The lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, a copy of which is in the Library.

Benefit Rates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes *(a)* have been made and *(b)* are planned in the amount paid in (i) the £75 limit on additional funeral expenses connected with a person's religion, (ii) the £2,500 exempt payments limit in the compensation recovery scheme and (iii) the £3,000 vaccine damage payment. [4125]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: No changes have been made to the £75 limit on additional funeral expenses arising from a requirement of the religious faith of the deceased, and none are planned.

Since the introduction of the compensation recovery scheme in 1990, no changes have been made to the small payments limit of £2,500.

A consultation document was published in October to assess the implications of possible changes to the compensation recovery scheme as proposed by the Social Security Select Committee. One issue discussed in this document is the future of the small payments limit. The Government are now considering the responses to the consultation exercise, and will announce their decision in due course.

The vaccine damage payments scheme began on 22 March 1979 when the payment was set at £10,000. The payment has subsequently been increased twice: to £20,000 on claims made on or after 16 August 1985 and to £30,000 on claims made on or after 15 April 1991. Whilst the value of the payment is reviewed periodically, there are no plans to change it at this time.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4247]

Mr. Burt: I am the only DSS Minister who has had his mobile telephone cloned in the last 18 months.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4248]

Mr. Burt: The Department of Social Security has six Ministers, each of whom has a mobile telephone. Additionally, four ministerial cars have telephones.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total amount paid by his Department to consultants in connection with the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance; [4585]

(2) which firms of consultants were employed by his Department in connection with the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [4584]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Department of Social Security has paid £2,224,000 through the Benefits Agency to consultants in connection with the introduction of jobseeker's allowance. The company used was Andersen Consulting.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent change there has been in take-up of disability allowance. [5235]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: In the 12 months to October 1995, the disability working allowance case load increased by 56 per cent. to 6,895.

The number of new and repeat claims for October 1995 was 2,245. This compares with 1,471 for October 1994.

HEALTH

Abortions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions were performed in 1994 on women *(a)* resident in each health region and *(b)* in each district health authority without overnight stay; and how many of these operations involved NHS hospitals, NHS agency arrangements and other purchasers. [4105]

Mr. Horam: The information requested for 1994 will be placed in the Library. For reason of confidentiality, statistics for district health authorities are presented by DHA of woman's usual residence, not by DHA of termination.

Mrs. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost per NHS abortion without overnight stay, involving (a) NHS hospitals and *(b)* NHS agency arrangements. [4107]

Mr. Horam: The estimated average cost of a surgical abortion without overnight stay in a national health service hospital is £175, at 1993–94 figures. No information is available centrally about the cost of abortions performed in the private sector under NHS agency arrangements.

Hip Replacements

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost to the NHS of a hip replacement. [2683]

Mr. Horam: The cost of individual procedures is not available centrally.

Tobacco

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned into the amount of tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide in tobacco products other than manufactured cigarettes; if he will list the available data; and if he will make a statement. [3979]

Mr. Horam: On behalf of the Department of Health, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist has carried out research on the tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide content of hand-rolling tobaccos. A report on this work is in the course of preparation and will be submitted for publication in an appropriate scientific journal.

NHS Land

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts and health authorities that have sold or leased land in 1995–96, indicating the amount of money received in each case, the purchaser and the total amount of money received in England from the sale and leasing of NHS land. [4083]

Mr. Horam: Information about total land sales in-year is not available centrally from national health service trusts. The information requested would be available only from the published accounts of each trust and health authority following their end of year. The name of the purchaser, and the amount of each sale and rental information is not available centrally.

Influenza

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contingency plans his Department has considered for dealing with a flu epidemic; and to what conclusion they have come. [4182]

Mr. Horam: Heavy demand on the national health service, whether from natural causes or man-made, is always a possibility and the NHS is required to have contingency plans in place to deal with such incidents and to exercise plans regularly. The weekly rate of influenza infection is monitored by the Royal College of General Practitioners clinical research unit and, if needed, an alert can be issued to public health doctors via the Epinet system.

The Department of Health regularly takes steps to protect those most at risk from influenza by the provision of advice about who is most at risk from serious complications arising from the disease and who should therefore receive influenza vaccine. This year doctors were reminded during the summer of the need to plan their influenza vaccination campaign, which was launched in October.

The Department has also produced a leaflet called "What should I do about flu?" which provides information on how to cope with the disease. Copies were sent to all GPs and made available through Post Offices and copies are available in the Library. We have also produced a video advert about the leaflet, which was shown in post offices.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *522*, on hospital discharges if he will provide comparable figures for *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92 and *(c)* 1992–93. [4287]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is shown in the table.

Destination of discharge of patients treated by consultants in geriatric medicine in NHS hospitals in England

Percentage

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Usual residence	68.79	67.60	68.78
Deaths	19.35	17.69	17.52
NHS hospital outside district—general ward/younger physically disabled	1.36	4.90	5.20
Non-NHS institution	4.29	4.66	4.57
Local authority residential home	1.85	1.68	1.59
Temporary residence e.g. hotels, residential educational institutions	1.73	1.56	1.43
NHS hospital outside district—mentally ill/handicapped ward	0.06	0.26	0.30
NHS nursing home	0.00	0.05	0.22
Not known	2.47	1.42	0.25
Special hospital	0.09	0.15	0.12

Figures do not total 100 due to rounding.

Mental Illness

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available for the treatment of all forms of acute mental illness but excluding beds involving learning disabilities, in each year since 1988–89; what was the number of finished consultant episodes in acute mental illnesses for the same years; and how many patients with acute mental illness were treated in those years. [4314]

Mr. Bowis: The number of beds available for the treatment of acute mental illness in each year since 1988–89 is shown in the table.

Average daily number of available beds for acute mental illness for all ages

England

Year	*Number*
1988–89	22,505
1989–90	22,754
1990–91	22,427
1991–92	22,159
1992–93	21,652
1993–94	21,447
1994–95	22,101

Notes:

1. Information held centrally on the number of National Health Service mental illness beds does not include the classification "acute". It does, however, differentiate between "long-stay" and "short-stay". "Acute mental illness" has therefore been interpreted as "short-stay" mental illness.

2. Date is collected by broad ward classification rather than by clinical specialty and returns are made on a financial year, ie April to March, basis.

Source:

Department of Health KH03 returns.

The number of finished consultant episodes in mental illness in each year since 1988–89 is shown in the table.

Finished consultant episodes for mental illness—ordinary admissions and day cases combined:

England

Year	*Number (thousands)*
1988–89	216.3
1989–90	215.9
1990–91	219.9
1991–92	221.3
1992–93	234.1
1993–94	237.3
1994–95	239.0

Notes:

1. Information held centrally on finished consultant episodes does not include the classification "acute mental illness". It does, however, include the classification "mental illness".

2. The definition of a "consultant episode" is the period that a patient spends under the continuous care of a specific consultant in a specific health care provider (which may be in more than one hospital within that health care provider). A hospital provider spell can comprise one or more consultant episodes. For example, a patient may be admitted under the care of a general physician and then be transferred to the care of a surgeon. This would count as two consultant episodes within a single hospital provider spell.

Source:

Department of Health KP70 returns.

Information of the number of patients is not available centrally.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *521*, on nursing homes, what information his Department maintains on trust-run registered nursing homes. [4288]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Sterilisation

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England are sterilised annually, by standard census age group. [4104]

Mr. Horam: The information available in respect to national health service hospital admissions is shown in the table.

Estimated number of ordinary and day case admissions, principal operation—male and female sterlisation—in NHS hospitals in England—1993–94

Ages	*Male*	*Female*
0–4	8	4
5–14	12	0
15–44	33,774	52,141
45–64	2,663	1,119
65–74	16	0
75–84	4	4
85 and over	12	0
Not known	59	19
All Ages	36,548	53,287

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3393]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I him on 6 December, column *224*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3394]

Mr. Horam: This Government's policy is that high-quality health care should be available to those who need it on the basis of their clinical need without regard to their ability to pay. The private finance initiative in the national health service is concerned with the provision of modern and efficient facilities for the delivery of NHS health care. There have been no policy changes arising from the agreement of PFI schemes.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4269]

Mr. Horam: During the past 12 months, there have been two instances of cloned telephone numbers affecting the mobile telephone of the then Under-Secretary of State for Health. The Department is not liable for any payment of charges arising from cloned telephone numbers.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4270]

Mr. Horam: There are 25 mobile telephones available to departmental private office for the use of Ministers and staff including four telephones fitted in ministerial cars.

Buckinghamshire County Council (Resources)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the special transitional grant and the social services standard spending assessment available to Buckinghamshire county council in each financial year from 1993–94 to 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [4697]

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table. Total resources available to Buckinghamshire county council for personal social services next year will be 35 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1993–94.

Resources for personal social services Buckinghamshire county council

£ million

	Standard spending assessment	*Special transitional grant for community care*
1993–94	45.920	4.268
1994–95	55.524	7.177
1995–96	62.001	6.515
1996–97	68.723	4.179

Figures for 1996–97 are provisional, issued for consultation.

Population Statistics

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the non-white proportion of *(a)* the electorate of London, *(b)* the population of London as a whole and *(c)* the population of London under the age of 16 years. [4595]

Mr. Horam: The electorial register does not give an indication of the ethnic group of electors, but information on people of voting age is shown in the table, together with the other information requested.

Age group within Greater London private household population	*Estimated percentage of people in ethnic groups other than White during period June 1994 to May 1995*
Aged 18 or over	19.2
Age under 16	33.8
All ages	22.5

NORTHERN IRELAND

Arms Decommissioning

11. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the number and type of illegally held firearms and ordnance and the percentage which would have to be decommissioned in order for all-party talks to commence. [3041]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The security forces maintain information on illegal weapons holdings and supplies, but it would not be appropriate to make this public. There must be a credible and verifiable start to the process of decommissioning, sufficient to create the necessary circumstances of confidence for all-party round table talks to commence.

16. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which groups in Northern Ireland have expressed their support for the decommissioning of arms as a precondition for the commencement of all-party talks on the political future of Northern Ireland. [3047]

Mr. Ancram: The position of the individual groups on the decommissioning issue is a matter for them.

The Government's position is that we cannot see a way in which to secure the necessary confidence to bring all parties to the negotiating table without a start being made to the decommissioning of illegal arms.

19. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on achieving the decommissioning of arms; and if he will make a statement. [3051]

21. **Mr. Maginnis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards the establishment of a disarmament commission to deal with the disposal of illegal weapons in Northern Ireland. [3053]

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what quantity of arms has to date been decommissioned by Republican terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland. [3036]

Sir John Wheeler: There have been no illegally held arms or equipment decommissioned to date. However, as the House will be aware, the British and Irish Governments announced on 28 November that they have agreed to establish an international body to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue. That body has now been established and has been asked to report to the two Governments by mid-January 1996.

Peace Process

12. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on co-operation with the Irish Government to promote peace in Northern Ireland. [3042]

17. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on the Government's twin-track approach to the Northern Ireland peace. [3049]

20. **Mr. Barnes:** To the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest position concerning the peace process; and if he will make a statement. [3052]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott), for Bolsver (Mr. Skinner), for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and for Neath (Mr. Hain).

15. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had about furthering the peace process; and if he will make a statement. [3046]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have had numerous recent discussions about furthering the peace process with the Tanaiste, and with the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties. Final negotiations between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach led to agreement and publication on 28 November of the two Governments' proposals for a twin-track process.

18. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects all-party talks to commence on the future constitution of Northern Ireland. [3050]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: As stated in the joint communique issued by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 28 November 1995, which announced the "twin track" process, our firm aim is to launch all-party negotiations by the end of February 1996. We believe that, with co-operation from all the relevant parties in both tracks, this should prove achievable.

West Link Junctions

13. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the timetable for construction of flyovers at west link junctions. [3043]

Mr. Moss: Schemes to provide flyovers at the Grosvenor road and Broadway junctions are included in the Department's six to 15 year major road works programme. However, the possibility of carrying out such schemes under the private finance initiative is currently being explored and this may lead to their earlier implementation.

Army Strength

14. **Mr. Austin Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence about future Army strength in Northern Ireland. [3044]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Army force levels in support of the RUC are an operational matter for the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding. I discuss such matters with the Secretary of State for Defence as appropriate and in the light of advice from the chief Constable and the GOC.

Extradition (Fraud)

22. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average time taken to obtain the extradition from the United States of America to Northern Ireland of a person suspected of having committed fraud after directions to prosecute have been issued in the United Kingdom. [3054]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There are no records of any such extraditions having been sought.

Statutory Instruments

23. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many statutory instruments have been passed through Parliament as a result of European Community directives in the past year. [3055]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend has not directly sponsored any statutory instruments through Parliament as a result of European Community directives in the past year.

Inward Investment

24. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the most recent figures in respect of the level of inward investment into Northern Ireland. [3056]

Mr. Ancram: So far this year, the industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland has announced 11 inward investment projects which offer the prospect of 3,655 new jobs.

EU Funds

25. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the standards of financial accountability in regard to funds allocated to Northern Ireland through the European Union. [3057]

Sir John Wheeler: All structural expenditure which is borne on the votes of Northern Ireland Departments is subject to the normal requirements of government accounting and to audit by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and by the European Court of Auditors. I am satisfied that the standard of financial accountability in regard to EU funds is satisfactory and we will continue to operate procedures which seek to safeguard the taxpayers' interest.

Social Housing

26. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the provision of social housing in Northern Ireland for the current year. [3058]

Mr. Moss: The numbers of new public and voluntary sector dwellings which were completed in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1995 to 31 October 1995 were as follows:

	Number
Northern Ireland housing executive (Public Sector)	809
Registered housing associations (Voluntary Sector)	680
Total	1,489

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3405]

Sir John Wheeler: No scheme under the private finance initiative, announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1992, have been approved in Northern Ireland to date.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3406]

Sir John Wheeler: No schemes under the private finance initiative, announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1992, have been approved in Northern Ireland to date. A range of projects across all Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office are under consideration. It is too early, however, to identify any policy changes which might arise from projects agreed under the initiative.

Trust Ports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made with the privatisation of trust ports. [3048]

Mr. Moss: The Ports (Northern Ireland) Order came into effect on 2 January 1995. This measure enables the Northern Ireland trust ports to bring forward privatisation schemes. It also provides reserve powers for the Department to initiate the privatisation of a port with a turnover in excess of £5 million, but these powers are not exercisable until two years after the order came into effect.

Police (Community Involvement)

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he is planning to enhance community identification with policing in Northern Ireland. [3033]

Sir John Wheeler: We will publish shortly proposals for legislative reforms, to increase the ability of the community, through the Police Authority for Northern Ireland to shape the future direction of policing. The RUC, the Police Authority and the Government are also undertaking a fundamental review of policing needs, services and organisation, with community identification at its core.

Access Rights (Grandmothers)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will study the issue of grandmothers' rights of access, in the light of Northern Ireland Office decisions on custody in relation to the case of Mrs. Vint, and Mr. Vint of Longridge in the Linlithgow constituency. [3045]

Mr. Moss: Decisions on the custody of children and access by relatives are solely a matter for the courts. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for me to comment on this particular case.

WALES

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what savings have been delivered by compulsory competitive tendering. [2655]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally. However, researchers at the university of Birmingham investigated the financial impact of compulsory competitive tendering in the first three years—1989 to 1992—of competition under the Local Government Act 1988. They identified overall savings of 7 per cent. for local authorities in England and Wales across the service areas defined by the legislation, with variations by service area.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of Forestry Commission woodland in Wales have been sold since October 1991; and, of these, how many hectares *(a)* remain open to the public and *(b)* have been closed to the public since October 1991. [3722]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Forestry Commission has sold 5,400 hectares of forest land in Wales since October 1991. The commission does not maintain records of public access to woodlands which it has sold.

School Buildings

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of cash needed to eliminate disrepair in local education authority schools in each of the local education authorities of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [4021]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I have made no such estimate. Local education authorities are responsible for the repair and maintenance of their school buildings.

Attendance Allowances

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the percentage change in attendance allowances between 1994–95 and 1995–96 for each local authority in Wales; and for each local authority, which political party is in control. [3795]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office does not collect or hold information in respect of attendance allowances set by local authorities. With regard to the political control on each existing county and district council, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Dover on 16 February. For the 22 unitary authorities elected on 4 May 1995, the latest information held by the Welsh Office is set out in the following table:

Local authority	*Political control*
Aberconwy and Colwyn County Borough	No overall control
Anglesey County	Independent
Blaenau Gwent County Borough	Labour
Bridgend County Borough	Labour
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire County	Plaid Cymru

Local authority	*Political control*
Caerphilly County Borough	Labour
Cardiff County	Labour
Cardiganshire County	Independent
Carmarthenshire County	Labour with minority
Denbighshire County	No overall control
Flintshire County	Labour
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough	Labour
Monmouthshire County	Labour
Neath and Port Talbot County Borough	Labour
Newport County Borough	Labour
Pembrokeshire County	Independent
Powys County	No political groups declared
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff County Borough	Labour
Torfaen County Borough	Labour
Swansea County	Labour
The Vale of Glamorgan County Borough	Labour
Wrexham County Borough	Labour

Hansard Volumn 254 Columns 761 and 762.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3955]

Mr. Hague: Details of management and other consultants since 1990–91 have been placed in the Library of the House. Information on other outside organisations is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of the number of staff employed in the Welsh Office, staff costs and the Department's aims and objectives are given in the Welsh Office departmental report for 1995 (Cm 2815).

Work (Young People)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what new measures he will adopt to get 18 to 24-year-old people into work; and if he will make a statement. [3857]

Mr. Richards: Young people up to the age of 25 can benefit from youth training, youth credits, modern apprenticeships and accelerated apprenticeships. They can also receive support under training for work and a range of other measures available through the Employment Service. The Department will continue to work with training and enterprise councils to meet the needs of these young people.

Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet *(a)* Buckley town council, *(b)* Alyn and Deeside council and *(c)* the senior councillors and officials of the shadow county authority of Flintshire to discuss his policies concerning road building in Wales. [4018]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans to do so. Policies for road building are set out in the transport chapter of the Welsh Office's departmental report (Cm 2815) published on 9 March 1995. I will announce roads and transport expenditure plans for 1996–97 shortly.

Housing Developments

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will meet residents of Liverpool road, Buckley, Clwyd, to discuss his planning policies as they affect applications to build new housing estates where there is only one access road; and if he will make a statement. [4022]

Mr. Hague: No. The determination of applications for planning permission is in the first place the responsibility of the local planning authority concerned. The local planning authority will need to have regard to, among other things, the series of planning policy guidance—PPG—notes, including PPG13, "Highways Considerations in Development Control", which incorporates guidance on access.

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new measures he plans to adopt to get the long-term unemployed into work. [3860]

Mr. Richards: The training and enterprise councils in Wales and the Employment Service continue to provide a range of measures to help the long-term unemployed back into work. These include training for work and services such as client advice, job club, work trials and the job interview guarantee scheme offered by the Employment Service. In addition, North West Wales and Gwent training and enterprise councils, in partnership with the Employment Service, are piloting the sole traders employment initiative which helps sole traders to take on their first employee from among the long-term unemployed.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration is being given to a change in the development area status of Swansea. [3798]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 21 November 1995 by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Trade and Industry, *Official Report*, column 77.

Population Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many 18 to 24-year-old people there are in each of the constituencies in Wales. [3858]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available information for each parliamentary constituency is from the 1991 census of population, and is given in the following table:

Residents aged 18 to 24

	Number
Aberavon	5,983
Alyn and Deeside	8,346
Blaenau Gwent	7,459
Brecon and Radnor	5,457
Bridgend	6,983
Caernarfon	5,666
Caerphilly	8,572
Cardiff Central	9,970
Cardiff North	5,846
Cardiff South and Penarth	8,203

Residents aged 18 to 24

	Number
Cardiff West	7,907
Carmarthen	7,452
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	6,880
Clwyd North West	7,454
Clwyd South West	7,663
Conwy	6,289
Cynon Valley	6,613
Delyn	8,043
Gower	6,303
Islwyn	6,833
Llanelli	7,308
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	3,648
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	7,909
Monmouth	6,450
Montgomery	4,851
Neath	6,655
Newport East	7,109
Newport West	7,640
Ogmore	7,477
Pembroke	8,844
Pontypridd	8,700
Rhondda	7,691
Swansea East	7,740
Swansea West	7,397
Torfaen	8,260
Vale of Glamorgan	8,908
Wrexham	8,630
Ynys Mon	6,689

Source:
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the most recent figures for *(a)* gross domestic product per capita and *(b)* the average wage in (i) Wales and (ii) each standard English planning regions. [4295]

Mr. Hague: The most recent figures for gross domestic product per capita in Wales and the English regions are for 1993. They are published in table 1, page 26 of the December 1994 edition of "Economic Trends". Figures for average earnings in Wales and the English regions are available for April 1995 and are published in table X5.3, part A, "New Earnings Survey 1995". Copies of these publications are in the Library of the House.

Employment of Children

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the organisations and individuals he has consulted on the consultation document "Employment of Children". [4534]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The consultation paper, "Employment of Children" was sent on 30 October to the 24 organisation in Wales listed as follows:

Assembly of Welsh Counties
British Medical Association, Wales
Children in Wales
Church in Wales, Board of Social Responsibility
Clybiau Plant Cymru
Confederation of British Industry, Wales
Council of Welsh Districts
CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales), Commissions on Wales and the World)
Education Welfare Officers (all Wales group)
Equal Opportunities Commission, Wales
Farmers Union of Wales
Health Promotion, Wales
Health Visitors Association, Wales region
Merched y Wawr
National Association of Social Workers in Education, Wales
National Federation of Women's Institutes, Wales
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Wales
Royal College of General Practitioners, Wales
Royal College of Nursing, Welsh Board
Sports Council for Wales
Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Wales Trades Union Congress
Wales Youth Agency
Welsh Consumer Council.

Road Bridges

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the use of 41-tonne lorries on road bridges; and how many currently need to be strengthened. [3370]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Of the 1,345 bridges on the trunk road network in Wales, 585 have been identified as requiring assessment, 424 have been assessed and 149 of these have been identified as requiring strengthening. The remaining 161 will be assessed, and all necessary strengthening programmed before 1 January 1999. Local authorities are responsible for bridges on non-trunk roads.

House Condition Survey

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in favour of a full house condition survey; if he will make it his policy to arrange for a new survey to be carried out without imposing administrative expenses on local councils; and if he will make a statement. [3392]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have received representations from the Council of Welsh Districts and a number of local authorities about a further Welsh house condition survey. My right hon. Friend and I are currently considering the position.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases; [3411]

(2) if he will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3412]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *808.*

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4261]

Mr. Hague: Three mobile phones are directly allocated to Welsh Office Ministers. They also have access to car phones in five official vehicles.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department had been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers in his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4262]

Mr. Hague: *(a)* once, 28 September, *(b)* once further, 26 March 1995, and *(c)* nil; the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones).

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ashford Project

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list the terms of reference agreed with the Church Commissioners for the review the Audit Committee is undertaking on Church Commission Projects Ltd. (Ashford great park). [4590]

Mr. Alison: The terms of reference for the review set by the Audit Committee are:

1. To review the origins of the Ashford project.
2. To examine the information made available to the Commissioners (including by whom and when) on the basis of which a decision to go ahead with the project was taken.
3. To consider the extent to which the outturn of the project to date has differed from the original projections (and why).
4. To report on the details of the amount so far spent on the project, to whom monies were paid and whether there is any scope for recovery of abortive expenditure.
5. To report on the results of the investigation including reference to any other relevant matters which may become apparent as part of the review.

Closed Investment Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what factors underlie the Church Commissioners' operation of a closed fund. [4588]

Mr. Alison: The Church Commissioners have two principal tasks in the operation of their closed investment fund: first to optimise returns over the long term from their investments within appropriate risk management controls; secondly, to set a level of distribution in support of the Church's ministry which is sustainable.

Other factors which underlie the commissioners' operation in pursuit of these aims are their responsibilities to make additional provision for the cure of souls in parishes, a trust inherited from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and to augment the maintenance of the poor clergy, inherited from the Queen Anne's bounty—their liabilities under the Clergy Pensions Measures; their other statutory obligations and their recognition of their partnership with parishes and dioceses who, increasingly, provide from giving for the maintenance of the Church's nationwide ministry. Without that giving, it could not be sustained.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Universities (Managers)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to increase universities access to high-quality management expertise. [3991]

Mr. Forth: Universities are responsible for taking their own decisions on management matters. They, like other employers, can benefit from the use of the national occupational standards for managers. These represent best practice by managers at all levels and form the basis for national vocational qualifications.

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the total outstanding student loan debt in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000. [4048]

Mr. Forth: The Department's estimates, to the nearest million, for the United Kingdom are:

Financial year-end	*£ million*
1995–96	1,940
1996–97	2,929
1997–98	4,012
1998–99	5,077

The Department does not hold figures for 1999–2000.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list projected *(a)* gross student loan and outlay and *(b)* student loan repayments in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99 and (iv) 1999–2000. [4053]

Mr. Forth: The estimated UK figures are:

			£ million
Financial year	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Loan outlay	1,013.0	1,145.8	1,200.5
Loan repayments (principal and interest)	100.2	154.3	244.7

The Department does not hold figures for 1999–2000.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cumulative total expenditure on computer systems for the administration of student loans by the Student Loans Company since 1990 in current prices; and what are the constituent parts of this sum. [3924]

Mr. Forth: These are matters for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the public sector borrowing requirement effect of the introduction of subsidised private sector loans in 1996–97 and each relevant year thereafter. [4047]

Mr. Forth: The extent of any overall reduction in public expenditure arising from the introduction of subsidised private sector loans to students will depend on what arrangements are made with the financial institutions and the extent to which students take out loans made under them. The plans announced at the time of the Budget made the following provisional assumptions about net savings.

	£ million
1996–97	100
1997–98	200
1998–99	250

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the meetings she or officials in her Department have had with *(a)* the Student Loans Company, *(b)* representatives of students and higher education institutions and *(c)* hon. Members regarding proposed reforms to the provision of student loans indicating the date of each meeting. [3926]

Mr. Forth: As I informed the hon. Gentleman during the Second Reading debate on 27 November, *Official Report*, column 954, I have personally spoken to the chairman and the chief executive of the Student Loans Company about our plans on two occasions. The first was on 16 August and the second on 19 September. My officials met with representatives of the company on 7 August, 16 October, 18 October and 20 October for discussions. This is in addition to their usual contacts with the company which provide frequent opportunities for discussion.

My officials have also invited representatives of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the National Union of Students in to discuss our proposals. The meeting with the CVCP was constructive. The NUS has not yet replied.

No meetings were held with hon. Members prior to the First Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the *(a)* maintenance grant, *(b)* student loan and *(c)* allowances available to students aged (i) 26, (ii) 27, (iii) 28, (iv) 29 to 50 and (v) 50 years or over in each year since 1990–91, both in cash prices and current prices. [4323]

Mr. Forth: Data on the main mandatory grant and student loan rates are shown in the following table. The allowances shown are available in addition to the main rates of grant. The amounts shown in the "current" columns have been calculated in 1995–96 prices using the September retail prices indices, excluding mortgage interest payments, at the start of each academic year.

Student loans are not available to those who have attained the age of 50 before the date on which they begin their course. The older student's allowance is available according to the age of the student before the start of his course and provided that he meets the relevant earnings test. It is not available to most students who start their course on or after 1 September 1995.

Maintenance grants, loans and allowances

£

	1990–91		*1991–92*		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*	
	Cash	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*
Grants and loans												
Main grant rates												
London	2,845	3,399	2,845	3,216	2,845	3,092	2,845	2,993	2,560	2,640	2,340	2,340
Elsewhere	2,265	2,706	2,265	2,560	2,265	2,461	2,265	2,383	2,040	2,103	1,885	1,885
Parental home	1,795	2,144	1,795	2,029	1,795	1,951	1,795	1,889	1,615	1,665	1,530	1,530
Main loan rates (full year)												
London	460	549	660	746	830	902	940	989	1,375	1,418	1,695	1,695
Elsewhere	420	502	580	656	715	777	800	842	1,150	1,186	1,385	1,385
Parental home	330	394	460	520	570	619	640	673	915	943	1,065	1,065
Other allowances												
Dependant child allowance												
Aged under 11	320	382	340	384	355	386	370	389	385	397	395	395
Aged 11 to 15	640	765	680	769	710	772	735	773	765	789	785	785
Aged 16 or 17	845	1,009	895	1,012	935	1,016	970	1,021	1,010	1,041	1,035	1,035
Aged 18 or over	1,215	1,451	1,290	1,458	1,350	1,467	1,400	1,473	1,460	1,505	1,495	1,495
Other dependants allowance	1,525	1,822	1,615	1,825	1,690	1,836	1,750	1,841	1,820	1,877	1,865	1,865

Maintenance grants, loans and allowances

£

	1990–91		1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Cash	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*	*Cash*	*Current*
Disabled students allowance												
Non-medical helper	4,000	4,778	4,240	4,792	4,430	4,814	4,550	4,787	4,730	4,877	4,850	4,850
Specialist equipment	3,000	3,584	3,180	3,594	3,325	3,613	3,420	3,598	3,560	3,671	3,650	3,650
Other	1,000	1,195	1,060	1,198	1,110	1,206	1,140	1,199	1,185	1,222	1,215	1,215
Extra weeks allowance												
London	63.15	75.44	66.30	74.94	69.30	75.31	71.20	74.92	74.05	76.35	75.90	75.90
Elsewhere	47.30	56.50	49.65	56.12	51.90	56.40	53.30	56.08	55.45	57.17	56.85	56.85
Parental home	33.15	39.60	34.80	39.33	36.40	39.55	37.40	39.35	38.90	40.11	39.85	39.85
Older students allowance												
Aged 26	250	299	265	300	280	304	290	305	300	309	310	310
Aged 27	455	544	480	543	500	543	515	542	535	552	550	550
Aged 28	675	806	715	808	750	815	770	810	800	825	820	820
Aged 29 or over	880	1,051	935	1,057	980	1,065	1,005	1,057	1,045	1,077	1,070	1,070

College Fees Payments

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is *(a)* the total recurrent grant and *(b)* the amount by which the recurrent grant has been reduced in recognition of college fees payment, for each university with recognised collegiate status in the current academic year; [4312]

(2) what is the total value of college fees payment to each university with recognised collegiate status in the current academic year; [4320]

(3) what is the current level of college fees reimbursed through the student's mandatory award in each of the colleges of universities which have recognised collegiate structures. [4313]

Mr. Forth: The Higher Education Funding Council for England determines the total recurrent grant and the amounts by which the recurrent grant is reduced in recognition of college fees payments at each of these universities. The total recurrent grant and the amount by which it has been reduced in the current academic year are given as follows for each collegiate university in England.

1995–96 (£)

	Recurrent grant	*Reduction*
Cambridge	85,435,264	11,475,844
Durham	29,136,143	172,150
Kent	19,539,798	105,798
Lancaster	25,244,075	143,796
Oxford	82,561,694	13,419,264
York	20,565,594	90,244

The HEFCE estimated the total value of college fees paid to the colleges of these universities to be as follows:

	£
Cambridge	28,689,610
Durham	1,223,208
Kent	736,230
Lancaster	1,132,250
Oxford	31,207,591
York	643,200

The current maximum levels of college fees reimbursed through a student's mandatory award in each of the colleges of the collegiate universities are shown.

	£
Cambridge colleges	
Christ's College	2,622
Churchill College	2,634
Clare College	2,640
Clare Hall	2,553
Corpus Christi College	2,706
Darwin College	2,667
Downing College	2,769
Emanuel College	2,652
Fitzwilliam College	2,784
Girton College	2,688
Gonville and Caius College	2,646
Hughes Hall	2,610
Jesus College	2,670
King's College	2,613
Lucy Cavendish College	2,715
Magdelene College	2,769
New Hall	2,763
Newnham College	2,757
Pembroke College	2,760
Peterhouse	2,607
Queen's College	2,727
Robinson College	2,739
St. Catherine's College	2,688
St. Edmunds College	2,571
St. John's College	2,574
Selwyn College	2,757
Sidney Sussex College	2,757
Trinity College	2,550
Trinity Hall	2,706
Wesley House	2,703
Wolfson College	2,646
Durham colleges	
University	189

	£
Hatfield	189
Grey	189
Van Mildert	189
Collingwood	189
St. Hild and St. Bede	189
St. Cuthbert's	189
St. Mary's	189
St. Aidan's	189
Trevelyan	189
University College, Stockton	189
St. Chad's	960
St. John's	960
Ushaw	960
Kent colleges	
Darwin	170
Eliot	170
Rutherford	170
Keynes	170
Lancaster colleges	
Bowland	175
Cartmel	175
Charlotte Mason	175
The County	175
Furness	175
Fylde	175
Grizedale	175
Lonsdale	175
Pendle	175
Oxford colleges	
Balliol	3,034
Brasenose	3,053
Christ Church	3,051
Corpus Christi	3,044
Exeter	3,086
Hertford	3,219
Jesus	3,057
Keeble	3,289
Lady Margaret Hall	3,211
Lincoln	2,999
Magdalen	3,084
Merton	2,966
New	3,075
Oriel	3,212
Pembroke	3,060
Queen's	3,017
St. Anne's	3,196
St. Catherine's	3,110
St. Edmund Hall	3,171
St. Hilda's	3,164
St. Hugh's	3,199
St. John's	3,014
St. Peter's	3,267
Somerville	3,169
Trinity	3,037
University	3,070
Wadham	3,130
Worcester	3,121
York colleges	
Alcuin	160
Derwent	160
Goodricke	160
Langwith	160
Vanburgh	160
Wentworth	160

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the spending per student in colleges of further education in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what is her Department's estimate for each year from 1995–96 to 1998–99. [4322]

Mr. Paice: Information on the total amount of spending in further education colleges is not held centrally. FE colleges have access to many sources of income, other than public expenditure, and are free to take their own decisions on how these resources are deployed. The Further Education Funding Council, however, holds collated accounting information from colleges, and I am therefore asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Training for Work

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the date of last claims criteria for training for work is still in force; and what are the numbers of training for work applicants rejected under this criterion. [4748]

Mr. Paice: Following discussions with training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service, the Government have announced plans to change from date of claim to an alternative measure of unemployment duration for funding purposes from 1 February next year. Eligibility for the programme is not based on this criterion, so no applicants will have been rejected on this basis.

Schools Expenditure

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools reach his Department's recommended expenditure level for (i) books and (ii) other resource items. [4544]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government do not recommend expenditure levels for books or other school resources. They believe that schools should be allowed to decide themselves how to spend their own budgets.

School Libraries

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many school library services have been closed in each of the past five years; [4542]

(2) what was the expenditure on books and materials in respect of school library services in each of the past five years, in real terms. [4545]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not collect this information.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the schools library service. [4546]

Mr. Squire: The Government recognise that school library services can play an important role in supporting schools. They also believe that schools should have the freedom to decide themselves how to secure services, books and other resources to support learning.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools reach the chief inspector of schools' recommendation in respect of library resource items per head. [4543]

Mr. Squire: Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools does not make recommendations in respect of library resource items per head.

Nursing Vouchers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment after what period she expects to evaluate the pilot scheme for nursery vouchers; and by what means. [4493]

Mr. Robin Squire: The operational arrangements for phase 1 will be evaluated in the course of 1996–97 in consultation with the local education authorities concerned and the company responsible for voucher issue. Inspection reports will also become available over that period.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each scheme so far agreed under the private finance initiative the revenue commitment entered into by the Government for each year until the commitment ceases. [3397]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 December.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the policy changes which will arise from the final agreement in respect of each scheme agreed under the private finance initiative. [3398]

Mrs. Gillan: The agreement of schemes under the private finance initiative does not result in changes to the policy of the Government on the PFI. Agreed schemes do, however, represent the application of the PFI policy and offer us the opportunity to refine further the process of implementation. The lessons learned are set out in the publication "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit". This is published jointly by HM Treasury and the private finance panel, and a copy is available in the Members' Library.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many mobile telephones there are available in her Department for the use of Ministers. [4255]

Mr. Robin Squire: Each Minister has his or her own personal mobile telephone—six in total. In addition, each Minister's private office has a mobile telephone—a further six. This makes a total of 12 immediately available for the use of Ministers.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the total amount paid by her Department to consultants in connection with the introduction of the job seeker's allowance; [4583]

(2) which firms of consultants were employed by her Department in connection with the introduction of the job seeker's allowance. [4586]

Mr. Forth: The Department for Education and Employment has to date paid £88,000 to Andersen Consulting.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement following the Social Affairs Council meeting on 5 December. [4940]

Mr. Forth: I attended the Social Affairs Council meeting on 5 December in Brussels.

There was an open discussion on employment issues. The Council's report for the employment discussion at the Madrid European Council, and the paper covering that report together with reports by the Economic and Finance Council and the Commission were agreed unanimously.

Unanimous agreement was reached on a fourth equal opportunities action programme with a budget of 30 mecu. There were no discussions on the draft community programmes on older people, health and safety—SAFE—and research and information exchange in the employment field—ESSEN. There were no other votes.

There were Commission presentations on three issues being taken forward under the other member states' agreement on social policy, on a Commission communication on the future of social protection, on a draft recommendation on the balanced participation of women and men in decision making and on the work of a Commission group on the information society. The draft posted workers directive was formally remitted to the Italian presidency.

The draft directive amending the use of work equipment directive was agreed as an A point, with the United Kingdom and Italy abstaining.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 December 1995

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental and Economic Policies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the recent report by the European Commission on the effects of environmental and economic policies. [1169]

Mr. Clappison: Much of the analysis and policy prescription in the European Commission report is in line with the views of Her Majesty's Government as set out in the UK's sustainable development strategy. In particular, the Government are committed to promoting the use of economic instruments where this is appropriate, though each case should be judged on its own merits. In the case of the landfill tax, the Government also adopted the principle of using a tax on pollution to reduce more distortionary taxes on employment. However, individual countries should in general be left to make their own choice of the most appropriate instrument to achieve their environmental goals.

Pigeons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the use of birds of prey to control feral pigeons in London. [4690]

Mr. Clappison: Under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issue annual general licences permitting authorised persons to kill or take 13 species of pest bird, including feral pigeons, for specified reasons using any method not prohibited by section 5 of the 1981 Act. It is a matter for the authorised persons to determine the most appropriate method of control.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence or representations he has been sent about the extent of the pigeon problem in London; what are the implications for public health; what is his programme of control; and if he will make a statement. [4689]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has regular correspondence on the subject of pigeon problems in urban areas.

Under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, my Department issues an annual general licence permitting authorised persons to kill or take 13 species of pest bird, including feral pigeons, for purposes of preserving public health of public safety. Under part VI of the Public Health Act 1961, local authorities have a specific power to abate or mitigate any nuisance, annoyance or damage caused by the congregation of pigeons in any built-up area.

Dredging Licences

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the conditions attached to dredging licences; what mechanisms will be employed to monitor compliance with conditions; when they will be made public; and if he will make a statement. [4766]

Sir Paul Beresford: Dredging licences are issued by the Crown Estate Commissioners. A prerequisite to the issue of a licence is a favourable Government view issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Government views contain any conditions specified by the Government under which the extraction should be allowed to go ahead. These conditions are designed to ensure protection of the marine environment and to prevent coastal damage arising from the dredging operation. They also include monitoring requirements and the provision of monitoring data for consideration by the Crown Estate, this Department and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food.

Letters containing Government views are issued to the Crown Estate, who include the conditions in their licences, and are copied to interested parties. They are available to the public. It would be for the Crown Estate Commissioners to decide whether to make licences public.

Public Car Parking Expenditure

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers he has to prevent Tyne and Wear development corporation or any other public agency from spending money from their grant allocation on land reclamation to provide car parking spaces. [4702]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* Under section 138 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 the Secretary of State has powers to give directions to an urban development corporation for restricting the exercise of its powers or for requiring it to exercise those powers in a specified manner. The Secretary of State has similar powers in respect of English Partnerships.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to prevent Tyne and Wear development corporation or any other agency from spending money from their grant on reclaiming land to provide 1,400 car parking spaces as part of stage 2 of the development of the Wearmouth colliery site in Sunderland. [4707]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer given 7 December 1995]:* No. Land reclamation is one of the prime functions of urban development corporations.

The stage 2 development will proceed only if a suitable regeneration use can be found. It is a proper use of public money to pump prime private developments on difficult sites.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what impact the changes in the composition of the standard spending assessment formula for 1996–97 have had on the levels of standard spending assessment and total external support for *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council, *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council, *(c)* Chiltern district council and *(d)* Wycombe district council; and if he will make a statement. [4698]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* Changes in proposed 1996–97 standard spending assessments and total external support for these authorities are shown in the table.

The changes in SSAs reflect the SSA control totals shown in annex E to the draft local government finance report for 1996–97, and any proposed data and methodology changes.

The changes in TES for individual authorities reflect changes in authorities' SSAs, their share of the proceeds of the national non-domestic rate, and any entitlement to SSA reduction grant.

Authority	*£ million percentage change in SSA*[1]		*£ million percentage change in TES*	
Buckinghamshire county council	+8.219	(+2.1)	+4.103	(+1.4)
Aylesbury vale district council	–0.721	(–5.4)	–0.045	(–5.0)
Chiltern district council	–0.136	(–1.9)	—0.052	(–1.3)
Wycombe district council	–0.819	(–5.8)	–0.359	(–3.6)

[1] Compared with 1995–96 SSAs adjusted for changes in functions.

Local Government Reorganisation Orders

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local government re-organisation orders covered by the financial provision referred to in his oral statement of 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 1333. [4703]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* Structure orders have been approved by Parliament for reorganisation in Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and North Yorkshire in 1996 and Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Dorset, Durham, East Sussex, Hampshire, Staffordshire, and Wiltshire in 1997. Local authorities in these areas, and authorities in any other areas where future structure orders provide for reorganisation in 1997, will be eligible for assistance with transitional costs in 1996–97. I hope to make a more detailed statement on the timing of further structure orders soon.

Local Government Elections

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment with respect to those local authority areas which are still the subject of review by the Local Government Commission on what date he proposes that local elections be held for any authority that may be created; and on what date local authorities will take up their responsibilities. [4859]

Sir Paul Beresford: For all those districts which are the subject of fresh reviews by the Local Government Commission, the timing of any structural change will depend on the commission's final recommendations and on the Government's response to those recommendations. Where there is to be reorganisation, it is our policy that there should be full elections to the future unitary authority the year before the transfer of responsibilities.

Departmental Spending Programmes

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the individual name of, and total amount in cash terms planned to be spent on, each individual spending programme as a result of the Budget settlement 1994 and *(b)* the total amount in cash terms now planned to be spent on each of these individual programmes as a result of the Budget settlement 1995 (i) for each individual spending programme making up the broad spending headings contained in the table "Provision for Department of the Environment Programmes 1995–96 to 1997–98" in his Department's press release No. 668 and (ii) for each year from 1995–96 to 1997–98; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The information requested is in the table which sets out spending plans announced at the time of the 1994 Budget and current plans for programme expenditure lines of £10 million and above. Detailed expenditure proposals for 1996–97 and beyond will be set out in my Department's main estimates and the 1996 annual report, to be published next March.

£ million

Programme[1]	*Plans (1994)*			*Plans (1995)*		
	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Housing and Construction						
Housing Corporation	1,365	1,348	1,363	1,365	1,247	1,150
of which: *Capital*[2]	*1,133*	*1,127*	*1,141*	*1,103*	*1,004*	*899*
Rough Sleepers Initiative[3]	*19*	*3*	*3*	*27*	*7*	*10*
Other (revenue)	*213*	*218*	*218*	*235*	*236*	*241*
Sale of Housing Corporation loans (receipts less adjustments)	—	—	—	—	–489	–489
Housing Revenue Account Subsidy	4,121	4,005	3,967	4,102	3,834	3,684
Local Authority Credit Approvals	869	972	959	869	789	752
Private Sector Renewal	253	259	273	253	258	272
Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (including, in 1995 plans, Challenge Fund)[4]	31	89	139	5	60	170
Other Housing	114	95	85	115	121	90
of which: *Section 73 Rough Sleepers Initiative*[3]	*4*	*3*	*3*	*4*	*11*	*12*
Gypsy Site Grant	*13*	*10*	*10*	*14*	*22*	*5*
Housing Defects Grant	*30*	*12*	*5*	*30*	*17*	*3*
Rent Officers	*34*	*35*	*35*	*34*	*36*	*37*
Other	*33*	*35*	*32*	*33*	*35*	*34*
Construction	27	26	26	27	25	24
Housing and Construction sub-total	6,781	6,794	6,812	6,737	5,844	5,655

£ million

Programme[1]		*Plans (1994)*			*Plans (1995)*	
	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Cities and Countryside						
Urban Development Corporations/Docklands Light Railway	239	215	210	244	203	187
English Partnerships	212	222	222	210	210	210
Housing Action Trusts	90	90	90	90	89	89
Single Regeneration Budget Residual Programmes[2]	666	533	367	660	546	359
Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund	125	265	436	125	265	483
Sub Total SRB	1,332	1,324	1,324	1,329	1,313	1,328
Other Urban	2	1	1	2	2	2
New Towns	–125	–185	–190	–125	–100	–190
European Regional Development Fund[5]	184	189	189	184	189	189
Countryside	147	146	146	150	146	146
of which: Countryside Commission[6]	*42*	*41*	*40*	*42*	*40*	*39*
English Nature	*40*	*40*	*40*	*40*	*39*	*39*
Rural Development Commission	*36*	*37*	*39*	*38*	*39*	*39*
National Parks	*16*	*16*	*15*	*16*	*16*	*15*
Other	*13*	*12*	*12*	*13*	*12*	*12*
Cities and Countryside sub total	1,540	1,476	1,470	1,540	1,550	1,474
Other programmes						
Environment Protection	97	89	89	100	206	203
of which: Environment Agency[7]	*5*	*0*	*0*	*5*	*121*	*122*
Research	*35*	*35*	*36*	*35*	*30*	*30*
Recycling Credit Approvals	*16*	*16*	*16*	*16*	*10*	*5*
Contaminated Land Credit Approvals	*13*	*13*	*13*	*14*	*16*	*18*
Other	*28*	*25*	*23*	*30*	*30*	*27*
Water[7]	67	63	63	67	6	6
British Waterways Board	48	48	47	48	47	46
Energy Efficiency	115	115	115	135	122	114
of which: Energy Savings Trust	—	—	—	—	*25*	*15*
Home Energy Efficiency Scheme	*86*	*87*	*87*	*106*	*73*	*75*
Other	*29*	*28*	*28*	*30*	*23*	*24*
DOE Administration	230	242	237	227	239	195
Health and Safety Executive[8]	*187*	*187*	*186*	189	176	174
Property Holdings[9]	–276	–267	–285	*–235*	*–236*	*–246*
of which: QEII Conference Centre and other buildings	*11*	*10*	*10*	11	10	10
PSA Services	48	29	25	36	26	23
Ordnance Survey	15	10	12	15	9	10
OFWAT	8	8	8	8	9	10
Local Government (Non-Aggregate External Finance)	238	234	232	306	234	230
Other Programmes sub-total	591	572	544	1,143	1,084	1,020
Total DOE (to £10 million)	8,910	8,840	8,830	9,420	8,480	8,150

[1] Figures in italics are not included in the overall total.

[2] 1995 plans for 1995–96 and 1996–97 include a transfer of £19 million from Housing Corporation capital to SRB residual programmes, for city challenge projects.

[3] Resources for the rough sleepers initiative are split between the Housing Corporation and Other Housing. At this stage the split is provisional, as final plans will be made after a consultation exercise.

[4] Provision for 1995–96 is for transfer to the Department of Social Security to meet the housing benefit costs of Large Scale Voluntary transfers. The 1995 Plans are lower since most of the transfers for 1995–96 have already taken place.

[5] A transfer of ERDF resources to the Department of National Heritage, totalling £5 million in 1996–97 and £3 million in 1997–98, was agreed subsequent to DOE press release 688.

[6] A transfer of £13 million a year from 1996–97 not reflected in these figures is also proposed from the Countryside Commission to MAFF in respect of the countryside stewardship scheme.

[7] 1995 plans for future years include the transfer of resources from the National Rivers Authority, waste regulation authorities, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution and certain DOE functions into the Environment Agency. It is also proposed to transfer £7 million a year from 1996–97 to MAFF in respect of the agency's fisheries functions. This transfer is not reflected in the table.

[8] Until July 1995 the Health and Safety Executive was part of the Department of Employment group.

[9] 1995 plans include the transfer of most of the resources for property holdings to the Cabinet Office, excluding the QEII conference centre and certain other buildings.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

Mr. Cynog Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria were employed in the selection of a new director general for the Forestry Commission. [3723]

Mr. Kynoch: The criteria used in selecting the new director general, including the qualities, experience and other attributes required, were set out in the leaflet, "Forestry Commission: Director General: Information for Applicants: B/2507", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

North Lanarkshire Council (Appointments)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whom he intends to appoint to conduct the inquiry into appointments made by North Lanarkshire council and if he will make a statement. [5514]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the powers conferred on me by section 211 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 I have appointed Mr. D. I. K. MacLeod to conduct the inquiry. Mr. MacLeod, a senior partner in Shepherd and Wedderburn WS, is a highly respected member of the legal profession in Scotland and an accredited specialist in employment law.

The formal terms of reference will be as follows:

> "To inquire into the question as to whether North Lanarkshire Council have, in relation to their appointment of Chief Officers, failed to comply with the duty imposed on them by section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to make appointments to paid office or employment on merit, and to report thereon."

The decision to establish this inquiry follows a number of complaints made to the Local Government Staff Commission (Scotland), which concluded that it was not able to give the council a clean bill of health.

The inquiry provides an opportunity to establish whether the complaints are justified and whether action such as re-running the appointment procedures is necessary. It is in the interests of all concerned that the matter should be resolved speedily but fairly and comprehensively and I have asked Mr. MacLeod to let me have his report by 31 January 1996.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which firms of consultants were employed by his Department in connection with the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance; [4587]

(2) what was the total amount paid by his Department to consultants in connection with the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [4582]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment are responsible for the jobseeker's allowance. No firms were employed and no moneys were paid by the Scottish Office.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Utility Industries (Mergers and Takeovers)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is *(a)* the average period and *(b)* the statutory minimum period within which the Directors General of Fair Trading, for Electricity Supply and for Water Services (i) receive and (ii) make recommendations with respect to the referring of proposed mergers and takeovers in the relevant industries to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. [5057.]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are no statutory minimum periods for consideration of mergers laid down in the Fair Trading Act for considering mergers. The other matters raised by the hon. Member are for the regulatory bodies concerned. I am arranging for the Director General of Fair Trading to send a reply to the hon. Member, in consultation with the Director General for Water Services and Director General for Electricity Supply as appropriate.

TREASURY

Finance Bill

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the Finance Bill. [4963]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 7 December 1995, column *332*.

Self-Assessment

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the savings to his Department from the introduction of tax self-assessment. [2690]

Mr. Jack: Self-assessment is expected to produce net staff savings of £50 million per year as a result of streamlining existing procedures within the Inland Revenue. Services to taxpayers will be maintained.

Government Debt

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the annual interest bill paid on Government debt for each year since 1978. [4328]

Mr. Waldegrave: Central Government net debt interest payments, which score in GGE(X), are shown in the table.

Central Government net debt interest payments

	£ million
1978–79	3,225
1979–80	4,453
1980–81	5,336
1981–82	6,172
1982–83	6,937
1983–84	8,391
1984–85	9,818
1985–86	10,389
1986–87	11,363
1987–88	11,977
1988–89	12,317
1989–90	12,195
1990–91	12,413
1991–92	11,500
1992–93	12,902
1993–94	14,845
1994–95	17,617

Coinage Changes

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the results of the Royal Mint's consultations about changes to the United Kingdom coinage. [4567]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In October 1994, the Royal Mint issued a consultation document seeking views about the possible introduction of a £2 coin for general circulation and on whether the existing 50p coin should be replaced by a smaller coin. In particular, the Royal Mint sought the views of those with special interests such as blind and elderly people and those who handle large amounts of coins and the manufacturers and users of coin-operated machines.

Responses to the Mint showed strong support for the introduction of a £2 coin and also a preference for a smaller 50p coin. I have carefully considered these responses and have now decided to introduce a new smaller 50p coin and a general circulation £2 coin. The new coins will be issued towards the end of 1997.

The new 50p coin will be smaller than the existing one but will be the same colour and shape. The £2 coin will be bicolour with a white centre and yellow outer ring. The precise specifications for the new coins will be issued early in the new year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Montserrat

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what request he has received for assistance because of renewed volcanic threats in Montserrat; and if he will make a statement. [4803]

Mr. Hanley: These threats caused an orderly evacuation of 5,000 people to prepared sites in the north of the island on 1 and 2 December. There is a continuous dialogue between Her Majesty's Government, the Governor and the Government of Montserrat. As a result, some of the associated costs are being met by the Overseas Development Administration within the £3 million committed to monitoring, relief and evacuation preparedness initiatives since this emergency began in July.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Marketing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the amount of aid for marketing and processing by county in each of the last three years. [4742]

Mr. Baldry: The available information is in the table. No awards were made in 1994.

EC processing and marketing grant: Awards announced 1993–1995 by counties in England

	1993 £	*1994* £	*1995* £
Avon	116,297	—	330,819
Bedfordshire	755,554	—	822,543
Cambridgeshire	410,255	—	1,859,759
Cheshire	37,666	—	128,177
Cleveland	298,296	—	—
Cornwall	187,200	—	127,190
Devon	1,054,824	—	71,225
Dorset	—	—	97,076
County Durham	—	—	144,000
Essex	—	—	82,166
Gloucestershire	425,848	—	147,000
Hampshire	—	—	356,776
Hereford and Worcester	487,172	—	237,570
Humberside	421,860	—	368,317
Kent	—	—	660,616
Lancashire	—	—	1,421,069
Leicestershire	114,070	—	—
Lincolnshire	912,790	—	1,688,300
London	—	—	1,518,781
Manchester	425,610	—	76,712
Merseyside	—	—	49,356
West Midlands	—	—	522,900
Norfolk	105,814	—	502,624
Northamptonshire	454,500	—	94,500
Northumberland	—	—	258,900
Nottinghamshire	—	—	481,015
Oxfordshire	194,700	—	272,550
Shropshire	163,746	—	703,568
Somerset	1,099,529	—	384,593
Staffordshire	45,989	—	43,500
Suffolk	937,217	—	2,633,497
Surrey	—	—	46,560
East Sussex	109,300	—	450,000
West Sussex	142,500	—	—
Tyne and Wear	515,400	—	—
Warwickshire	—	—	40,500
North Yorkshire	398,586	—	185,746
South Yorkshire	368,400	—	39,000
West Yorkshire	202,500	—	1,131,460
Total	10,385,623	0	17,978,634

North Sea Dredging

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the dredging programme in the North sea, area 107; what proposals he has to ensure that full consultation takes place; what compensation is to be made available to the Lynn fishermen; what is the time scale for compensation; and if he will make a statement; [4765]

(2) what use is being made of the material being dredged from North sea, area 107; and if he will make a statement. [4767]

Mr. Baldry: A Crown Estate licence to dredge area 107 was first granted in 1968. Under the Government view arrangements, the current uplift in the annual extraction limit for the area has been agreed for a period of four years. Material extracted under this variation may be used only to complete the initial major beach renourishment programme being undertaken by the National Rivers Authority from Mablethorpe to Skegness in order to reduce the risk of flooding to some 35,000 people. Extensive consultation with fisheries representatives took place before the variation was agreed.

There is no provision for compensation, but in the Government view that we gave we made it clear that the consent was subject to a number of conditions which were designed to afford the maximum protection to fish stocks. Additionally, we required the dredgers to have a fisheries liaison officer aboard every vessel.

Spanish-owned Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make it his policy to require all Spanish-owned British-registered vessels eligible for compensation under the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 to land future catches at British ports as a condition of the compensation; [4950]

(2) how many claims for compensation he has received concerning the Merchant Shipping Act 1988; if he will list the vessels in respect of which those claims are made; from which ports they operate; and if they are currently fishing; [5051]

(3) what evidence he plans to request from Spanish vessels registered as British and claiming compensation for the time they were unable to fish. [5058]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 6 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *234–35*.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4222]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* My ministerial colleagues and I frequently undertake official engagements outside London, particularly in rural areas. We travel abroad as necessary to promote British interests overseas, including at Agriculture and Fisheries Councils.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4251]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* There are eight mobile telephones available within MAFF for the use of Ministers.

WALES

Statutory Instruments (Health Services)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all statutory instruments in respect of health services from his Department of the present Parliament. [4055]

Mr. Richards: Ministers at the Welsh Office have made 61 statutory instruments in the present Parliament in respect of health services. Full details of those made to 31 December 1994 are shown in the annual volume of "Statutory Instruments", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. A list of statutory instruments made since 1 January 1995 will be placed in the Library of the House. Details of statutory instruments made in respect of health services in England and Wales are included in my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health's reply to the hon. Member today.

Council Tax

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State of Wales what is his estimate of the cost to the average council tax bill in Wales of an 11 per cent. increase in charges. [4294]

Mr. Hague: The average Welsh council tax per dwelling in 1995–96 is £330. An increase of 11 per cent. would add around £36.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column 2, if he will place in the Library the basis for his calculation of the estimates of Government expenditure per capita in Wales in *(a)* 1979–80 and *(b)* 1993–94. [5025]

Mr. Hague: The figure for 1993–94 was taken from table 7.6B of the statistical supplement to the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96, Cm 2821. The figure for the per capita spend in Wales in 1979–80 was based on an amount —£1,138—taken from written answer provided by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 22 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *608-18*. This amount was brought to 1993–94 prices by the application of the latest GDP deflator at market prices. As I pointed out in my answer on 4 December, the figures for 1979–80 and 1993–94 are not directly comparable because of changes in the definition and coverage of identifiable territorial public expenditure.

Beaches

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what undertakings he has sought from Welsh Water as to the adherence of the company to the announced programme of capital expenditure in respect of the provision of 50 European blue flag beaches in Wales by the year 2000, and if he will make a statement. [4850]

Mr. Hague: I understand that Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water has committed itself to maintaining its capital programme. This includes the £38 million discretionary investment programme it announced earlier this year as well as the on-going five-year investment programme of £1 billion which is subjected to regulatory requirements.

Ministerial Adviser

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the requirements for candidates for the recent appointment for a political adviser to the Secretary of State; what factors determined whether this post was advertised; and if he will list the previous experience, the current pay and length of contract of the successful candidate. [4857]

Mr. Hague: With the approval of the Prime Minister and after interviewing a number of candidates I appointed Mr. Barnaby Towns personally as my special adviser.

His salary has been negotiated individually and in relation to previous earnings and is confidential. It is on a salary spine of 34 points ranging from £19,503 to £67,609; appointments are non-pensionable and the salary reflects this.

The appointments of special advisers terminate in the circumstances set out in the model appointment letter for special advisers. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Departmental Press Notices

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of all press notices issued by the Welsh Office on Tuesday 5 December. [4975]

Mr. Hague: As is our normal practice, copies of all press notices issued by the Welsh Office on Tuesday 5 December have been sent to the Library of the House.

General Medical Practitioners

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what is the general practitioner to population ratio in each health authority. [4929]

Mr. Richards: Information relating to the population per general medical practitioner in each family health service authority at 1 April 1995 is given in the following table:

FHSA	*Population per GMP*
Clwyd	1,807
Dyfed	1,587
Gwent	1,831
Gwynedd	1,484
Mid Glamorgan	1,809
Powys	1,382
South Glamorgan	1,659
West Glamorgan	1,767

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *147*, if he will name and give the address of each school and the date on which the relevant constituency hon. Member was informed. [4971]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

Tongwynlais school, Tongwynlais
Birchgrove school, Cardiff
Whitchurch school, Cardiff

Young Enterprise Scheme
Cardiff high school, Cardiff
Stanwell school, Penarth
Woodland school, Cardiff

Notifications are as arranged since 1987.

Welsh Language

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will announce his conclusions on future responsibility for grants in support of the main non-statutory organisations which support the Welsh language. [5626]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I have considered carefully the responses to the consultation paper circulated by the Welsh Office last May and have concluded that the Welsh Language Board should assume responsibility for most of these grants from 1997–98.

The four organisations supported by these grants—the Welsh Books Council, the Welsh nursery schools movement—Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin—the National Eisteddfod and the Welsh youth movement—Urdd Gobaith Cymru—all play significant roles in sustaining and developing the Welsh language and increasing the opportunities for its use in daily life in Wales. We consider it entirely appropriate for the Welsh Language Board, which was established by this Government to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language, to take on the responsibility for supporting these important organisations.

We have, however, been impressed by the argument put forward by the Welsh Books Council and others that support for the council's central function of promoting book publishing in Wales would not sit happily with the Welsh Language Board. The Welsh Books Council's core objectives include the encouragement of interest in English language books about Wales and support for authors and publishers in furtherance of this aim. As it would be impossible to disentangle support for non-Welsh books from the Welsh Books Council's central advisory service to Welsh language authors and publishers, we have been convinced that it would not be appropriate for the Welsh Language Board to assume responsibility for the council's core activities. We do, however, intend to transfer to the Welsh Language Board the responsibility for grant-aiding the Welsh Books Council to support individual publishers under the grants to publishers scheme, which is devoted to the production of Welsh language books.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Provincial Theatres

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action she is taking to safeguard the future of provincial theatres. [4725]

Mr. Sproat: The development of policy in support of regional theatres is a matter for the Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards. The council is currently undertaking a review of publicly funded drama in England, and has recently completed an extensive process of consultation. Future funding proposals will be developed in due course, following the outcome of this review.

BBC Transmission Facilities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many representations she has received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against privatisation of BBC transmission facilities; and from whom. [3257]

Mr. Sproat: Since the publication of our 1988 White Paper, "Broadcasting in the '90s: Competition, Choice and Quality", in which were stated our intention to separate the provision of television services from their delivery, a number of representations have been received, both for and against privatisation, but details are not recorded in the form requested.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make it her policy to retain a golden share in BBC transmission facilities. [3243]

Mr. Sproat: No.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if money raised by the privatisation of the BBC transmission facilities will be paid to the BBC. [3245]

Mr. Sproat: The net proceeds of sale of those transmission assets funded from the licence fee, which is the majority, will be available to the BBC, which is committed to investing them in digital production technology, while those from the sale of assets funded through grant-in-aid will return to the Exchequer.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the BBC will be permitted to hire cheaper transmission facilities from other providers when its own transmission facilities are privatised. [3241]

Mr. Sproat: No decisions have been taken on the nature of future contracts with transmission providers for the services to the BBC.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to what extent the proportion of the BBC licence fee necessary to pay for the use of its transmitters when privatised will be geared to *(a)* inflation and *(b)* the actual transmission charges. [3244]

Mr. Sproat: There is no set proportion of the licence fee related to specific items of BBC expenditure. Changes in the licence fee up to and including 1996 have been set at the level of changes in the retail prices index, as announced by the then Secretary of State on 4 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *309*. The Government will determine the appropriate level for the licence fee in subsequent years in advance of the 1997 licence fee settlement, taking into account all relevant factors.

National Lottery

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to encourage communities and organisations in *(a)* Northern Ireland *(b)* the North East, *(c)* the east midlands and *(d)* south-west England and ethnic community groups and local groups in inner cities to make applications to the Millennium Commission fund. [3139]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Tibet

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Chinese Government regarding human rights abuses in Tibet. [4723]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised human rights abuses in Tibet during his discussions with Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, in London on 3 October.

EU Common Visa System

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the extra costs arising after the introduction of a common system of visa requirements by the European Union; and what action he has taken so far in respect of this estimate. [4489]

Mr. Hanley: The estimated cost of implementing council Regulation (EC) No 2317/95—the EU common visa list—is between £3,090,0900 and £3,390,000 in the start-up year. The estimated continued annual running cost is £1,740,000 at current prices. The funding will be found from within existing provision.

Common visa list-related entry clearance work will be subject to the FCO commitment to achieve full cost recovery in financial year 1996–97 in the case of non-settlement work and financial year 1997–98 for settlement work. These recoveries are remitted to the Consolidated Fund and are of no direct benefit, therefore, to the FCO.

The cost of implementing Council Regulation (EC) No. 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas cannot yet be quantified.

Burma

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Burmese Government regarding the restriction of democracy. [4728]

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom has had no ministerial contact with the ruling military regime in Burma, the State Law and Order Restoration Council, but we regularly raise at official level our concerns about the need for democratic reform in Burma.

Council of the European Union

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union. [5294]

Mr. David Davis: The following Councils are scheduled:

December 4: Foreign Affairs Council
December 5: Foreign Affairs Council
December 5: Labour and Social Affairs Council
December 7: Transport Council
December 11: Agriculture Council, ECOFIN Council
December 12: Agriculture Council, Foreign Affairs Council
December 14: Energy
December 18: ECOFIN Council, Environment Council
December 19: Environment Council
December 20: Development Council
December 21: Fisheries Council
December 22: Fisheries Council

Following are the subjects for discussion:

December 4–5: Foreign Affairs Council

Provisional agenda as follows:

Preparation for Madrid European Council
Mediterranean policy
Relations with Latin America
Relations with Asia
Relations with Switzerland

Relations with Former Soviet Union

Relations with Central and Eastern Europeans

Former Yugoslavia

Preventative diplomacy and peace-keeping in Africa (poss.)

Lome IV: internal financing agreement

Draft mandate with South Africa

Mandate for EURATOM/Argentina Agreement

Commercial questions

Article 24.6

Nigeria

Other business: UN financial crisis

In the margins:

Signature of EU/Andean Agreement on chemical precursors for drugs followed by dinner to discuss future of EU/Andean Pact relations

Signature of Interim Agreement with Kazakhstan

December 5: Labour and Social Affairs Council

Provisional agenda for the Social Affairs Council agreed as follows:

Approval of the provisional agenda.

Approval of the "A" points.

Employment:

open debate on employment policy

Council contribution to the Report on Employment to be submitted to the Madrid European Council (15/16 December)

extending the mandate of the ad hoc group

Draft decision on the fourth programme on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women[1]

Draft decision on the Fourth Community action programme in the area of health and safety at work (SAFE)

Draft decision on actions in favour of Older People[1]

Draft amending regulation in Regulations 1408/71, 574/72, 1247/92 and 1945/93 (social security for migrant workers): 1994 package[1]

Draft directive amending the Use of Work Equipment Directive[1]

Draft regulation and directive on the European Co-operative Society Statute—Presidency report

Draft decision on a multiannual programme for Community action in support on co-operatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations—Presidency report

Draft directive on Posted Workers

Draft directive on the Reconciliation of Family and Professional life—Commission information (possible) Draft recommendation on the Balanced Participation of Men and Women in Decision Making—Commission presentation

other business

[1]Indicates items on which a vote may be taken.

December 7: Transport Council

Airport Ground Handling Liberalisation Directive (common position)

Driving Licences—amendment to allow plastic card driving licences (common position)

Amendment to Regulation 1107/70 on state aids to railways (orientation debate for political agreement)—Inland Waterways "package" (orientation debate)

Aviation Relations with US (debate)

Mandate for road haulage negotiations with Central and Eastern European countries (adoption of mandate)

Resolution on short sea shipping

Directive on Marine Safety Equipment (orientation debate for political agreement)

Report on implementation on Maritime Cabotage Regulation (debate).

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

December 11–12: Agriculture Council

Reform of the rice regime (possible)

Reform of the fruit and vegetable regime

Set-aside (possible)

Meat products (possible)

Molluscs (possible)

Feedingstuffs (possible)

Pesticides (possible)

December 11: Ecofin Council

It is not certain that this Council will take place.

December 12: Foreign Affairs Council

It is not certain that this Council will take place.

December 14: Energy Council

Electricity liberalisation (possible common position)

Energy Policy White Paper (Commission presentation)

Paper on Gas Supply (Commission presentation)

Energy TENs (possible adoption)

Energy efficiency of fridges and freezers (possible common position)

Revision of Regulation on notification of energy investments (adoption)

Registration of Crude Oil Imports (adoption)

Repeal of several energy measures (progress report)

Energy Charter Treaty (progress report)

Euro-Mediterranean energy dimension (Presidency report)

(possible) Radiological protection safety standards

December 18: Ecofin Council

It is not certain that this Council will take place

December 18–19: Environment Council

Environmental impact assessment

Biocides (orientation debate)

Water (Council conclusions)

Codification (Council resolution)

Coastal zones (Council conclusions)

Light rain emissions (common position)

Ecolabelling debate

Ecomanagement and audit scheme

Climate change (Council conclusions)

December 20: Development Council

Food aid regulation

Humanitarian aid regulation

South Africa regulation

Gender and development

NGO cofinancing regulation

(possible) Decentralised cooperation regulation

Rehabilitation regulation

Refugees in Asia and Central America regulation

Tropical Forestry regulation

December 21–22: Fisheries Council

TACs and Quotas

EC/Norway

EC/Ireland

EC/Greenland

EC/Faeroes

EC/Latvia

EC/Lithuania

EC/Estonia
EC/Russia—Ex-Swedish agreements
EC/Poland—Ex-Swedish agreements
NAFO
End-year quota flexibility (possible)
Fixed gear (possible)
List of species for log books (possible)

Overseas Trade Promotion

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the location of staff in his Department employed to promote British trade overseas. [3026]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The location and the number of staff whose responsibilities lie primarily in promoting trade with the United Kingdom are listed in the table.

There are in addition a large number of staff who contribute a lower proportion of their time directly to export promotion. For example, all heads of mission are an important part of the trade promotion effort. Staff engaged in political, economic and information also make a significant contribution to export and inward investment effort.

Number and location of staff employed to promote British trade overseas (as at 31 May 1995)

Location of mission	*Number of staff*
Abidjan	4
Abu Dhabi	7
Abuja	1
Accra	5
Addis Ababa	1
Aden	2
Al Khobar	4
Alexandria	2
Algiers	3
Almaty	3
Amman	6
Ankara	8
Antananarivo	2
Ashgabat	2
Asuncion	2
Athens	9
Atlanta	7
Auckland	9
Baghdad	6
Bahrain	5
Baku	1
Bandar Seri Begawan	3
Bangalore	2
Bangkok	15
Barcelona	7
Beirut	4
Belgrade	5
Belmopan	1
Belo Horizonte	1
Berlin	13
Berne	2
Bilbao	3
Bogota	7
Bombay	12
Bordeaux	2
Boston	6
Brasilia	4
Bratislava	2
Bridgetown	3
Brisbane	5
Brussels	11
Brussels Ukrep	3
Bucharest	6
Budapest	10
Buenos Aires	10
Cairo	9
Calcutta	6
Canberra	2
Cape Town	4
Caracas	8
Casablanca	5
Castries	1
Chiang Mai	1
Chicago	14
Cleveland	5
Colombo	5
Copenhagen	14
Dakar	1
Dallas	4
Damascus	5
Dar Es Salaam	5
Dhaka	3
Doha	6
Douala	1
Dubai	12
Dublin	7
Durban	2
Dusseldorf	20
Ekaterinburg	1
Florence	2
Frankfurt	10
Freetown	1
Gaborone	2
Geneva CG	3
Georgetown	2
Gothenburg	2
Guatemala City	2
Hamburg	9
Hanoi	7
Harare	5
Havana	2
Helsinki	11
Ho Chi Minh	5
Hong Kong BTC	13
Hong Kong CTU	4
Honiara	1
Houston	5
Islamabad	7
Istanbul	10
Jakarta	15
Jedda	8
Jerusalem	2
Johannesburg	15
Kaduna	2
Kampala	3
Kano	1
Karachi	7
Kathmandu	2
Khartoum	1
Kiev	4
Kingston	4
Kingstown	1
Kinshasa	1
Kuala Lumpur	19
Kuching	1
Kuwait	9
La Paz	2
Lagos	13
Las Palmas	2
Lille	4
Lilongwe	2
Lima	3
Lisbon	14

Number and location of staff employed to promote British trade overseas (as at 31 May 1995)

Location of mission	*Number of staff*
Ljubljana	4
Lome	1
Los Angeles	7
Luanda	2
Lusaka	4
Luxembourg	2
Lyons	6
Madras	8
Madrid	18
Managua	1
Manila	5
Maputo	1
Marseilles	3
Melbourne	10
Mexico City	11
Miami	4
Milan	22
Minsk	1
Montevideo	3
Montreal	5
Moscow	12
Munich	7
Muscat	6
Nagoya	3
Nairobi	8
Naples	3
Nassau	1
New Delhi	16
New York CG	20
Nicosia	6
Oporto	3
Osaka	11
Oslo	12
Panama City	2
Paris	27
Peking	14
Perth	5
Phnom Penh	2
Port Harcourt	2
Port Louis	3
Port Moresby	2
Port of Spain	4
Prague	10
Pusan	1
Quito	4
Rabat	1
Rangoon	4
Recife	1
Reykjavik	2
Riga	2
Rio de Janeiro	8
Riyadh	16
Rome	8
San Francisco	6
San Jose	4
San Juan	1
San Salvador	2
Sana'a	4
Santiago	7
Santo Domingo	2
Sao Paulo	9
Seattle	4
Seoul	17
Seville	2
Shanghai	4
Singapore	16
Sofia	5
St. John's	1
St. Petersburg	3
Stockholm	14
Stuttgart	5
Suva	2
Sydney	12
Tallinn	1
Tashkent	1
Tbilisi	1
Tegucigalpa	1
Tehran	6
Tel Aviv	6
The Hague	12
Tirana	1
Tokyo	33
Toronto	9
Tunis	4
Ulaanbaatar	1
Valletta	3
Vancouver	7
Vienna	7
Vilnius	2
Warsaw	11
Washington	5
Wellington	2
Yaounde	1
Yerevan	1
Zagreb	2
Zurich	12

There are currently three UK-based officers seconded to the British trade cultural office, Taipei. A further five locally engaged staff are also employed by the British trade cultural office.

London:

Joint export and promotion department: 22 staff.

TRANSPORT

Motoring Offences

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has conducted into the number of occasions in which a driver facing court action for motoring offences involving personal injury is subsequently involved in another motor accident prior to the original case coming to court; and if he will list the statistics collated by his Department over any convenient period. [5357]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Brunel Thames Tunnel

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement on the latest application by London Transport for repairs to the Brunel tunnel under the Thames. [5017]

Mr. Norris: A revised application by London Underground Ltd. for listed building consent to carry out works to the Thames tunnel has recently been notified to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The application is currently under consideration. It is hoped that a decision on whether it should be called in will be made shortly.

Unleaded Petrol

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of petrol sales are accounted for by unleaded fuel. [4539]

Mr. Norris: Figures on petrol sales are not recorded. However, deliveries of unleaded petrol to retail outlets accounted for 63.75 per cent. of total petrol deliveries in September 1995.

Coaches

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many buses and coaches in Great Britain re-registered with Northern Ireland registration marks have consequently failed to meet the annual testing requirements for such vehicles; [4498]

(2) how many buses and coaches re-registered with Northern Ireland registration marks or first registered with Northern Ireland registration marks were subject to spot checks by the Vehicle Inspectorate were found to be *(a)* roadworthy, *(b)* unroadworthy, *(c)* unroadworthy and subjected to disciplinary action against the operator by the Traffic Commissioner, in each of the last five years. [4499]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available in the form requested. Test failure and enforcement statistics are not recorded in terms of registrations marks.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many buses and coaches in Great Britain which have been re-registered with registration marks originating from Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years were *(a)* between five and 10 years old, *(b)* between 10 and 15 years old, *(c)* between 15 and 20 years and *(d)* older than 20 years at the time of this re-registration. [4497]

Mr. Norris: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Street Furniture

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his powers to ensure that defective street lighting, traffic lights and street furniture in urban and rural areas is repaired. [4538]

Mr. Norris: Powers and responsibility for carrying out repairs to street lighting and traffic lights lie with the relevant highway authority—that is, the Secretary of State on trunk roads and local authorities for work on other roads. The Secretary of State has no powers to require such repairs on roads for which he is not the highway authority.

HEALTH

Hepatitis C

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what date screening for hepatitis C started in each regional blood transfusion centre; [3758]

(2) when screening for hepatitis C first started in blood products in each EC country. [3759]

Mr. Horam: Routine screening for Hepatitis C was introduced throughout the national blood service from September 1991, when reliable tests first became available.

We do not have full information about when other European Community countries introduced testing for Hepatitis C, but we know that some introduced testing before the United Kingdom. However, the expert committee which advises UK Ministers took the view prior to 1991 that tests should not be introduced in the UK because neither the screening test nor the confirmatory test was reliable enough.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all statutory instruments in respect of health services from his Department in the present Parliament. [4051]

Mr. Horam: Up to 6 December 1995, Ministers in the Department of Health have made 912 statutory instruments in the present Parliament. The great majority relate broadly to health services but some were made in connection with other responsibilities, for example the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Full details of those made to 31 December 1994 are shown in the annual volumes of "Statutory Instruments", copies of which is available in the Library. A list of those statutory instruments made by my Department since 1 January 1995 will be placed in the Library. Of the 912, some 750 were made in connection with the establishment of national health service trusts under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. A detailed breakdown of all 912 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

GP Deputising Services

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the percentage of out-of-hours work done by private GP deputising services in each of the last six years. [5028]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available.

NHS Executive Letters

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many executive letters have been sent out by the NHS management executive in each of the last six years. [5027]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of executive letters issued*
1990	233
1991	151
1992	95
1993	118
1994	102
1995 (to date)	134

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy in respect of referring the Benson and Hedges gratis campaign to *(a)* the Advertising Standards Authority and *(b)* the committee for monitoring agreements. [5056]

Mr. Horam: Advertisements for gift catalogues and other promotional material produced by tobacco companies fall under the cigarette code and are considered by the Advertising Standards Authority. Complaints about the catalogues themselves fall under the cigarette promotion code and are considered by the committee for monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship.

Tiffield Secure Unit

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the capacity of the Tiffield secure unit; what is the capital cost per head; and what is his Department's guideline as to the annual operating cost per inmate *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding capital costs. [4805]

Mr. Bowis: The new secure unit at Tiffield will provide 16 places. The capital cost per place is £269,273. Northamptonshire county council is responsible for all revenue cost matters.

Good Hope Hospital

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* the bed availability and *(b)* the level of temporary hospital closure at Birmingham's Good Hope hospital. [4965]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the debate about Good Hope hospital on 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*. Details of bed availability at Good Hope hospital can be found in the publication "Bed availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the effect on the timing of hospital developments of their inclusion in private finance initiatives. [4967]

Mr. Horam: We expect hospital developments using the private finance initiative to be completed earlier than would otherwise be possible.

GP Distribution

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the general practitioner to population ratio in each health district. [4928]

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

Capital Expenditure

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the levels of capital expenditure on hospitals in each year since 1979 and that planned in the next three years. [4968]

Mr. Horam: Capital expenditure on hospitals cannot be separately identified. Total capital expenditure by national health service bodies, which includes expenditure on hospitals, in each of the last 17 years is shown in the table.

The definition of capital has changed during this period so comparisons between years cannot readily be made. For 1993–94 the threshold value for the definition of capital expenditure was increased from £1,000 to £5,000. This technical change to accounting policy reduced capital expenditure, as money spent on tangible assets which was formerly classed as capital was, in 1993–94, recorded as revenue. In that year over £100 million was transferred from capital to revenue to take account of the increase to the capital threshold.

Figures for the current and forward years are not available centrally on a comparable basis.

Year	*Total capital expenditure £ thousand*
1994–95	1,805,240
1993–94	1,813,860
1992–93	1,926,438
1991–92	1,808,745
1990–91	1,485,404
1989–90	1,292,212
1988–89	1,087,936
1987–88	1,001,444
1986–87	936,291
1985–86	891,947
1984–85	795,404
1983–84	713,947
1982–83	686,386
1981–82	671,386
1980–81	563,174
1979–80	416,387
1978–79	376,352

Source:

Annual accounts of health authorities and summarisation schedules of NHS Trusts.

Notes:

1. The table shows figures for RHAs, DHAs and the London postgraduate teaching hospitals (SHAs). Figures post 1991-92 include NHS trusts.
2. Figures for 1994-95 are provisional.
3. The figures for 1991-92 onwards represent capital additions, as recorded in accounts, which include assets purchased by authorities/trusts and assets donated to authorities/trust.
4. The figures pre-1991-92 represent capital expenditure as recorded in authorities accounts.

Hospitality

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the hospitality budget for his Department in each of the last five years. [4348]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 1 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *23*. Due to technical changes in the Department's accounting system, the figure given for the Department for 1994–95 covered 13 months' expenditure.

DEFENCE

Mustard Gas

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research findings he has evaluated on the genetic effects of exposure to mustard gas; and what are the conclusions of this research. [4986]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mrs. Margaret Ewing dated 8 December 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what research findings have been evaluated regarding the genetic effects of exposure to mustard gas has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment as one of its divisions.

The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has not carried out any research on the genetic effects of exposure to the chemical warfare agent Mustard gas nor has it evaluated any research findings relating to this subject.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

Theft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reported incidents of theft there have been in his Department in each of the last 10 years. [4565]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The information as follows:

Year	*Number*
1985–86	3
1986–87	0
1987–88	5
1988–89	1
1989–90	1
1990–91	12
1991–92	2
1992–93	2
1993–94	20
1994–95	51

The figures for the two most recent years have been significantly affected by improved reporting procedures following the creation of the defence fraud unit.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about measures being taken by his Department to counteract theft in his Department. [4567]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* My Department has taken a range of measures to deter and detect theft and to make staff aware of the need for vigilance. All suspected cases are vigorously pursued and an internal statement entitled, "Fraud and Theft—Policy and Law", makes it clear that we shall not tolerate dishonest behaviour among MOD employees. Investigations into suspected fraud and theft are undertaken by the Ministry of Defence and Service police. The deterrence of fraud, including theft, forms part of high level management plans with requirements placed upon senior line management to impose sound controls, follow up suspicions and report suspected theft. There is a defence fraud unit which is tasked with collating information, assessing policy and raising awareness of the risk of fraud and theft. Physical security is an essential element at all MOD establishments and appropriate measures such as random gate checks and inventory reviews are among the key controls operated by management. Recovery is pursued wherever possible.

Surplus Munitions Material (Disposal)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current procedure for disposing of surplus explosives and other munitions materials; and if he will make a statement. [4985]

Mr. Arbuthnot: When explosives and other munitions material are declared surplus, the preferred option is for disposal by sale under strict Government guidelines. If this is not possible, either for safety reasons or because the material has become time-expired, it is disposed of in one of the following ways:

by an approved contractor;

by the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation using a rotary kiln with environmental emission controls or by burning in the open under strictly controlled conditions;

locally by technically qualified personnel on licensed demolition grounds on MOD property.

Type 23 Frigate

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the contract for the type 23 frigate order. [5008]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have yet to take a decision.

New Weapons

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received with regard to co-operating with EC and NATO allies in the research and development of new weapons systems; and if he will make a statement. [4988]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department pursues international collaboration on the research and development of equipment as an efficient means of achieving value for money in defence procurement. Details are provided in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995, paragraphs 436 to 438. My officials actively participate in a wide variety of collaborative arrangements and multilateral programmes. Opportunities for collaboration on research are identified in the NATO defence research group and in the Western European armaments group's EUCLID—European Co-operation for the Long Term in Defence—programme. Details can be found on page 57 of volume 2 of this year's "Forward Look on Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Arcadia Land plc

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts Arcadia Land plc has with his Department. [4979]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The central database maintained by my Department has no record of any contracts placed with Arcadia Land plc. A record of contracts placed by agencies or local purchase units is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

National Defence Industries Council

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the National Defence Industries Council last met; who was present; and what topics were discussed. [4980]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The National Defence Industries Council last met on 23 November 1995. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence chaired the meeting, which was attended by Ministers and officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry and senior figures in the United Kingdom defence industry. The council discussed current topics in the field of defence procurement and the defence industry.

Civilian Employees, Scotland

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians are employed by the Ministry of Defence in Scotland. [4987]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As of 1 October 1995, around 10,500 of my Department's 113,100 UK-based civilian staff were located in Scotland.

Domestic Property Sales

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service houses have been sold in each of the last 12 months; and what were the total receipts from these sales. [4978]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Sales of married quarters have historically been recorded on a quarterly basis. In the 12 months to 30 September 1995 a total of 1,062 properties were sold; 290,279,229 and 264 in each of the four quarters. The receipts from such disposals are not separately recorded and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Battlefield Identification Technology

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to develop battlefield identification friend or foe technology for use in the armed forces; and when it is estimated that such technology will be deployed. [4972]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Work to develop a battlefield identification friend or foe system to help reduce fratricide is progressing well. However, this is an extremely complex technical requirement and it is vital that any deployed system be interoperable with our allies. In order to provide a system as soon as possible, a staged approach is being adopted which will allow an interim capability to be fielded in advance of the full solution. It is estimated that an interim capability will be available in around six months.

Light Vehicle Replacement Competition

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the decision to tender for the light vehicle replacement competition was announced; which companies placed tenders for that competition; when the decision to acquire 394 light vehicles from Steyr-Daimler-Puch was taken; when the contract was awarded to Steyr-Daimler-Puch; and if he will make a statement. [4976]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The decision to put future purchases of light and medium utility trucks for the Army to competition was taken in April 1985. Invitations to tender for the competition were issued in October 1991. Land Rover, Iveco Ford and Steyr-Daimler-Puch submitted tenders. The decision to purchase 394 of the heavy duty version of the medium utility truck from Steyr-Daimler-Puch was taken and the contract placed in June 1994.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of incapacity benefit are currently exempt from the all-work test by virtue of *(a)* receipt of the highest rate of disability living allowance care component, *(b)* in receipt of invalidity benefit and aged over 58 years on 13 April, *(c)* with a serious medical condition and *(d)* with a serious mental illness. [1832]

Mr. Burt: *Pursuant to his reply of 27 November, Official Report, c.513.* The information I gave regarding the number of former invalidity benefit recipients who received benefit from 1 December 1993 and who were aged 58 or over on 13 April was incorrect. The correct information is as follows:

Reason for exemption from the all work test	*Number exempt*
Receipt of the disability living allowance highest rate care component	20,976
Receipt of invalidity benefit between 1 December 1993 and 12 April 1995 and aged 58 or over on 13 April 1995	705,000
Severe medical condition, including severe mental illness	138,828

1. Figures for severe mental illness are not separately available.
2. Figures for exempt incapacity benefit claimants who are also in receipt of widow's benefit are not held on the computer system and are not included above.
3. Information available to end of October 1995.
4. Former recipients of invalidity benefit are tested as satisfying the all work test rather than being exempt from it.
5. The number of former invalidity benefit recipients who are treated as satisfying the all work test due to receipt of invalidity benefit on 1 December 1993 and being aged 58 or over on 13 April 1995 has been estimated and rounded to the nearest 5,000. Further information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total staffing cost of the Child Support Agency during each year since 1992–93. [2219]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 7 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the staffing costs of the Child Support Agency.

The staff costs are as follows:

	£ million
1992–93	40.098
1993–94	78.761
1994–95	107.244

It is important to emphasize that comparisons between these figures are not possible for the following reasons:

1. The 1992–93 figure is a cash cost only whereas the 1993–94 and 1994–95 are on a 'full cost' basis as reported in the Agency's Accounts.

2. The 1992–93 figures cover the period before the Agency was launched and as such only include the liable relative field staff, the project staff and the first recruits into Hastings and Dudley centres. It does not include any proportion of the corporate overheads.

3. The 1993–94 figures do not include the full year costs of Plymouth and Birkenhead centres as these were not opened or fully staffed until late 1993.

4. The Agency has taken on work which was previously covered by the Lord Chancellor's Department (L.C.D.) and no comparative figures for the cost savings which have been made within this Department are available.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a month by month breakdown of the benefit savings achieved by the Child Support Agency from April 1994 until the latest month available using the same headings as in his answer of 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1499*. [3205]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 7 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about benefit savings.

The tables attached show the monthly breakdown from April 1994 to September 1995. I wrote to you in July of this year giving a breakdown of the benefit savings collected from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995. I then replied to your Question on 16 November 1995 giving updated figures to 30 September 1995.

The tables show that in 1994/95 the Agency recorded savings of £480.60 million. So far this year the Agency has recorded savings of £195.03 million, but this does not include savings from Housing Benefit and Council tax which will be calculated later in the year.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefit savings—April 1995 to September 1995 *£ million*

Category of benefit savings	*April 1995*	*May 1995*	*June 1995*	*July 1995*	*August 1995*	*September 1995*	*YTD 1995/96*
Resulting from pre–CSA assessments:							
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State	0.25	0.19	0.29	0.40	0.21	0.24	1.57
Resulting from CSA and pre–CSA assessments:							
Paid direct by absent parent to parent with care	10.67	11.19	10.83	11.08	11.19	10.74	65.69
Resulting from CSA assessments:							
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State	4.11	5.58	5.36	4.73	5.16	5.21	30.16
Deductions from Absent Parent's Income support payments	0.45	0.87	0.73	0.68	0.72	0.73	4.18
Income Support claim cessations							
Maintenance exceeds rate of benefit	0.96	0.75	0.62	0.63	0.77	0.57	4.30
Income Support claim withdrawn within four weeks of CSA action	12.82	14.35	14.85	11.51	12.40	15.06	80.99
Reductions in Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance resulting from CSA assessments	1.32	1.35	1.48	1.27	1.23	1.498.14	
Housing Benefit/Council Tax reductions resulting from CSA assessments	Calculated retrospectively at the end of the year						
Total	30.58	34.28	34.16	30.30	31.67	34.04	195.03

Benefit savings—April 1994 to March 1995 *£ million*

Category of benefit savings	*April 1994*	*May 1994*	*June 1994*	*July 1994*	*August 1994*	*September 1994*	*October 1994*	*November 1994*	*December 1994*	*January 1995*	*February 1995*	*March 1995*	*YTD 94/95*
Resulting from pre—CSA assessment:													
Paid direct by absent parent to parent with care	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.59	10.36	10.42	9.84	10.41	10.16	8.76	9.11	119.64
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State	1.25	1.10	0.99	0.94	0.71	0.68	0.47	–0.11	0.34	0.51	0.31	0.06	7.23
Resulting from CSA assessment:													
Paid direct by absent parent to parent with care	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.80	1.46	1.37	1.13	1.23	1.01	1.08	1.29	1.99	13.76

Benefit savings—April 1994 to March 1995 *£ million*

Category of benefit savings	*April 1994*	*May 1994*	*June 1994*	*July 1994*	*August 1994*	*September 1994*	*October 1994*	*November 1994*	*December 1994*	*January 1995*	*February 1995*	*March 1995*	*YTD 94/95*
Paid through Agency collection service to Secretary of State	1.78	1.82	2.36	3.08	3.43	3.75	3.53	4.30	3.88	4.52	5.85	9.6	547.94
Deductions from Absent Parent's Income support payments	0.37	0.45	0.52	0.11	0.20	0.17	0.23	0.30	0.24	0.17	0.37	0.4	63.59
Income Support claim cessations													
Maintenance exceeds rate of benefit	1.66	1.23	2.36	4.24	2.33	1.60	1.31	2.62	1.52	1.57	1.85	1.55	23.83
Income Support claim withdrawn within four weeks of CSA action	18.80	19.92	21.14	14.90	15.40	16.45	17.26	17.13	11.15	13.81	15.10	18.47	199.53
Reductions in Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance resulting from CSA assessments							monthly breakdown not available						12.84
Housing Benefit/ Council Tax resulting from CSA assessments							Monthly breakdown not available						52.25
Total	34.65	35.31	38.17	34.07	34.12	34.38	34.34	35.32	28.55	31.80	33.53	41.28	480.60

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many deduction of earning orders have been issued during 1995 by the Child Support Agency. [3520]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. John Spellar, dated 7 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Deduction from Earnings Orders.

Between April and the end of September 1995 22,066 Orders had been issued. You may be interested to know that this information is available in the Child Support Agency Statistical Information report, which is placed monthly in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Royal Mail

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what contingency plans exist to ensure the payment of benefits during industrial action at Royal Mail sorting offices. [4581]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Hutton, dated 7 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what contingency plans exist to ensure the payment of benefits during industrial action at Royal Mail sorting offices.

The Benefits Agency (BA) has long standing instructions for staff covering disruption of postal delivery and collection services.

The instructions cover the impact of postal disruption, the options for dealing with girocheques and order books issued by Area Computer Centres and North Fylde Central Office, liaison within the BA and between the BA and the Post Office, and the arrangements for local BA offices to deal with the increase in callers and telephone queries. The instructions also cover local disputes and the arrangements for customers to either collect payment from their local BA office, or where they are unable to attend the office, for payment to be delivered by local office staff.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of four-year-olds in maintained pre-school provision (i) in each local education authority and (ii) nationally at January 1995; [3998]

(2) what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of three-year-olds in maintained pre-school provision (i) in each local education authority and (ii) nationally at January 1995; [3997]

(3) what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of three and four-year-olds in maintained pre-school provision (i) in each local education authority and (ii) nationally in January 1995. [3999]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on pupils aged three and four in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in each local education authority in England in January 1995 is shown in the following table. The Department does not publish information on participation rates of individual age cohorts by local education authority.

Pupils aged three and four in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in England—January 1995 (provisional)

	Pupils (age at 31 August 1994)		*Percentage of population aged 3 and 4 at 31 December 1994*
	Age 3[1]	*Age 4*[2]	
Camden	845	4	25
Greenwich	2,229	746	48
Hackney	1,898	11	35
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,069	271	46

Pupils aged three and four in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in England—January 1995 (provisional)

	Pupils (age at 31 August 1994)		*Percentage of population aged 3 and 4 at 31 December 1994*
	Age 3[1]	*Age 4*[2]	
Islington	1,473	80	37
Kensington and Chelsea	603	153	27
Lambeth	1,603	490	31
Lewisham	1,869	612	37
Southwark	2,323	91	42
Tower Hamlets	2,456	267	58
Wandsworth	2,056	54	35
Westminster	801	187	31
Barking and Dagenham	2,046	6	46
Barnet	2,024	44	32
Bexley	1,413	6	23
Brent	2,459	17	37
Bromley	162	2	2
Croydon	1,999	12	21
Ealing	3,143	7	46
Enfield	1,620	3	22
Haringey	2,354	50	44
Harrow	1,006	3	18
Havering	464	3	9
Hillingdon	1,430	1,923	49
Hounslow	2,362	0	40
Kingston upon Thames	1,028	14	35
Merton	1,860	387	55
Newham	2,925	1,206	52
Redbridge	970	310	20
Richmond upon Thames	653	1	18
Sutton	816	1,147	41
Waltham Forest	1,738	899	39
Birmingham	10,471	17	34
Coventry	1,910	0	24
Dudley	2,626	11	37
Sandwell	3,844	136	54
Solihull	1,877	3	36
Walsall	3,505	2	59
Wolverhampton	3,175	6	54
Knowsley	2,336	23	62
Liverpool	4,941	4	46
St. Helens	1,489	3	35
Sefton	2,290	5	36
Wirral	2,156	1	26
Bolton	2,703	3	41
Bury	1,448	0	30
Manchester	5,116	1,764	54
Oldham	2,455	3	37
Rochdale	2,074	10	33
Salford	2,922	22	53
Stockport	1,972	3	27
Tameside	2,377	1	39
Trafford	2,056	30	43
Wigan	2,050	4	25
Barnsley	1,975	869	48
Doncaster	3,647	1	44
Rotherham	2,176	1,110	46
Sheffield	3,888	1,473	42
Bradford	5,142	634	44
Calderdale	1,945	1	36
Kirklees	3,985	31	40
Leeds	7,147	549	47
Wakefield	3,389	976	54
Gateshead	1,675	2	36
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,761	7	39
North Tyneside	2,306	0	55
South Tyneside	1,971	3	53
Sunderland	3,300	1	42
Avon	4,844	52	21
Bedfordshire	3,010	2,003	32
Berkshire	3,043	3,721	32
Buckinghamshire	1,785	1,201	16
Cambridge	2,174	8	12
Cheshire	4,528	75	21
Cleveland	7,179	5	60
Cornwall[3]	1,393	175	15
Cumbria	2,971	40	25
Derbyshire	6,515	2,168	38
Devon	1,998	855	12
Dorset	726	0	5
Durham	6,356	29	46
East Sussex	1,424	54	10
Essex	1,604	981	7
Gloucestershire	27	0	0
Hampshire	1,750	67	5
Hereford and Worcester	868	770	9
Hertfordshire	6,734	2,673	34
Humberside	6,343	2,308	38
Isle of Wight	150	3	7
Kent	1,853	43	5
Lancashire	7,235	24	21
Leicestershire	3,119	1,913	21
Lincolnshire	1,917	33	14
Norfolk	1,119	119	7
North Yorkshire	3,096	489	22
Northamptonshire	3,024	4	18
Northumberland	2,411	7	41
Nottinghamshire	7,807	4,995	50
Oxfordshire	1,668	1,521	19
Shropshire	1,332	669	18
Somerset	521	2	5
Staffordshire	6,602	94	25
Suffolk	1,650	1,422	17
Surrey	2,423	345	12
Warwickshire	2,109	4	17
West Sussex	828	308	7
Wiltshire	397	158	4
England[3,4]	277,376	46,064	27

[1] Includes pupils who became four years of age by 1 January 1995.

[2] Excludes pupils who became five years of age by 1 January 1995.

[3] Includes Isles of Scilly.

[4] Includes Corporation of London.

Student Accommodation

Mr. Cynog Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statutory provisions govern the responsibility of university authorities for damage done by students to student accommodation. [4311]

Mr. Forth: None. As independent bodies, universities are responsible for their own internal affairs. In the private rented sector landlords have recourse for damage caused by students through tenancy agreements and the legal system, as the would for any other renting accommodation.

Schools Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will make a statement on the local authority allocations and capital grants to *(a)* voluntary-aided and *(b)* grant-maintained schools in 1996–97; [4506]

(2) if she will give a breakdown of the capital budget for schools for 1996–97. [4505]

Mrs. Gillan: Central Government support for schools in 1996–97 is broken down as follows:

Type of school	*Capital budget £ million*
Grant-maintained schools	138
City technology colleges	2
Aided schools	61
County and controlled schools	423
Non-maintained special schools	1
Total	625

The figures do not include the capital element included within the budget for the "specialised schools" programme, which includes both capital and recurrent expenditure on specialist schools in the grant-maintained and maintained sectors, and which has been allocated £23 million in 1996–97.

Individual allocations for aided schools will be announced shortly. Allocations to grant-maintained schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools.

School Premises Regulations

Mr. Nigel Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what review has been conducted on the adequacy and operation of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 prior to the decision to modify the regulations; who was responsible for the review; what were their qualifications and experience; what was its cost; where and by what means its findings were publicised; and whom she consulted concerning its conclusions. [4492]

Mrs. Gillan: The review was announced on 2 October 1990. The terms of reference were to consider the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 in the light of changes in educational practice over the last 10 years and to review priorities in the light of these.

The review team was led by a professional architect in my Department with 22 years' experience. The team included other experienced professional advisers and senior officials from my Department, representatives of the Welsh Office and Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools, and an observer from the Scottish Office.

No separate estimate was made of the cost of the review, as distinct from my Department's other work on school organisation matters.

As required in the terms of reference of the review, its findings were reported to the Secretary of State for Education and to the Secretary of State for Wales.

A consultation letter was sent out on 25 February 1991 to local education authorities, teachers' associations, voluntary bodies and other interested organisations. A similar letter was sent to grant-maintained school governors. The Welsh Office sent their own consultation letter to LEAs and organisations in Wales. Following the announcement of the Government's intention to bring forward a revised set of Education (School Premises) Regulations, a second consultation letter was sent out on 14 July 1995 to the same range of bodies as the previous letter.

Community Action

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list all companies, by region, that have provided work placements for 50 or more unemployed people on community action programmes over the past 12 months; [4597]

(2) if she will list the companies that provide work placements to unemployed people on the community action programme, who will have their contracts reduced at the end of November, by region, indicating in each case the level of the reduction; [4601]

(3) what was the cost per unemployed person placed with the community action programme in the current financial year; [4599]

(4) how many people in each region are currently on community action programmes whose placements will be curtailed; [4603]

(5) what was the cost to public funds of the community action programme in the current financial year; [4598]

(6) what factors underlie the reduction of contracts to companies that provide work placements to unemployed people on the community action programme at the end of November 1995; [4602]

(7) if she will make a statement about the future of the community action programme; [4596]

(8) if she will list the companies that provide work placements to unemployed people on community action programme, by region, who will have their contracts withdrawn at the end of November indicating the reasons for the withdrawal of contracts; [4600]

(9) how many unemployed people are expected to be recruited onto the community action programme between 29 December 1995 and 31 March 1996. [4604]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 8 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the closure of community Action, the cost of the programme and the people and organisations affected by the closure.

Community Action is a programme of jobsearch help which is integrated with part-time work experience. It is delivered by providing organisations, chiefly in the voluntary/charitable sector through contracts with Employment Service regional offices.

Following the Budget, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced that Community Action is to close and that recruitment to the programme will cease on 29 December 1995. Whilst Community Action is a useful programme, with falling unemployment and a necessary close scrutiny of the budgets of all government Departments, it no longer represents best value for money. As part of our current strategy to tackle longer-term unemployment in a more buoyant labour market we are changing programme provision to help more long term unemployed people receive help with jobsearch.

The organisations who hold contracts to deliver Community Action are responsible for administration, delivery of the jobsearch element of the programme and also arranging work projects and placements for Community Action participants. Work projects and placements are with a wide range of voluntary/charitable organisations and these change continually. It is not therefore possible to provide a list of all organisations who have provided work placements in the last 12 months. I can, however, provide a list, by region, of all organisations who hold contracts to deliver Community Action. This is attached.

This financial year, the average cost per person taking up a place on Community Action is £1,827. The budget for the programme is £70 million and at the end of October, the latest date for which figures are available, the programme had cost £44,947,987.

At the end of October there were 12,909 people participating in Community Action. It is not our intention to terminate any of these people's participation prematurely. Indeed, we are currently working closely with providers to ensure that this is the case.

I hope this is helpful.

Region	*Organisation*	*Maximum number of places*
NORTHN	CTF	75
NORTHN	Cumbria Training Company	39
NORTHN	British Trust For Conservation Volunteers	29
NORTHN	Northern Training Trust	106
NORTHN	National Trust	39
NORTHN	Archon 2000	124
NORTHN	BOYS BRIGADE	35
NORTHN	Community Care	32
NORTHN	YMCA	30
NORTHN	SUSTRANS	35
NORTHN	Y Training	137
NORTHN	NACRO NCT	96
NORTHN	South Tyneside Churches	39
NORTHN	Community Industry	31
NORTHN	Cleveland Youth Association	85
NORTHN	CSV	87
Y and H	Atkis Ltd.	40
Y and H	Morthyng Ltd.	57
Y and H	Halifax URC Training	51
Y and H	BTCV Enterprises	38
Y and H	BTCV Enterprises	54
Y and H	Bradford Cathedral Centre Ltd.	36
Y and H	Great Grimsby Borough Council	58
Y and H	Whitby Training Centre	30
Y and H	Instant Muscle	32
Y and H	Yorkshire Rural Community Council	29
Y and H	CRA Accredited Trainers Ltd.	43
Y and H	National Trust	47
Y and H	Q-MAT Ltd.	35
Y and H	Action for Employment—Dewsbury	47
Y and H	Trainline Group Ltd.	36
Y and H	BTCV Enterprises Ltd.	30
Y and H	City Training Services	55
Y and H	The Cellar Project	42
Y and H	MYCC—Barnsley	16
Y and H	MYCC—Wakefield	30
Y and H	MYCC—Pontefract	48
Y and H	MYCC—Huddersfield	53
Y and H	Mid Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce—Dewsbury	30
Y and H	NACRO	35
Y and H	NACRO	58
Y and H	NACRO	36
Y and H	Action For Employment	61
Y and H	Action For Employment	81
Y and H	Action For Employment	79
Y and H	Action For Employment	75
Y and H	Hillsborough Community Development Trust	32
Y and H	Beverly Work Bridge Ltd.	126
Y and H	Hull College	97
Y and H	Action For Employment—Wakefield	48
Y and H	BEST Ltd.	58
EM and E	CTF Training	52
EM and E	Cambridge Training and Development	38
EM and E	Shakleton Associates	35
EM and E	Jasmire	94
EM and E	SAGAT	8
EM and E	East Midlands Training services	25
EM and E	Portals Business College	26
EM and E	Lagat Ltd.	49
EM and E	Boston Training Agency Ltd.	56
EM and E	CRA	60
EM and E	NACRO	223
EM and E	Norwich YMCA	59
EM and E	East Midlands Training Partnership	35
Em and E	Employment Training Services	35
EM and E	CTF	59
EM and E	Aintree	40
EM and E	Amber Valley	75
EM and E	Grant Met	107
EM and E	Mansfield Family Trust	70
EM and E	Bestco	85
EM and E	Dukeries Training Agency Ltd.	30
LASER	Westminster Training and Development	200
LASER	Workability	120
LASER	Training Network (Central and West London)	100
LASER	NACRO (Essex)	100
LASER	BTCV Enterprises	80
LASER	Sunnyside	40
LASER	West Sussex County Council	200
LASER	West Herts Training Consortium	140
LASER	The Training and Business Factory (South London) Ltd.	280
LASER	Training Network (North London)	100
LASER	Training Network (Chilterns)	100
LASER	Skills Training South Kent	100
LASER	SELTO	285
LASER	SEETEC	255
LASER	Scout Enterprises	300
LASER	Ridgemond Training	70
LASER	Portals	150
LASER	Oaklands College	90
LASER	NESCOT	75
LASER	National Trust (South)	128
LASER	National Trust (North)	120
LASER	NACRO (London)	120
LASER	Civic Trust	310
LASER	BBont	70
LASER	Bridge Project	120
LASER	BTCV Enterprises	203
LASER	Can Do	100
LASER	Career Ahead	100
LASER	Community Industry	145
LASER	Community Link	250
LASER	Convergence Systems	130
LASER	Crown College	100
LASER	Croyden and South London Chamber of Commerce	75
LASER	Dunstable College	130
LASER	East Kent Itec	70
LASER	East Sussex Health Authority	200
LASER	Employment Initiatives Group	130
LASER	Firmstart Medway	110
LASER	GrantMet Trust	150
LASER	GrantMet Trust Hampshire	250
LASER	GrantMet Trust Sussex and Surrey	360
LASER	Hadlow College	100
LASER	Harlow College	175
LASER	Headstart	215

Region	*Organisation*	*Maximum number of places*
LASER	Haringley Education Service Training Agency	130
LASER	Havering Group Training Association	120
LASER	Instant Muscle	335
LASER	Island Volunteers Service	80
LASER	Kilburn Skills	204
LASER	London Union of Youth Clubs	225
SW	WESTON HERITAGE CENTRE LTD.	59
SW	Ilfracombe Restoration and Training Trust	17
SW	Community Link	35
SW	Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd.	60
SW	BTCV Enterprises Ltd.	20
SW	Great Western Enterprise Ltd.	63
SW	The Civic Trust	125
SW	Instant Muscle	84
SW	Grandmet Trust	357
SW	NACRO/NCT	20
SW	Training for Employment	52
SW	Dartington Tech.	40
SW	Torridge Training Services Ltd.	30
SW	Plymouth City Council	40
SW	Community Service Volunteers	31
SW	DM Training	37
SW	Groundwork Trust	40
SW	The National Trust	170
WALES	Track 2000	20
WALES	Taff Ely Borough Council	12
WALES	Mid-Glamorgan Community Education	20
WALES	Gwent Quality Training	20
WALES	Holyhead Opportunities Trust	10
WALES	Ceredigion District Council	15
WALES	Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations	30
WALES	Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations	20
WALES	Community Studies (Deeside College)	44
WALES	Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd.	15
WALES	Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd.	30
WALES	Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd.	30
WALES	Co-Options Ltd.	9
WALES	Ynys Mon Borough Council	12
WALES	NACRO (NCT)	20
WALES	NACRO (NCT)	20
WALES	NACRO (NCT)	10
WALES	CSV Training Wales	5
WALES	CSV Training Wales	27
WALES	Aderyn	25
WALES	Community Industry	18
WALES	National Trust	7
WALES	Instant Muscle Ltd.	18
WALES	Instant Muscle Ltd.	60
WALES	Neath Borough Council Training Agency	17
WALES	Instant Muscle	20
WALES	Instant Muscle	51
WALES	Instant Muscle	18
WALES	BTCV Enterprises Ltd.	33
WALES	BTCV Enterprises Ltd.	12
WALES	BTCV Enterprises Ltd.	17
WALES	Community Industry	8
WALES	Community Industry	17
WALES	Community Industry	12
WMIDS	BTCV Enterprises	100
WMIDS	BVSC	200
WMIDS	Comex EIC	100
WMIDS	Community Industry	210
WMIDS	Employment Training in Warwickshire	40
WMIDS	Lloyds Training	45
WMIDS	Most Training	100
WMIDS	New Careers Training Shropshire	100
WMIDS	New Careers Training Staffordshire	90
WMIDS	Shropshire County Training	100
WMIDS	Staffordshire County Training	50
WMIDS	Warwickshire Bureau	50
WMIDS	Warwickshire Wildlife Trust	30
WMIDS	Worcester College of Technology	75
WMIDS	Beacon Centre for the Blind	100
NRTHWEST	Beneast Training Ltd.	547
NRTHWEST	NACRO	113
NRTHWEST	Serve Wirral Trust Co. Ltd.	70
NRTHWEST	Rathbone	90
NRTHWEST	CLEE Training	95
NRTHWEST	Wigan Metropolitan Training	90
NRTHWEST	Fazakerley and District CWP Agency	214
NRTHWEST	Grandmet Trust	180
NRTHWEST	Training Network	105
NRTHWEST	BTCV	80
NRTHWEST	Jarvis Training Management	341
NRTHWEST	Business Support Unit Ltd.	230
NRTHWEST	Beneast Training Ltd.	230
NRTHWEST	Cumbria Training Co. Ltd.	150
NRTHWEST	Sefton Council Adult Training	90
NRTHWEST	Specialised Technical Services	215
NRTHWEST	Thameside Aides and Services for the Handicapped	100
SCOT	Training Craft	45
SCOT	Community Industry	190
SCOT	Wester Hailes Management Agency	30
SCOT	Volunteer Centre	50
SCOT	Balloch Trust Enterprises Ltd.	40
SCOT	CSV	190
SCOT	Lewis Council of Social Services	6
SCOTR	Royal Zoological Society	40
SCOT	Scottish Wildlife Trust	100
SCOT	Grandmet Trust	200
SCOT	Access Partnership	50
SCOT	Wigtown Council for Voluntary Services	30
SCOT	MI Technologies Limited	425
SCOT	Galloway Training Limited	100
SCOT	Lothian Training Limited	20
SCOT	Grainshore Training Centre	10
SCOT	Caithness and Sutherland Training Trust	30
SCOT	Best Limited	50
SCOT	Ard Ross	100
SCOT	Scottish National Council of YMCAs	135
SCOT	Nevis Training Centre	30
SCOT	IMS	265
NRTHWEST	Rathbone	90
NRTHWEST	CLEE Training	95
NRTHWEST	Wigan Metropolitan Training	90
NRTHWEST	Fazakerley and District CWP Agency	214
NRTHWEST	Grandmet Trust	180
NRTHWEST	Training Network	105
NRTHWEST	BTCV	80
NRTHWEST	Jarvis Training Management	341
NRTHWEST	Business Support Unit Ltd.	230
NRTHWEST	Beneast Training Ltd.	230
NRTHWEST	Cumbria Training Co. Ltd.	150
NRTHWEST	Sefton Council Adult Training	90
NRTHWEST	Specialised Technical Services	215
NRTHWEST	Thameside Aides and Services for the Handicapped	100
SCOT	Training Craft	45
SCOT	Community Industry	190
SCOT	Wester Hailes Management Agency	30
SCOT	Volunteer Centre	50
SCOT	Balloch Trust Enterprises Ltd.	40
SCOT	CSV	190
SCOT	Lewis Council of Social Services	6
SCOTR	Royal Zoological Society	40
SCOT	Scottish Wildlife Trust	100

Region	*Organisation*	*Maximum number of places*
SCOT	Grandmet Trust	200
SCOT	Access Partnership	50
SCOT	Wigtown Council for Voluntary Services	30
SCOT	MI Technologies Limited	425
SCOT	Galloway Training Limited	100
SCOT	Lothian Training Limited	20
SCOT	Grainshore Training Centre	10
SCOT	Caithness and Sutherland Training Trust	30
SCOT	Best Limited	50
SCOT	Ard Ross	100
SCOT	Scottish National Council of YMCAs	135
SCOT	Nevis Training Centre	30
SCOT	IMS	265

Interview Travel Expenses

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consideration she has given to making payments to job applicants for travelling expenses when they travel distances across London, within the M25 area, to attend job interviews; and if she will make a statement. [4680]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 8 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about travelling expenses for job applicants travelling to attend job interviews within the M25 area.

I know it can be very difficult for unemployed people to cope with the expense of getting to interviews and the Employment Service (ES) has been running a travel to interview scheme (TIS) for a number of years now to help with this. The scheme's main aim is to encourage people who have been unemployed for four or more weeks to widen their job search. It does this by helping them with travelling costs and, if necessary, overnight accommodation costs to attend job interviews outside their usual travel to work area. A few basic conditions must be met before assistance can be granted, to ensue the scheme is properly and fairly administered and gives good value for money. In the last year the ES has used TIS to help over 51,000 applicants with travelling costs totalling £1.8 m.

One of the eligibility rules is that the job interview must be beyond normal daily travelling distance of the applicant's home area. We appreciate that it is very difficult to draw the line around what constitutes "normal" daily travelling distance but we try to be fair about this. My jobcentre managers, working to broad guidelines supplied by my Head Office are authorised to decide for this purpose, what their local labour market is. The guidance given in respect of journeys around London is either 40 miles or a journey taking more than 1 hour 20 minutes. However, each application is considered individually. Factors such as distance, costs, availability of public transport and the length of time the journey takes are all checked and where any doubt exists, discretion is advised in favour of the applicant.

The scheme has recently been reviewed and my people were aware of the problem of the high transport costs around the London area. One of the changes suggested was that special consideration should be given where particularly high transport costs were involved, and that such considerations should be left to the discretion of my District or Regional offices for the reasons given earlier. The results of the review are currently under consideration

I hope this is helpful.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date and with what terms of reference the inter-departmental working group on the firemen's pension scheme was set up; and when he now expects it to publish its report. [5026]

Mr. Sackville: The review of the firefighters' pension scheme was announced in March 1994. The review group's terms of reference require it to identify ways in which the scheme could be made more comparable to other public service schemes. I hope that it will be possible to circulate a consultation document to the fire service organisations in the not too distant future.

Mr. Abiodum Igbinidu

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now defer implementation of the directions to deport Mr. Abiodum Igbinidu. [4854]

Miss Widdecombe: Directions for Mr. Abiodum Igbinidu's removal on 9 December were deferred to 5 December, following representations made on his behalf.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Minister of State, Foreign Office, on 5 December 1995, *Official Report,* column *214,* for what reasons the letter concerning an interview of the sponsor in the United Kingdom was sent to the Foreign Office; how long it took his Department to send the letter to the Foreign Office; and what were the reasons for the delay. [4930]

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Member's letter of 6 November related to an entry clearance application which had been deferred to the Home Office for further inquiries to be made to enable the entry clearance officer to make a decision. Replies to letters in these circumstances fall to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The hon. Member's letter was received in the immigration and nationality department on 13 November and was faxed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office migration and visa correspondence unit on 1 December. I regret the delay in transferring the letter, which arose because it was not immediately recognised that it related to a deferred application.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 28 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *659* and of 4 December 1995, *Official Report,* column 22, concerning the bodies from which he *(a)* sought information or *(b)* had consultations with in respect of current asylum and immigration problems, if he will list such bodies in either category as can be given without incurring disproportionate costs. [4734]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* I have nothing to add to the answers that I gave to the hon. Member on 28 November and 4 December.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many remanded prisoners in England and Wales who did not subsequently receive custodial sentences lost their homes following their remand to prison in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [4310]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question on the numbers of remand prisoners who did not subsequently receive custodial sentences in each year since 1992 but lost their homes following their admission to prison.

The information requested is not recorded. Remand prisoners are not obliged to tell the prison authorities of difficulties in retaining accommodation and, once released, former remand prisoners are not required to maintain contact with the Prison Service or the Probation Service after release from custody.

The Prison Service's statement of principle on unconvicted prisoners, which is set out in the Prisoners' Information Book, is based on the presumption of their innocence. One of its provisions is that unconvicted prisoners will be allowed all reasonable facilities to preserve their accommodation and employment. Most prisons have staff trained in the provision of advice on housing and employment issues, and all will have a pool of such staff by next April.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current remand population broken by *(a)* ethnic background and *(b)* gender in England and Wales. [3659]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the ethnic breakdown of the current remand population.

The information is shown in the attached table.

Remand population on 31 October 1995[1] by ethnic origin and sex, England and Wales

Ethnic origin	*Total*	*Males*	*Females*
White	9,292	8,910	382
Black	1,537	1,450	87
South Asian	313	308	5
Chinese and Other Asian	139	134	5
Other/unrecorded	220	200	20
Total	11,501	11,002	499

[1] Provisional figures.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of acquitted remand prisoners, who were in employment before their period of custody, return to employment on their release. [3513]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Jim Cunningham dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question on the percentage of acquitted remand prisoners who were in employment before their period of custody and who return to employment on their release.

The information requested is not recorded. Acquitted remand prisoners are under no duty to maintain contact with the Prison Service once they are released, nor are they under the supervision of the Probation Service.

The Prison Service's statement of principle on unconvicted prisoners (which is set out in the Prisoners' Information Book) is based on the presumption of their innocence. One of its provisions is that they will be given all reasonable facilities to preserve their accommodation and employment. Most prisons have staff trained in the provision of advice on housing and employment issues, and all will have a pool of such staff by next April.

Prisoner Suicides

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prisoners and *(b)* remanded prisoners in England and Wales committed suicide in (i) 1991, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1993 and (iv) 1994. [4298]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about suicides in prisons in England and Wales.

Between 1 January 1991 and 1 December 1994 there were 191 self-inflicted deaths in prison in England and Wales. The attached table shows a breakdown of figures for each year for remand/unsentenced prisoners and sentenced prisoners.

Self-inflicted deaths[1] in England and Wales in 1991–1994: by status of prisoner

Year	*Self-inflicted deaths—all prisoners*	*Self inflicted deaths of remand/unsentenced prisoners*	*Self inflicted deaths of sentenced prisoners*
1991	42	16	26
1992	41	24	17
1993	47	26	21
1994	61	30	13

[1] The figures are for *all* self inflicted deaths which provide a more accurate representation than restriction to inquest verdicts of suicide.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the suicide rate for *(a)* sentenced prisoners and *(b)* prisoners on remand in each year since 1990. [3516]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about suicide rates in the Prison Service since 1990.

Between 1 January 1990 and 1 December 1995 there were 298 self-inflicted deaths in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. The attached table shows a breakdown of figures for each year for remand-unsentenced prisoners and sentenced prisoners.

Self inflicted deaths[1] in England and Wales 1990-1995 (as to 1 December): by status of prisoner

Year	*Self inflicted deaths of remand/unsentenced prisoners*	*Self inflicted deaths of sentenced prisoners*
1990	27	23
1991	16	26
1992	24	17
1993	26	21
1994	30	31
1995[2]	25	33

[1] Figures are provided for all self-inflicted deaths which provide a more accurate representation than restriction to inquest verdicts of suicides.

[2] As of 1 December 1995.

Child Sex Offences Abroad

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take against those who travel abroad to commit sex crimes against children. [5515]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 12 July 1995, *Official Report*, column 600, that he would urgently examine the law of incitement and conspiracy. As a result of that examination, the Government propose, subject to a suitable legislative opportunity being found, to extend the scope of the law of incitement and conspiracy. This extension would bring within the jurisdiction of the courts those who incite others or who conspire to commit sexual offences against children abroad.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to prohibit the sale of electoral registers; and if he will make a statement. [4483]

Mr. Sackville: No; the electoral register is a public document, and it would not be practicable to restrict its availability to electoral purposes only.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to prevent the commercial use of the film from CCTV cameras without the permission of those being filmed. [3492]

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) on 5 December 1995, *Offiical Report* column 207.

Prison Population

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England and Wales are currently serving *(a)* less than 12 months, *(b)* 12 months to three years, *(c)* three to four years, *(d)* four to 10 years, *(e)* 10 years or more and *(f)* life, broken down by (i) ethnic background and (ii) gender. [3660]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the ethnic breakdown of the current prison population, according to length of sentence and gender.

The information is shown in the attached table.

Sentenced prison population on 31 October 1995[1] by ethnic origin, sex and sentence length *England and Wales*

Sentence length	*Total*	*White*	*Black*	*South Asian*	*Chinese and other Asian*	*Other/unrecorded*
Males						
Less than 12 months	6,533	5,828	446	152	53	54
12 months to less than 3 years	10,653	9,256	921	275	108	93
3 years to less than 4 years	3,992	3,304	500	116	30	42
4 years to less than 10 years	11,077	8,613	1,746	385	145	188
10 years to less than life	2,575	1,954	410	97	36	78
Life	3,145	2,724	242	117	30	32
Fine defaulters	395	359	25	7	1	3
Total	38,370	32,038	4,290	1,149	403	490
Females						
Less than 12 months	343	294	37	2	1	9
12 months to less than 3 years	452	373	66	1	4	8
3 years to less than 4 years	133	90	37	2	0	4
4 years to less than 10 years	360	218	119	5	6	12
10 years to less than life	76	36	32	4	0	4
Life	117	99	7	6	0	5
Fine defaulters	19	17	2	0	0	0
Total	1,500	1,127	300	20	11	42

[1] Provisional figures.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current sentenced prison population broken down by (i) ethnic background and (ii) gender in England and Wales. [3658]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 8 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the ethnic breakdown of the current sentenced prison population.

The information is shown in the table attached.

Sentenced population[1] on 31 October 1995[2] by ethnic origin and sex

England and Wales

Ethnic origin	*Total*	*Males*	*Females*
White	33,165	32,038	1,127
Black	4,590	4,290	300
South Asian	1,169	1,149	20
Chinese and other Asian	414	403	11
Other/unrecorded	532	490	42
Total	39,870	38,370	1,500

[1] Including fine defaulters.

[2] Provisional figures.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 December 1995

HOUSE OF COMMONS

HMSO (Privatisation)

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what consideration the House of Commons Commission has given to the possible safeguards that might be required to protect the future provision of printing services to Parliament in the event of the privatisation of HMSO. [4901]

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* After careful considering of the possible safeguards that might be required to protect the future provision of printing services to Parliament in the event of privatisation of HMSO, the Commission agreed to the following reply which Madam Speaker has sent to the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons:

You wrote to me on 19 September to notify me of the Government's plan to privatise Her Majesty's Stationery Office, and to ask me what safeguards might be required to enable the House to continue its agreement with HMSO after privatisation. Before sending this reply, I have, as you know, consulted the Finance and Services Committee and my colleagues on the House of Commons Commission. We have also taken the advice of the House officials most directly concerned.

Although the services of HMSO are important throughout the public sector, they are of particularly vital significance to the House of Commons. Unlike Government Departments and agencies, the House places continuous daily demands on HMSO's printing services whenever it is in session. The timely production of the Order Paper, Hansard, bills and other documents—to very tight timetables and generally overnight—is essential to the transaction of parliamentary business: without the necessary documents, the House and its committees simply could not function.

Against this background, you will understand that I and my fellow Commissioners have concerns about the possible consequences, both short and long-term, of privatising a public sector organisation which has, in general, given good and reliable service to the House for most of this century. Our principal concerns, and the safeguards which we think necessary to meet them, may be summarised as follows:

(i) For some time to come the House will continue to be dependent on the Parliamentary Press in South London, with its trained and experienced staff, to ensure the overnight printing of documents to the timetables and standards which we have come to expect. This is a costly facility, and there must be some anxiety that a private sector owner would be tempted to experiment with cheaper methods for providing the service, not appreciating the unpredictability of the House's requirements and the large variations in parliamentary workload that can be experienced from one year (and even one week) to the next. We would therefore be seeking an absolute guarantee that the overnight production facilities in inner London will be retained for as long as the House continues to consider them necessary.

(ii) Staff of the House (the Editorial Supervisor of the Vote and his team) currently work alongside HMSO employees in the overnight compilation and preparation of the Vote Bundle. We would need a guarantee that adequate space and facilities in the Parliamentary Press will continue to be made available to those staff for as long as the House requires.

(iii) The House's documents and the procedural rules which underpin them, are complex. HMSO staff and management acquire experience and knowledge of those complexities as they progress from job to job in the organisation; and they are brought up in the tradition that in all circumstances the requirements of Parliament are paramount. We are concerned that a private company might seek to economise by employing less experienced staff or by appointing new managers who would not have the same appreciation of the House's needs. We would therefore be looking for an assurance that there will be substantial continuity in the staffing and management of the relevant sections of HMSO after privatisation, and adequate training for any new staff.

(iv) For similar reasons we seek an assurance of prior consultation with the House before any significant changes are made in the management or organisation of HMSO's directorate of Parliamentary and Statutory Publishing.

(v) At present, as an Agency, HMSO is under ministerial oversight and a minister is ultimately answerable to the House in the event of a failure in its services. After privatisation, that line of accountability will be broken. The House authorities will be responsible or contracting with the privatised company for the provision of printing and publishing services, but will not be in a position to account directly for a failure on the company's part to meet the requirements of the contract. We therefore think it essential that there should be an identified individual within the privatised Stationery Office who is responsible for the contract with the House and acknowledges an obligation to account to the authorities and committees of the House on all aspects of the service being provided.

(vi) The House has negotiated, and with the Commission's approval is on the point of concluding, a new Supply and Service Agreement (SSA) with HMSO. This agreement provides for a detailed specification of service standards, delivery schedules and related technical details. These specifications should, at least, maintain existing standards, and no attempt should be made to water them down after privatisation, without agreement with the House authorities.

(vii) Similarly, we consider that any prospective purchaser of the Stationery Office should be required to accept the agreed principles which are set out in the SSA, particularly so far as they concern the rights of the House to regulate the production and reproduction of its documents, both in paper and electronic form.

(viii) The first annual financial settlement under the new SSA will come into effect on 1 January 1996. Among other things, it provides for substantial reductions in the sale price of many House publications, including Hansard. This is an objective to which I, and many Members of the House, have attached great importance for some time; and it has been achieved without any significant increase in the payments to be made to HMSO by the House. Further improvements should follow from increasing use of new technology. Any prospective purchaser of HMSO should therefore be required to guarantee that it will not seek any increase (in real terms) in the charges paid by the House or the level of prices to the public above those negotiated for 1996, and that the House will be credited with a proportionate share of future savings arising from technological advances.

Roger Freeman's press statement on 27 September indicated that the Government's decision to privatise HMSO was conditional on satisfactory arrangements being made for the future provision of services to Parliament. Before deciding whether or not that criterion has been met, the Commission will need to be assured that the safeguards and guarantees which I have outlined in this letter are capable of being enforced, not just in the immediate aftermath of privatisation but over the longer term. In that connection we are particularly concerned at the possibility that an initial purchaser might subsequently wish to break up the business by partial sales. Fragmentation of the organisation, or sale to an overseas buyer, could pose serious, and perhaps unacceptable, problems for the House. We would like to know what mechanisms the Government proposes to guard against that possibility.

Assuming the Commission and the House can be satisfied on these points, it will be necessary to convert the SSA and the new safeguards, together with the service specifications and the settlement on prices and charges, into formal contracts which will take effect on privatisation. This is a complex and exacting task for the small team of House officials involved, and professional and legal support will probably be required. Every effort will be made to progress this work in accordance with the Government's programme for the sale, which I understand is aimed at completion in July next year; but we cannot at this stage be at all confident that it will be possible to resolve all the issues before that deadline. We therefore request that, if it proves to be necessary, the Government's timetable for the sale of HMSO, should be adapted to the progress of preparatory work, rather than the other way round.

In this letter, I have set out the views of the Commission, which has statutory responsibility for the House's services. But we also agreed that the House as a whole should be given an early opportunity to express its opinion on the Government's proposals. That debate might best be based on a prior ministerial statement. I am therefore copying this letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. A copy goes also to the Lord Chairman of Committees in the House of Lords.

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what consideration his Committee has given to the implications for the House of privatisation of HMSO. [5254]

Mr. Channon: The Finance and Services Committee considered the matter raised by the right hon. Gentleman during its deliberation on a new supply and service agreement with HMSO. The Committee's recommendations have been put before the House of Commons Commission which is giving the matter urgent consideration.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3962]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: *(a)* This information has not been held centrally, and figures for the years before 1992–93 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. On the best information currently available, for the years 1992 to 1995 the following numbers of external consultants have won contracts, with the total spend on external consultancy as specified:

	1992–3	*1993–4*	*1994–5*
Numbers of consultants	34	63	69
Total spend	£1.2 million	£1.4 million	£1.5 million

(b) The answer to this question could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Department.

(c) Copies of the civil service staff post summary tables from 1990 to 1995 can be found in the House Libraries and numbers of individuals employed by the Department may be found therein.

The purpose of each individual's employment is to assist the Department to attain its aims and objectives, as set out in the departmental report, which also details the relevant costs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chechnya

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission in Chechnya. [4961]

Mr. David Davis: The OSCE assistance group continues to operate in Chechnya. We receive regular reports on its activities from the OSCE. It continues to play a valuable role in promoting a peaceful settlement to the conflict, and has our full support in this work.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress on the establishment of a peacekeeping force for Nagorno-Karabakh under OSCE auspices. [4960]

Mr. David Davis: The Budapest ministerial conference of the OSCE—7 to 8 December—decided that the signing of a political agreement on cessation of the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh would enable the OSCE permanent council to take a decision on the establishment of the OSCE peacekeeping operation. The co-chairman of the Minsk group reported to the conference that the parties to the conflict have declared their commitment to continue respecting the ceasefire, and to establish direct contacts to achieve agreement on the principles governing the resolution of the conflict.

A high-level planning group has produced an initial report on the technical aspects of a peacekeeping operation and will make further recommendations.

Burma

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline *(a)* his Department's position in relation to trade with Burma and *(b)* that of other EU members; and if he will make a statement. [4774]

Mr. Hanley: There is no obstacle to United kingdom firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union arms embargo. I set out to the House in some detail on July 19 the Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, *Official Report,* columns *1638–45.*

We regularly discuss policy towards Burma with our EU partners, but do not have details of their policy on trade.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has received regarding the use of forced labour in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [4776]

Mr. Hanley: We have received representations about human rights abuses in Burma, including the use of forced labour, from a wide variety of sources including Church groups, non-governmental organisations and members of the public.

Officials have consistently expressed our concern about the use of forced labour in Burma, both in international forums and directly to the ruling military regime, the State Law and Order Restoration Council. We will continue to do so.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has provided in the last three years to United Kingdom companies interested in trade with Burma, or in operating in Burma; what is the cost of this assistance; and if he will make a statement. [4775]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade today.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have been held in detention on St. Helena as a result of allegations of non-payment of debts; how long they were held before their cases were heard in court; and what sentence they received. [4871]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The power of arrest arises only where an alleged debtor is about to leave St. Helena and has failed to furnish security for his appearance before a court. In the one instance during the last five years when the power was exercised, the alleged debtor was held for three hours and five minutes and was released on security being given. No question of sentence arises in such cases.

TRANSPORT

InterCity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the Director General of Passenger Rail Franchising in relation to preservation of InterCity services west of Cardiff in the event of a franchise grant to the BR Western Region management and First Bus consortium. [5416]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions with the franchising director. The franchising director has specified those InterCity services west of Cardiff which, in his opinion, needed to be protected in the Great Western passenger service requirement. The franchise operator will be contractually obliged to provide these services. InterCity services west of Cardiff are also provided by Cross Country and will be included in the PSR for that franchise when it is developed in due course.

Railways

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to revise the objectives, instructions and guidance issued to the franchising director under section 5 of the Railways Act 1993. [5434]

Sir George Young: I am today writing to the franchising director amplifying his instructions in relation to risk sharing in franchise agreements, the funding of services in passenger transport executive areas and the provision of concessionary travel for railway employees. I am placing a copy of my letter in the Library.

Tourism Signposting

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for liberalising tourism signposting. [5656]

Mr. Watts: We shall be laying a statutory instrument tomorrow to amend the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994 as they apply in England, Wales and Scotland.

EU Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5075]

Mr. Watts: It is the policy in my Department to ensure that we do not gold-plate European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in light of this policy.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Andrew Smith: To as the Secretary of State for Transport what are the reasons for the difference between the figures for the effects of privatisation on the national railways' external financial limits in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 in his Department's press notice No. 380 of 28 November and by the equivalent figures in table 2 of "Transport Report 1995"; and if he will provide an equivalent figure for 1998–99. [5194]

Mr. Watts: The figures for the effects of privatisation given in both publications referred to are the same, except in 1996–97 where rounding in the press notice to the nearest £10 million accounts for the small difference between the figures. A figure for 1998–99 is not yet available.

A419

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To as the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the award of the contracts for the A419 Latton bypass and the A417 Cirencester/Stratton bypass. [4838]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated 11 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, when he expects to announce the award of the contracts for the A419 Latton Bypass and the A417 Cirencester/Stratton Bypass.

As announced in Managing the Roads Programme published on 28 November, we have shortlisted bidders for the first four Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) projects, one of which embraces the Latton and Cirencester/Stratton Bypass schemes. Negotiations are continuing and we now expect to announce the award of the DBFO contract in the new year.

M1 (Fatal Accidents)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* non-fatal and *(b)* fatal accidents took place at each junction section of the M1 from London up to junction 29 for each of the last three years; how many took place *(a)* in daylight and *(b)* in darkness; and if he will make a statement. [3200]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Irvine Patnick, dated 11 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, how many (a) non-fatal and (b) fatal accidents took place at each junction section of the M1 from London up to Junction 29 for each of the last three years; how many took place (a) in daylight and (b) in darkness; and if he will make a statement.

The Highways Agency is committed to contributing to the Government's target of reducing road casualties by one third by the year 2000 when compared with the average for the UK between 1981 and 1985. Although motorway traffic doubled between that baseline and 1994, casualty numbers increased by 73%, while the number of fatalities fell by 30%. The overall accident rate on motorways reduced from 0.13 to 0.11 personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres.

The information you require is shown on the attached table.

Junction section	*Accidents 1992*				*Accidents 1993*				*Accidents 1994*			
	Daylight	*Darkness*	*Fatal*	*Non fatal*	*Daylight*	*Darkness*	*Fatal*	*Non fatal*	*Daylight*	*Darkness*	*Fatal*	*Non fatal*
Junction 1–2	6	5	0	11	4	2	0	6	6	1	0	7
Junction 2–3	11	6	0	17	5	3	0	18	6	3	0	11
Junction 3–4	9	4	0	13	8	6	1	13	11	5	1	15
Junction 4–5	21	16	1	36	14	5	0	19	11	5	0	16
Junction 5–6	9	2	0	11	9	4	0	13	18	6	2	22
Junction 6–6a	2	1	0	3	3	2	0	5	5	0	0	5
Junction 6a–7	14	9	0	23	29	7	1	35	22	12	2	32
Junction 7–8	9	3	0	12	7	4	0	11	6	2	0	8
Junction 8–9	45	13	2	56	41	18	3	56	52	18	2	68
Junction 9–10	25	[illegible]	0	30	57	6	2	61	18	9	1	26
Junction 10–11	21	[illegible]	2	24	13	4	0	17	12	7	1	18
Junction 11–12	24	12	0	36	20	9	1	28	15	5	0	20
Junction 12–13	19	10	3	26	16	10	0	28	18	10	1	25
Junction 13–14	21	10	0	31	19	3	0	22	15	4	0	19
Junction 14–15	19	15	3	31	18	8	1	25	18	14	0	32
Junction 15–15a	12	4	0	16	11	0	1	10	10	4	0	14
Junction 15a–16	5	2	0	7	8	1	1	8	10	3	0	13
Junction 16–17	26	12	0	38	38	10	1	47	31	17	2	46
Junction 17–18	5	4	0	9	5	2	0	7	2	5	0	7
Junction 18–19	10	8	0	18	18	18	0	36	10	3	0	13
Junction 19–20	6	0	0	6	6	4	0	10	5	3	0	8
Junction 20–21	13	9	2	20	18	6	1	23	13	8	0	21
Junction 21–22	13	5	0	18	31	7	2	36	13	11	0	24
Junction 22–23	8	4	1	11	14	4	0	18	18	7	1	24
Junction 23–23a	5	5	1	9	4	5	0	9	7	3	0	10
Junction 23a–24	7	5	1	11	2	2	0	4	4	3	0	7
Junction												

Junction section	Accidents 1992				Accidents 1993				Accidents 1994			
	Daylight	Darkness	Fatal	Non fatal	Daylight	Darkness	Fatal	Non fatal	Daylight	Darkness	Fatal	Non fatal
24–25 Junction	7	3	0	10	11	4	1	14	13	4	0	17
25–26 Junction	13	6	2	17	16	5	0	21	22	11	0	33
26–27 Junction	11	4	0	15	17	9	0	26	14	4	0	18
27–28 Junction	12	4	0	16	12	9	1	20	11	4	0	15
28–29	28	6	2	32	44	9	1	52	40	12	0	52

Rail Franchising

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) at what point in the franchising process a comparison of the costs of the preferred bidders against those of British Rail is to be considered for each of the first three train operating companies; [4974]

(2) if he will publish the comparative costs of services under *(a)* the preferred bidder and *(b)* British Rail for the first three train operating companies to be franchised; [4931]

(3) if he will make a statement on the costs using the preferred bidder for each of the first three train operating companies, relative to the costs of continuing the service under British Rail. [4973]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* Until franchise negotiations are complete information about the preferred bids is commercially confidential. The franchising director will award franchises to the bidders that offer the best overall value for money in terms of services for passengers and costs to taxpayers. He makes comparisons of the costs of preferred bidders against those of British Rail throughout the bidding process as these are an essential component of his value-for-money judgement.

For the funding of the British Rail train operating companies in 1995–96, I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 13 July to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), *Official Report,* column *706.* I will write to the hon. Member shortly on the level of support appropriate to each train operating company that has been agreed between the franchising director and the British Railways Board, and will place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

The franchising director expects to publish subsidy figures for the first three franchisees in the franchising director's register in due course; although, under section 73 of the Railways Act 1993, information may be withheld at the discretion of the Secretary of State or the franchising director if disclosure would be against the public interest or the commercial interests of franchisees.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Challenge

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make an announcement of successful regional challenge projects, and if he will make a statement. [5468]

Mr. Eggar: I am today announcing the successful regional challenge projects in England which will receive grant totalling £140 million towards projects costing almost £800 million.

Regional challenge is designed to enhance local partnerships, stimulate innovative local development and maximise the contribution of the private sector. The projects announced today will bring a new dynamism and efficiency to local economies across England. Local firms will play a major role in projects ranging from industrial and transport infrastructure, tourism, research and development and environmental improvement to training and job creation.

I am particularly encouraged by the wide range of local bodies that have been involved in the development of regional challenge projects. The competition has encouraged the far greater involvement of the private sector. This involvement is clearly reflected in its contributions to projects which account for almost half the total costs of the winning projects, and have added considerably to quality and value for money. The value of the dialogue between the public and private sectors about what is needed in local communities is shown by the type of projects that have been put forward.

Regional challenge projects are typically larger in scale, more comprehensive in their effect, and better address the specific needs of local communities. This culture of co-operation will benefit not only today's winners. I hope that, as with previous competitions, many of the partnerships brought together by regional challenge will go ahead with part or all of their projects, even though they are not winners, thus spreading the benefits of the challenge even wider.

A list of winning projects is set out:

1 Lairdside (Birkenhead)

2 New Media Factory (Liverpool)

3 Eurogateway (Bootle)

4 Cornwall and Devon tourism development

5 Rural area training and information opportunities (Cornwall and Devon)

6 Swaffham eco-tech centre

7 Action to support planning investment for regeneration and enterprise

8 Networking Business and the community (Hereford and Worcester, Shropshire)

9 Whitby beacon

10 Hills of the North (Cumbria)

11 Lincolnshire access network

12 Adams Building (Nottingham)

13 Pumping life back into the Coalfield community (Broughton)

14 The Great Northern and Lowly Project (Manchester and Salford)

15 China Gateway North West (Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire)

16 North West Business Excellence Initiative (Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire)

17 Integrated Waste Management (Sheffield)

18 Technology Challenge (Yorkshire and Humberside)

19 Earth Centre (Dearne Valley)

20 The year of the electronic Image (Yorkshire and Humberside)

21 South Humber Bank Industrial and Technological Regeneration (Cleethorpes)

22 European centre for advanced industries (North Shields)

23 Teeside Innovation Partnership (Teeside)

24 Raising Regional competitiveness (Tyne and Wear, Northumberland, Co. Durham and Cleveland)

25 International centre for life (Newcastle)

26 Trent Challenge (Rugely and Armitage with Hansacre)

27 Renaissance Canal (area wide)

28 Creating a World Class Supplier Base (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley)

29 Starting with a competitive advantage (Coventry)

30 Digital City of Stoke on Trent (Stoke on Trent)

31 West Midlands Interactive Technology Centre (Coalbrookdale, Telford)

32 East London and Lee Valley Teleregion

33 Manufacturing—a new future for East London (Tower Hamlets)

34 Robin Hood Regeneration Corridor.

Burma

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department has provided in the last three years to United Kingdom companies interested in trading with Burma, or doing business there; what is the cost of this assistance; and if he will make a statement. [4769]

Mr. Nelson: Over the last three years, no financial assistance has been given to United Kingdom companies interested in trading with Burma. Our assistance has been limited to providing advice and information concerning the commercial, economic and political developments in the country via officials both in Rangoon and London. The cost of this assistance is not held on a central database and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, was fully set out in the speech by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), on 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1641–45. There is no obstacle to UK firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union embargo.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received regarding the use of forced labour in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [4772]

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes, today.

The Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, was fully set out in the speech by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1641–45. There is no obstacle to UK firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union embargo.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance was offered by his Department to *(a)* the South of England Exports Association British trade mission to Singapore and Brunei, with the option to visit Myanmar, which took place on 4 to 12 November and *(b)* the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry seminar "An Introduction to Burma", which took place on 5 December; what was the cost of this assistance in each case; and if he will make a statement. [4770]

Mr. Nelson: *(a)* The DTI travel grant for Singapore and Brunei is £666 per eligible company. The South of England Exports Association was not offered any financial assistance to visit Burma and would have undertaken this leg of its planned visit as an unsupported option. In the event, the mission was cancelled due to lack of support.

(b) Delegates who attended the trade awareness seminar "An Introduction to Burma" at the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry—LCCI—on 5 December were charged a fee of £60 for non-LCCI members and £45 for members, including VAT. An exact breakdown of the costs incurred is not available so soon after the event, but we expect to recoup the costs from the amount taken in attendance fees.

The Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, was fully set out in the speech by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 19 July, *Official Report*, columns 1641–45. There is no obstacle to UK firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union embargo.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in relation to *(a)* trade with Burma, and *(b)* United Kingdom companies operating in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [4768]

Mr. Nelson: The Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, was fully set out in the speech by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 19 July, *Official Report*, columns 1641–45. There is no obstacle to UK firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union embargo.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to organise a trade mission to Burma in 1996; what assistance will be offered to United Kingdom companies attending; and if he will make a statement. [4771]

Mr. Nelson: We propose to organise a trade mission to Burma next February and will be providing financial assistance to a maximum of 20 eligible United Kingdom companies, in the form of a travel grant of £1,000, towards the cost of the visit.

The Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, was full set out in the speech by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 19 July, *Official Report,* columns 1641-45. There is no obstacle to UK firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union embargo.

Nuclear Site Licensing

Mr. Home Roberston: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will instruct the Health and Safety Executive to send its consultation documents on changes to nuclear site licences arising from the privatisation of the nuclear industry to hon. Members with nuclear power stations in their constituencies; and if he will extend the consultation period. [4872]

Mr. Eggar: It is for the Health and Safety Executive, as the independent regulator of the nuclear industry, to specify those public bodies to whom applicants must provide details of licence applications and to decide on whether or not to extend the statutory consultation period.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to regulate firms providing grant information to small firms. [5256]

Mr. Page: There are no plans to regulate such businesses.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department is taking to promote the use of renewable sources of energy in the business community. [4711]

Mr. Page: The Government are stimulating the development of new and renewable energy sources and industrial and market infrastructure through a market enablement strategy. The strategy was published as "Energy Paper 62" in March 1994. The strategy's principal measure involves stimulating an initial market for electricity-producing technologies close to commercial competitiveness via renewables orders made under the non-fossil fuel obligation—NFFO.

As I announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) on 2 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns *441–42,* the proposals for a fourth NFFO order for England and Wales for a further 400 to 500 MW of contracts for renewables-generated electricity.

Other measures are aimed at assessing and developing technology options in collaboration with industry, ensuring that the market is fully informed, removing inappropriate market barriers and encouraging international competitive industries to develop.

Specific actions under the new and renewable energy programme to date have included support for 11 studies undertaken with regional electricity companies and local authorities which identify the local availability of renewable resources; work with the financial community to promote the availability of suitable investment funds; and support for studies aimed at evaluating the prospects for retail sales of renewable electricity. Another measure funded under the DTI's new and renewable energy programme is the energy design advice scheme—EDAS—which aims to improve the energy and environmental performance of the building stock in both commercial and residential sectors, through the provision of specialised low-energy building expertise to building designers and their clients.

My Department also publishes, through the energy technology support unit, a wide range of literature on renewable energy and operates an inquiries bureau for businesses, local authorities and the general public.

The Government intend to work, through the NFFO and taking account of those factors which influence business competitiveness, towards a figure of 1500 MW DNC of new electricity generating capacity from renewable energy sources for the United Kingdom as a whole by 2000.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Government-funded research projects are currently engaged on the development of renewable sources of energy. [4712]

Mr. Page: My Department is currently supporting 358 research projects under the new and renewable energy programme.

Energy Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposal the United Kingdom intends to put to the EU Energy Council in Brussels on 14 December on ways to alleviate fuel poverty within the framework of the draft EU White Paper on energy policy. [4946]

Mr. Page: The EU White Paper on energy policy will be presented by the Commission for the first time at the Energy Council on 14 December. Therefore the United Kingdom will not be in a position to make any proposals within its framework until its contents have been thoroughly considered.

British Coal Pumping Stations

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the British Coal pumping stations which closed between 1965 and privatisation in the City of Durham constituency; and which closures after that date have been notified to his Department [5130]

Mr. Page: The first part of the hon. Member's question is a matter for the British Coal Corporation and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member. I understand from the Coal Authority that the nine pumping stations in County Durham transferred to the authority on 31 October 1994 are all still being operated. There was and is no requirement for my Department to be notified in such cases.

London Electricity

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance is being provided from public funds to London Electricity to transfer its customer operations functions out of London. [4786]

Mr. Page: I understand that London Electricity is transferring part of its customer operations functions to Doxford park in the Sunderland enterprise zone. As with any other company moving into an enterprise zone, the company will be eligible for capital allowances, and be exempt from the national non-domestic rate for the remainder of the life of the enterprise zone. No direct grants are being made to London Electricity from central Government.

Business Link Services Guide

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what definition of the personal business adviser service has been drawn up by the small firms and business link division; and if he will publish the guidelines that have been issued on the service. [4825]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* A detailed definition of the business link personal business adviser service, including a model job description, is included in the "Business Link Services Guide", section C 25–36, which was published on 31 October 1995.

A copy of the services guide is available in the Library of the House.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4268]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* There have been no recorded incidents of Minister's mobile telephones being cloned within the last 18 months or prior to that period. Ministers in my Department are issued with digital mobile telephones which are inherently more difficult to clone than their analogue counterparts.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery (Under-age Purchasing)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to eliminate the sale of national lottery tickets to under-age children. [4719]

Mr. Sproat: Last week I welcomed the announcement made by the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulatory matters, about the new action designed to stamp out under-age lottery sales. I am also holding discussions with the police, the Home Office and other parties about the enforcement of the law governing the sale of tickets to under-16-year-olds.

National Lottery

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her circular letter to Members about the national lottery dated 10 November, reference C95/10129, if she will place in the Library *(a)* on paper and *(b)* on computer disk in a spreadsheet format compatible with the Library's computer information about each of the awards made from the good causes fund to date indicating in each case (i) the nature of the activity supported, (ii) the amount of money granted, (iii) the distributing body making the award and (iv) the parliamentary constituency in which the recipient body's headquarters is based. [4537]

Mr. Sproat: My Department already produces a monthly report of the distribution of lottery proceeds. Included in this report are financial details of the awards made each month and the total since the lottery began, for each distributor and by region of the United Kingdom. Copies of this report are placed in the Libraries of the House.

SCOTLAND

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5071]

Mr. Kynoch: It is the policy in the Scottish Office to ensure that we do not gold-plate European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in light of this policy.

Nuclear Site Licensing

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct the Health and Safety Executive to send its consultation documents on changes to nuclear site licences arising from the privatisation of the nuclear industry to hon. Members with nuclear power stations in their constituencies; and if he will extend the consultation period. [4992]

Mr. Kynoch: No.

Water Authorities

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who are the chairman, chief executive and members of each of the new water authorities; and what are their correspondence addresses. [4456]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The names of each of the chairmen, chief executives and members of the new water authorities and their correspondence addresses are as follows:

North of Scotland Water Authority—Mr. J. Robertson (Chairman), Mr. A. Findlay (Chief Executive), Mr. D. Addly, Councillor R. Bissett, Councillor J. Easten, Councillor N. Graham, Mr. A. Lewis, Mr. A. MacCallum, Councillor O. Macdonald, Mr. N. McAndrew, Councillor D. Nicholson, Mr. D. Paton. Correspondence should be addressed to: North of Scotland Water Authority, Caledonia House, 63 Academy Street, Inverness, IV1 1LU.

East of Scotland Water Authority—Dr. I. Preston (Chairman), Mr. R. Rennet (Chief Executive), Mr. D. Barlow, Mr. R. Bell, Councillor I. Berry, Councillor Ian Galloway, Councillor A. Dickson, Councillor T. Kerr, Councillor P. McCafferty, Mr. H. O'Hanlon, Sir Francis McWilliams, Mr. R. Summers. Correspondence should be addressed to: East of Scotland Water Authority, 27 Perth Street, Edinburgh, EH3 5RB.

West of Scotland Water Authority—Mr. J. Jameson (Chairman), Mr. E. Chambers (Chief Executive, Mr. N. Berry, Councillor M. Bryson, Sir Robert Easton, Mr. J. Goodwin, Mr. D. Gray, Mr. P. Kennedy, Councillor W. Petrie, Councillor R. Reid, Provost L. Rosin, Councillor I. Young. Correspondence should be addressed to: West of Scotland Water Authority, 419 Balmore Road Glasgow, G22 6NU.

Departmental Inquiry Line

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of the calls made to the Scottish Office inquiry line since its establishment were on matters on which his Department *(a)* was competent and *(b)* not competent to deal with. [4452]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* This information is not recorded but the inquiry officers consider that the majority of calls relate to matters for which the Scottish Office is responsible.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement indicating for each calendar month since its establishment the number of calls made to the Scottish Office inquiry line and how many of these calls have been *(a)* interactive and *(b)* non-interactive. [4434]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The numbers of calls received are:

Year	*Number*
1993	
October	797
November	835
December	357
1994	
January	211
February	239
March	199
April	220
May	308
June	315
July	305
August	341
September	334
October	372
November	396
December	354
1995	
January	276
February	346
March	348
April	317
May	257
June	159
July	199
August	276
September	343
October	293
November	[1]337

[1] To 24 November.

Information on types of calls is not recorded.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much in total it has cost his Department to establish, publicise and operate the Scottish Office inquiry line; and what are the annual costs of this service. [4451]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Scotland on 18 April 1995, *Official Report*, columns *79–80.*

Fisheries Research Vessel

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the signing of a contract for the construction of a fisheries research vessel; and if he will make a statement. [4555]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* I still expect to reach a decision on the tenders by 31 December 1995. I shall notify the hon. Member of my decision.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

International Development Association

27. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in relation to the replenishment of IDA11. [3310]

Mr. Hanley: We are working to ensure a satisfactory outcome to the negotiations on the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association and to enhance IDA's effectiveness by strengthening its focus on poverty reduction, sound economic management and sustainable development.

International Labour Migration

32. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of United Kingdom bilateral aid on international labour migration. [3317]

Mr. Hanley: The effects of United Kingdom bilateral aid cannot be assessed separately from other factors affecting international labour migration. ODA seeks to help people in aid recipient countries to improve their lives, but accepts that any influence on their decisions to migrate will be modest.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place and with whom as to medical and food aid to Sri Lanka during the present conflict. [3314]

Mr. Hanley: We are in frequent contact with the Government of Sri Lanka and relief agencies about the provision of emergency assistance, including medical and food aid needs, to those affected by the present conflict in the north.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Materials (Exports)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Prime Minister what changes have been made in the guideline for the export of nuclear materials, equipment and technology by the United Kingdom beyond the measures set out in his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) of 13 January 1993, *Official Report*, column *745*. [5393]

The Prime Minister: The guidelines for the export of nuclear materials, equipment, and technology by the United Kingdom remain the same with one exception. The guidelines of the nuclear suppliers' group, of which the UK is a member, will, in exceptional cases, allow such exports to non-nuclear weapon states without full scope safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Authority, where they are deemed essential to the safe operation of existing facilities and if IAEA safeguards are applied to these facilities.

The NSG has also adopted guidelines for the transfer of nuclear-related dual-use material, equipment and technology. These exports are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Departmental Transfers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received concerning the transfer of *(a)* personnel and *(b)* responsibilities from Government Departments to Scotland; and what plans he has to make such a transfer. [5096]

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any recent representations on this topic. My right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for Scotland have, however, recently received representations from Grampian regional council and the City of Aberdeen district council about the scope for transferring to Aberdeen additional jobs in the Department of Trade and Industry's oil and gas division. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy will be meeting representatives of the councils shortly to discuss this issue.

Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to hold consultations with other Prime Ministers of those countries where Her Majesty the Queen is Head of State about the future role and duties of the Princess of Wales. [4867]

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future role and duties of the Princess of Wales. [4841]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the statement I made on 9 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *845*.

Nigeria

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what action he has taken following the disclosure of normally confidential information to the media of information concerning the application by Mr. Abiodum Igbindu, for political asylum in the United Kingdom. [4853]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) on 5 December, *Official Report*, column 136.

DEFENCE

Royal Dockyards (Privatisation)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date of consultancy payments made to firms in relation to work carried out to develop his Department's plans for the privatisation of *(a)* Devonport royal dockyard and *(b)* Rosyth royal dockyard. [5363]

Mr. Arbuthnot: During the period between 18 October 1993, when my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for Defence announced our policy towards the future management of the royal dockyards, *Official Report*, 18 October 1993, columns *39–41*, and 30 November 1995, expenditure charged to defence votes in respect of consultancy advice given in relation to the proposed privatisation of the dockyards amounted to some £8.4 million, including VAT. Further costs have been incurred, but final details will not be available until invoices have been presented and payments agreed. Costs attributable to one dockyard or the other cannot be separately identified.

Army Officers (Business Appointments)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by name, rank and service the former serving officers of the armed forces who *(a)* have applied under the business appointments procedure and *(b)* have had their application refused. [5323]

Mr. Soames: During the last two years, the following applications under the business appointments procedure were made by officers who had retired from the armed forces:

	Number
Admiral of the Fleet	3
Vice Admiral	2
Rear Admiral	9
Captain	3
Commander	3
Lieutenant Commander	8
Major General	20
Brigadier	2
Colonel	4
Lieutenant Colonel	4
Major	1
Captain	1
Marshal of the RAF	1
Air Chief Marshal	1
Air Marshal	4
Air Vice-Marshal	2
Air Commodore	1
Group Captain	3
Wing Commander	2
Squadron Leader	6

None of the applications was refused: restrictions were imposed on nine applications. It is not our practice to disclose the names of the officers concerned.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 November, *Official Report*, column *349*, how the business appointments policy for former serving officers of the armed services is enforced; and what sanctions may be imposed. [5322]

Mr. Soames: Business appointment applications are approved unconditionally or subject to a waiting period of up to two years from the applicant's last day in Crown service, or to a condition banning the applicant from involvement in a particular project or area of work for up to two years. Where a condition is imposed, both the applicant and prospective employer are informed in writing of the nature of the condition.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sites of special scientific interest on his Ministry's land have been de-listed in each of the last five years. [4726]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence owns or occupies over 200 sites of special scientific interest. Available records do not show any such sites as having been de-listed in the last five years.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many instances of aircraft using reheat have been recorded by RAF police conducting covert monitoring of low flying in each year since 1990. [4486]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft movements have been observed by RAF police conducting covert monitoring of low flying in each year since 1990. [4487]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of aircraft observed by the RAF police while conducting covert monitoring, including deployments with the Skyguard radar system, of military low flying in each year since 1990 are as follows:

1990: 461

1991: 780

1992: 850

1993: 788

1994: 265

1995[1]: 236.

[1] To 30th November 1995.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints from the public his Department has received arising from low-level flying in each of the last five years. [4730]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of complaints and inquiries about military low flying received by my Department in each of the last five years are as follows:

1991: 4,846

1992: 6,295

1993: 5,738

[illegible]778

1995: [illegible],492.

[1] Up to 30 November 1995.

"The Nemesis File"

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the alleged Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers non-commissioned officer *(a)* required and *(b)* sought the permission of the Ministry of Defence before publishing "The Nemesis File". [4863]

Mr. Soames: Serving and former members of the armed forces are required to seek authorisation from the Ministry of Defence before publishing information gained during their service. "The Nemesis File" was not submitted.

Widows' Pensions

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many widows have received pensions under the special provisions for pre-1950 widows; and how much has been expended on these pensions in total. [4869]

Mr. Soames: Information on the number of former pensioners and total costs of the pensions paid to them is not available.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many widows are currently receiving a pre-1950 widow's pension; and at what rates these are currently being paid. [4870]

Mr. Soames: The number of widows currently receiving a pre-1950 widow's pension could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The current rates of special widow's pension, dependent on rank of the service man, are £12.39 to £22.19 a week. The pension is subject to the same index-linking arrangements as other public service pensions.

Tain Bombing Range

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence following the recent noise evaluation survey of properties in the vicinity of Tain bombing range, Ross-shire, if he will *(a)* publish the objective criteria upon which he decides subsequent eligibility for compensation and *(b)* provide a detailed breakdown of the findings involved; and if he will make a statement. [5016]

Mr. Soames: Under the terms of the Ministry of Defence noise insulation grant scheme, which was introduced in 1985, owners of properties severely affected by military aircraft noise are eligible for grants to cover the cost of installing noise insulation in bedrooms and up to two living rooms. Eligibility is limited to properties subject to a noise level of 70 decibels averaged over a 16-hour day. The environmental noise survey undertaken at RAF Tain air weapons range in August 1995 showed that, as a result of strictly enforced aircraft circuit patterns and an overall reduction in the number of aircraft movements, no local properties are now subject to noise in excess of the 70 decibel threshold. The noise survey report was made available to the Ross and Cromarty district council on 16 November and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to make available to the relatives of service or civilian personnel killed in military aircraft accidents the full text of the board of inquiry report into the accident. [5173]

Mr. Soames: Since December 1992, in recognition of the special position of next of kin, service board of inquiry reports have been made available to the nominated next of kin of deceased service—and associated civilian—personnel, should they so request, subject only to the essential minimum of security requirements.

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish a list of schools on the admissible schools list; [4624]

(2) if he will list the schools receiving funds from the boarding school allowance indicating the numbers of pupils at each school benefiting from the scheme. [4625]

Mr. Soames: A list of some 800 schools in respect of which boarding school allowance may be paid is kept by my Department. I am arranging for a copy of the most recent admissible schools list—June 1995—to be placed in the Library of the House. The list details the number of service children attending each school at the end of the summer term 1995 and whose parents claimed boarding school allowance.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pupils have benefitted from the boarding school allowance in each of the past four years. [4626]

Mr. Soames: The total average number of children for whom boarding school allowance was claimed in the academic years in question was:

1991–1992: 16,208
1992–1993: 15,120
1993–1994: 12,567
1994–1995: 11,363.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pupils, and at what cost, are funded at the Quantock school, Taunton by the boarding school allowance. [4628]

Mr. Soames: The total number of service children attending Quantock school, Taunton, and whose parents have claimed boarding school allowance for the autumn term 1995, is 38. The total estimated cost to my Department for this provision is £81,969.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the annual cost of the boarding school allowance in each of the last four years. [4627]

Mr. Soames: The total cost to my Department of boarding school allowance for the years in question was:

1991–1992: £115.35 million
1992–1993: £116.72 million
1993–1994: £113.61 million
1994–1995: £107.23 million.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment the Service Children's Education Authority has made of the suitability of the Quantock school, Taunton to remain on the list of admissible schools. [4629]

Mr. Soames: SCEA conducts an on-going assessment of the quality of pastoral care at schools on the Ministry of Defence admissible schools list. As part of that process, an informal visit to Quantock school, Taunton was carried out in June 1995. A number of reservations were expressed concerning the quality of pastoral care available and, as a result, the suitability of Quantock school to remain on the MOD admissible schools list is being reviewed.

Northern Ireland (Troops)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of British forces currently stationed in Northern Ireland; what the figure was in August in each year since 1993; and what plans there are to withdraw British forces from Northern Ireland during the coming year. [4611]

Mr. Soames: There are currently some 16,500 members of the armed forces stationed in Northern Ireland. This figure includes Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel as well as nine general service infantry battalions and six home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment. In both August 1993 and August 1994 the equivalent figure was approximately 19,000; by August 1995 this had fallen to approximately 17,500.

Force levels in Northern Ireland are kept continually under review. Since the terrorist ceasefires in 1994 three major units deployed in the infantry role have been relocated from Northern Ireland to bases elsewhere. Future measure of this kind will depend on the security situation.

Redirected Mail

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy with regard to forwarding the mail for members of the armed services serving abroad who have moved home. [4810]

Mr. Soames: The redirection of mail between British Forces Post Office addresses, whether in the United Kingdom or overseas, is a unit responsibility and no charges are made to customers for this service.

Redirection from a UK civil address to a BFPO address is handled under normal post office arrangements for which a charge is made. The charge is, however, set at the inland rate irrespective of the location of the BFPO.

Redirected mail from a civil UK address to an overseas civil address would be undertaken by the Post Office and its normal charges for this service would apply.

Equipment Reliability

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost to his Department each year of inadequate reliability and maintainability of defence equipment. [5361]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry of Defence aims to maximise reliability and maintainability to the extent that this is cost-effective. Earlier and more systematic attention is paid to the R and M, and demonstrated achievement of R and M requirements is linked to contract payments. This approach has helped MOD achieve significance improvements compared with earlier generations of equipment, thereby saving costs and enhancing operational effectiveness. It is not possible to quantify the total yearly savings resulting from this R and M initiative.

Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the relocation of the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme following the forthcoming closure of RAF Wroughton. [5315]

Mr. Soames: The Gulf war medical assessment programme is currently being relocated to the central medical establishment, Kelvin house, 32–34 Cleveland street, London W1P 6AU. The physical move will take place during the next week, and routine appointments will be available in January, after a necessary period of adjustment to re-establish the programme's facilities.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to his Department of the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme to date. [5317]

Mr. Soames: The assessments are funded from within my Department's normal secondary care programme and cannot be identified separately.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what medical tests were made on examinees under the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme. [5318]

Mr. Soames: All tests offered to individuals coming forward for assessment are tailored to the particular requirements of each patient after considering the medical and occupational history, the reported symptoms and clinical signs found on detailed initial examination. Possible tests include: a full blood assay, urinalysis, X-Ray, or CT/MRI scan, electrocardiograph, endoscopy and vitalograph studies. Further tests or referrals are available when required.

Aircraft Training (Scotland)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the *(a)* total Royal Air Force training hours, *(b)* total NATO training hours and *(c)* total non-RAF and non-NATO training hours flown over Scotland in the past 12 months. [4981]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Service Costs

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost per service person, including equipment, land, buildings, training and personnel expenditure for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy, *(c)* Royal Marines and *(d)* Royal Air Force. [4984]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* This information is not available in the form requested.

Service Housing Stock

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of Stae for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on the housing market of his plans to sell off his Department's service housing stock. [4977]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* The large majority of the properties transferred will initially be rented back by MOD to meet service accommodation needs. Our proposal will conduce to a more efficient release of surplus properties by MOD over time. Whether those empty properties are then sold, re-let or redeveloped will be a matter for the future owner of the stock, who will no doubt have regard to market demand at the time.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Cleveland. [3562]

Mr. Soames: *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Cleveland:

Hartlepool: 3

Langbaurgh: 1.

All four of these dwellings have been unoccupied for more than six months and are in the process of being sold.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Essex. [3554]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Essex:

	Number
Braintree	109
Chelmsford	1
Southend East	13
South Colchester and Malden	228

Seven of the properties in Southend, East, 34 properties in South Colchester and Malden and the one vacant in Chelmsford are all in the process of being sold. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Cheshire. [3555]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Cheshire:

City of Chester: 31

Tatton: 4

Warrington South: 24.

All the vacant properties in Tatton and seven of those in the city of Chester are in the process of being sold. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwelling owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Bedfordshire. [3556]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Bedfordshire:

Mid Bedfordshire: 55

South-West Bedfordshire: 54.

Of the vacant properties in South-West Bedfordshire, 35 are in the process of being sold. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Greater Manchester. [3558]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwelling are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Great Manchester:

Ashton-under-Lyne: 4

Bury South: 7

Heywood and Middleton: 1

Manchester Withington: 1

Manchester Wythenshawe: 9

Stretford: 3.

One of the vacant properties in Ashton-under-Lyne and all in Manchester, Wythenshawe and Stretford are in the process of being sold. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Derbyshire. [3559]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* My Department owns no dwellings in Derbyshire.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Kent. [3560]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Kent:

	Number
Ashford	12
Canterbury	14
Dover	223
Folkestone and Hythe	142
Gillingham	106
Gravesham	20
Maidstone	21
Medway	176
Sevenoaks	15
South Thanet	34
Tunbridge Wells	2

All vacant properties in Gravesham, Medway and Tunbridge Wells and 113 of the vacant properties in Dover are in the process of being sold. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Avon. [3561]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Avon:

	Number
Bath	1
Bristol East	1
Bristol North-West	2
Bristol West	3
Northavon	3
Wansdyke	1
Weston-Super-Mare	76

Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department are *(a)* currently unoccupied and *(b)* have been unoccupied for six months or more in each parliamentary constituency in Hampshire. [3557]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 December 1995:]:* The following empty dwellings are owned by my Department in each parliamentary constituency in Hampshire.

	Number
Aldershot	255
Basingstoke	5
East Hampshire	83
Eastleigh	1
Fareham	29
Gosport	281
Havant	7
New Forest	3
North-West Hampshire	128
Portsmouth North	66
Portsmouth South	45
Romsey and Waterside	54
Winchester	84

All the vacant properties in Basingstoke, Eastleigh and New Forest, and 33 of those in North-West Hampshire are in the process of being sold. Information on properties unoccupied for six months or more is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Agency Locations

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the principal locations of *(a)* the Army Base Repair Organisation, *(b)* the Meteorological Office, *(c)* the Military Survey, *(d)* the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency, *(e)* the RAF Training Group Defence Agency, *(f)* the Pay and Pensions Agency, *(g)* the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation, *(h)* the Defence Accounts Agency and *(i)* the Defence Animal Centre; and how many (i) civilian and (ii) uniformed personnel are employed at each location. [4349]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* This is a matter for the agencies concerned. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Brigadier J. R. Drew to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the principal locations of a number of Defence Agencies, including the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), and how many staff, military and civilian, are employed at each location.

I have enclosed a table which gives the location of all the ABRO workshop sites and offices and the numbers employed at each, as at 1 November 1995. These range from major workshop facilities such as those at Donnington and Bovington to small offices arranging the repair of equipment under contract by industry. I have enclosed an information pack about the agency which includes the Annual Report and Accounts 94/95, the Corporate Plan 1995 and a brief history.

I hope that you find this useful.

Army Base Repair Organisation—location of sites and staff

Location	*Civilian staff*	*Military*
Andover	170	4
Aldershot	170	—
Arborfield	13	—
Ashford[1]	170	—
Belfast	8	—
Bovington	453	2
Bristol	4	—
Cardiff	4	—
Catterick	159	—
Chilwell	3	—
Colchester	140	—
Donnington	1,019	—
Droitwich	4	—
Liverpool	2	—
Manchester	5	—
Oakington	4	—
Old Dalby[1]	395	—
Plymouth	3	—
Salisbury	6	—
Sennybridge	17	—
Stirling	162	—
Warminster	347	—
York	5	—
Total	3,263	6

[1] These workshops are due to close as part of the agency rationalisation of workshop capacity.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about principal locations of certain MOD organisations.

(a) The principal location of the Meteorological Office is at Bracknell, Berkshire

(b) 1238 people are employed at Bracknell

(c) All are civilians.

Letter from Brigadier A. J. Hoon to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of the Military Survey Defence Agency principal locations and the number of Agency staff at each of these locations as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

Please find attached a table which shows a list of our principal locations with a breakdown of the civilian and service staff employed by the Agency at each of these locations on 31 Oct 95.

I hope you find this information useful.

Military Survey defence agency principal locations and staff

Serial (a)	*Location* (b)	*Military*[1] (c)	*Civilian*[1] (d)	*Totals*[1] (e)
1	Feltham	30	641	671
2	Tolworth	0	78	78
3	Guildford	1	25	26
4	Hermitage	264	69	333
5	Germany[2]	76	39	115
6	Total	371	852	1,223

Notes:

[1] Staff numbers represent the total number of people employed (full and part time) in the Military Survey Defence Agency at each location on 31 October 1995.

[2] Germany staff were transferred into the Agency on 1 April 1995. Most civilian staff in Germany are Locally Employed Civilians (LECs) and are not part of the Home Civil Service.

Letter from Air Vice-Marshal R. H. Kyle to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence in which you asked for details of the principal locations of the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency and how many uniformed and civilian personnel are employed at each location, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The information you requested is listed as an attachment to this letter. The figures are as at 30 September 1995, which is the most recent date for which centrally held figures are available.

As a result of the end of the Cold War and a reduction in the perceived threat, and in common with other elements of the Ministry of Defence, the Agency is in the process of rationalising its operations and reducing in size. This is expected to lead to the closure of RAF Carlisle, RAF Quedgeley and RAF North Luffenham over the next 3 years. In addition, the number of personnel in the Agency will reduce to approximately 2,400 uniformed and 5,400 civilian staff by 1999.

I hope that this information meets your requirements.

Attachment:

1. List of RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency Principal Locations and Personnel Numbers.

List of the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency principal locations and personnel numbers—30 September 1995

Unit	*Uniformed personnel*	*Civilian personnel*
RAF Brampton	79	62
RAF Cardington	—	121
RAF Carlisle	12	533
RAF North Luffenham	563	137
RAF Quedgeley	777	205
RAF Sealand	421	1,171
RAF St. Athan	2,539	1,417
RAF Stafford	697	734
RAF Armament Support Unit	316	5
Total	4,634	4,385

Letter from Air Commodore A. A. Nicholson to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence on the principal locations for a number of military organisations and the numbers of people employed at each location. The details for the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency are:

Principal Locations	*Number of People Employed*[1,2] *Military*	*Civilian*
Headquarters staff and other training units		
Royal Air Force Innsworth, Gloucester	162	[3]98
Other Training Units	18	[3]33
Major training stations and training units		
Royal Air Force Cosford, Shropshire	895	[3]450
Royal Air Force Cranwell, Lincolnshire[4]	817	[3]353
Royal Air Force Halton, Buckinghamshire	782	[3]291
Royal Air Force Linton on Ouse, North Yorkshire	342	[3]176
Royal Air Force Locking, Avon	454	[3]236
Royal Air Force St. Athan, South Glamorgan[5]	193	130
Royal Air Force Shawbury, Shropshire	320	[3]177
Royal Air Force Valley, Gwynedd	830	238

Notes:

[1] Projected figures for end-Financial Year 1995–96 (as at 31 March 1996).

[2] Figures do not include trainees.

[3] Figures include casual and part-time employees.

[4] Figures are for Training Group resources only at Royal Air Force Cranwell.

[5] Figures are for Training Group resources only at Royal Air Force St. Athan.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel and Training Command.

Letter from Captain W. S. Graham to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, which sought locations and personnel numbers employed within the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

Address	*Civilian personnel*	*Service personnel*
RNAY Fleetlands, Gosport, Hants PO13 0AA	1,194	10
RNAW Almondbank, Perth PH1 3NQ, Scotland	366	1
Total	1,560	11

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

DEFENCE ACCOUNTS AGENCY

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the principal locations of my Agency and the numbers of staff employed at each location.

The Defence Accounts Agency operates from five locations in the UK: two in Bath; and one each at Cheadle Hulme, Liverpool and

Worcester. The numbers of staff currently employed at each location are as follows:

	Number
Bath (Pinesgate West)	119
Bath (Warminster Road)	294
Cheadle Hulme	277
Liverpool	641
Worcester	167
Total	1,498

These are all civilians—the Agency does not employ uniformed personnel.

You may also wish to note that the Agency is currently restructuring following its first three year review as a Defence Agency (Defence Accounts Agency Annual Report and Accounts 1994–95—HC Paper No. 542 refers). Some restructuring has already occurred and is reflected in the information given above. The remainder entails demerger into two separate agencies: the Defence Bills Agency and the Pay and Personnel Agency. This is expected to occur early in the New Year. Both organizations will continue to operate from their existing sites, ie: the Defence Bills Agency at Liverpool; and the Pay and Personnel Agency from Bath, Cheadle Hulme and Worcester, as listed above.

Letter from Colonel A. H. Roache to Dr. David Clark, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about locations and staff numbers in Defence Agencies. This falls within my area of responsibility.

The Defence Animal Centre operates from a single site at Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire and retains a training area at RAF Syerston in Lincolnshire. The number of staff employed as at 01 Nov 96 was 135 military and 48.5 civilian.

Contamination

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of all Ministry of Defence estates in Scotland where *(a)* radioactive, *(b)* fuel and *(c)* other types of contamination is at a level that is above the maximum allowable level for a civilian residential area. [4983]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* There are no Ministry of Defence sites in Scotland where land contamination has been identified as posing a significant risk to health and safety or the environment and therefore requiring decontamination. Remediation work at RAF Lossiemouth following an accidental oil fuel spillage in April is continuing and will be completed shortly.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Competitiveness

12. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received on his policy on competitiveness. [3289]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The White Paper "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" has been widely welcomed by industry. Major representative bodies such as the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation and the Chemical Industries Association, as well as many major companies, have all expressed their support.

Deregulation

15. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress of the deregulation initiative as it affects *(a)* legislation in the United Kingdom and *(b)* directives from Europe. [3291]

Mr. Freeman: Recent progress on deregulation includes the passing into law of the first two deregulation orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. Many other deregulatory changes are being made by secondary legislation and administrative action. I have been pressing the case for deregulation in the European Community. There has been a significant decline in the number of new Commission proposals for legislation in 1996. I am urging the Commission to make a commitment at the forthcoming European Council to improve the quality of future legislation and review existing European legislation.

18. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what analysis he has made of the likely effects of the Government's campaign of deregulation on United Kingdom competitiveness. [3305]

Mr. Freeman: As we made clear in our second White Paper on competitiveness, deregulation is central to improving United Kingdom competitiveness. Unnecessary requirements stand in the way of market entry, innovation, investment and jobs. We have a programme for repealing or amending well over 1,000 regulations and are on target to have dealt with over 500 by the end of the year. We are also taking action to ensure that new regulations are introduced only where really justified and are enforced in a business-friendly way.

22. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to involve small firms in his campaign to reduce the burden of regulation. [3307]

Mr. Freeman: I have recently met a number of small firms representative bodies about deregulation. The deregulation task force includes a number of members drawn from the small firms sector. Small firms must also now be consulted as part of the compliance cost assessment procedure on new regulatory proposals to make sure they will not be disproportionately affected. The Prime Minister recently launched a series of seminars for small firms which is providing another channel for them to make their views known to us. I am also keen to hear direct from small firms about the problems they are facing and am issuing them an invitation to write to me.

25. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's policy is on employee protection matters in co-ordinating the Government's deregulation policy. [3299]

Mr. Freeman: Deregulation is aimed at achieving better regulation and is not about removing necessary protection, whether for employees, or, for example, consumers or the enviornment. For deregulation orders made under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act, the responsible Minister must give details of how any necessary protection under existing legislation will be maintained.

26. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contacts he has had with industry about the Government's campaign on deregulation. [3309]

Mr. Freeman: The Government are advised by the deregulation task force about businesses priorities for deregulation and I have regular contact with the chairman, Francis Maude. The task force published its first report in September and of 52 recommendations the Government accepted 46 in whole or in part. In addition, I discuss deregulation with various representative bodies of industry and individual industrialists from time to time.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to discuss the Molitor report on deregulation with the European Commission. [3304]

Mr. Freeman: I discussed the Molitor report and the United Kingdom's objectives for European deregulation with the Commission on Monday 11 September and Thursday 23 November. I expect to continue these discussions next year.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many regulations which are now identified as suitable for repeal under the deregulation initiative were brought in by the Ministry of Defence between 1983 and 1986, the Department of the Environment between 1990 and 1992 and the Department for Trade and Industry between 1992 and 5 July 1995. [3781]

Mr. Freeman: The number of regulations for the dates in question are as follows:

Ministry of Defence: 0

Department of the Enviornment: 0

Department of Trade and Industry: 3.

Ministerial Priorities

16. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are his current priorities. [3292]

Mr. Denham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his priorities. [3287]

The Deputy Prime Minister: To promote the competitiveness agenda, the deregulation initiative and the effective administration on the services for which my Department is responsible.

Desk-top Diary System

17. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when his new desk-top diary system will be ready for use; and what the final cost of introducing it will be. [3293]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The strategic diary is now operating; the infrastructure on which it runs has cost about £150,000 to set up. Additional costs will be incurred as it is developed.

Government Policy Cabinet Committee

19. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the objectives are of the Cabinet Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy. [3294]

The Deputy Prime Minister: As the title suggests, the Committee considers matters relating to the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy.

Civil Service Morale

21. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of morale in the civil service. [3296]

Mr. Willetts: Morale in the civil service is best maintained by allowing staff to perform to the best of their abilities in the career they have chosen. This Government's civil service reforms enable staff to focus their attention on delivering high-quality public services: this is the best way of satisfying both them and the users of their services.

Government Policies

23. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy for the co-ordination of the Government's long-term strategies. [3297]

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are pursuing economic prosperity and security for all, based on an enterprise economy; creating a nation of opportunity reflecting the Government's values of choice, ownership and reward; upholding decent common-sense values in the pursuit of law and order and justice; providing the people of Britain with first class public services; and reflecting pride in our nation and its place in the world.

"Competing for Quality"

24. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are the latest figures for efficiency savings resulting from the "Competing for Quality" programme. [3298]

Mr. Freeman: The results for the period April 1992 to March 1995 were published in the "Government Opportunities" special report in June. This report is available in the House of Commons Library.

Special Advisers

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what reviews he has undertaken on the pay and conditions of service of special advisers. [3290]

Mr. Willetts: We are implementing the Nolan recommendation that special advisers should be subject to the same scrutiny as other civil servants in respect of business appointments which they propose to take up within two years of leaving service. We are also considering changes in their pay arrangements to take account of changes in the civil service pay structure.

Science Cabinet Committee

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Cabinet Committee on science last met; and how frequently he expects meetings to take place. [3295]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Issues relating to science and technology now come under the remit of the ministerial Committee on Competitiveness.

Publicity Material

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many identical copies of an advertisement for the bus and coach driving manual were sent on the same day to Barton Accessories in Moreleigh road, Harbertonford, Totness, South Devon, in the same post, and for what reason; what is HMSO's policy regarding duplication of publicity information; and if he will make a statement on the cost of duplication by HMSO. [5031]

Mr. Willetts: As this question concerns a purely operational matter, I have asked the chief executive of HMSO to write direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Lynn to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 8 December 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your question (No 43N) to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about duplicate mailings from HMSO.

I am sorry that the Manager of Barton Accessories had to suffer no less than nine envelopes containing identical information, including a letter signed by Steven Norris recommending an HMSO publication.

As you probably know, it is common commercial practice to buy in mailing lists in order to reach specialised markets. HMSO brought this one, on an electronic disk, from a company specialising in passenger carrying vehicles. It has become clear to us that this particular list contained a number of duplications, and we have complained to the firm about it. They have apologised profusely, and waived all their charges.

I recognise that this is little consolation to your constituent, but I am grateful to you for bringing the matter to my attention.

Former Prime Ministers (Funding)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what funding Lady Thatcher continues to receive from Her Majesty's Government for her private office and staff costs; how much she has received to date since she ceased to be a Member of this House; and if he will make a statement. [4488]

Mr. Freeman: All former Prime Ministers are eligible to receive an allowance to assist them with the continuing heavy burden of office and secretarial costs arising from their special position in public life. The allowance is similar in purpose and amount to the parliamentary office costs allowance, but is paid in respect of public, not parliamentary, duties.

The maximum amount of the allowance available to former Prime Ministers during the current financial year is £42,754, plus £4,275 for contributions to pension schemes of members of staff whose salaries are paid from the allowance.

I do not think it right to disclose the amounts of this allowance claimed by individual former Prime Ministers, any more than the House discloses details of claims by individual Members under the office costs allowance.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the reduction in the range of departmental responsibilities since 1979; and what staff savings have been made in each Department of State at each level from assistant secretary upwards, including redundancies announced but not yet implemented, together with the reduction in the numbers of Ministers. [4337]

Mr. Freeman: Departmental responsibilities are a matter of public record, set out in the relevant edition of the "List of Ministerial Responsibilities" and elsewhere.

Changes between 1 April 1979 and 1 April 1995 in the number of staff at each of grade levels 1 to 5 are shown in the table. Organisational and other changes between those dates limit comparability, but some approximate groupings of Departments and agencies have been made. Numbers of planned reductions by grade and method of release are not centrally available.

There were 82 Ministers, excluding Law Officers and Whips, in January 1979; there are 84 at present.

Grade levels 1 to 5 change between 1 April 1979 and 1 April 1995

Departments and their agencies	*Grade 1*	*Grade 2*	*Grade 3*	*Grade 4*	*Grade 5*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	—	–1	–5	–4	–13
Cabinet Office and Central Statistical Office[1]	–3	–3	–7	+4	–13
Central Office of Information	—	—	—	–2	–3
HMSO	—	—	–1	—	–9
Chancellor of the Exchequer					
Treasury[1]	–1	–5	–1	+1	+13
Customs and Excise	—	–1	–2	–1	–13
Government Actuary	—	—	—	—	+1
Inland Revenue	—	–1	–7	–16	–15
Department of National Savings	—	—	–2	+2	–1
National Investment and Loans Office	—	—	—	—	—
Registry of Friendly Societies	—	+1	—	+3	+5
Royal Mint	—	—	—	—	–2
Paymaster	—	—	—	—	—
Defence	+1	–19	–47	–20	–76
Education and Employment[1]	—	–5	–6	+1	–18
Environment and National Heritage[1]	–1	–4	–23	–10	–71
HSE/HSC	—	—	—	+1	+2
Ordnance Survey	—	—	—	—	+5
Office of Water Services[2]	—	—	+1	—	+4
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	—	—	—	+1	–17
Overseas Development Administration	—	–3	—	–2	–1
Health and Social Security[1]	+1	–2	–20	+3	–26

Grade levels 1 to 5 change between 1 April 1979 and 1 April 1995

Departments and their agencies	*Grade 1*	*Grade 2*	*Grade 3*	*Grade 4*	*Grade 5*
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	—	—	—	–1	–2
Home Office and HM Prison Service	—	–1	—	–2	+37
Lord Chancellor's Department	—	–2	–9	+7	+9
HM Land Registry	—	+1	+1	—	+5
Public Record Office	—	—	—	—	+2
OFLOT[2]	—	—	—	—	+2
Northern Ireland Office	—	—	—	+2	–3
Scotland					
Scottish Office	—	–2	–8	+4	–18
Scottish Court Service	—	—	—	+1	–1
General Register Office–Scotland	—	—	—	—	–1
Registers of Scotland	—	—	—	+1	+1
Scottish Record Office	—	—	—	—	—
Trade and Industry and Transport[1]	–4	–12	–16	+9	–4
ACAS	—	—	—	+1	–3
Office of Electricity Regulation[2]	—	—	+1	—	+6
Office of Gas Supply[2]	—	—	—	+1	+2
OPRAF[2]	—	—	+1	—	+6
Office of the Rail Regulator[2]	—	—	—	+1	+4
Wales					
Welsh Office	—	—	–1	+5	–6
Other Civil Departments					
Civil Service Pay Research Unit[3]	—	—	—	—	–1
Charity Commission	—	—	–1	+3	—
Crown Estate Office	—	—	–1	—	–1
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal	—	—	+2	+5	+22
Crown Prosecution Service	—	–1	+4	+13	+40
Export Credit Guarantee Department	—	—	–2	—	—
Intervention Board	—	—	+1	—	+2
Legal Secretariat	—	+1	—	+1	+4
Lord Advocate's Department	—	—	+3	—	+1
Office of Fair Trading	—	—	–2	—	+1
Privy Council Office	—	—	—	—	—
Serious Fraud Office[2]	—	+1	+1	+1	+8
Treasury Solicitor	—	—	—	+3	—
All Departments					
Total numbers 1979	41	177	594	242	2,547
Total numbers 1995	34	119	448	258	2,411
Change	–7	–58	–146	+16	–136

Notes:

[1] Departments involved in major functional changes.

[2] Departments in 1995 with no equivalent in 1979.

[3] Departments in 1979 with no equivalent in 1995.

HMSO (Privatisation)

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will list the individuals and organisations he has consulted about the implications for the service provided to the House of the proposed privatisation of HMSO; and if he will make a statement; [5252]

(2) what further consultations he plans about the implications for the service provided to the House of the proposed privatisation of HMSO. [5253]

Mr. Freeman: I, my colleagues and officials have consulted management and staff at HMSO, including at the Parliamentary Press, my advisers Coopers and Lybrand and those responsible for the existing arrangements in the House and in the other place on this matter. In addition, I gave evidence on the proposed privatisation of HMSO to the Finance and Services Committee on 21 November.

Parliament is HMSO's most important customer and the Government attach great importance to ensuring that all its requirements would be fully met by privatisation. My intention is therefore that all of these consultations would continue throughout any sale process, and I have invited those responsible for the existing arrangements in the House and the other place to be involved in the privatisation, including advising me on the selection of the preferred bidder.

GP Forms

Ms Harman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many forms relating to general practice he plans to abolish in the next year; and how many of these have been introduced since 1979. [3119]

Mr. Malone: I have been asked to reply.

Implementation of the "Patients not paper" recommendations for fewer, better forms will abolish 20 individual forms, of which three are new since 1979. General practitioners will have to complete about 15 million fewer forms a year as a result.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection Registrar

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications have been made by Government Departments to the Data Protection Registrar in the course of the last three years. [3306]

Mr. Sackville: I understand from the Data Protection Registrar that information about the number of applications for registration from Government Departments is not readily available. The registrar has, however, identified 802 register entries relating to Government Departments headed by members of the Cabinet or other Ministers. Registration is for a period of three years.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the actual or estimated number of *(a)* applicants for political asylum in the United Kingdom and *(b)* persons not applicants but dependent on them, broken down to show those currently residing in (i) Tower Hamlets, (ii) Hackney, (iii) other parts of London, (iv) the west midlands, (v) the west riding, (vi) the north-west, (vii) the north-east and (viii) elsewhere in England and Wales. [4605]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 31 October 1995, 66,655 principal applicants were awaiting an initial decision on their asylum applications. It is estimated that these applicants have approximately 20,000 dependants.

Information on the places of residence of people currently seeking asylum is not held centrally.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making under his proposals in the Asylum and Immigration Bill to ensure he is regularly briefed on human rights and political conditions in overseas countries, with particular reference to those countries he designates as not giving rise to serious risks of persecutions; and what arrangements he is making to consider representations that certain countries should be *(a)* included and *(b)* excluded from such designation. [4610]

Miss Widdecombe: Conditions in countries of origin are continuously monitored by the asylum division on the basis of information from a wide range of sources including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and non-governmental organisations. We are always prepared to consider representations.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy *(a)* to publish regularly reports which give profiles of human rights and political conditions prevailing in particular countries, *(b)* to list those countries on which home country reports are held, *(c)* to place all home country reports and revisions in the Library and *(d)* to ensure that the reports are available to immigration law practitioners and human rights organisations; and if he will make a statement. [4612]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum applications will continue to be considered on the particular facts of each case. Summary background briefs on Ghana and Nigeria have been sent to the immigration appellate authorities, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association and other interested organisations.

The Nigeria brief is being updated; when this has been done, both briefs will be placed in the Library and any further such briefs will be made available in the same way.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the official statements and *(b)* documents other than those contained in the Asylum and Immigration Bill relating to the measures and methods that Her Majesty's Government intend to adopt in respect of current problems of asylum and immigration; and if he will list for each (i) change and (ii) innovation the information his Department has (1) obtained and (2) evaluated relating to its practicality and efficiency. [4745]

Miss Widdecombe: We have made available to the House a list of background papers which are relevant to the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received on the Asylum and Immigration Bill; and how many have been in whole or in part opposed to the Bill. [5272]

Miss Widdecombe: We have received a substantial amount of correspondence about our asylum and immigration proposals expressing a wide range of views. To date, 43 representations have been received from members of the public in favour of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, and 38 against.

Exclusion Orders

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders have been withdrawn since August 1994; and under what powers and against whom those exclusion orders were imposed. [4618]

Mr. Howard: Forty-one exclusion orders have been revoked or allowed to lapse since 31 August 1994. Thirty-six orders remain in force. All these orders were made under the provisions of part II and schedule 2 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. It is not our practice to identify those excluded.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the names of the individuals who are currently subject to exclusion orders, *(b)* their nationality, *(c)* the parts of the United Kingdom from which they are excluded and *(d)* under what powers the person was excluded; and if he will make a statement. [4617]

Mr. Howard: It is not our practice to identify those excluded, but all those subject to exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 are believed to be citizens of this country or the

Irish Republic or both. Thirty-two people are currently excluded from Great Britain under the Act, and four from the United Kingdom. None is excluded from Northern Ireland alone. These orders were made under part II and schedule 2 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Parole Board Hearings

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the parole board will conduct an oral hearing into the applications for release for Irish prisoners who had served 20 years of their sentences by July 1995. [4616]

Miss Widdecombe: Discretionary lifer panels of the parole board will hear these cases on 12, 13 and 14 December 1995.

Fine Defaulters

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons who had defaulted on a fine were jailed in England and Wales during 1994; and what was the average sentence length; [3437]

(2) how many persons have been jailed in England and Wales following default of a fine to date during 1995. [3438]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about fine defaulters.

Provisional information shows that 22,469 people were received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of a fine in 1994. The average time imposed was around 18 days.

Provisional information for January–October 1995 shows that 17,650 people were received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of a fine.

On 31 October 1995, the last available date for which figures are available, there were 414 fine defaulters in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of *(a)* members of staff and *(b)* other officially approved visitors to prisons in England and Wales who have been caught seeking to take illegal drugs into prisons in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [4500]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of (a) members of staff and (b) other officially approved visitors to prisons in England and Wales who have been caught seeking to take illegal drugs into prisons in each of the last three years.

The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a person convicted of attempting to smuggle drugs into a prison in England and Wales is allowed to make visits to prison inmates. [4504]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about whether a person convicted in attempting to smuggle drugs into a prison in England and Wales is allowed to make visits to prison inmates.

Guidance on visits policy is contained in Rules 33, 34 and 37A of the Prison Rules and corresponding Rules 10, 11 and 13 of the Young Offender Institution Rules. Standing Order 5A and Circular Instruction 11/1991 to governors sets out in more detail the arrangements which should apply.

There is no blanket policy to refuse permission for persons convicted of smuggling drugs into prisons to visit prisoners in prisons in England and Wales. It would be extremely difficult to enforce any such policy and it would be prohibitively costly for the Prison Service to extend the vetting procedures already in force for persons applying to visit category A prisoners to all family and friends wishing to visit prisoners throughout the prison estate. However, governors already have discretion to refuse visits on the grounds of security, good order or discipline, or in the interests of the prevention or discouragement of crime. A governor may use this discretion where a visitor is recognised to be an ex-prisoner convicted of drug offences or other serious crimes, or someone known to be involved with drugs or has already been found trying to smuggle illicit substances into a prison visits area. Alternatively, where security or control considerations require, the governor can stipulate that a closed visits room or visits box is used.

Under the arrangements for category A prisoners, prospective visitors are invited to complete a form and to submit two passport photographs. The local police force is asked to verify the photograph, to make checks concerning previous convictions and to provide any other information which may be of importance in relation to security. Previous convictions, by themselves, do not automatically preclude approval of an application but discretion can be exercised given all the known facts.

The Learmont report into prison security makes a number of recommendations to improve the supervision of visits for prisoners. These are under consideration. In addition, mandatory closed visits were introduced in June this year for those few prisoners who are category A exceptional risk. As part of its drugs strategy programme, the Prison Service intends to conduct a pilot study in a sample of prisons making it mandatory to impose a closed visit for any person found using or trafficking in drugs.

Departmental Employees Statistics

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3968]

Mr. Howard: For information on consultants employed by my Department relating to the financial year 1994–95, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for

Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 12 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *597*. For information prior to 1994–95, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Darlington on 23 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *1223*, by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), the then Under-Secretary of State, for the Home Department.

A list of outside organisations employed by the Department since 1990 and the purpose of their employment as well as total payment made to them could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

For information on individual employees, copies of the civil service staff in post summary tables for 1990 through to 1995 can be found in the Library. Each employee is involved in assisting the Department to attain its aims and objectives as set out in the departmental report. Pay bill figures for individuals employed by the Department are as follows.

Year (Outturn)	*£ million*
1990–91	886
1991–92	986
1992–93	1,104
1993–94	1,115
1994–95[1]	1,182

[1] Estimated outturn.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female remand prisoners in each year since 1991 were single mothers; how many of these subsequently received a custodial sentence in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [4300]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many female remand prisoners were single mothers; how many of these subsequently received a custodial sentence in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement.

No information is held centrally on this subject. However, a study of mothers in prison was conducted in November 1994 by the Home Office Research and Planning Unit. 470 remanded women (unconvicted and unsentenced) were interviewed. Of these, 75 (16 per cent) were single mothers.

No information is available about the number of remanded single mothers who subsequently received a custodial sentence.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time spent on remand in custody by *(a)* male and *(b)* female defendants before trial in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [4299]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the average time spent on remand in custody by (a) male and (b) female defendants before trial in each year since 1991.

This information was provided in a written answer to Mr Jim Cunningham MP (Coventry South East) on 5 December (Col 210).

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of the prison population in England and Wales who had not been sentenced to imprisonment but were awaiting *(a)* trial or sentencing, *(b)* trial and *(c)* sentencing on 1 January 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 respectively; and if he will make a statement. [4297]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the total number of the prison population in England and Wales who had not been sentenced to imprisonment but were awaiting (a) trial or sentencing, (b) trial and (c) sentencing on the 1st January 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 respectively.

The available information relates to the remand population in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on the last day of the month. Information has therefore been provided in the attached table for 31 December in all years since 1990.

Population of untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners in prison service establishments[1] England and Wales on 31 December 1990–1994

On 31 December	*Untried*	*Convicted unsentenced*	*All remand*
1990	7,444	1,598	9,042
1991	8,184	1,697	9,881
1992	6,718	1,772	8,490
1993	8,388	2,375	10,763
1994	8,771	2,709	11,480

[1] Includes those held in police cells. The population at the end of the year is depressed by the christmas/new year holiday; the magnitude and timing of the temporary effect can vary from year to year.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* all remand prisoners on the 1 January of each year since 1991; how many in each case (i) did and (ii) did not receive a custodial sentence; and if he will make a statement. [4309]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking what was the total number of (a) male, (b) female and (c) all remand prisoners on the 1st January of each year since 1991; how many in each case (i) did and (ii) did not receive a custodial sentence.

The available information relates to the remand population in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on the last day of the month. Information has therefore been provided in the attached table for 31 December in each year since 1990.

Information on the outcome at court for these prisoners is not available. Details of the outcome at court for remand receptions are given in table 2.5 of the 1993 edition of "Prison Statistics, England and Wales", Cm 2893, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Prison Population

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* all prisoners in England and Wales on 1 January of each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [4308]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about what was the total number of (a) male and (b) female and (c) all prisoners in England and Wales on the 1st of January each year since 1991.

The available information relates to the population in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on the last day of the month. Information has therefore been provided in the attached table for 31 December for each year since 1990.

Muhammed Naviede

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the *(a)* closed and *(b)* open prisons Muhammed Naviede has been held in since his prison sentence was imposed; [4502]

(2) which body is funding the private medical treatment being given to prison inmate Mohammed Naviede at St. Thomas's hospital, London; what has been the weekly cost of treatment; and when it is expected to conclude; [4501]

(3) what has been the number of prison officers and the hours they have spent guarding Mohammed Naviede, while at St. Thomas's hospital; what has been the total cost to date; and who is responsible for paying this cost. [4503]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 11 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about Mr Mohammed Naviede, who is at Brixton prison.

Mr. Naviede was convicted and sentenced on 7 July for fraud. Since this date he has been detained at Brixton prison and no decisions have been made to transfer him to open conditions.

Mr. Naviede was admitted to St. Thomas's Hospital as a NHS patient on 30 August. He elected to have the private treatment available at this hospital. The costs of the private care were not met by the Prison Service and we are, therefore, unable to comment upon who paid for the medical treatment and what the weekly costs were.

Mr. Naviede was at St. Thomas's Hospital until 18 September. Prison officers guarded him for the entire period. A total of six prison officers were deployed for each 24 hour period in line with standard security practice.

The Prison Service is responsible for paying for the staffing costs involved in the escort and guarding of prisoners. Approximately £11,500 was spent on staffing resources for this period. The same costs would have been incurred had Mr. Naviede received National Health Service treatment.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to appoint a permanent Director General of the Prison Service; and what procedures have been instituted to vet applicants for the post of Director General of the Prison Service; [3262]

(2) what criteria will be used to judge applicants for the post of Director General of the Prison Service; and what priority will be accorded to independence of judgment. [3263]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 5 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *204*.

EU Research and Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the indicative contributions to the EU budget in respect of research and development for his Department in 1993–94. [1912]

Mr. Howard: Table 2.1 of the statistical supplement to "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1995" contains indicative figures for the United Kingdom's contributions to the European Community budget in respect of research and development. Departments' policy responsibilities are subject to change and can vary from year to year. My Department currently has an 0.07 per cent. share of the indicative contribution of the United Kingdom in respect of this part of the Community's budget.

Ministerial Broadcasts

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions during the parliamentary Session 1994–95 when he gave broadcast interviews on radio or television in respect of his ministerial responsibilities, indicating for each date and the main topic under headings of *(a)* the BBC Radio 4 "Today" programme, *(b)* other sound broadcasts and *(c)* television broadcasts. [4467]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* During the parliamentary Session 1994–95 I gave a great many broadcast interviews in response to requests from the media. These interviews covered a wide range of Home Office responsibilities.

Detailed information is not available in the form requested.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Income

37. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what income is received annually by the Church Commissioners from non-church building based congregations. [3323]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners do not receive income directly from congregations. They do receive income from dioceses towards clergy stipends, which is then paid out directly to clergy with their monthly stipend payments. This income is mainly derived from parishes, but the commissioners have no information on individual parish contributions to such sums.

Turnbull Commission

38. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Church Commissioners will be making to Lambeth palace concerning the report of the Turnbull commission on the future of the Church of England. [3325]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners welcome the aim of improving the machinery of the Church at national level in support of the ministry and mission to the whole nation and look forward to taking a constructive part in the debate on the Turnbull report and its vision.

The board of governors has identified three key principles which need to be safeguarded in the planning and implementation of the proposed structures. These are:

(i) the important Church/state link, which is exemplified in the commissioners' constitution, in recognition that the Church of England is the established Church;

(ii) the impartiality which the commissioners deliver in the discharge of many of their responsibilities, especially those under the Pastoral Measure 1983; and

(iii) the need within the timetable for adequate consultation and detailed planning to ensure that any change is right for the Church and delivers a national service as good as, or better than, that provided now.

Arising from these principles are a number of important matters which will need to be addressed including the protection and handling of the commissioners' charitable responsibilities and the interplay between asset management and distribution, for example, the balance between their pensions liabilities and the support of the active ministry.

These concerns have been transmitted to the archbishops orally and in writing. In addition, the commissioners are represented on the archbishops' advisory group which is following up the Turnbull report.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the consequences of the proposals of Her Majesty's Government concerning arrangements for asylum and immigration to cease to pay existing benefit to certain categories of person after 8 January 1996, on the administration and finances of local authorities for support of families with children required by section 17 of the Children Act 1989. [4613]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Proposals on social security payments to asylum seekers and other persons from abroad were presented to the Social Security Advisory Committee on 11 October. The committee has carried out a public consultation on these proposals and has received representations from many individuals and organisations, including housing associations and local authorities. The committee has evaluated those responses and we are currently studying its report. The effect on local authority responsibilities under the Children Act will be taken into account in the preparation of the Government's reply.

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5069]

Mr. Burt: It is the policy of this Department to ensure that we do not gold-plate European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the UK. We take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Survey on Women, Pensions and Divorce

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to publish the DSS-commissioned survey on women, pensions and divorce. [4990]

Mr. Heald: We expect to receive the final draft reports by the end of March 1996 and will publish the findings soon afterwards. Preliminary results of the research should be available to the Department by the end of this year.

Maternity Grant

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many maternity grants from the social fund were paid out in each quarter of 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995, in each region of the United Kingdom. [5144]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Information is available by area directorate only and will be placed in the Library. Information about Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Child Care Disregard

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was his Department's original estimate for the numbers of lone parents who would be eligible for the child care disregard in 1995–96; and how many lone parents are currently receiving the child care disregard. [5271]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: As at 31 July 1995, 19,000 lone parents were receiving the child care disregard.[1]

Original estimates were that, in the long run, 150,000 families would gain from the new help. Provision was made in the expenditure forecasts based on around 100,000 gainers from the child care disregard in 1995–96 of whom the majority were lone parents. This estimate recognised the uncertainty of behavioural effects and the pace at which they occur. These effects are occurring more slowly than anticipated. We regularly revise our estimates in the light of new data.

[1] Source: Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

TREASURY

Civil Service Accounting Practices

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to review civil service accounting practices. [3308]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government are implementing resource accounting and budgeting across Government Departments. Details are set out in the White Paper "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money", Cm 2929, published in July 1995.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the overshoot or undershoot in the public sector borrowing requirement in each year since 1992 with respect to the Red Book estimate for *(a)* the subsequent year up to 1996–97 and *(b)* two years up to 1997–98. [5145]

Mr. Waldegrave: The table gives the requested figures.

Forecast and outturn figures for the public sector borrowing requirement

£ billion

Source	*Period*	*Forecast*	*Outturn*	*Error*
FSBR March 1992	1992–93	28.1	36.3	–8.2
	1993–94	32	45.4	–13.4
FSBR March 1993	1993–94	50.1	45.4	4.7
	1994–95	44	35.9	8.1
FSBR November 1993	1994–95	37.9	35.9	2.0
	1995–96	30	–	–
FSBR November 1994	1995–96	21.5	–	–
	1996–97	13	–	–
FSBR November 1995	1996–97	22.4	–	–
	1997–98	15	–	–

Note:

The November 1994 FSBR figures are those published in the revised tables, January 1995, following the decision to leave the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power at 8 per cent. and the further Budget measures announced on 8 December 1994.

Household Incomes

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of families with children with taxable incomes below the income tax threshold but above the lower earnings limit for national insurance; and if he will estimate the number of families with children who pay tax only at the lower rate. [79]

Mr. Jack: It is estimated that in 1995–96 about 250,000 families with children—defined as single parents and married couples with children—have no income tax liability but pay national insurance contributions. This figure includes people who have earnings for only part of the financial year. About 400,000 families with children are liable to income tax only at the lower rate. The estimates are based on information projected form the 1993 family expenditure survey and are therefore provisional.

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the disposable income of households in *(a)* the lowest decile and *(b)* the highest decile, in 1994–95, for households with (i) one adult, (ii) one adult, two or more children, (iii) one man, one woman and one child, (iv) one man, one woman and two children, (v) one man, one woman and three children, (vi) two adults, four or more children, (vii) three adults, one or more children and (viii) four adults, one or more children, following table 34 in the Central Statistical Office family spending report for 1992. [5009]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The deciles for 1994–95 corresponding to those in table 34 of the report on the family expenditure survey for 1992 are given in the table. The figures are estimates from the FES, and are subject to sampling variations. The figures have been rounded to the nearest pound.

	Average weekly disposable income (£)	
	Lowest decile point	*Highest decile point*
One adult	62	302
One adult, two or more children	87	242
One man, one woman and one child	141	604
One man, one woman and two children	194	662
One man, one woman and three children	145	593
Two adults, four or more children	[1]—	[1]—
Three adults, one or more children	246	688
Four adults, one or more children	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Figures are not available as there are too few households in the sample to provide reliable estimates.

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the disposable income of households in *(a)* lowest decile and *(b)* the highest decile in 1994–95 in actual terms per week, and as a percentage of the median for (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) Greater London, following table 34 in the CSO family spending report for 1992. [4958]

Mrs. Knight: The deciles for 1994–95 corresponding to those in table 34 of the report on the family expenditure survey for 1992 are given in the table. The figures are estimates from the FES, and are subject to sampling variations. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10p.

	Average weekly disposable income (£)			As a percentage of the median	
	Lowest decile	Highest decile	Median	Lowest decile	Highest decile
United Kingdom	76.40	565.10	247.60	30.9	228.2
Greater London	75.50	698.90	265.10	28.5	263.6

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to table 9.7, how many adults in retired households participating in the family expenditure survey for 1994–95 were *(a)* dependent only on state pensions/income support and *(b)* dependent on state, occupational or personal private pensions from two or more sources; what was the average value of that income by gross income decile group; and what was the average weekly amount. [5011]

Mrs. Knight: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to remove the obligation on individuals to produce a certificate in order to qualify for VAT on fuel at the rate of 8 per cent. for domestic users; and if he will make a statement. [5250]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many estates in each county in England were allowed conditional exemption from inheritance tax on grounds of public access to land for the most recent year for which figures are available. [3782]

Mr. Jack: In 1994–95 there were 18 estates in the United Kingdom where land and buildings were designated and given conditional exemption.

A breakdown of this total by county would identify counties where there were fewer than five designations. As this would compromise the normal rules on taxpayer confidentiality, I regret that I cannot provide the information requested.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring forward the date for the introduction of the new inheritance tax threshold to the date of his Budget statement. [4491]

Mr. Jack: The proposed increase in the inheritance tax threshold replaces the much smaller increase which would otherwise be due under statutory indexation from 6 April 1996.

Interest Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the average real rate of interest for each year since 1975. [4330]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Real interest rates can be calculated in a number of ways, depending on the choice of nominal interest rate and the measure of inflation. Table 47 of "Economic Trends" annual supplement, Central Statistical Office, gives a number of possible measures of the nominal interest rate. Figures for various measures of inflation can be calculated from data in the same CSO publication.

Import Penetration

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the figure for import penetration for all the manufactured items covered by table 15.10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics". [4749]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The 1994 information is being prepared for publication and will be included in the December issue of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics".

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Government monitor imports of manufactures; what is the target for publication of figures for import penetration in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics"; what has been recent performance against target; and if he will make a statement. [4558]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The Government use a range of figures to monitor the imports of manufactures. For example, aggregate figures on the imports of manufactures are published each month by the Central Statistical Office in the first releases on the balance of UK visible trade. More detailed statistics on trade with non-EC countries are published monthly in *Business Monitor MM20,* with corresponding statistics on trade with EC countries published quarterly in *Business Monitor MQ20,* both of which are published by HM Customs and Excise.

The CSO aims to make all data available in the public domain as soon as possible. The import penetration figures are published in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" on this basis. The 1994 data will be published in the December issue; this issue will include a number of presentational improvements since the previous publication.

Home Income Plans

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current tax relief on mortgage interest for home income plans. [4956]

Mr. Jack: Tax relief for interest paid by someone over 65 who takes out a loan, secured on his or her home, to buy a life annuity—often called a home income plan—is given at the basic rate of income tax. This is currently 25 per cent.

VAT (Energy Efficiency and Supply)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the reasons for imposing different rates of VAT on energy efficiency and energy supply. [5013]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Any extension of the existing unique reduced rate of VAT on energy supply would add to the burden on business in the administration and collection of VAT. Moreover, adjustment to the VAT structure by way of a reduced rate for certain goods would be an inefficient means of addressing an objective such as energy efficiency.

Building Societies Acts

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the draft legislation on the reform of the Building Societies Acts; how long the consultative period will be; and if he will make a statement. [4846]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government intend to publish a draft Building Societies Bill for three months' consultation early in the new year, with the aim of introducing new legislation during the life of this Parliament. The draft Bill will amend the Building Societies Act 1986.

Stamp Duty (Houses)

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the yield in the last available financial year from stamp duty in respect of house sale and purchase. [4962]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The yield from stamp duty on residential property in 1994–95 is estimated at £520 million.

Homeworking

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the amount of homeworking in Lancashire.

Mrs. Angela Knight: This information is not at present readily available. All the information collected in the labour force survey will be released at county level following the publication of the full summer 1995 results in December 1995. However, the LFS includes questions about homeworking only in the spring and autumn quarters, so the information requested will not be available until the autumn 1995 results are published in March 1996.

External Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to restore the annual supplement to the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics". [4559]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" is the responsibility of the Central Statistical Office which has no plans to produce annual supplements to this publication.

Residential Care Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of elderly people who will not now sell their homes to pay for long-term care. [4858]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* Clearly the measures that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget will benefit a large number of people. Raising to £16,000 the level of assets below which people can get some help for long-term care, and increasing to £10,000 the level below which they make no contribution at all, will help all those of modest means who need long-term care.

ENVIRONMENT

OECD Report

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of Stae for the Environment what assessment he has made of the 1993 OECD report on environmental policies and competitiveness. [1154]

Mr. Clappison: I have noted the OECD report with interest. It is a balanced report which examines a number of important issues. We remain committed to promoting the use of economic instruments to achieve our environmental goals, where this is appropriate. In the case of the landfill tax we have used the revenues raised by an environmental tax to reduce other distortionary taxes on employment. However, in considering the scope for new environmental taxes it is important to judge each case on its merits.

Process Guidance Notes

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account was taken of the effects on environmental technology manufacturers, of the postponement of the upgrading deadlines in process guidance notes PG 6/7(91), PG 6/8(91), PG 6/13(91), PG 6/14(91), PG 6/15(91), PG 6/16(92), PG 6/18(92), PG 6/22(92), PG 6/28(92) and PG 6/32(92). [3107]

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 29 November 1995]:* The deferral of the upgrading deadlines for all the listed process guidance notes will allow time for a thorough review; the Department was conscious of potential effects on environment technology manufactures.

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what independent assessment he received of the cost estimates provided to his Department by the industry sectors directly affected by process guidance notes PG 6/7 (91), PG 6/8 (91), PG 6/13 (91), PG 6/14 (91), PG 6/15 (91), PG 6/16 (92), PG 6/18 (92), PG 6/22 (92), PG 6/28 (92) and PG 6/32 (92); and by whom such assessments were made. [3124]

Mr. Jones: All the listed process guidance notes, published in 1991–92, were drafted by environmental health officers seconded to the Department who took account of all information provided by industry consultees. The notes are now being reviewed and any cost estimates received will be carefully assessed. In particular, account will be taken of two studies being undertaken by consultants for my Department and for the Department of Trade and Industry into the costs of reducing emissions of volatile organic compounds from solvent-using industrial sectors.

Housing Associations (Tax Changes)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment (1) what discussions he has held with *(a)* local authorities considering a large-scale voluntary transfer of housing and *(b)* non-charitable housing associations set up as a consequence of a large-scale voluntary transfer proposal about the potential impact on their business plans of his proposal to withdraw tax relief grant in April 1997; [4280]

(2) what consideration he gave to the impact on housing association rents of his proposal to withdraw tax relief grant from non-charitable housing associations; [4238]

(3) what assumptions he has made about the number of non-charitable housing associations which may alter their constitution and seek charitable status as a consequence of his proposal to withdraw tax relief grant in April 1997; [4279]

(4) what consultation he has undertaken with non-charitable housing associations, their tenants, their lenders and other interested parties before deciding to discontinue their entitlement to tax relief grant; [4277]

(5) what discussions he has held with large-scale voluntary transfer housing associations about the potential impact on their business plans of the proposed withdrawal of tax relief grant in April 1997. [4281]

Mr. Curry: In deciding that tax relief grant for non-charitable housing associations should be discontinued from April 1997, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, the Government were aware that withdrawal would in many cases necessitate some adjustment to their business plans and finances. The Government none the less took the view that it was not appropriate for non-charitable associations to continue to have this financial benefit in the context of the Government's proposals to allow other bodies to compete for funds to support the provision of social housing.

My Department will be talking in detail to the National Federation of Housing Associations and other bodies concerned about the proposals.

Decisions on whether to seek charitable status are a matter for individual associations. Housing associations' rents depend on many factors, including the efficiency of their development and upkeep of property, and their management costs.

Sheffield City Council

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total number of planning applications made by Sheffield city council for each of the last three years and the total number of public inquiries for each application; how many he has called in; and if he will make a statement. [4099]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department does not collect separate information on applications made by local authorities. However, Sheffield city council has provided the following figures on applications made by it:

1992–93 (from mid-July): 42

1993–94: 74

1994–95: 72.

No Sheffield city council applications have been called in during these three years and no public inquiries have therefore been held.

Green Belt

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further guidance he has given on PPG2 to local authorities to define the criteria for redesignation of green belt land. [4086]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have not published any further planning policy guidance on green belts since the revised PPG2 was issued earlier this year. Green belt boundaries can be altered only in exceptional circumstances.

Planning Applications

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total number of planning applications for each of the last five years; how many in each year have been called in; if he will express those called in as percentage of the total number each year; what criteria are used for calling in by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [4087]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is as follows (England figures):

	Applications received	*Applications called in*	*Percentage of applications called in*
1990–91	530,358	132	0.02
1991–92	508,948	140	0.03
1992–93	461,982	101	0.02
1993–94	479,409	99	0.02
1994–95	479,188	167	0.03

My right hon. Friend's policy for calling in planning applications is set out in the reply he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) on 26 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *314–15*.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department has issued to local authorities to ensure full public awareness of planning applications lodged; and if he will make a statement. [4085]

Mr. Jones: Advice to local authorities on publicising planning applications is given in the Department's circular 15/92.

Regional Offices

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to harmonise the terms and conditions of employees' working in the integrated regional offices who are employed by different Departments. [4507]

Sir Paul Beresford: The four Departments responsible for the government offices in the regions are seeking as far as possible to harmonise personnel management practices in the offices and are discussing proposals with management staff and the trade unions.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the total number of staff in each regional government office on *(a)* 1 October 1994 and *(b)* 1 October 1995; and in each case how many of those staff held temporary promotions. [4319]

Sir Paul Beresford: The table shows total numbers of staff in each of the government offices on *(a)* 1 October 1994 and *(b)* 1 October 1995. It also shows how many of those staff held temporary promotions at those dates.

	1 October 1994		*1 October 1995*	
Government office	*Number of staff on temporary promotion*	*Number of staff*	*Number of staff*	*Number of staff on temporary promotion*
NE	308	27	297	30
NW	355	8	323	8
YH	338	37	318	45
M	165	—	169	1
WM	351	33	326	31
EM	264	25	233	18
ER	189	14	184	16
SW	247	25	251	23
SE	231	12	220	14
L	340	10	323	17

Vehicle Pollution

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are currently involved in the research into pollution from fuel emissions with particular reference to the emissions of PM_{10}s; and if he will make a statement. [3302]

Mr. Clappison: The Departments of the Environment and of Transport have established a collaborative programme of research with industry into emissions of PM_{10} from vehicles. The aim of the first part of the programme was to design a test methodology and a measurement programme for PM_{10} in vehicular exhaust. This was achieved through the participation of experts from over 25 organisations in the project, including the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, individual companies and universities. The second phase will measure the emissions of PM_{10} from a variety of road transport vehicles. My Department has also established a programme to measure emissions of PM_{10} from industrial sources. Results from both these research programmes are expected in 1996–97.

Climate Change Panel

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the inclusion of practitioners' cost-benefit analysis in the intergovernmental panel on climate change on the public perception of the scientific objectivity of the panel. [3747]

Mr. Clappison: The contribution of cost-benefit analysis to the assessment of man-made climate change is only one of the many issues being addressed by the intergovernmental panel on climate change. The second assessment report is to be considered at a meeting of the panel in Rome from 11 to 15 December.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy for United Kingdom representatives at the intergovernmental panel on climate change meeting in Rome from 11 to 15 December, to oppose the inclusion in the IPCC's second assessment report of cost-benefit analysis material based on differing values for the lives of people in richer and poorer countries. [3748]

Mr. Clappison: Reservations on the cost-benefit analysis of climate change involving the differential evaluation of a statistical life are already reflected in the summary for policy makers of the report of WGIII of the IPCC, which was approved in Montreal in October.

The meeting of the intergovernmental panel on climate change in Rome, 11 to 15 December, will consider the policy maker's summaries to all three working group reports, and agree an overall executive summary.

Newham (Funding)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his oral answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column 1343, concerning the funding of the London borough of Newham, he will make a statement on the areas, or total, of overspending referred to in his answer. [4704]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend was explaining to the hon. Member that under our provisional capping criteria Newham's permitted budget increase for 1996–97 is less than that of Westminster because Newham's budget this year is some 1.3 per cent. above its standard spending assessment whereas Westminster's is some 12 per cent. below.

Our proposals for 1996–97 mean that Newham's SSA per head will be one of the highest in the country. If it decides that spending on education should be below the amount which we have made available, that is a matter for it.

Housing Action Trusts

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the planned financial allocation in the financial year 1995–96 in respect of each housing action trust; and in each case, what proportion of total housing action trust spending these allocations represent; [4826]

(2) what has been the annual financial allocation to each housing action trust in each year since their start; and, in each case, what proportion of total housing action trust spending these allocations represent. [4827]

Sir Paul Beresford: The grant in aid allocations to each housing action trust and the percentages these represent of each trust's total expenditure in each year from their start, including estimates for 1995–96, are as follows:

	1991–92		*1992–93*		*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*	
Housing action trust	*Grant-in-aid £ million*	*Percentage of gross expenditure*	*Grant-in-aid £ million*	*Percentage of gross expenditure*	*Grant-in-aid £ million*	*Percentage of gross expenditure*	*Grant-in-aid £ million*	*Percentage of gross expenditure*	*Estimated Grant-in-aid £ million*	*Percentage of estimated gross expenditure*
Castle Vale	—	—	—	—	2.3	100	6.4	55	12.0	68
Liverpool	—	—	0.2	100	16.0	83	13.7	71	18.0	78
North Hull	9.8	98	14.5	93	26.5	94	27.4	91	17.0	84
Stonebridge	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.9	100	3.0	60
Tower Hamlets	—	—	—	—	8.6	100	6.9	71	10.0	81
Waltham Forest	0.3	95	11.8	78	25.0	98	36.7	94	30.0	90
Total	10.1	98	26.5	86	78.4	93	92.0	83	90.0	81

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the estimated total cost to public funds of each housing action trust completing its agreed programmes, giving the figures *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each trust. [4828]

Sir Paul Beresford: For North Hull housing action trust, the total cost to public funds is estimated to be about £115 million. For the other trusts, the estimated costs to public funds of the housing development and/or refurbishment programmes envisaged in the studies preceding the establishment of each HAT were as follows:

Housing action trust	*Date established*	*Estimated development cost £ million*
Castle Vale	1993	130
Liverpool	1993	130
Stonebridge	1994	100
Tower Hamlets	1993	65-85
Waltham Forest	1992	160–170

The trusts and my Department are currently reviewing estimates of trusts' lifetimes, costs and the balance of their funding in the light of updated assessments of their housing and other regeneration activities and the scope for engaging private finance to help meet their objectives. We plan to complete these reviews during 1996–97.

Building Research Establishment

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which consultancy group has been appointed to advise him on the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment; what are its terms of reference; when it will report; and which organisations are being consulted. [4809]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *799*, in which I stated that PA Consulting had been appointed to advise on the options for transferring the Building Research Establishment to the private sector. I also refer her to the answer which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State (Sir P. Beresford) gave to the hon. Member for Greenwich on 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *93*, indicating that he had placed in the Library a copy of the specification issued to all the consultants invited to tender.

The consultants have been asked to report by 31 January 1996. They are at present finalising a list of organisations whom they propose to consult. I shall write to the hon. Member when their list is complete.

Hedgerows

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue guidance to local authorities with regard to a hedgerow evaluation system against which the most important hedges could be evaluated and retained under the Environment Act 1995; and if he will make a statement on how he proposes local authorities fund the administration of such hedgerow schemes. [5029]

Mr. Clappison: Before introducing a scheme for the protection of important hedgerows under the Environment Act 1995, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is required to consult all interested bodies, including those representing local authorities, on the detailed arrangements. As part of that exercise, we shall consult on the criteria to be used by local authorities in order to identify those important hedgerows which should be retained on the grounds of their historical importance or their values to the wildlife or landscape of an area; and on a system for evaluating hedges against these criteria. Before reaching decisions on the overall level of the local government finance settlement for 1996–97, the Secretary of State has taken into consideration any new financial burdens on local authorities, as well as potential efficiency savings.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made with the single regeneration budget; when he will be announcing the results of the second bidding round of the single regeneration budget challenge fund; and if he will make a statement. [5596]

Mr. Curry: The single regeneration budget is making an unprecedented contribution to local regeneration. Resources for the single regeneration budget for 1996–97 and the two subsequent years will total nearly £3.8 billion. Of that total, over £1.3 billion will go to support schemes approved under the challenge fund. The remainder will support on-going initiatives and existing commitments under programmes taken into the single regeneration budget including English Partnerships, urban development corporations, housing action trusts, city challenge and estate action.

Round 1 of the challenge fund, under which some 200 schemes were approved, started in April 1995. These schemes stand to attract, over their lifetime of up to seven years, some £1.1 billion in challenge fund support, and some £2.5 billion in private sector investment.

Round 2 of the challenge fund built on the success of round 1 and has attracted a wide range of high quality bids. We have decided to approve 172 bids. Many of those were unsuccessful in round 1 and were greatly improved and successfully resubmitted by local partnerships for round 2. On initial estimates, the successful bids should attract over their lifetime over £1 billion in challenge fund support, and some £2.5 billion in private sector investment. Details of the successful individual bids will be published tomorrow, and will be placed in the Library of the House and circulated to hon. Members.

Taken together, the schemes approved under rounds 1 and 2 of the challenge fund should create or safeguard 500,000 jobs, support over 80,000 new businesses, complete or improve nearly 170,000 homes and support over 20,000 voluntary and community groups. Over a third of these schemes are specifically directed towards ethnic minority communities.

Following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement, provision totalling £250 million has been made for third and fourth rounds of the challenge fund. The third round will operate on the same lines as round 2. It will be launched next year for schemes starting from April 1997, with planned resources of £50 million in 1997–98 and £150 million in 1998–99. Resources for later years will be determined in the light of subsequent public expenditure settlements.

Waste Strategy

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish the waste strategy for England and Wales. [5657]

Mr. Gummer: The waste White Paper, "Making Waste Work: A strategy for sustainable waste management in England and Wales", will be published on 12 December. It builds on the ideas set out in the sustainable development strategy, published in January 1994. The strategy aims to improve the way we manage our waste. Only by taking responsibility for the waste we produce can we ensure that our environment is protected both now and for future generations.

Copies will be available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Environment Agency

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to issue a further draft of statutory guidance to the Environment Agency on its objectives, including the contribution it is to make towards the achievement of sustainable development. [5658]

Mr. Clappison: Together with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is today issuing for consultation a draft of the statutory guidance which we must give to the Environment Agency about its objectives and about the contribution which it can make towards achieving the goal of sustainable development. To put that guidance in context, we are also issuing a more general document which restates the principles of sustainable development and offers a commentary on the duty which the agency has to take account of likely costs and benefits, including those to the environment.

Wind Farms

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many wind farms currently operate in the United Kingdom; and how many are planned over the next three years. [4715]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

At 30 September 1995, 37 wind projects, including 28 wind farms, were operating in the United Kingdom through contracts made under the first two renewables non-fossil fuel obligation orders for England and Wales, the first Northern Ireland NFFO order and the first Scottish renewables order—SRO. Up to three more wind farms are likely to become operational under NI-NFFO 1. The second NI-NFFO order has yet to be made. It is too early to estimate how many more wind farms under SRO-1 will become operational.

Of the 31 wind farm contracts made under NFFO 3 for England and Wales, about 20 are expected bo be commissioned; none is yet operating. In addition, 24 smaller wind projects under 1.6 MW DNC were offered NFFO contracts, none of which has yet been commissioned.

I announced in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) on 2 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *441–44*, the proposals for a fourth NFFO order for England and Wales for a further 400 to 500 MW of renewables-generated electricity. As part of these proposals, the Government are considering separate bands for new generating stations including one for wind power split into two bands catering for large wind farms and for small cluster/single machines. The order is expected to be made in 1997. Also on 2 November 1995 I announced proposals for a second Scottish renewables order for 70 to 80 MW of renewables-generated electricity. As part of these proposals, the Government are considering four separate bands for generating stations including one for wind power. The order is expected to be made in 1996.

HEALTH

Occupational Health

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated as to the effectiveness of occupational health programmes in the workplace leading to (i) greater productivity, (ii) less sick leave, (iii) higher rates of retention of staff and (iv) better working relationships; and if he will make a statement. [3753]

Mr. Horam: Health promotion is one aspect of occupational health which falls to the Department. The Department of Health set up the workplace task force which evaluated the available research on health promotion programmes in the workplace. As a result, last month the Department published a resource pack for employers and will shortly be setting up a workplace health advisory team which will assist small and medium-sized firms to provide health promotion in the workplace.

Departmental Employees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3959]

Mr. Horam: Information about each consultant and outside organisation employed by the Department of Health since 1990 and the total payments to them could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of individuals employed by the Department are contained in the civil service staff post summary tables, copies of which are available in the Library. Staffing costs since 1990 can be found in the relevant copies of the departmental report.

The purpose of employing consultants, outside organisations and individuals was and is to assist the Department in achieving its aims and objectives as set out in the departmental reports.

Health Authorities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all health authorities with effect from 1 April 1996. [4063]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on 23 November, *Official Report*, column *331*, concerning the new health authorities.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the budget for each health authority in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96. [4966]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* 1994–95 final revenue cash limits and 1995–96 initial revenue cash limits for each district health authority will be placed in the Library.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent on breast cancer research in each year since 1989–90 by the Government. [4004]

Mr. Malone: The figures are shown in the table:

	Thousands
1990–91	3,220
1991–92	2,139
1992–93	3,791
1993–94	3,948
1994–95	4,284

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) at what date and time the Committee on Safety of Medicines met to consider safety issues relating to the third generation oral contraceptive; [4301]

(2) at what date and time papers relating to potential safety concerns about third generation oral contraceptives were first made available to all members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [4302]

Mr. Malone: The Committee on Safety of Medicines met on Friday 13 October at 10 am to consider the issues relating to third generation oral contraceptives. The papers for the meeting were dispatched to all members of the committee at 4 pm on 11 October by express courier service and were received by members at 10.30 am the following morning. Prior to this, some members of the CSM and expert external advisers had met on 10 October to consider the papers. Some advisers were also provided with each element of the data as it became available and a series of meetings were held to discuss the evidence as it evolved between June and October.

Prior to the availability of the new epidemiological evidence on third generation oral contraceptives, the CSM had reviewed the safety of third generation oral contraceptives and gestodene-based oral contraceptives in particular on three occasions, in 1989, 1991 and 1995.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the costs, including travel costs and emoluments, of supporting the sub-committees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, for each year since 1991. [4306]

Mr. Malone: The information requested in respect of the sub-committtees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines—biologicals, chemistry, pharmacy and standards, pharmacovigilance and safety and efficacy—is as shown in the table for each financial year since 1990–91. The figures include members' fees, travel, hotel, and other miscellaneous costs.

1990–91: £116,265.26

1991–92: £120,427.43

1992–93: £113,874.82

1993–94: £121,778.89

1994–95: £92,741.42.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the names, professional appointments, date of first appointment to the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the total duration of membership of each member of the Committee on Safety of Medicines as at 1 October; [4304]

(2) how many members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines have a qualification in epidemiology. [4303]

Mr. Malone: The membership of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and information requested is shown in the table. Dr. Janet Darbyshire has a formal epidemiological qualification and in addition Professor M. D. Rawlins, chairman, and Professor M. J. S. Langman have extensive experience in pharmacoepidemiology.

The committee consults as necessary other disciplines not represented on the committee, including experts in epidemiology, and when the need arises co-opts them on to the committee as "members for the day". The sub-committees of the Committee on Safety of Medicines additionally provide a range of expertise which may not be represented on the main committee.

Name	*Professional appointment*	*Appointed*	*Duration until 1 October 1995*
Professor M. D. Rawlins (Chairman)	Professor of Clinical Pharmacology—Newcastle University	January 1980	15 years 9 months
Professor A. M. Breckenridge	Professor of Clinical Pharmacology—Liverpool University	January 1981	12 years 9 months
Dr. Kate L. Costeloe	Reader in Neonatal Paediatrics, University of London Medical College	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Dr. Janet H. Darbyshire	Head of MRC's HIV Clinical Trials Centre Hon. Consultant in Thoracic Medicine and Hon. Senior Lecturer in Epidermiology, University College London Medical School	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor D. S. Davies	Professor of Biochemical Pharmacology at Royal Postgraduate Medical School Hammersmith Hospital	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor Anne Ferguson	Professor of Gastroenterology and Head of Department of Medicine—Edinburgh University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor A. T. Florence	Dean of the School of Pharmacy—London University	January 1981	14 years 9 months
Professor A. M. Geddes	Head of Department of Infection—Birmingham University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor E. C. Gordon-Smith	Professor of Haematology—St. George's Hospital Medical School, London	January 1990	5 years 9 months
Professor K. Gull	Director of the Research and Graduate School, School of Biological Sciences, Manchester University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor H. S. Jacobs	Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology, University College and Middlesex School of Medicine	January 1984	11 years 9 months
Dr. W. A. Jerrett	General Practitioner—Glamorgan	January 1987	8 years 9 months
Dr. B. J. Kirby	Consultant Physician and Deputy Director of the Postgraduate Medical School—Exeter University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Miss Gillian C. N. Lachelin	Reader and Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist—University College and Middlesex School of Medicine	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor M. J. S. Langman	Professor of Medicine and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry—Birmingham University	January 1987	8 years 9 months
Dr. A. V. P. Mackay	Medical Director of the Argyll and Bute NHS Trust and McIntosh Lecturer in Psychological Medicine—Glasgow University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor J. M. Midgley	Professor of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry-Strathclyde University	January 1990	5 years 9 months
Professor B. K. Park	Professor of Pharmacology and Therapeutics—Liverpool University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor J. C. Petrie	Professor of Clinical Pharmacology—Aberdeen University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor A. Li Wan PO	Professor of Clinical Pharmaceutics—Nottingham University	January 1993	2 years 9 months
Professor Anne E. Tattersfield	Professor of Respiratory Medicine—Nottingham University	January 1993	2 years 9 months

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the remuneration which the chairman and members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines received in respect of their work on the committee the last year for which figures are available. [4307]

Mr. Malone: For the financial year 1994–95, the chairman received £2,358 in attendance and preparation fees and the members received among them £34,294 in attendance and preparation fees in respect of 11 one-day meetings. In addition, the chairman and members were reimbursed their travel, hotel and other miscellaneous cost.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statutory provisions govern the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [4305]

Mr. Malone: The Committee on Safety of Medicines is a committee established by Ministers under powers in section 4 of the Medicines Act 1968. The committee was established by the Medicines (Committee on Safety of Medicines) Order 1970, S.I. 1970/1257, to give advice—with respect to safety, quality and efficacy—on medicinal products for human use and to promote the collection and investigation of information about adverse reactions, to enable such advice to be given.

The Medicines Commission and Committees Regulations 1970, S.I. 1970/746, made under powers in schedule 1 to the Medicines Act 1968, provide inter alia for the terms of office of members of committees established under section 4.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the numbers and cost of elderly patients blocking hospital beds. [4403]

Mr. Bowis: Patients' discharge from hospital may be delayed for a variety of reasons. We do not hold central statistics for patients who may be occupying a bed unnecessarily.

Medical Ethics

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the code of practice published by the British Medical Association entitled "Advance Statements About Medical Treatment"; and if he will make a statement. [4535]

Mr. Horam: The code of practice was drawn up for health professionals, by a multi-professional group under the auspices of the British Medical Association, in response to a recommendation by the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics. Little representation has been made to the Department of Health about this code.

Childrens' Hospices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that local health authorities meet the Government's target of 50:50 funding for children's hospices; and if he will make a statement on the future of children's hospices. [4549]

Mr. Bowis: The 50:50 target is no longer relevant, since funds have been built into health authorities' cash allocations to enable them to decide the level of funding required to meet the needs of their resident population for hospice services. Childrens' hospices are now able to benefit from health service funding through the contracts health authorities and general practitioner fundholders can make with service providers in both the national health service and the voluntary sector.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to encourage local health authorities to provide childrens' hospices with regular financial payments. [4547]

Mr. Bowis: We have funded a £5 million programme of pilot projects over five years to determine the type of services of most benefit to children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. The projects include services provided by childrens' hospices. The evaluation of the programme will help health authorities and general practitioner fundholders contract for the range of services necessary to meet the needs of locally resident children and their families.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average percentage of childrens' hospices' incomes derived from local health authority contributions. [4548]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases were on in-patient waiting lists in England on *(a)* 30 September and *(b)* the latest date for which figures are available. [4495]

Mr. Horam: Provisional figures show that on 30 September 1995, the latest date for which information has been published, 1,041,025 people in England were waiting for in-patient or day case treatment at national health service hospitals.

Health Service Commissioner

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which bodies other then aggrieved patients are able to submit complaints to the health service ombudsman for investigation. [4496]

Mr. Horam: The health service commissioner can investigate complaints from a person or body other than the aggrieved patient in certain circumstances. Complaints can be accepted from someone acting on behalf of the patient if it is clear the patient supports the complaint or is not capable of doing so. If, for instance, the patient has died or is incapable of making a complaint, complaints can be accepted from a close family member—preferably the next of kin. Complaints can also be accepted from a representative or adviser, who may be a national health service employee, if there are good reasons why a family member cannot make the complaint. The commissioner can also accept complaints from NHS bodies such as health authorities.

District Health Authority Meetings

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to permit community health council representatives attending meetings of district health authorities to speak and to have their observations recorded in the public minutes. [4515]

Mr. Horam: All district health authority meetings are open to members of the public. The chairman of the authority will decide whether members of the public will be permitted to make representations during the course of proceedings.

Employment of Children

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from whom he has received representations in support of the proposal in his Department's consultation document "Employment of Children" to relax the law relating to children's employment. [4920]

Mr. Bowis: I have not as yet received any representations on the consultation document.

Disabled People

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to extend the health care payments proposed for patients in nursing homes to cover disabled people who choose to live in residential homes. [4796]

Mr. Bowis: We have no plans for health care payments in either type of home.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many disabled persons entered residential homes in each of the last three years. [4795]

Mr. Bowis: Information on the degree of disability of individuals on entry to residential homes is not available centrally. Most people entering residential care would be regarded as having a significant degree of disability or dysfunction.

Medical Confidentiality

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses he received in relation to his discussion paper concerning medical confidentiality; what plans he has to bring forward proposals to protect medical confidentiality in the current Session of Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [5337]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 4 December, *Official Report*, columns *42–43*.

We received 175 responses to the consultative document "Confidentiality, Use and Disclosure of Information".

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average response time for an ambulance on a 999 call in the City of Durham constituency. [5128]

Mr. Horam: Information is not available centrally by constituency.

Psychiatric Care

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has made for *(a)* the inspections, *(b)* the drawing up of reports and the drawing up of recommendations to him by persons he appoints (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, in respect of private psychiatric hospitals where fees for patients are paid for by national health service purchasers. [4623]

Mr. Bowis: Private psychiatric hospitals are subject to registration and inspection by health authorities under part II of the Registered Homes Act 1984. The primary concern of the registering authority is to ensure that the level of care provided is sufficient and suitable to meet the needs of individual patients.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what public funds have been paid to Partnerships in Care in respect of psychiatric treatment for patients paid for by purchasing bodies of the national health service in the financial year 1994–95; and if he will list the number of establishments concerned and the approximate number of patients for whom fees were paid; [4622]

(2) what public funds have been expended in respect of Mr. Stephen Laudat arising from his residential treatment at Kneesworth hospital. [4621]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally and it is not the practice to give details of the cost relating to the care of individuals.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the names and locations of the secure hospitals establishments *(a)* owned and *(b)* run by the firm Partnerships in Care, used by national health service purchasers, indicating for each (i) the number of beds, (ii) the number occupied by national health service patients and (iii) the number of qualified psychiatrists on the staff; [4606]

(2) what is the minimum number of persons with qualifications in psychiatric medicine that he requires, in full-time equivalent, to be on the staff of private psychiatric hospitals providing secure accommodation for national health service patients; and if he will indicate the nature of the qualifications required. [4620]

Mr. Bowis: Under the Registered Homes Act 1984, health authorities are required to register and inspect all mental nursing homes including privately owned secure hospitals in their catchment area. The Act requires that the health authority must satisfy itself that the home provides sufficient and suitable professional, technical, ancillary and other staff having regard to the size of the home and the number, age, sex and condition of the patients therein. Information about individual establishments is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts and health authorities have now implemented the care programme approach for people discharged from psychiatric hospitals; and which have not. [5060]

Mr. Bowis: We have asked health authorities and trusts to ensure, as a matter of urgency, that the care programme approach is applied to all patients who have been accepted for care by the specialist psychiatric services. The latest reports suggest that this objective will largely be achieved by March 1996.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column

454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5068]

Mr. Horam: It is the policy of my Department to ensure that we do not add any unnecessary burden when implementing European directives in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in light of this policy.

Anti-smoking Campaigns

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the cost of the current campaigns by the Health Education Authority in England designed to encourage people to stop smoking in the current financial year; if he will make a statement on *(a)* the overall campaign and *(b)* the television advertising campaign; and if he will identify separately the costs of *(b)*. [4860]

Mr. Horam: In the 1995–96 financial year, the Health Education Authority's budget for anti-smoking activity is £6,492 million.

The national smoking education campaign is designed to reduce the prevalence of cigarette smoking by preventing uptake among young people and motivating and assisting those in low-income groups, in particular parents and pregnant women, to give up.

The television commercials which will run from 26 December will cost £2.768 million.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the assessment of performance-related pay for family health services authority officials has taken into account changes in the number of GP fundholders in the FHSA area. [5059]

Mr. Malone: It is for individual national health service employers to set the aims and objectives for employees for the purpose of performance-related pay.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the available evidence on the connection between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia in humans. [4934]

Mr. Horam: The independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee provides the Government with an expert assessment of the scientific evidence as it develops. There is no current scientific evidence that BSE can be transmitted to humans or that eating beef causes CJD.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has on changes in the level of incidence of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease over the last 10 years. [4935]

Mr. Horam: The national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance centre in Edinburgh investigates the incidence and epidemiology of CJD cases in the United Kingdom, paying particular attention to occupation and eating habits, to establish whether there has been any change in the pattern of the disease since the advent of BSE. There continues to be no evidence of an emerging CJD epidemic. The United Kingdom incidence of CJD is comparable to countries in Europe and elsewhere, with no or very little BSE.

Information on the incidence of CJD in the UK since 1985 is contained in the fourth annual report of the national CJD unit published on 5 October 1995, copies of which are available in the Library. The latest provisional figures for 1995 so far indicate that the incidence will be lower than in 1994.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *42*, on what date his Department first informed the Federation of Tour Operators about the outbreak of legionnaire's disease in Kusadasi; and if he will place in the Library copies of the letters sent to the Federation of Tour Operators and the Association of British Travel Agents. [5398]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has an agreement with the Association of British Travel Agents that notifications about outbreaks of disease will be sent to it and it, in turn, will notify the travel industry. The Department first wrote to the Federation of Tour Operators about the outbreak of legionnaire's disease in Kusadasi on 29 September, although informal contact had been made by telephone a day earlier. Copies of the letters to ABTA and the FTO will be placed in the Library.

Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is (i) the procurement route for the tendering exercise for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy and what were the dates on which *(a)* the tender was announced, *(b)* information was made available, *(c)* expressions of interest had to be received, *(d)* organisations to be invited to tender were selected and informed and *(e)* tenders had to be submitted; and (ii) if all the procedures complied with the regulations set out by the European Union. [5278]

Mr. Horam: The tender exercise was announced in *The Lancet* and the *Health Service Journal* between 26 and 28 October 1995. The deadline for expressions of interest was 10 November. Every respondent to the advertisements was sent a statement of requirements on 13 November and was invited to attend a briefing meeting on 21 November. A full invitation to tender was issued to those who attended the briefing meeting.

A sift of responses to preliminary questions in the statement of requirements took place on Friday 24 November and organisations were informed in writing and by telephone on that day. Those remaining in the exercise have been asked to submit completed tenders by Friday 15 December.

I can confirm that the procedures comply with the regulations set out by the European Union.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the stillbirth rate, excluding foetal deaths at 24 to 27 weeks of gestation registered since 1 October 1992, *(b)* the neonatal mortality rate and *(c)* the post-neonatal mortality rate in England and Wales in each of the last 20 years; and what was the change in each rate in each of the periods (i) 1975 to 1980, (ii) 1980 to 1985 and (iii) 1985 to 1990 and in each single year since 1990. [5274]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the tables.

Stillbirth, neonatal and post-neonatal mortality rates[1] England and Wales 1975–94

	Stillbirths[2]	*Neonatal*	*Postneonatal*
1975	10.3	10.7	5.0
1976	9.7	9.7	4.6
1977	9.4	9.3	4.5
1978	8.5	8.7	4.5
1979	8.0	8.2	4.6
1980	7.2	7.7	4.4
1981	6.6	6.7	4.4
1982	6.3	6.3	4.6
1983	5.7	5.9	4.3
1984	5.7	5.6	3.9
1985	5.5	5.1	4.0
1986	5.3	5.3	4.3
1987	5.0	5.1	4.1
1988	4.9	4.9	4.1
1989	4.7	4.8	3.7
1990	4.6	4.6	3.3
1991	4.6	4.4	3.0
1992	4.3	4.3	2.3
1993	4.4	4.2	2.1
1994	4.4	4.1	2.1

[1] Stillbirths per 1,000 live and still births. Neonatal and postneonatal mortality per 1,000 live births.

[2] Stillbirths of 28 weeks gestation or more.

Percentage changes in stillbirth, neonatal and post-neonatal rates, England and Wales 1975–1994

	Stillbirths[1]	*Neonatal*	*Post-neonatal*
1975 to 1979	–22.8	–23.2	8.4
1980 to 1984	–21.2	–27.6	12.0
1985 to 1989	–15.2	–11.6	13.2
1990 to 1994	–4.6	–9.7	38.2
1990 to 1991	0.9	–4.3	9.2
1991 to 1992	–8.2	–1.8	23.7
1992 to 1993	2.7	–3.1	6.5
1993 to 1994	0.3	–0.8	4.6

[1] Stillbirths of 28 weeks gestation or more.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were his Department's objectives in establishing the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy; what mechanisms were established to ensure that the objectives were achieved; what evaluations have been done of the inquiry; and if he will place in the Library such reports of evaluations which have been undertaken. [5276]

Mr. Horam: The confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy was established to:

investigate the circumstances of stillbirths, neonatal and post-neonatal deaths;

identify avoidable factors and seek their remedy;

and to improve understanding and clinical practice.

No evaluations have yet been completed. It is too soon to demonstrate any direct effect on infant and perinatal mortality.

The reports of the inquiry are a tool for improving understanding and copies have been placed in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the full costs to his Department and to the inquiry of the tendering process for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy. [5279]

Mr. Horam: The tender process for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy is still in progress. A record of identifiable costs is therefore not yet available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff have been employed on work for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy in each year *(a)* centrally, *(b)* in the NHS regions and districts and *(c)* elsewhere. [5277]

Mr. Horam: The central secretariat of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy had four members of staff in the period 1992 to 1994 and five members of staff from the end of 1994 to present. Regional/district figures are not available for the years 1992 to 1994. In the current year there are approximately 30 people engaged in the inquiry's work at regional level. There is a large number of other people in the NHS who contribute to the inquiry, but no figures are available. There are no data on the number of people employed on the various special projects.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department established the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy; and how much money was *(a)* allocated to and *(b)* spent on the inquiry in each year since it was established, showing separately the sums (i) for central organisation and analysis, (ii) allocated to NHS regions and districts, by region and (iii) allocated for other purposes. [5275]

Mr. Horam: I shall let the hon. Member have such financial information as is available as soon as possible.

Venous Thromboembolism

Mr. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the levels of risk of venous thromboembolisms per 100,000 women per year for *(a)* smoking and *(b)* non-smoking (1) women not using (i) oral contraceptives, (ii) second generation oral contraceptives, (iii) oral contraceptives containing desogentrol or gestodene and (2) in pregnancy. [5146]

Mr. Malone: Smoking is not clearly established to be a factor which affects the risk of venous thromboembolism. This is in contrast to its important effect on the risk of arterial disease associated with the use of oral contraceptives.

The approximate levels of risk of venous thromboembolism in women according to use of oral contraceptives and pregnancy are shown in the table.

	Risk of venous thromboembolism (per 100,000 women per year)
No use of OCs	5
Use of second-generation OC	15
Use of OC containing desogentrol or gestodene	30
Pregnancy	60

As indicated above, the levels of risk of venous thromboembolism are the same whether or not a woman smokes.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many inspectors appointed by himself or by a local authority whose duties include those set out in the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995 are currently in post. [2390]

Mrs. Browning: For the purpose of the Animals and the Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995 in England, 366 inspectors, of whom 241 are veterinary inspectors, have been appointed by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The number of inspectors appointed by local authorities under the regulations is not held centrally.

Animal Transport

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of returns he has received during 1995 from owners and charters of vessels on which animals have been carried from the United Kingdom indicating *(a)* the number of animals that have died, *(b)* the number of animals killed, *(c)* the numbers of animals seriously injured, *(d)* the total numbers of each class of animal shipped and *(e)* the cause of such deaths, slaughter or injury. [3842]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry has received no such returns.

Fishing Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many different licences for instruments other than rod and line are required by law in order to fish in English rivers, what is the total licence duty received form each of these in each of the last two years, and if he will list the proposed increase in each licence for next year. [5032]

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is given in the table. For the sake of completeness the table includes data on instruments used in tidal estuaries and the sea. Details of licence duties applicable to instruments for catching eels have not been included.

NRA Region (England only)	*Fishing method*	*1994*			*[1]1995*			*1996*
		[1]Number	*Duty* £	*Value* [2]£	*[1]Number*	*Duty* £	*Value* £[2]	*Proposed duty* £
Northumbria (N and Y)	Coastal (N) drift and T nets	30	800.00	24,026.00	29	800.00	23,200.00	995.00
	Coastal (N) drift nets	31	725.00	21,750.00	26	725.00	18,850.00	975.00
	Coastal (N) T nets	1	470.00	470.60	2	470.00	940.00	720.00
	Coastal (S) drift nets	38	725.00	27,561.40	34	725.00	24,650.00	975.00
Yorkshire (N and Y)	Coastal drift nets	15	620.00	9,306.00	10	620.00	6,200.00	661.00
	Coastal T or J nets	23	470.00	10,810.60	21	470.00	9,870.00	720.00
Anglian	Drift nets	44	50.00	2,219.20	42	50.00	2,100.00	67.00
	Other nets (various)	28	25.00	708.40	23	25.00	575.00	55.00
Thames	Nil	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southern	Public seine nets	2	1.00	2.00	2	1.00	2.00	55.00
	Woodmill seine net	—	—	—	1	70.00	70.00	300.00
Wessex (SW)	Seine nets	7	147.00	1,031.80	7	147.00	1,029.00	294.00
	Dip nets	2	47.50	94.80	0	47.50	0.00	67.00
	Putcher ranks	2	—	123.60	2	—	123.60	—
	150 Putchers (units of 50)	(3)	41.20	—	(3)	41.20	—	67.00
South West	Seine nets (single river)[1]	14	120.00	—	14	120.00	—	240.00
	Seine nets (single river)	74	120.00	8,917.20	69	120.00	8,280.00	240.00
	Seine nets (double river)	1	190.00	191.20	1	190.00	190.00	380.00
	Fixed Engine (Weir) Avon[4]	1	190.00	—	0	190.00	—	190.00
	Fixed Engine (Trap) Lyn	1	190.00	191.00	1	190.00	190.00	380.00
	Drift nets (Camel)	7	120.00	842.60	7	120.00	840.00	240.00
Severn Trent	Lave nets (half season)	21	21.00	441.00	30	21.00	630.00	42.00
	Lave nets (full season)	19	42.00	798.00	14	42.00	588.00	84.00
	Seine nets	5	100.00	506.80	5	100.00	500.00	200.00

NRA Region (England only)	Fishing method	1994 [1]Number	1994 Duty £	1994 Value [2]£	[5]1995 [1]Number	[5]1995 Duty £	[5]1995 Value £[3]	1996 Proposed duty £
	Fixed engine ranks comprising:	11	—	2,704.00	10	—	1,554.00	—
	4,150 Putchers (units of 50)	(100)	25.00	—	(57)	25.00	—	55.00
	570 m of leaders:							
	Leaders <90 m	(3)	33.00	—	(1)	33.00	—	33.00
	additional 20 m lengths	(11)	9.00	—	(10)	9.00	—	9.00
	Putt (1 fixed engine)	2	3.00	—	2	3.00	—	3.00
	Stop net (boat)	0	60.00	—	0	60.00	—	80.00
	Topping net (R Trent)	1	2.00	2.00	1	2.00	2.00	55.00
	Draft net (R Trent)	1	12.00	12.00	1	12.00	12.00	55.00
North West	Haaf nets (Solway)	165	58.00	9,570.00	165	58.00	9,570.00	116.00
	Cribs (Eden)	2	257.00	514.00	3	257.00	771.00	301.00
	Fishing Baulk (Esk)	0	287.00	0.00	0	287.00	0.00	301.00
	Drift nets (Cumbria coastal)	4	288.00	1,154.60	4	288.00	1,152.00	538.00
	Drift nets (Ribble)	6	177.00	1,065.40	6	177.00	1,062.00	354.00
	Haaf nets (Lune)	26	100.00	2,600.00	26	100.00	2,600.00	200.00
	Drift nets (Lune)	10	288.00	2,884.20	10	288.00	2,880.00	538.00
	Seine nets (Lune)	1	248.00	249.00	1	248.00	248.00	496.00
	Crib (Derwent)	1	576.00	576.00	0	576.00	0.00	576.00
	Lave nets (Kent)	8	100.00	800.00	8	100.00	800.00	134.00
	Lave nets (Leven)	6	100.00	600.00	6	100.00	600.00	134.00

Key:

[1] Numbers represent the number of licensees, except for data in parentheses which represent numbers of licensed components on which duty is payable.

[2] Value includes 20p for each netsman endorsed on a licence.

[3] Taw and Torridge rehabilitation scheme in operation. Licensees agreed not to fish in 1994 and 1995 and were not charged for their licences.

[4] Licence for Avon fixed engine bought by the NRA. Not used.

[5] Provisional data.

Source:

1994 data—NRA Fisheries Statistics 1994.

1995 and 1996 data—NRA.

Milk

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having with his European counterparts to increase the permitted amount of milk Britain is allowed to produce to enable British producers to make yoghurt, cheese and clotted cream. [5033]

Mr. Baldry: We have advocated the leasing of milk quota across member state frontiers as a means of allowing quota to migrate to those parts of the Community, like the United Kingdom, where milk can be produced most efficiently. Our EC partners and the Commission do not share our enthusiasm for reforming this aspect of the EC quota regulations, but we will continue to press the case whenever the opportunity arises.

Potato Marketing Scheme

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the recent consultation on the proposal to bring the potato marketing scheme to an end; and if he will make a statement. [5527]

Mr. Boswell: There were 24 responses to the consultation from a wide range of interests. Some of the organisations that responded either opposed the Government's decision to revoke the scheme or expressed disappointment with it, while others supported revocation. There was, however, widespread support for an industry body funded by a statutory levy to succeed the Potato Marketing Board, and it will be for the board to develop appropriate proposals, if that is what growers wish. Several respondents stressed the importance of introducing a lightweight EU regime for potatoes, and we again pressed for early progress on this at the Agriculture Council on 29 and 30 November. A copy of the consultation document, together with the list of responses, has been placed in the Library of the House.

In accordance with section 25(1) of the Agriculture Act 1993, we shall tomorrow lay an order before both Houses specifying 1 July 1996 as the beginning of the revocation process. This would mean revocation of the scheme on 30 June 1997, as previously planned.

Paignton Zoo

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the extension to Paignton zoo; [4043]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of compliance with the procedures followed under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 in respect of the extension to Paignton zoo; and if he will make a statement. [4044]

Mrs. Browning *[Holding answer 7 December 1995]:* No approach has been made to the Ministry in connection with the extension at Paignton zoo.

Under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, English Nature is responsible for the issue of licences for the purpose of any development as defined in section 55(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4252]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* MAFF Ministers has been issued with digitally based mobile telephones which provide greater security features than their analogue counterparts since the beginning of July this year. We have had no cases of mobile telephones being cloned since then.

There have been four cases of mobile telephones used by MAFF Ministers being cloned within the last 18 months. These all occurred within the last 12 months. Those concerned were the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldgrave), the then Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), the then Parliamentary Secretary, my noble Friend the Earl Howe, and the current Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning).

Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he proposes in respect of the regularity of inspections carried out by his officials of calves and sheep being exported through Dover. [4743]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* My officials are maintaining the practice of carrying out regular checks on calves and sheep at the port of export.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many horses, ponies and donkeys have been licensed for export from the United Kingdom since 1 January 1995 to *(a)* France *(b)* Belgium and *(c)* the Netherlands. [4747]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* Figures on the issue of licences, between 1 January and 30 November 1995, for the export of horses, and ponies and donkeys intended for breeding, riding or recreation are shown in the table. The include transhipments from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but exclude thoroughbred horses which may be exported for racing or breeding with certification issued by a steward or the secretary of the Jockey Club:

Destination	*Horses*	*Ponies*	*Donkeys*
France	480	74	1
Belgium	317	111	20
Netherlands	329	131	none

Source:
MAFF animal welfare records.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications to export horses, ponies and donkeys from the United Kingdom have been rejected by him since 1 January; and how many animals were covered by these rejected applications. [4746]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* We do not record these figures. Between 1 April and 30 October 1995 the Ministry received more than 2,200 applications. When considering applications the Ministry takes into account the purpose of the journey and the welfare arrangements. During the course of these considerations a number of applications are then withdrawn by the applicant or not proceeded with.

Horse Sales

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of compliance with the provisions of the Welfare of Horses at Markets (and Other Places of Sale) Order 1990 in respect of horse sales in Henley in Arden market; and if he will make a statement. [4744]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* Horse sales are held at the market on a monthly basis and there has been a regular assessment of compliance by both the state veterinary service and the local authority. In reports submitted so far this year there has been no evidence of unnecessary suffering. The Ministry, however, continues to give advice to both the market and local authority on the standards to be observed.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the circumstances of the birth, feed history and date of death of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy case in June 1993, referred to in his answer of 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, column 200. [4970]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* The animal was born on 17 June 1993, of a dam which was culled in 1994 when 10 years old and showed no symptoms of BSE. The suspect was slaughtered on 11 August 1995, and is known to have been fed on concentrate feed. We are currently tracing the feed ingredients, although the material consumed by this animal will clearly no longer be available for analysis.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what costing her Department has *(a)* made and *(b)* commissioned for the collection of student loan repayments through the national insurance system. [3925]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *119*.

Higher Education Funding Council

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate of the cost of *(a)* teaching and *(b)* research assessment exercises to be conducted by the Higher Education Funding Council (England) in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99. [4321]

Mr. Forth: The Higher Education Funding Council for England determines the conduct of these assessments and what proportion of its running costs should be spent on them. I am asking the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will break down the £5 million estimate of administration costs for the nursery scheme; on what experience the estimates were made; and how the notice for tender was publicised. [4490]

Mr. Robin Squire: The estimated cost of inspection and administration in phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme is based on: training inspectors for phase 1; inspections of that phase; training of inspectors in preparation for full implementation in phase 2; and the contract to administer the scheme in phase 1, which was awarded after competitive tender.

Advertisements inviting contractors to express an interest in tendering for the voucher contract were placed in a number of national newspapers, the *Times Educational Supplement*, *The Economist* and "Government Opportunities".

Ofsted

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will give a breakdown of the Ofsted budget for 1995–96; and if she will make a statement. [4514]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Car Leasing and Subsistence Rates

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list members of staff in *(a)* the Department for Education and *(b)* the Department of Employment in June 1995; what the subsistence rates prevailing in each Department (i) were and (ii) are currently; what were the car leasing arrangements in each former Department; and how many of the staff in each former Department were receiving lease cars or car leasing support. [4819]

Mr. Robin Squire: At 30 June 1995 there were 2,020 staff in the Department for Education and 4,721 staff in the Employment Department.

The United Kingdom subsistence rates for staff in the former Department for Education and Employment Department are as follows and are still current.

Allowance	*DFE system/rates*	*ED system/rates*
Day subsistence		
Absence over 5 hours	£4.25	£4.25
Absence over 10 hours	£9.30	£9.30
Absence over 12 hours	£13.55	£13.55
Overnight subsistence (24 hour rates)		
Staying in a hotel	Use of hotel list offering discounts. A fixed rate of London £65, elsewhere £60 is paid	Actual cost of B&B arranged through booking agent plus £20.50 (tax free) and an additional £7.50 (taxable)
Staying with friends/relatives or making arrangements	£25.00 tax free	£35.00 tax free

Neither the former ED nor the DFE had leased cars in June 1995. The Department for Education and Employment has no leased cars currently. In the former Employment Department, and currently in the Department for Education and Employment vehicles have been purchased for official use. Staff who travel at least 5,000 miles each year on official business may be allocated an official car, which they are permitted to use for private purposes, in return for a monthly payment.

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the most recent statistics available for *(a)* the average amount paid out per pension under the teachers' superannuation scheme, *(b)* the number of pensioners currently receiving pensions under the teachers' superannuation scheme on a region-by-region basis, *(c)* the average age of the recipients of pensions under the teachers' superannuation scheme for each year since 1988 and *(d)* how many people have left the scheme to date to take up private pensions. [4821]

Mr. Robin Squire: The average amount paid out per pension under the teachers' superannuation scheme at 31 October 1995 was £6,144 per annum. The number of pensioners currently receiving pensions under the teachers' superannuation scheme at 31 October 1995 was 367,961. A regional analysis could be produced only at disproportionate cost. The average age of recipients of pensions under the teachers' superannuation scheme at 31 October 1995 was 66 years. Figures for earlier years are not available. Information on the number of teachers who have left the scheme to take up private pensions is not collected.

English-medium Schools Abroad

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what supervision her Department exercises over schools abroad which use English as a language of teaching and which prepare children for English GCSE and A-level examinations. [4800]

Mr. Forth: None.

Free School Meals

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children were in receipt of free school meals, by region, in each of the last five years. [4922]

Mrs. Gillan: Information on the take-up of free school meals in maintained schools in England in the years 1991 to 1995 is shown in the following table:

Pupils taking free school meals in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by region in England 1991–95

Position in January each year

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
North	80,111	88,703	95,102	99,500	101,456
North West	165,598	191,052	207,690	217,154	218,516
East Anglia	20,844	27,657	33,369	35,868	36,607
Yorkshire and Humberside	102,672	120,243	130,571	136,066	137,382
West Midlands	110,564	133,311	148,944	155,509	154,062
East Anglia	57,511	68,415	78,212	83,624	85,763
Greater London	136,456	169,787	196,965	219,229	230,650
Other South East	95,582	134,528	167,783	184,492	185,469
South West	52,075	68,272	82,690	85,684	84,932
England	821,413	1,001,968	1,141,326	1,217,126	1,234,684

[1] Provisional.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment under which items of their budgeted provision governors of grant-maintained schools may make capital purchases of mobile classrooms. [4607]

Mr. Robin Squire: A grant-maintained school may make capital purchases of mobile classrooms using its formula or named capital allocations, or its annual maintenance grant.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by how much the proposed budget for the assisted places scheme was underspent in the years 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96. [5034]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 24 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *623*, for the years up to and including 1994–95; 1995–96 is still in progress.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils benefited in the years 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 from the assisted places schemes. [5035]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 24 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *623*, and to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *117*.

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment on 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 454, if she will make it her policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5065]

Mr. Forth: It is the policy in the Department to ensure that we do not gold-plate European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice she has offered to the Funding Agency for Schools regarding publicity for agency proposals to open new grant-maintained schools; what financial limits are imposed in each case; and if she will make a statement. [5251]

Mr. Robin Squire: My Department issued general guidance, in circular 23/94, regarding consultations prior to the publication of statutory proposals. The Funding Agency for Schools is under a statutory duty to consult on its proposals to establish new grant-maintained schools. It is for the agency to decide what are appropriate consultations in the light of guidance from the Secretary of State and to determine expenditure accordingly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Expenditure

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the allocation to individual programmes in Northern Ireland of the public expenditure totals announced on 28 November. [5433]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In his unified Budget statement on 28 November my right hon. and learned friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced total public expenditure planning figures for the Northern Ireland programme. I have now decided on the allocations to individual programmes as shown in the following table. Copies of a more detailed statement have been placed in the Library. These allocations reflect my assessment of how best to distribute the Northern Ireland public expenditure totals in response to local needs and circumstances.

£ million

Programme	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Northern Ireland Office:			
Law, Order, Protective and Miscellaneous Services	858	860	850
Northern Ireland Departments			
Northern Ireland Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Services and Support	149	150	140

£ million

Programme	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Industry, Trade and Employment	483	480	470
Energy	58	60	60
Roads and Transport	176	170	180
Housing	248	270	270
Environmental and Miscellaneous Services	243	250	220
Law, Order and Protective Services (Fire Service)	43	40	40
Education, Arts and Libraries	1,404	1,430	1,430
Health and Personal Social Services	1,578	1,620	1,630
Social Security Administration	162	160	160
Other Public Services	59	60	60
NI Block (excluding Social Security Benefits)	5,461	5,560	5,510
Social Security Benefits	2,383	2,480	2,590
NI Block	7,844	8,040	8,100
National Agriculture and Fisheries Support	165	170	170
NI Programme	8,009	8,210	8,270

Notes:

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest £1 million in 1996–97 and to the nearest £10 million in 1997–98 and 1998–99.

[2] The figures to 1996–97 will form the basis for preparation by Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office of main estimates for the coming year. These will be presented to Parliament in due course.

[3] Northern Ireland will also receive additional resources for the extra spending which will result from the Budget measures to help meet the costs of long-term care.

[4] The EU peace and reconciliation programme has been provisionally allocated to the individual programmes and is included in the figures above. The allocation set aside for the partnership measure is for the time being included with the environmental and miscellaneous services figures.

Road Safety Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the recommended staffing level for road safety education officers; and what is the current number of staff in post. [2718]

Mr. Moss: There are no recommended staffing levels for the road safety education officer service within Northern Ireland. The current number of staff in post is 13.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what have been the percentages of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who have been Protestant and Catholic in each of the past 10 years; [3530]

(2) what have been the percentages of men and women who have been recruits to the Royal Ulster Constabulary for each of the past 10 years; [3528]

(3) what have been the percentages of men and women in the Royal Ulster Constabulary in each of the past 10 years; [3527]

(4) what have been the percentages of recruits to the Royal Ulster Constabulary who have been Protestant and Catholic for each of the past 10 years. [3529]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is in the tables.

Table 1: Community background—percentage of strength

	RUC regular			*Full-time reserve*			*Part-time reserve*	
Year	*CB1*	*CB2*	*Year*	*CB1*	*CB2*	*Year*	*CB1*	*CB2*
1990	89.32	7.75	1990	90.27	5.45	1990	95.05	3.92
1991	89.33	7.72	1991	89.78	5.82	1991	94.92	4.09
1992	89.38	7.91	1992	89.15	6.08	1992	94.97	3.91
1993	89.14	7.90	1993	88.60	6.28	1993	95.03	3.74
1994	89.22	7.77	1994	88.30	6.44	1994	94.16	4.50
November 1995	89.06	7.91	November 1995	88.36	6.33	November 1995	93.40	5.20

Notes:

1. Information relating to community background is not available prior to 1990.
2. The latest figures regarding force strength are at 1 November 1995.
3. CB1 refers to perceived community background—Protestant, CB2 refers to perceived community background—Roman Catholic.

Table 2: Recruitment—percentage male and female

	RUC regular			*Full-time reserve*			*Part-time reserve*	
Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Year*	*Male*	*Female*	*Year*	*Male*	*Female*
1985	92.3	7.7	1985	100.0	0	1985	100.0	0
1986	91.4	8.6	1986	100.0	0	1986	81.2	18.8
1987	89.8	10.2	1987	100.0	0	1987	59.2	40.8
1988	82.7	17.3	1988	81.5	18.5	1988	65.4	34.6
1989	78.2	21.8	1989	95.2	4.8	1989	44.5	55.5
1990	75.8	24.2	1990	91.2	8.8	1990	58.4	41.6
1991	85.6	14.4	1991	89.8	10.2	1991	45.7	54.3
1992	76.5	23.5	1992	81.8	18.2	1992	45.1	54.9
1993	78.7	21.3	1993	90.1	9.9	1993	47.3	52.7
1994	71.1	28.9	1994	76.9	23.1	1994	76.4	23.6
1995	70.9	29.1	1995	75.0	25.0	1995	46.0	54.0

Notes:

1. Information relating to community background is not available prior to 1990.
2. The latest figures regarding force strength are at 1 November 1995.
3. CBI refers to perceived community background—Protestant, CB2 refers to perceived community background—Roman Catholic.

Table 3: Force strength—percentage male and female

	RUC regular			Full-time reserve			Part-time reserve	
Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Year*	*Male*	*Female*	*Year*	*Male*	*Female*
1985	92.1	7.9	1985	100	0	1985	82.4	17.6
1986	92.1	7.9	1986	100	0	1986	82.7	17.3
1987	92.2	7.8	1987	99.9	0.1	1987	80.6	19.4
1988	91.9	8.1	1988	99.0	1.0	1988	78.6	21.4
1989	91.7	8.3	1989	98.7	1.3	1989	75.9	24.1
1990	91.4	8.6	1990	98.5	1.5	1990	74.0	26.0
1991	91.4	8.6	1991	98.0	2.0	1991	71.7	28.3
1992	90.7	9.3	1992	96.4	3.6	1992	70.7	29.3
1993	90.3	9.7	1993	96.2	3.8	1993	69.5	30.5
1994	90.0	10.0	1994	95.5	4.5	1994	66.8	33.2
November 1995	89.6	10.4	November 1995	95.2	4.8	November 1995	65.0	35.0

Notes:

1. Information relating to community background is not available prior to 1990.
2. The latest figures regarding force strength are at 1 November 1995.
3. CBI refers to perceived community background—Protestant, CB2 refers to perceived community background—Roman Catholic.

Table 4: Recruitment—percentage community background

	RUC regular			Full-time reserve			Part-time reserve	
Year	*CBI*	*CB2*	*Year*	*CBI*	*CB2*	*Year*	*CBI*	*CB2*
1990	87.36	7.14	1990	87.70	11.40	1990	92.03	7.96
1991	86.67	7.14	1991	81.81	12.30	1991	90.43	9.57
1992	87.41	9.26	1992	87.41	9.26	1992	91.67	2.78
1993	79.71	6.76	1993	79.61	8.55	1993	89.19	8.11
1994	86.80	6.60	1994	77.31	7.56	1994	88.04	9.09
1995	77.71	15.43	1995	86.36	6.82	1995	86.10	10.70

Notes:

1. Information relating to community background is not available prior to 1990.
2. The latest figures regarding force strength are at 1 November 1995.
3. CB1 refers to perceived community background—Protestant, CB2 refers to perceived community background—Roman Catholic.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what records are kept of the geographical origins of recruits to the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and if he will publish them. [3531]

Sir John Wheeler: No records are kept of the geographical origins of recruits.

Church Attacks

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those Chief Constable's certificates issued since 1 January 1990 relating to attacks on Protestant churches and halls and Catholic churches and halls. [3538]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the Compensation Agency has produced a list of 182 Protestant and Roman Catholic church properties for which it has received a Chief Constable's certificate since 1 January 1990. I have arranged for a copy of this list to be placed in the Library.

Discussions (Irish Republic and USA)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list each occasion since 1990 when reproductive health, population control or access to abortion and contraception, have been discussed by officials of his Department with representatives of *(a)* the Irish Government and *(b)* the Government of the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the nature of each discussion indicating to what extent it referred to *(a)* the receipt of United States aid and *(b)* the peace process. [3985]

Mr. Moss: There have been no such discussions.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those *(a)* consultants *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3970]

Sir John Wheeler: Information in relation to consultants covering the financial years 1990–91 to 1994–95 has been placed in the Library. This is recorded under four categories—general management consultancy, information technology, privatisation and next steps. Total payment amounts are shown where this would not breach commercial confidentiality but is omitted in the cases of single contracts (marked *). The other information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all statutory instruments in respect of health services from his Department for the present Parliament. [4050]

Mr. Moss: Full details of the statutory rules made to 31 December 1994 are shown in the annual volume of "Statutory Rules", a copy of which is available in the Library.

The list of the statutory rules in respect of health and personal social services made since 1 January 1995 is as follows:

Northern Ireland statutory rules 1995
(1 January 1995 to 6 December 1995)

Statutory rules number	
6	Causeway Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (NI) 1995 (11 January)
16	Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment, Regulations (NI) 1995 (23 January)
56	General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (28 February)
83	Dental Charges (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (9 March)
95	Health and Personal Social Services (Superannuation) Regulations (NI) 1995 (15 March)
114	Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (NI) 1995 (22 March)
115	General Ophthalmic Services (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (22 March)
124	Health and Social Services Trusts (Originating Capital Debt) (Amendment) Order (NI) 1995 (23 March)
126	General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (NI) 1995 (27 March)
135	Charges for Drugs and Appliances (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (29 March)
138	Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (30 March)
142	Eastern Ambulance Service Health and Social Services Trust Dissolution Order (NI) 1995 (30 March)
143	Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (NI) 1995 (30 March)
144	Health and Social Services Trusts (Originating Capital Debt) Order (NI) 1995 (31 March)
211	Welfare Foods (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (23 May)
286	Health and Personal Social Services (Assessment of Resources) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (18 July)
305	Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1995 (3 August)
306	Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Variation) Order (NI) 1995 (3 August)
351	Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (NI) 1995 (4 September)
358	Optional Charges and Payments (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (NI) 1995 (8 September)
361	Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (NI) 1995 (12 September)
397	Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (Establishment and Constitution) Order (NI) 1995 (18 October)
402	Charges for Drugs and Appliances (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (NI) 1995 (19 October)
421	United Hospitals Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (NI) 1995 (8 November)
422	Altnagelvin Hospitals Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (NI) 1995 (8 November)
423	Foyle Health and Social Services Trust (Establishment) Order (NI) 1995 (8 November)

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all NHS trusts *(a)* as of 30 November 1995 and *(b)* with effect from 1 April 1996. [4062]

Mr. Moss: At 30 November 1995 the following NHS trusts had been established in Northern Ireland.

Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital HSS Trust
Ulster North Down and Ards Hospitals HSS Trust
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust
Green Park HSS Trust
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust
North Down and Ards Community HSS Trust
South and East Belfast HSS Trust
North and West Belfast HSS Trust
Down Lisburn HSS Trust
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust
Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust
Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust
Causeway HSS Trust
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSS Trust
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust
United Hospitals HSS Trust
Altnagelvin Hospitals HSS Trust
Foyle HSS Trust.

In addition, the following units were approved for trust status on 8 November 1995 and will be established when a chairman has been identified:

Sperrin Lakeland
Homefirst.

It is anticipated that they will become fully operational on 1 April 1996.

US Financial Assistance

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total amount of financial assistance made available by the United States of America, either directly or through the International Fund for Ireland, to assist with the regeneration of Northern Ireland, and to what extent that aid is governed by those aspects of section 104(d) of the United States International Development and Food Assistance Act 1978 which requires that all nations receiving United States foreign assistance must take steps to reduce their rate of population growth; and if he will make a statement. [3984]

Sir John Wheeler: There has been no direct financial assistance made available by the United States of America to assist with the regeneration of Northern Ireland. The United States of America has contributed a total of $250 million to the International Fund for Ireland over the period 1986 to 1995 inclusive. Under the terms of the agreement establishing the fund approximately three quarters of its resources are to be disbursed in Northern Ireland. The US contributions to the fund are governed by the US Anglo-Irish Support Act 1986 and fall outside the terms of section 104(d) of the US International Development and Food Assistance Act 1978.

Forensic Science Laboratory

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland forensic science laboratory was launched as a next steps agency. [5432]

Sir John Wheeler: I launched the Northern Ireland forensic science laboratory as a next steps agency on 1 September 1995, to be known as the Forensic Science Agency of Northern Ireland. The agency will continue to supply a wide range of forensic services to the RUC and the courts in Northern Ireland. The agency published its framework document and corporate and business plan in September and copies of both have been placed in the Library.

EC Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5070]

Sir John Wheeler: Within the NI departments, there is no such existing policy at the present time, but legislation influenced by EC directives is progressed on a parity basis with Great Britain. Any initiatives taken by Great Britain Departments to review past legislation implementing European directives which impose additional burdens will be closely monitored by departments.

Rugby League

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* financial; and *(b)* other assistance to rugby league is made available by the Northern Ireland Sports Council. [4993]

Mr. Ancram: None. Rugby league has no governing body to which financial or other assistance could be made.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have involved the Minister travelling abroad. [4228]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding reply 6 December 1995]:* Ministers have spent the following numbers of days out of the office, each of which may have involved more than one visit:

	Ministerial visits (Days)	*Travelling abroad*	
		(Days)	*Percentage*
Sir P. Mayhew	25	2	(8.0)
Mr. M. Ancram	24	2	(8.3)
Sir J. Wheeler	23	3	(13.0)
Baroness Denton	95	20	(21.1)
Mr. M. Moss	48	1	(2.1)

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned; [4264]

(2) how many mobile telephones there are available in his Department for the use of Ministers. [4263]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and my hon. Friend the member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) both had their mobile telephones cloned within the last 12 months.

The five Northern Ireland Ministers have mobile phones fitted in their official London cars. There are also additional telephones carried by private secretaries which are available for use by Ministers as necessary.

WALES

Council Tax

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to maintain the current differential between council tax bills in Wales and England. [4293]

Mr. Hague: In some years it will be necessary for local authorities to raise a greater proportion of their revenue locally. The actual level of council tax will be set by local authorities but I expect there to be a large differential between council tax levels in Wales and England for the foreseeable future.

Planning Policy Guidance

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the organisations which have sent him responses to the draft planning policy guidance for Wales. [3423]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The organisations are as follows:

Clwyd county council
Dyfed county council
Gwent county council
Gwynedd county council
Mid Glamorgan county council
Powys county council
South Glamorgan county council
West Glamorgan county council
Assembly of Welsh Counties
Aberconwy Borough Council
Alyn and Deeside District Council
Blaenau Gwent Borough Council
Cardiff City Council
Carmarthen District Council
Ceredigion District Council
Colwyn Borough Council
Cynon Valley Borough Council
Delyn Borough Council
Dinefwr Borough Council
Dwyfor District Council
Glyndwr District Council

Islwyn Borough Council
Monmouth Borough Council
Montgomeryshire District Council
Neath Borough Council
Newport Borough Council
Ogwr Borough Council
Port Talbot Borough Council
Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council
Radnorshire District Council
Rhondda Borough Council
South Pembrokeshire District Council
Swansea City Council
Taff-Ely Borough Council
Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council
Wrexham Maelor Borough Council
Ynys Mon/Isle of Anglesey Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire County Council
Cardiff County Council
Cardiganshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Neath and Port Talbot County Borough Council
Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Brecon Beacons National Park
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
Snowdonia National Park
Newport Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Earth, Cymru
Tai Cymru/Housing for Wales
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
The House Builders Federation, South Wales
British Retail Consortium
Cycle Campaign Network
Cardiff Cycling Campaign
Cardiff Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry
Aberdare and District Chamber of Trade and Commerce
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Welsh Historic Gardens Trust
The Royal Town Planning Institute
Association of Welsh RIGS Groups
Society of Welsh District Planning Officers
The Sports Council for Wales
Chief Officers of Recreation and Leisure
Land Authority for Wales
Regional Technical Officer for North Wales Waste Management Group
Mandix
The Crown Estate
Mr. Brian Thomas and Pontypridd Market Company
Barratt South Wales
NFU in Wales
National Rivers Authority, Welsh Region
Severn Trent Water
Severn Estuary Strategy Group
The Civic Trust for Wales
Wales Tourist Board
Royal Society of Architects in Wales
The Commission for Local Administration in Wales
The Ramblers Association
Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link
Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, and for:
    Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
    The Welsh Wildlife Trusts
    Wales Association of Community and Town Councils
    Welsh Chamber of Trade and Commerce
    Ramblers' Association
    Youth Hostels Association—Wales
    WWF UK (World Wide Fund for Nature)
    Council for National Parks
    Field Studies Council (Cymru)
    Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
    British Horse Society
    Plantlife
    Gower Society
    Friends of the Earth Cymru
    Open Spaces Society
    National Federation of Women's Institutes
Farmers' Union of Wales
Countryside Council for Wales
The Country Landowners Association
Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust
Metropolitan Borough of Wirral
Hafod Trust
Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies
The Georgian Group
The Victorian Society
The Twentieth Century Society
Rescue: The British Archaeological Trust
Coventry University, School of The Built Environment
Healey and Baker for:
    Alliance and Leicester Society
    Nationwide Building Society
    Abbey National plc
    Bradford and Bingley Building Society
Beazer Homes plc and Beazer Homes (Wales) Ltd.
British Aggregate Construction Materials Industries
Sand and Gravel Association
Federation of Small Businesses
G. L. Hearn and Partners (for Tesco Stores Ltd.)
Disability Wales
Cheshire County Council
Dyfed Archaeological Trust
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust
Play Wales, Chwarae Cymru
Urban Design Group (Wales)
Chester City Council
Tony Thorpe Associates (for Vodafone Ltd.)
MVM Planning (for British Rail Property Board)
Aaron and Partners
Ideal Homes

Boots The Chemists
Western Planning
Railway Development Society Wales
The Garden History Society
ICOMOS UK
Terry Adams Ltd.
National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors
Acoustic Consultants Limited
Institute of Field Archaeologists
Shawater Ltd.
Council for British Archaeology
Council for British Archaeology Wales
The Football Association of Wales
Association of Conservation Officers
Association of Local Government Ecologists
Association of County Archaeological Officers
The Gower Society
Sears plc
Welsh Wildlife Trusts
Sainsbury's
Safeway Stores plc
Tesco Stores Ltd.
Cambrian Council of Welsh Motor Cycle Clubs
Department of National Heritage
St. Quintin Chartered Surveyors
British Gas Properties
Historic Buildings Council For Wales
The National Trust
Liberal Democrats Wales
Clwyd Ornithological Society
CVCP (Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom)
Welsh Water
Deeside Urban Wildlife Group
Deeside Naturalists Society
Dee Estuary Strategy
Ancient Monuments Board For Wales
The British Association for Shooting and Conservation
SCAUM (Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers)
A number of individuals also responded.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the written responses his Department has received to the draft planning policy guidance for Wales. [4400]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5072]

Mr. Hague: It is the policy of my Department to ensure that we do not add any unnecessary burden when implementing European directives in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Welsh Regional Consumer Committee

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh customer services committee of the Office of Water and Sewerage, in relation to the impact of water and sewerage service customers of the agreed takeover of South Wales Electricity. [5417]

Mr. Hague: None. The Director General of Water Services has, jointly with the Director General of Electricity Supply, issued a consultation paper on the issues raised by the bid by Welsh Water plc for South Wales Electricity plc. The views of the Welsh customer services committee will be taken into account by the DGWS in formulating his advice to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Training for Work

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Welsh training and enterprise councils concerning flexibility between the last day of training and the first day of employment in the approval and funding for outcome and output-related payment methods under training for work schemes for the long-term unemployed. [5421]

Mr. Hague: None. However, with effect from 27 March 1995 arrangements have been agreed with training and enterprise councils in Wales for outcome-related payments to be made in respect of training for work trainees who get a job within six months of leaving the programme.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what monitoring systems he has available to him and what proposals he has to improve the monitoring systems with respect to the output and outcome of related funding methods for training for work schemes in respect of the numbers of former training for work trainees still in work three months or longer after completing their training for work training programmes; and if he will make a statement. [5420]

Mr. Hague: My Department's agreement with training and enterprise councils requires them to retain evidence of job outcomes achieved by training for work trainees, for whom a job outcome payment may be payable. A payment can be made in respect of a trainee gaining employment within six months of leaving the programme.

The administrative arrangements for training for work in 1996–97 are currently under review and my officials are in consultation with training and enterprise councils about potential changes to the programme.

Welsh Water

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to removing the 15 per cent. maximum shareholding in Welsh Water. [5414]

Mr. Hague: None. This is a matter for the shareholders.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the effects on financial markets of the 15 per cent. maximum shareholding rule incorporated in perpetuity by his Department into the articles of association of Welsh Water plc at the time of privatisation. [5415]

Mr. Hague: None.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Welsh Development Agency concerning the funding of already signed contracts for commencement during the period November 1995 to 31 March 1996, and the consideration of abrogation; and if he will make a statement. [5422]

Mr. Hague: None. These are operational matters for the agency.

Departmental Correspondence

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the *Western Mail* as regards the form of publication of letters from Ministers and civil servants on behalf of Ministers and signed as approved by the relevant Minister; what proposals he has to clarify the distinction between the responsibility of Ministers for instructing and approving letters and civil servants for drafting and dispatching letters; and if he will make a statement. [5419]

Mr. Hague: It is standard practice across Whitehall for letters dictated by or approved by a Minister to be signed by a civil servant on behalf of the Minister in his absence. This is always made clear on the letter and is used to avoid delays in transmission. This happened with the letter from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Member for Clwyd North-West (Mr. Richards) printed in the *Western Mail* on 4 December. The newspaper incorrectly carried the name of the civil servant rather than that of my hon. Friend whose letter it was. When the error was pointed out by an official the *Western Mail* carried a correction the following day.

It is also standard practice for officials to provide advice to Ministers on matters of official business, including letters.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the original letter, relating to the health service in Wales, published in the *Western Mail* on 4 December in the name of the Welsh Office civil servant Richard Morgan. [5255]

Mr. Hague: I am today placing a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Child Abuse

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he is able to announce his decision on whether there should be an inquiry into the various allegations of child abuse in north Wales and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: On 5 May the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), appointed Miss Nicola Davies QC to undertake an examination of relevant papers held by the various agencies concerned and to advise on whether an inquiry was required.

Upon the evidence contained in the documents examined Miss Davies has recommended that a public inquiry cannot be justified. The documents held by the North Wales police do contain allegations of abuse but the majority of the allegations relate to the period 1980 to 1988. The police investigations were triggered by letters from Clwyd and Gwynedd county councils and all the issues raised in those letters were properly investigated. With limited exceptions, children in care after 1989 were not interviewed by the police. Since 1989 there has been a radical revision of existing procedures.

An inquiry into events prior to 1989 would be primarily of historical interest. The documents examined by Miss Davies do not demonstrate that the problems of the pre-1989 period have continued. In the absence of such core evidence Miss Davies feels unable to recommend that reasonable grounds exist which would provide the basis for a public inquiry.

However, she has concluded that there should be a detailed examination of the practices and procedures of the social service departments of both Clwyd and Gwynedd county councils and of private homes in those areas to ensure that they are adequate and working effectively. She has recommended that this work be undertaken by an independent person experienced in social work and child care. This person should:

(a) examine documents held by the statutory agencies and all the private agencies in Clwyd and Gwynedd who provide residential care for children which are relevant to such provision for the period 1991 to the present. The purpose of the examination would be to scrutinise the procedures and to comment on their adequacy and effectiveness; such an examination should address the following issues:

(i) management, supervision and monitoring of staff at all levels;

(ii) personnel procedures, recruitment of staff, induction, probationary periods, promotion, redeployment of staff, training plans for staff of residential homes, overall planning and individual profiles;

(iii) implementation of care planning and review process, examination of children's records for supporting documentation;

(iv) implementation of complaints procedures for children and staff; assessment of child protection procedures;

(v) assessment of all books, diaries and logs kept in the various homes;

(vi) the understanding of the various procedures and systems on the part of staff, parents, children and carers. Such procedures to include planning and review, children's rights, complaints, advocacy and independent visitors.

(b) interview any individual whose knowledge and experience is deemed to be of relevance to such an investigation. The interviewing of any such individual would be in private;

(c) investigate the area of foster care;

(d) investigate the units in Clwyd county council and Gwynedd county council responsible for registering and inspecting homes.

I accept Miss Davies' conclusion that no case for a public inquiry has been established. That is the basis upon which I am proceeding unless any new compelling factor should come to light.

I am also accepting Miss Davies' other recommendations and am appointing, under section 80 of the Children Act 1989, Miss Adrianne Jones to head this examination.

Miss Jones is to start work immediately. I shall be asking her, in addition, to advise me upon the proposedpractices and procedures of the six new unitary authorities in north Wales who will take over full responsibility for social services matters in April 1996.

I am grateful to Miss Davies and to all of the various agencies who co-operated fully with her.

I have arranged for Miss Davies' conclusions and recommendations to be placed in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 December 1995

TRANSPORT

Stansted Airport

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking in respect of BAA's application for an increase in the air transport movements limit at Stansted airport. [5949]

Mr. Watts: We are today beginning consultation on raising the limit on air transport movements at Stansted. This follows the application by BAA plc, the airport operator, to increase the limit to 150,000 movements each year. The Department is seeking views on this option, as well as on an alternative option of increasing the limit to 120,000 movements a year.

When planning permission was granted for the development of Stansted, an upper limit was placed on the number of air transport movements each year to ensure that the local infrastructure could cope with air traffic growth. We now need to decide whether it is time to increase that upper limit, and if so by how much, taking account of local interests and without unduly restricting the airport's ability to grow.

The Department will be seeking the views of airlines, local authorities and other interested parties. Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library.

Motor Vehicle Tests (Deregulation)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimate saving to businesses from the Deregulation (Motor Vehicles Tests) Order 1996. [5556]

Mr. Norris: The estimated annual potential benefit to both business and private motorists is £3 million. It is not possible to apportion that estimate between the two categories of vehicle user without disproportionate effort.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will show for all consultants and other outside organisations or individuals currently or previously employed by his Department for advice or assistance in rail privatisation *(a)* the name of the consultancy, organisation or individual, *(b)* the length of the contract offered to each consultancy, organisation or individual, *(c)* the total amount inclusive of VAT paid to date to each consultancy, organisation or individual and *(d)* the services required by his Department from each consultancy, organisation or individual; and if he will make a statement. [270]

Mr. Watts *[pursuant to his reply, 22 November 1995, c. 142–43]:* Information about payments to individual contractors is commercially confidential.

Payments made to date to consultants currently or previously employed by the Department total £35.4 million.

Consultants currently employed by the Department on rail privatisation are:

Consultants	
Linklaters and Paines	Legal advice
Freshfields	Legal advice
Samuel Montagu	Merchant Banking
Hambros	Merchant Banking
SBC Warburg	Merchant Banking
Merrill Lynch	Merchant Banking
KPMG Peat Marwick	Accountancy and Taxation
Ernst and Young	Accountancy
Price Waterhouse	Accountancy
Shandwick	Marketing
Gresham	Marketing
Dewe Rogerson	Marketing
Ernst and Young	Information Systems
Richard Ellis	Property matters
Sedgwick	Insurance
Brodies	Advice on Scots law
Travers Morgan	Specialist advice on BRIS contract pricing
Ernst and Young	Corporate finance advice on BRIS contract pricing
Mercer Management	Freight
PA Consulting Group	Information Systems
Touche Ross	Reporting consultants
Solid Solutions	Retail offer advisers
Sherman and Sterling	US lawyers
Bruce Bower Assoc.	Financial adviser
K. Bence	Engineering adviser

Contractors employed by the Department on rail privatisation to provide services other than consultancy advice are:

Consultants	
WRC (via COI)	Advertising agency
Sampson Tyrrell	Design company
Royal Bank of Scotland	Receiving/custodian bank
Mail Marketing (Bristol) Ltd	Mailing house
Database Group Ltd	Database manager
Royal Mail	Postal services
Lloyds Bank Registrars	Database provider
Bowne International	Printers
Touche Ross	Fraud audit

Consultants previously employed by the Department on rail privatisation are:

Consultants	
Arthur D. Little	Research
Coopers and Lybrand	Access and access charging
Norman Broadbent	Recruitment
Putnham Hayes and Bartlett	Access and access charging
Debenham Tewson and Chinnocks	Property matters
NERA	Regulatory matters
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Industry structure

Contracts for consultancy advice are normally offered on an on-going basis with provision for the Department to terminate the contract.

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those consultants, outside organisations and individuals employed to date by his Department to assist with the franchising of ScotRail. [5507]

Mr. Watts: No advisers have been appointed to assist exclusively with the franchising of ScotRail, but a number of advisers have been appointed to assist on a range of issues relating to rail privatisation. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) on earlier today.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the Director General of the Office of Rail Franchise Regulation concerning issues of competition relevant to the preferred bidder status of the Western Region management team and First Bus for the Great Western passenger rail franchise and the dominant supplier position of First Bus in bus transport on the Cardiff-Swansea express bus route; and if he will make a statement. [5418]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* Any competition issues raised by a rail franchise bid are for the franchising director, the Rail Regulator and the Director General of Fair Trading. My Department has been involved in discussions of a general nature.

The Railways Act 1993 confers on the Rail Regulator the functions of the Director General of Fair Trading with respect to any monopoly situation or anti-competitive practice relating to the supply of railway services. Qualifying mergers are investigated by the Office of Fair Trading under the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Lollipop People

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each region, the number of lollipop (i) men and (ii) women employed in each year since 1979, and if he will make a statement; [5364]

(2) what is the average wage for lollipop *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and if he will make a statement. [5365]

Mr. Norris: The information is not collected centrally.

Foreign-owned Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many foreign-owned British-registered fishing vessels are *(a)* demersal vessels of 10 m and *(b)* beamers of 10 m; and what are their engine capacities and lengths. [4969]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* The information requested is not available.

Traffic Regulation Orders

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department gives to local authorities to determine traffic regulation orders; and what procedures are available to the public to object to such orders. [5246]

Mr. Norris: Statutory procedures for local authorities to make traffic regulation orders in England and Wales under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 are set out in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989/1120), as amended by the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 1993 (SI 1993/1500). These include requirements to consult parties that appear likely to be affected, to advertise the proposal and provide a general opportunity for objections to be submitted, and to give such objections due consideration before an order is made.

Airline Lost Luggage Compensation

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to uprate annually the "amount per kilo" calculation for lost baggage compensation on airlines under the Carriage By Air (Sterling Equivalents) Order 1986. [4822]

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend expects to make a new Carriage by Air (Sterling Equivalents) Order early in the new year.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to encourage other European partners to ratify the 1975 Montreal protocol relating to compensation levels for lost baggage so that provisions under the protocol can be brought into force. [4823]

Mr. Norris: The Government acknowledge that liability limits established by the Warsaw convention 1929 and the Hague protocol 1955 are inadequate. Montreal additional protocol No. 3, which includes provision for updating liability limits for baggage, is unlikely to come into force in the immediate future. We have therefore been exploring within the European Civil Aviation Conference alternative means of increasing liability limits.

Classic Vehicles

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicles over 25 years of age are currently registered in the Sheffield area. [5243]

Mr. Norris: An estimated 18,250 vehicles over 25 years of age are currently licensed in the Sheffield post town area. Of these, 11,550 are in private and light goods, motorcycle or tricycle taxation classes and will qualify for exemption from vehicle excise duty as a result of the vehicle taxation changes announced in the Budget on 28 November 1995.

London Regional Transport Smart Card

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with London Transport in respect of the design of the smart card currently being considered by London Regional Transport with particular reference to data protection matters. [5339]

Mr. Norris: None.

Data Protection Act Certificates

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what occasions certificates under section 27 of the

Data Protection Act 1984 were signed by a member of his Department; for how long each certificate was valid; if he will make a statement on the other circumstances in which vehicle owner records or driver licence details can be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security; to what extent circumstances will extend to the digitised form of the photograph on the new driving licence; and if he will make a statement. [5340]

Mr. Norris: Certificates under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 must be signed by a member of the Cabinet or the Attorney-General or the Lord Advocate. The Secretary of State for Transport has not signed such a certificate. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is registered under the Act.

I also refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 25 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *367*.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5579]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport, excluding its agencies, spent £127,247 on official hospitality in 1994–95. The overall budget for 1995–96, which now also includes some non-entertainment costs such as those for eyesight test for VDU users, is £202,524, of which £84,351 has so far been spent.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5562]

Sir George Young: The annual costs for the Department of Transport are as follows:

£

1993–94	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*
16,008.20	Nil	6,869.90

Figures exclude VAT.

[1] To date. The Department moved to new premises in 1995.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Special Educational Needs Tribunal

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the first annual report of the president of the special educational needs tribunal will be published; and if she will make a statement. [5845]

Mrs. Gillan: The report has been published today, and copies have been placed in the Library.

I very much welcome the report which shows that, during its first year of operation, the special educational needs tribunal has met the targets it was set for dealing with appeals. This is an excellent start.

The SEN tribunal president, staff and members have worked very hard and have achieved a great deal during the year. This has been achieved despite extreme and unexpected pressure—the tribunal has done well to adapt to meet this. The report is a tribute to their hard work.

The tribunal has been very well received by both parents and local education authorities. It has gained a deserved reputation for impartiality, informality and, above all, fairness. This is something which I applaud.

This is an excellent base on which to build. I hope the tribunal will continue the excellent work it has begun.

Supported Employment (Disabled People)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated of the net Exchequer costs of moving disabled persons off benefits and on to supported placement schemes; if she will list the *(a)* calculations and *(b)* conclusions contained in these studies; and if she will estimate the costs involved in respect of Remploy's employees. [4691]

Mr. Paice: A 1989 study "The Net Exchequer Costs of Sheltered Employment" examined these issues. It is available in the Library. More recently, the Department has commissioned a study by the Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities to look at the effectiveness of supported employment agencies, which among other things will revisit some of the issues of the earlier study. This study has not yet been completed, and we will consider its findings in due course.

Standard Spending Assessments

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average standard spending assessment provision for *(a)* primary pupils and *(b)* secondary pupils in each English county in 1995–96 and 1996–97, in current prices. [4919]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table sets out each English shire authority's education standard spending assessment per five to 10-year-old and per 11 to 15-year-old for the relevant years in cash terms. The figures for 1996–97 are provisional.

	SSA per pupil (5–10)		*SSA per pupil (11–15)*	
LEA name	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £
Avon[1]	1,838	n/a	2,460	n/a
Bedfordshire	1,995	2,057	2,664	2,751
Berkshire	1,988	2,47	2,664	2,735
Buckinghamshire	1,966	2,021	2,630	2,716
Cambridgeshire	1,876	1,962	2,508	2,616
Cheshire	1,817	1,903	2,408	2,530
Cleveland[1]	1,940	n/a	2,589	n/a
Cornwall	1,893	1,984	2,522	2,646
Cumbria	1,856	1,957	2,470	2,600
Derbyshire	1,812	1,911	2,415	2,557
Devon	1,879	1,958	2,506	2,611

	SSA per pupil (5–10)		SSA per pupil (11–15)	
LEA name	1995–96 £	1996–97 £	1995–96 £	1996–97 £
Dorset	1,833	1,910	2,440	2,538
Durham	1,884	1,983	2,512	2,651
East Sussex	2,000	2,043	2,672	2,730
Essex	1,989	2,055	2,647	2,751
Gloucestershire	1,836	1,912	2,435	2,544
Hampshire	1,930	1,989	2,575	2,659
Hereford and Worcester	1,827	1,914	2,439	2,558
Hertfordshire	2,010	2,074	2,663	2,756
Humberside[1]	1,891	n/a	2,509	n/a
Isle of Wight Council	2,016	2,070	2,696	2,757
Kent	1,968	2,032	2,620	2,715
Lancashire	1,877	1,964	2,502	2,617
Leicestershire	1,864	1,954	2,483	2,605
Lincolnshire	1,873	1,969	2,483	2,632
Norfolk	1,881	1,971	2,508	2,631
North Yorkshire[1]	1,827	n/a	2,422	n/a
Northamptonshire	1,836	1,927	2,448	2,570
Northumberland	1,825	1,935	2,421	2,583
Nottinghamshire	1,883	1,973	2,506	2,632
Oxfordshire	1,933	1,985	2,575	2,627
Shropshire	1,862	1,952	2,479	2,598
Somerset	1,846	1,933	2,489	2,582
Staffordshire	1,805	1,894	2,398	2,522
Suffolk	1,820	1,901	2,422	2,540
Surrey	1,998	2,040	2,679	2,724
Warwickshire	1,822	1,906	2,433	2,545
West Sussex	1,932	1,987	2,571	2,649
Wiltshire	1,835	1,921	2,451	2,563

[1] LEAs that ceases to exist on 1 April 1996 as a result of Local Government Reorganisation.

Discretionary Awards (Dance and Drama Students)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her most recent estimate of the number of local education authorities that do not make discretionary awards to students of dance and drama. [4957]

Mr. Forth: Discretionary awards are a matter for local education authorities. The Department does not collect data on the discretionary awards policies of individual authorities.

Class Sizes

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consideration has been given to health and safety issues in the context of increases in class size. [5286]

Mrs. Gillan: Local education authorities and school governors have a general duty to ensure that school premises are safe. They will obviously want to bear that duty in mind in considering how to accommodate any increase in pupil numbers.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the application of the Government's policy on age discrimination in respect of the training and enterprise council operating agreement with regard to priority for training for work for particular age groups. [5397]

Mr. Paice: No one has priority for entry to training for work solely on the grounds of age. Priority for entry to training for work is given to people who are regarded as being seriously disadvantaged in the labour market. This includes 18 to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for two years or more. Priority comes into effect only when there is a waiting list for entry. It is unlikely that this has occurred in practice.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the function of classroom assistants; what is her policy on the extent to which they are expected to engage in formal class teaching; and what guidance her Department issues regarding their engagement and use. [5351]

Mr. Robin Squire: Decisions on the engagement and deployment of classroom assistants are for headteachers and governors in consultation with the teaching staff whose work is to be supported. The Department is currently funding a pilot programme of training for specialist teacher assistants, and has defined the competences that this group of assistants will need to offer effective support to classroom teachers, principally at key stage 1, in the teaching of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Jobcentre Staff

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of staff within jobcentres who are in receipt of family credit. [5426]

Mr. Forth: This information is not available from the Department for Education and Employment as individuals are required to contact social security (income support) directly if they wish to apply for family credit.

Job Creation (Construction Industry)

Mr. Hindchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of jobs in the construction industry which would be created by a building programme of 35,000 homes in one year. [5325]

Mr Forth: The Department has made no such assessment.

Quantock School

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the performance of the Quantock school, Somerset to establish if it meets the standards required by her Department. [5461]

Mrs Gillan: Standards at independent schools are monitored through educational inspection by Ofsted and, in the case of boarding schools, by local services departments for child welfare provision. Inspectors from Ofsted and Somerset social services department have visited Quantock school this year and reported that provision meets the minimum standards required by the Education Act 1944, as amended.

TREASURY

VAT Debt (Bankruptcies)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of firms closed down in each year as a consequence of the actions of VAT inspectors for each year since 1979 by county. [5362]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* Figures are not available prior to 1986 and are not available at all by county.

The number of bankruptcy and winding-up orders made by the courts following petitions laid by Customs and Excise in respect of VAT debts was:

Year to	*Bankruptcy orders*	*Winding-up orders*
31 March 1987	1,147	938
31 March 1988	778	690
31 March 1989	1,010	552
31 March 1990	1,047	1,172
31 March 1991	1,394	1,649
31 March 1992	3,025	2,098
31 March 1993	4,006	3,537
31 March 1994	4,970	3,668
31 March 1995	2,270	2,409

Share Ownership

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the value of the United Kingdom equity market was *(a)* in the hands of private shareholders and *(b)* held by pension funds for each year since 1979. [1460]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is available for the years 1981, and 1989 to 1993 only. Details are in the table.

Beneficial ownership 1981–1993

	Percentage of total equity owned, 31 December	
Year	*Pension funds*	*Individual*
1981	26.7	28.2
1989	30.6	20.6
1990	31.6	20.3
1991	31.3	19.9
1992	35.1	20.4
1993	34.2	17.7
1994	27.8	20.3

Household Incomes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in take-home pay after tax and inflation for a one-earner couple on average male earnings with two children for the years *(a)* 1978–79 and 1996–97 *(b)* 1991–92 and 1996–97 and *(c)* 1995–96 and 1996–97. [3729]

Mr. Jack: The estimates are as follows:

Growth in take-home pay after tax and inflation

	One earner couple on average male earnings with two children	
	£ per week (1995–96 prices)	*£ per year (1995–96 prices)*
1978–79 to 1996–97	88.20	4,590
1991–92 to 1996–97	13.20	690
1995–96 to 1996–97	8.60	450

This information has been published in table 3 of the HM Treasury's living standards press release.

Consumption Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* consumption as a proportion of gross domestic product and *(b)* consumer credit per capita in 1979, 1985, 1988 and 1994. [4508]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested for 1990 onwards, for consumption as a proportion of gross domestic product, can be derived from table 2.2 of "Economic Trends", November 1995 edition, No. 505, which is available in the House of Commons Library. Figures for earlier years are available in "Economic Trends" annual supplement, 1996 edition. They are also held on the Central Statistical Office database which can be accessed by the Library. The CSO database identifiers are:

Consumers expenditure: CCBH

Gross domestic product: CAOP.

The level of consumer credit for 1990 onwards can be obtained from table 3.4 of "Financial Statistics", November 1995 edition, No. 403, and the total population from 1984 onwards can be obtained from table 17.1 of "United Kingdom National Accounts 1995". Previous years will be available in earlier copies of these publications, all available in the House of Commons Library. They are also held on the Central Statistical Office database which can be accessed by the Library. The CSO database identifiers are:

Consumer Credit: AILA prior to 1987. VZRD 1987 onwards.

Total UK population: DYAY.

Pension Contributions

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to tables 1.3, 7.1 and 10.4 in the latest report on the family expenditure survey, what was the average weekly expenditure in 1994–95 of all non-retired households on (i) contributions to pension and superannuation funds deducted by employees, (ii) personal pensions and (iii) national insurance contributions paid by employees, by gross income decile or quintile group. [5010]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates of the average weekly expenditure on these items by households where the head of household is non-retired are given below. The figures are estimates from the FES, and are subject to sampling variations. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10p.

Average weekly gross income (£)

	Lowest quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Highest quintile*	*All households*
Contributions to pension and superannuation funds deducted by employers	0.0	1.60	5.40	8.60	18.80	6.90
Personal pensions	0.60	2.70	3.70	6.30	17.90	6.20
National insurance contributions paid by employees	0.60	8.00	17.90	26.30	37.70	18.10

EC Convergence Criteria

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise the subject of the consequences of EU member states' attempts to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria at the EU Finance Council in Brussels on 11 December. [5647]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The ECOFIN Council provisionally scheduled for 11 December was cancelled as work on preparation for the Madrid Council had been satisfactorily completed.

Tax Simplification Report

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish and lay before Parliament the Inland Revenue's report on tax simplification. [5951]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue report, entitled "The Path to Tax Simplification", has today been laid before Parliament in accordance with section 160 of the Finance Act 1995.

I warmly welcome this report. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his Budget statement that tax law has become too long and complicated and that he proposed that the Revenue tax code be rewritten in plain language.

This report suggests a practical way forward to deal with this issue. Its central proposal is a major project to rewrite tax law in clearer and simpler language. This would reduce the compliance costs which the tax system imposes, in one way or another, on every taxpayer in the country. It would also support the Government's deregulation initiative, the system of self-assessment we are introducing, and the Revenue's continuing efforts to improve customer service, quality and cost-efficiency in all its work.

A number of practical issues need further consideration including the parliamentary implications for dealing with the rewritten tax legislation. Meanwhile, the Chancellor has asked the Inland Revenue to proceed with preparatory work.

In addition to the report, the Inland Revenue has today issued "The Path to Tax Simplification—a background paper", which contains further material on tax simplification. This document has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Both documents will be on sale to the public from today.

PRIME MINISTER

Campbell Soups

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit the Campbell Soups Homepride plant in Mary port. [3603]

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December. [3940]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 December 1995. [3942]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Crown Jewels

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what public records exist covering the purchase and early history of *(a)* the imperial state crown of George I, *(b)* the coronation crown of George IV and *(c)* the crown of Queen Adelaide; [5282]

(2) what representations he has received about the ownership and future of the imperial crown of George I, the coronation crown of George IV and the crown of Queen Adelaide; [5280]

(3) what is his policy on the future of the imperial crown of George I, the imperial state crown of George IV and the crown of Queen Adelaide. [5281]

The Prime Minister: So far as I am aware, I have received no representations about the ownership and future of these crown frames. I understand that the crown frames have been acquired by Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei and that the prince has most generously decided to present them to the nation. The applications for licences to export the frames have accordingly been withdrawn. A public record concerning the crown frames is in the annual report of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art, 1994–95, which was placed in the Library of the House on 24 October 1995.

Security Services Act

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements have been made to appoint a commissioner under the Security Services Act 1989 when Lord Justice

Stuart-Smith's appointment expires on 17 December 1995. [5844]

The Prime Minister: Lord Justice Stuart-Smith has accepted re-appointment for a further two years until 14 December 1997.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5558]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Digital Terrestrial Television

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will impose a universal service obligation on broadcasters on the introduction of digital terrestrial television. [5240]

Mr. Sproat: The term "universal service obligation" is used in telecommunications to mean a requirement on a provider to enable consumers, regardless of where they live, to be connected to networks at an affordable price. There is no exact parallel with digital terrestrial television, where constraints on frequency availability mean that it will not be possible in the short-term for all new services to be made available to all consumers in the United Kingdom.

The Government's policy document, "Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting", Cm 2946, published on 10 August, made clear that two of the key criteria on which applications from prospective multiplex providers would be judged would be their proposals to maximise the number of viewers who can be reached by digital terrestrial television, and their proposals to promote the take-up of digital receiving equipment, including through ensuring that it is made available at an affordable price. Analogue television transmissions will be maintained until a broadly similar proportion of the population as is now able to receive them can receive digital broadcast. No one will lose services that they are currently able to receive.

National Lottery

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much has been spent to date on the national lottery in each region of England and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. [4540]

Mr. Sproat: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. The director general of the national lottery, Peter Davies has licensed Camelot to run the national lottery and he regulates its operations. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Cable Licences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many cable licences have not been acted upon and have lapsed. [4947]

Mr. Sproat: Eight licences have been revoked because of the failure of the licensee to implement his proposals. In six of these cases, the area has been readvertised and new licences awarded in respect of five; an application for the sixth is currently under consideration by the Independent Television Commission. The remaining two licences have not yet been readvertised.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Visits to Brussels

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members have used the facility for visiting Brussels in each year since its inception.

Mr. Newton: The facility for hon. Members to visit institutions of the European Community in Brussels, Luxembourg, and Strasbourg was introduced on 1 January 1992. For the purposes of the Resolution, the year begins on 1 April.

The number of visits by hon. Members to Brussels, for each year since the inception of the facility, is as follows:

1991–92: 29
1992–93: 64
1993–94: 60
1994–95: 49
1995–96 (part): 24.

WALES

NHS Trusts

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish information on the management costs of NHS trusts in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [6023]

Mr. Richards: NHS trusts are now required to publish their management costs in their audited annual accounts. The accounts most recently published are for the financial year 1994–95. The following table shows the management costs of NHS trusts in Wales for that year, as audited and reported in their accounts, in cash terms and as a percentage of each trust's income.

The definition of management used is the M1 figure devised by the Audit Commission. It includes the salaries of all managers—except those who are primarily clinicians—who earn more than £20,000 per year, and of managers in a few other specified posts regardless of salary, and the costs of management consultancy.

Hospitals and other services which are not part of a trust or did not become trusts until April 1995 are not included in the table.

Alongside ever-improving health, service and choice, first-class stewardship of resources is a key task for the health service. That is why, in "Caring for the Future", we set the target of transferring £12.5 million per year from management to patient care in the period from 1994–95 to 1996–97. Trusts in Wales are playing an essential part in this, and with the publication of trust management costs this year we can see the first fruits of that policy.

The figures are lower than they would otherwise be because of the transfers that have already been made. I expect next year's figures to be lower still, as they will reflect some of the transfers being made in the present financial year. Beyond that, we are about to set targets for transfers in 1996–97, so the cost figures to be published in two years' time should be lower again.

There are several reasons why trusts can have different management costs, so comparison should be approached carefully, but I hope that trusts themselves will find the figures useful in their efforts to contain and reduce costs further.

Management costs of NHS trusts in Wales, 1994–95

Name of trust	*Type of trust*	*Income* *£000s*	*Management costs (M1)* *£000s*	*Percentage of income*
Glan Clwyd NHS Trust	Acute	57,924	1,702	2.94
Wrexham Maelor NHS Trust	Acute	53,103	1,881	3.54
Clwydian Community NHS Trust	Community/Mental Health	64,164	2,385	3.72
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	Ambulance	12,225	516	4.22
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	Acute/Community	38,416	1,207	3.14
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	Acute/Community	31,037	812	2.62
Ceredigion NHS Trust	Acute/Community	23,116	831	3.59
Derwen NHS Trust	Mental Health/Illness	22,443	954	4.25
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	Acute	93,222	2,633	2.82
Neville Hall NHS Trust	Acute	40,707	1,463	3.59
Gwent Community NHS Trust	Community/Mental Health	57,340	2,699	4.71
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute	60,476	1,982	3.28
Gwynedd Community NHS Trust	Community/Mental Health	47,819	1,636	3.42
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	Acute/Mental Health	64,002	1,558	2.43
Rhondda NHS Trust	Acute/Community	29,190	993	3.40
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	Acute/Community	47,445	1,678	3.54
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust	Ambulance	7,793	1,002	12.86
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	Acute/Community	41,986	1,873	4.46
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute/Community	41,887	1,882	4.49
Llandough NHS Trust	Acute/Community	50,400	2,268	4.50
Velindre NHS Trust	Acute	10,579	619	5.85
South and East Wales Ambulance Trust	Ambulance	17,571	1,119	6.37
Swansea NHS Trust	Acute	54,264	1,233	2.27
Morriston NHS Trust	Acute	62,146	1,609	2.59
			Median	3.57
			Mean	3.55

Earnings

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £2.50, *(b)* £3, *(c)* £3.50, *(d)* £4, *(e)* £4.50, *(f)* £5, *(g)* £5.50, *(h)* £6.50, per hour, including and excluding overtime distinguishing between manual and non-manual, male and female and part-time workers. [4944]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is shown in the table.

Full time employees on adult rates, pay not affected by absence: April 1995, Wales

Percentage with hourly earnings less than:	*Non-manual males* *Including overtime*	*Non-manual males* *Excluding overtime*	*Manual males* *Including overtime*	*Manual males* *Excluding overtime*	*Non-manual females* *Including overtime*	*Non-manual females* *Excluding overtime*	*Manual females* *Including overtime*	*Manual females* *Excluding overtime*
£2.50	0.3	0.3	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.8	3.5	3.8
£3.00	0.7	0.8	2.0	2.5	1.6	1.6	8.9	9.2
£3.50	2.1	2.2	5.7	6.5	4.3	4.5	22.2	21.6
£4.00	5.5	5.7	12.8	15.1	10.6	10.9	35.8	37.9
£4.50	8.0	8.5	22.4	25.6	17.5	17.8	55.0	56.1
£5.00	10.9	11.4	32.2	35.1	25.6	26.2	69.1	70.7
£5.50	15.2	15.6	41.8	44.7	34.9	35.2	79.4	81.0
£6.50	23.6	24.0	57.7	60.5	52.8	53.1	91.1	91.6

All part-time adults[1](a)

Percentage with hourly earnings less than:	*Including overtime*	*Excluding overtime*
£2.50	6.0	6.0
£3.00	10.5	10.6
£3.50	28.7	28.8
£4.00	46.2	46.4
£4.50	59.4	60.3
£5.00	68.8	68.7
£5.50	74.3	74.1
£6.50	81.6	81.6

Note:

[1] The New Earnings Survey only covers those earning above the income tax threshold. As a result a significant number of part-time employees are excluded.

Source:

New Earnings Survey.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of full-time workers on adult rates currently earn less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £150, *(c)*£200, and *(d)* £250 per week, (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime. [4945]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is shown in the table.

Full time employees on adult rates, pay not affected by absence: April 1995, Wales

Percentage with weekly earnings less than:	*Excluding overtime*	*Including overtime*
£100	1.0	0.9
£150	11.0	9.2
£200	32.4	26.9
£250	51.5	44.6

Source:
New Earnings Survey.

Unemployment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Flynn) of 4 December, *Official Report,* columns 7–8, if he will make a statement on the criteria he used to calculate levels of employment and unemployment. [5012]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures used are from the claimant unemployment count as published monthly by the Central Statistical Office. For Wales as a whole, seasonally adjusted figures are available and used for month-to-month comparisons because they avoid the distortion of seasonal variation. Below this geographical level only unadjusted figures are published by the CSO, so where individual counties and parliamentary constituencies are compared with Wales, unadjusted figures are used.

Bus Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the increase in diesel fuel duty in his Budget statement on the operation of bus services. [5306]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This increase is very small in terms of the overall operational costs of bus services. There is, therefore, no reason for it to have significant impact on the levels of services. It should encourage the operators to be more efficient in their use of fuel, and reduce emissions from public service vehicles.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to maintain the frequency of local bus services. [5307]

Mr. Jones: Bus operators must be free to respond to changes in the market. It is for county councils to ensure that essential public transport services are provided where these cannot be provided commercially.

Angling Byelaws

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the National Rivers Authority's proposed amendment to change the finish of the salmon and sea trout fishing season to 7 October, and its impact on fishing tourism in south-west Wales; [5374]

(2) what assessments he has made of the impact of the National Rivers Authority's proposed amendment to the rod and line byelaws on fishing tourism in south-west Wales. [5375]

Mr. Hague: I understand that the NRA is intending to amend its byelaws to conserve fish stocks. It has not yet submitted the byelaws for confirmation, but when it does so I shall consider the case for the amendments along with the comments of all objectors.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh health common services authority concerning the effects on charges to NHS trusts in Wales for the authority's services of the authority reducing its occupancy of Crickhowell house to *(a)* less than 75 per cent. *(b)* less than 50 per cent. *(c)* less than 25 per cent. of the office space; and if the charges will reflect the rent paid by the authority for the whole building; [5640]

(2) what agreement he has reached with the prescription pricing division of the health common services authority in relation to its relocation from Crickhowell house, Cardiff bay; and what agreement he has made with the chairman of the Welsh health common services authority in respect of the market rent for the prescription pricing division in *(a)* its present location and *(b)* elsewhere; [5637]

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh health common services authority in relation to *(a)* relocations of parts of the authority outside Crickhowell house following market testing exercises and *(b)* the sub-letting of consequently vacated office space at Crickhowell house; what obligations his Department has in respect of rental guarantees at Crickhowell house regarding vacated space; and if he will make a statement. [5642]

Mr. Hague: My Department is discussing these matters with the authority. The whole of the building has been leased for 25 years from 31 August but there is provision for sub-letting.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh health common services authority concerning special redundancy terms for current employees of the authority over 50 years of age. [5638]

Mr. Hague: None. Following discussions with my Department the authority will be introducing a voluntary redundancy scheme in due course in line with criteria which it will be establishing.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees giving their full-time equivalents, there were in his Department on 31 December in each year since 1993; and what are the planned figures for 31 December 1996. [5644]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

	Full-time staff	Full-time equivalent or part-time staff
31 December 1993	2,439	202
31 December 1994	2,357	199
1 December 1995	2,222	184

It is expected that staff numbers—full-time equivalent—will be reduced to 2,100 during 1996–97.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with trade unions regarding compliance with European Union directives on large-scale redundancies in respect of his Department's current staff reductions and redundancies programme. [5641]

Mr. Hague: Consultation on the current staff reductions has taken place with the trade unions in my Department on the basis of the appropriate departmental Whitely Council agreements. The consultations comply with the provisions of the relevant European directives.

Occupational Health

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many medical and nursing staff were working in occupational health within the national health service in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will list the grades of those employees. [5428]

Mr. Richards: Information on nursing staff working in occupational health is not available centrally. Information on the whole-time equivalent number of medical staff whose main specialty was occupational health is given in the table.

	Staff in post at 30 September		
Grade	1992	1993	1994
Consultant	2.9	4.1	4.5
Senior registrar	—	1.0	—
Hospital practitioner	—	0.2	0.2
Clinical assistant	1.5	1.6	1.1

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iran and Saudi Arabia (Unpaid Debts)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia in respect of the problem of non-payment and late payment for medical products exported to these countries by Smith and Nephew. [5241]

Mr. Hanley: Smith and Nephew has not approached us about their payment problems with Iran. But the ECGD are dealing with both pre and post-revolutionary insured debt repayment matters in Iran. Current commercial debt claims by United Kingdom creditors are being administered through Credit Suisse in London.

Our embassy in Riyadh has addressed with the Saudi Government the question of payment arrears, particularly for medical supplies, including payments owed for deliveries from Smith and Nephew. A number of outstanding payments have issued in 1995, but considerable sums remain outstanding and our embassy continues to seek early payment of the remainder.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from *(a)* Smith and Nephew and *(b)* other United Kingdom manufacturers about the difficulty of securing payments for goods exported to Iran and Saudi Arabia. [5242]

Mr. Hanley: We have not received any representations from Smith and Nephew or other manufacturers about securing payment from Iran.

We have not had any approaches from Smith and Nephew about Saudi Arabia, but the company informed my right hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Mr. Needham), the then Minister of Trade, in June of its debt problem with Saudi Arabia. We have also had approaches from a number of other United Kingdom manufacturers. Some have been paid; most, like pharmaceutical companies, which supply on a regular basis, have been paid some of their older outstanding debts but one is still about a year in arrears.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many civil service personnel in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are located in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [5106]

Mr. Hanley: At 1 April 1995, the latest date for which data are available, the figures were:

	Number
England	3,327
Wales	0
Scotland	475
Northern Ireland	0

Diplomatic Missions, Scotland

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* nationality and *(b)* location of each diplomatic mission located in Scotland; and what representations he has received regarding the closure of these missions. [5107]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There are no diplomatic missions located in Scotland; there are, however, 84 consular posts representing 37 countries.

Mohammed Rafiq

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of his immigration appeal in Leeds on 16 August 1995; and when Mohammed Rafiq will be allowed to enter the United Kingdom to join his wife. [4996]

Mr. Hanley: Mr. Rafiq's appeal was successful and he has now been medically cleared. Entry clearance will be granted on application to the high commission at Islamabad.

Russian Visitors' Visas

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what quota system the British embassy in Moscow applies for the approval of visitors' visas for Russian applicants hoping to come to Britain. [5376]

Mr. Hanley: There is no quota system. Each application is considered on its merits by an entry clearance officer and in accordance with the requirements of the immigration rules.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of Russian visitors' visas granted in the current year to date. [5378]

Mr. Hanley: In the first 11 months of 1995, the British embassy in Moscow issued 86,085 United Kingdom and Commonwealth-dependent territory visas, of which 84,315 were UK visa issues for Russians. During that same period, the British consulate general in St. Petersburg issued 15,164 UK and Commonwealth-dependent territory visas, of which 15,147 were UK visa issues for Russians.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria are used by the British embassy in Moscow to determine which visitors' visa applications from Russian citizens are approved. [5377]

Mr. Hanley: Entry clearance officers at the British embassy in Moscow consider all visa applications in accordance with the requirements of the immigration rules, as is the case at all our entry clearance issuing posts overseas.

Consultants

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total cost to date of consultancy payments made to firms in relation to work carried out to develop his Department's plans for the proposed sell-off of its housing stock. [5379]

Mr. Hanley: No payments have been made to date in relation to such work.

High Commission Buildings

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent on the residence of the former British high commissioner in Kiribati on *(a)* the sub-lease, *(b)* ground rent and *(c)* fixtures, fittings and furnishings since the property was acquired on 31 March 1984. [5484]

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

(a) Sub-lease purchased in 1984 for Australian $65,000 or approximately £30,000.

(b) Ground rent Australian $142 or approximately £64 per annum for 11 years, total £704.

(c) £9,974 has been spent on fixtures, fittings and furnishings since 1 April 1992. Figures before that date could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the residence of the former British high commissioner in Kiribati is to be handed over with fixtures, fittings and furnishings still in place; and if he will make a statement. [5485]

Mr. Hanley: All fixtures, fittings and furnishings of any value have been removed for use elsewhere.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what use the former British high commissioner's residence in Kiribati is to be put after handover to the Kiribati Government; and if he will make a statement. [5486]

Mr. Hanley: This will be for the Government of Kiribati to decide.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the locations of British high commissioners' residences overseas; which buildings are sited on foreign Government-owned land and sub-leased to the British Government on terms similar to the Kiribati property; and if he will make a statement. [5487]

Mr. Hanley: A list of the locations of British high commissioners' residences is given in "A". A list of those sited on foreign Government-owned land and sub-leased on terms similar to those for the high commissioner's residence in Kiribati is in list "B".

List A

Location of High Commission Residences.

Abuja
Accra
Antigua
Bandar Seri Begawan
Banjul
Belmopan
Bridgetown
Canberra
Castries
Colombo
Dar es Salaam
Dhaka
Freetown
Gaborone
Georgetown
Harare
Honiara
Islamabad
Kampala
Kingston
Kingstown
Kuala Lumpur
Lilongwe
Lusaka
Maseru
Maputo
Mbabane
Nairobi
Nassau
New Delhi
Nicosia
Nuku'alofa
Ottawa
Port Louis
Port Moresby
Port of Spain
Pretoria
Singapore

St. Georges
Valletta
Victoria
Vila
Wellington
Windhoek
Yaoundé.

List B

Location of residences sited on foreign Government-owned land and sub-leased on terms similar to those for the High Commissioner's residence in Kiribati.

Accra
Banjul
Canberra
Dhaka
Honiara
Islamabad
Kampala
Lusaka
Nuku'alofa
Port Moresby
Vila.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the British high commissions that have closed in the last five years; how each property has been disposed of; what was the original purchase price and the sale price obtained for each property where appropriate; and if he will make a statement. [5488]

Mr. Hanley: The only high commission to have closed in the last five years is that in Kiribati. The high commission offices have been transferred to the Overseas Development Administration. It is intended that the former high commissioner's residence should be handed over to the Government of Kiribati. Details of the cost of sub-lease purchase and ground rent are in my earlier answer.

HEALTH

NHS

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioner, *(b)* consultant *(c)* junior doctor and *(d)* nursing midwifery posts were vacant in each of the last five years. [4185]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Information on vacancies for general practitioners is not centrally available. Figures on nursing and midwifery vacancies collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics are available in the annual report of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. Copies of the review body's report are placed in the Library each year.

The process of appointment of a doctor typically involves advertising the post and the selection of the most suitable candidate to fill it. The numbers of vacancies on 30 September will include many posts which happen to be vacant on that day but are in process of being filled.

Consultant vacant posts as at 30 September each year in England (whole-time equivalent)

1990: 700
1991: 470
1992: 540
1993: 480
1994: 570.

Whole-time equivalent of junior doctor vacant posts as at 30 September each year in England

	1990	*1991*[1]	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total junior doctors[2]	530	—	580	640	640
Senior registrar	230	—	180	200	200
Registrar	230	—	280	310	280
Senior house officer	70	—	120	130	170

[1] Data on junior doctors for 1991 are available only at disproportionate cost.

[2] Vacant post figures for house officers are not collected.

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore individual grades may not add up to the total.

Smoking (Children)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new campaigns his Department intends to introduce to alert children to the dangers of smoking. [4724]

Mr. Horam: A new three-year programme aimed at 11 to 15-year olds will be launched next year when the present Health Education Authority campaign comes to an end. Additionally, the current national smoking education campaign is particularly aimed at parents, who are a key influence on children's smoking behaviour.

Pharmacists (Reimbursement)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average length of time it takes for the national health service to reimburse pharmacists for the cost of medicines dispensed by them; [4916]

(2) what plans he has to take steps to speed the process whereby pharmacists are reimbursed for medicines that they have prescribed; [4918]

(3) what is his target length of time for the period between a claim for reimbursement by a pharmacist who has dispensed medicine and the payment therefor. [4917]

Mr. Malone: A payment representing approximately 80 per cent. of the amount due is paid on the first day of the month following that in which the prescription is submitted for pricing. The remainder is paid on the first day of the following month.

Pharmacists are currently paid on time, to a timetable originally agreed with the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee. There are no plans to change the arrangement.

Leg Ulcer Bandages

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the expenditure on general practitioner prescribed leg ulcer bandages via the PACT—prescribing analyses and costs—system in 1994 by nation, region and health authority; and what this expenditure is as an expenditure per head of population for each of the regions and health authorities. [4927]

Mr. Malone: It is not possible to identify reliably expenditure on leg ulcer bandages because the bandages used for the treatment of leg ulcers may also be used for other purposes.

Work Experience Trainees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidances he has issued to the NHS on the involvement of work experience trainees in medical procedures. [5593]

Mr. Malone: None. This is a matter for local national health service employers. I understand that the General Medical Council has provided guidance to doctors about delegating care to non-medical staff and students in its booklet, "Good medical practice", which was issued to all doctors this autumn.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning from the consumption of food on non-domestic premises have been notified in each year since 1985. [4999]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally. Formal notifications of the total number of cases of food poisoning are published annually in the MB2 series, "Communicable Disease Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase public awareness about the causes of food poisoning. [5001]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have a continuing programme of food hygiene publicity which includes promoting public awareness of the causes of food poisoning.

Advisory material is kept under regular review in the light of developments, including information from research and surveillance, and independent expert advice.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many successful prosecutions for food poisoning against *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies there have been in each of the last five years. [5002]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Intestinal Diseases

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of *(a)* cholera, *(b)* typhoid fever, *(c)* paratyphoid fever, *(d)* dysentery and *(e)* food poisoning were notified in each year from 1985 to 1992; [4998]

(2) if he will make a statement on the incidence of *(a)* typhoid fever, *(b)* cholera, *(c)* paratyphoid fever, *(d)* dysentery and *(e)* food poisoning in England since 1985; [5000]

(3) what is his estimate of the costs to the NHS resulting from incidents of food poisoning in each year from 1985 to 1995. [4997]

Mr. Horam: The requested information on cholera is shown in the table.

Cholera

	Total[1]
1985	4
1986	5
1987	2
1988	10
1989	1
1990	6
1991	4
1992	9

Notes:

[1] Includes cases and symptomless excreters.

Source:

Vibrio Cholera 01 Faecal Isolates England and Wales 1985–1992 DEP LEP confirmed laboratory reports to CDSC.

Information on paratyphoid fever, dysentery and food poisoning are available in OPCS's MB2 "Series Communicable Disease Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest available publication is series MB2 No. 20 (1993).

The great majority of cases of cholera, typhoid and paratyphoid fever are due to infections acquired abroad.

The rise in dysentery notifications in 1992 was consistent with the secular pattern of upsurges in incidence every seven to eight years, although the number of cases reported in 1992 was much greater than that reported during the previous upsurge.

No such estimate has been made of the costs to the NHS resulting from incidents of food poisoning.

There is no clear explanation for the increase in food poisoning notifications. On 22 October 1993 my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State announced the start of a major study of infectious intestinal diseases in England. The purpose of the study is to establish the incidence, sources, causes and socio-economic costs of infectious intestinal disease. This is the most comprehensive study of its type ever attempted. It will involve 70 general practices and more than 20,000 volunteers. The study will be completed in 1996 with results available in 1997.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5066]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* It is the policy in the Department to ensure that we do not gold-plate European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into food treatment methods for destroying the infective agent of BSE prior to consumption. [4936]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* The Government's policy on BSE is to ensure that all cattle suspected of suffering from BSE, and specified bovine offals from all cattle which might or might not be incubating the disease, are removed from the human and animal feed chain.

The United Kingdom and European Commission jointly funded an experiment to assess the effectiveness of various rendering systems used within the EU in deactivating the BSE and scrapie agents. The scrapie experiment is still in progress, although the BSE experiment has been completed. It found that some systems failed to inactivate the BSE agent, whereas others did so to a significant extent. The results formed the basis for Commission decision 94/382, which sets standards for rendering ruminant material and prohibits the use of systems which fail significantly to inactivate the BSE agent. These standards are being met by rendering plants in the UK.

Herbicides

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ban the herbicide bentazole; and if he will make a statement. [5147]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* There is no pesticide or pesticide active ingredient by the name of bentazole approved in the United Kingdom. The Government have no plans to ban the approved herbicide active ingredient bentazone.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he will make available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995, 1996 or 1997 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1995–96, and if he will make a statement. [3687]

Mr. Curry *[pursuant to his reply, 29 November 1995, c. 733–34]:* An error occurred in the figures given in the answer. The maximum amounts that it would be appropriate to allocate towards the amount of expenditure by local authorities on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1995–96 are:

Maximum amounts: £000 rounded

Authority	*1995–96*	*Total 1994–95 and 1995–96*
Isle of Wight		
Isle of Wight Council	1,750	3,937
Cleveland		
Cleveland County Council	2,500	—
Hartlepool Borough Council	3,200	3,748
Langbaurgh on Tees Borough Council	2,550	2,637
Middlesborough Borough Council	2,160	2,354
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	2,930	3,428
Avon		
Avon County Council	2,500	—
Bristol City Council	3,000	—
Woodspring District Council	3,250	—
In Bath and North-east Somerset, of which:	3,000	—
Bath and North-east Somerset Council	1,810	—
Bath City Council	600	—
Wandsdyke District Council	590	—
In South Gloucestershire, of which:	3,000	—
South Gloucestershire Council	1,800	—
Kingswood Borough Council	650	—
Northavon District Council	550	—
Humberside		
Humberside County Council	2,500	—
Hull City Council	3,000	—
In the East Riding of Yorkshire, of which:	3,200	—
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	1,200	—
Beverley Borough Council	650	—
Boothferry Borough Council	300	—
East Yorkshire Borough Council	550	—
Holderness Borough Council	500	—
In North Lincolnshire, of which:	2,900	—
North Lincolnshire Council	1,800	—
Glanford Borough Council	550	—
Scunthrope Borough Council	550	—
In North-east Lincolnshire, of which:	2,950	—
North-east Lincolnshire Mr. Curry	1,900	—
Cleethorpes Borough Council	450	—
Great Grimsby	600	—
North Yorkshire		
North Yorkshire County Council	1,000	—
Rydedale District Council	410	—
Selby District Council	510	—
In York, of which:	3,000	—
York District Council	2,550	—
York City Council	450	—
Total	49,310	52,824

American Bullfrog

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to eliminate the threat to indigenous wildlife of the American bullfrog. [4731]

Mr. Clappison: The north American bullfrog is covered by the provisions of section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which makes it an offence to release, or allow to escape into the wild, any animal which is not ordinarily resident in, and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain.

As a result of a small number of sightings in the wild this summer we are consulting English Nature, our statutory scientific advisers, to identify the scale of any threat. Where sales outlets have been identified, the Department has made known the potential threat of such illegal releases.

Home Improvement Agencies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to increase support for home improvement agencies. [4710]

Mr. Clappison: We are increasing support for home improvement agencies from £4.25 million in 1995–96 to £4.8 million from 1996–97. This will enable grant support to be extended to more agencies across the country and ensure that the advice and help provided by agencies is available to more elderly and disabled people, and people on low incomes.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce more severe penalties for the destruction of sites of special scientific interest. [4727]

Mr. Clappison: None, although we have agreed in principle to consider further powers for requiring the restoration of a site's special interest. The level of fines is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Pensioners (Central Heating)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of pensioner households lack central heating. [4551]

Mr. Clappison: An estimated 19 per cent. of households headed by a person over retirement age lacked central heating in England in 1994–95.

This estimate is from the 1994–95 survey of English housing. Like all estimates from surveys it is liable to sampling variability.

Housing (Elderly and Disabled People)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what measures he proposes to ensure that private sector building companies provide housing that meets the specific needs of people *(a)* over the age of 65 years and *(b)* the disabled. [4552]

Mr. Clappison: The Government consulted earlier this year on proposals to extend the requirements of the building regulations to help disabled people in new dwellings in England and Wales. The proposals are intended to identify a range of reasonable provisions which could be incorporated into new dwellings in order to allow future occupiers:

(a) to be able to invite disabled people to visit them in their own homes; and

(b) to be able to cope better with reducing mobility as people grow older and hence to be able to "stay put" longer in their own homes.

Over 1,000 responses have been received to that consultation, and these are at present being analysed.

Trichloroethylene

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the permitted levels for the occupational exposure level of trichloroethylene following the decision of the Swedish Government to reduce permitted exposure levels. [4550]

Sir Paul Beresford: Trichloroethylene is one of the priority substances being reviewed under the European Union's existing substances regulation. The United Kingdom, through the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of the Environment, leads on this review, which will include a comprehensive risk review of all available scientific data on the human health and environmental effects of trichloroethylene. The conclusion of the review at EU level will help determine whether there is a need to revise occupational exposure limits. Trichloroethylene currently has a maximum exposure limit set under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to promote energy efficiency in industry. [4708]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend has plans further to encourage the efficient use of energy in the industrial sector through new initiatives such as a strategy for small and medium enterprises which is currently being developed under the energy efficiency best practice programme—EEBPP—and projects planned by the energy saving trust aimed at small businesses. These complement measures aimed at the industrial sector through the EEBPP and the making a corporate commitment campaign.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent estimates his Department has made of the cost of wasted energy through energy inefficient homes, offices and industrial buildings in the United Kingdom. [4716]

Mr. Clappison: In 1994, the last year for which figures are available, energy consumption in the United Kingdom housing, offices and industrial buildings sectors was worth about £17.5 billion. It has been estimated that around 20 per cent. of energy could be saved through investment in cost-effective energy efficiency measures.

Red Squirrels

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposal he has to prevent further erosion of the red squirrel population in north-east England. [4951]

Mr. Clappison: Measures to safeguard the red squirrel population include full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and a prohibition on the release of grey squirrels to restrict their spread. English Nature's species recovery programme, which aims to achieve long-term sustainable survival of endangered species, includes the red squirrel. The programme features the restocking of small populations.

The Red Alert North-East partnership, which English Nature has part funded, is taking steps to improve status and general awareness of the red squirrel. They are also carrying out research into the sorts of conifer preferred by red squirrels.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he plans to put to the EU Environment Council in Brussels on 18 to 19 December on the harmonisation of EU policies of self-sufficiency for the management and disposal of toxic and radioactive waste. [5014]

Mr. Clappison: There are no plans to discuss EU waste policies at the December Environment Council.

Areas of Tranquillity

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce a definition of areas of tranquillity. [4824]

Mr. Clappison: Ministers have looked with interest at the recent work by the Council for the Protection of Rural England which aims to define tranquil areas. The Government have no plans to introduce such a definition.

Accomodation (Tourist Areas)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the extent to which business organisations advertise the availability of residential vacancies in hotels, hostels and houses in multiple occupation in tourist areas to attract unemployment benefit claimants; what is the nature of such organisations; and if he will make a statement. [5392]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has not commissioned any research into this topic, but we have received evidence, both from right hon. and hon. Members, and the public, of this practice. The Government have already taken measures to tighten the planning controls on the switch of hotels into hostel use and have announced that we will shortly be bringing forward legislation to improve conditions and management standards in this type of accommodation.

County Hall, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the financial arrangements between Whitbread plc and Shirayama Shokusan Ltd. in respect of county hall, London SE1; and if payment of the deferred element of the original purchase price will now be made to the London residuary body. [5311]

Sir Paul Beresford: The arrangements between Shirayama Shokusan and Whitbread are a matter for those two parties. Under the terms of its purchase of the riverside building, Shirayama is required from April 1997 to pay the deferred £10 million at the rate of 50 per cent. of the annual net profit of the hotel and other business activities in the riverside building, and in any event to pay the full sum by 2012, irrespective of any profits.

Water Leakages

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what leakage reduction targets each water company set out in their submissions to the Director General of Water Services at his five-year price review; [4608]

(2) if he will publish, company by company, the leakage reduction target plans submitted in their asset management plans at privatisation. [4609]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* Projections for national reductions in leakage were contained in Ofwat's occasional paper 1, "Future levels of demand and supply for water", published in November 1994. Individual company projections of water balances provided for the periodic review were not necessarily on a consistent basis and are commercially confidential.

The Office of Water Services is currently assessing trends in leakage since privatisation on a comparative basis, as part of its contribution to the report for my right hon. Friend on the lessons to be learnt from the drought.

Housing, Kirklees

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of new *(a)* private and *(b)* social houses commenced in Kirklees for each year since 1974. [4938]

Mr. Clappison: The table shows figures as reported to the Department by Kirklees borough council and the National House Building Council:

New housebuilding: Kirklees local authority area

Numbers of dwellings

	Starts			Completions		
	Private sector	*Local authority and housing association sectors*[1]	*Total*	*Private sector*	*Local authority and housing association sectors*[1]	*Total*
1974	918	696	1,614	1,138	343	1,481
1975	1,294	389	1,683	1,028	422	1,450
1976	1,150	1,122	2,272	1,143	481	1,624
1977	858	428	1,286	995	644	1,639
1978	1,163	905	2,068	1,146	864	2,010
1979	929	545	1,474	959	492	1,451
1980	666	304	970	823	1,054	1,877
1981	543	118	661	649	487	1,136
1982	681	318	999	593	164	757
1983	619	106	725	681	284	965

New housebuilding: Kirklees local authority area

Numbers of dwellings

	Starts			Completions		
	Private sector	Local authority and housing association sectors[1]	Total	Private sector	Local authority and housing association sectors[1]	Total
1984	586	54	640	620	81	701
1985	530	73	603	689	34	723
1986	735	95	830	506	102	608
1987	658	44	702	519	62	581
1988	1,030	129	1,159	917	18	935
1989	954	112	1,066	658	151	809
1990	661	97	758	711	77	788
1991	1,034	29	1,063	1,318	130	1,448
1992	1,068	232	1,300	1,213	121	1,334
1993	889	48	937	913	206	1,119
1994	993	116	1,109	874	67	941

Note:

[1] Local authority and housing association new build only.

Source:

Department of the Environment.

Off-shore Conservation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on *(a)* the funding of the seabirds and cetaceans branch of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and *(b)* its role in promoting off-shore conservation. [4994]

Mr. Clappison: The seabirds and cetaceans branch of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee is responsible for carrying out the special nature conservation functions of the three country conservation agencies—English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales—in off-shore areas, and provides advice on the animal species which live there. The budget for the seabirds and cetaceans branch in 1995–96 is £416,000.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of income *(a)* the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and *(b)* its seabirds and cetaceans branch, receive from the oil industry. [4995]

Mr. Clappison: In 1995–96 contributions from the oil industry represent 3.2 per cent. of the overall budget of the JNCC and 28 per cent. of the seabirds and cetacean branch budget.

Housing Association Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has made, on the basis of the level of the housing association expenditure announced in the 1995 financial statement, of the number of housing association homes for rent which will be constructed in 1996–97; and what was his estimate of funding levels for 1996–97 on the basis of the 1992 financial statement; [5150]

(2) if he will estimate the funding available for new rented housing association homes in 1996–97 if the expenditure levels in the 1992 autumn statement had been maintained for each local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside; [5157]

(3) what estimate he has of the number of housing association homes for rent which will be built in 1996–97 in each local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside; [5158]

(4) what is the total central Government funding for new rented housing association homes for 1996–97, excluding tenant incentive schemes, do-it-yourself share ownership and major repairs of sales programmes for each local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside. [5159]

Mr. Clappison: The 1992 autumn statement provided indicative funding levels for 1993–94 to 1995–96, and not 1996–97. In 1996–97, funding for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme will be over £1 billion. Together with homes provided from local authority funding for housing associations and other sources, this is expected to provide around 60,600 homes for rent or shared ownership in 1996–97.

Separate figures for rent and the sale and incentive programmes will be available when the Housing Corporation has assessed housing associations' bids for 1996–97 projects and finalised the approved development programme, in late January. The corporation will thereafter publish details of ADP funding allocations in each local authority area.

Housing Subsidies

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the current housing need for under 25-year-olds; what plans he has to meet that need; and if he will make a statement. [5151]

Mr. Clappison: The Government estimate that newly arising need for subsidised housing for all age groups for England lies within a range of 60,000 to 100,000 units a year between 1991 and 2001.

We estimate that Housing Corporation funding over the next three years—1996–97–1998–99—together with homes being provided from other resources, are intended to provide an average of around 60,000 new social lettings a year.

The estimates of newly arising need and the planned new lettings are not subdivided by age group.

Neighbourhood Noise

Mr. Robert Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's response to the consultation on the review of the effectiveness of neighbour noise controls. [5762]

Mr. Clappison: The review of the effectiveness of neighbour noise controls made recommendations relating to the management of local authority noise services; liaison between local authorities and the police; powers of confiscation; and the introduction of a night-time noise offence.

On 27 March this year, we consulted on these recommendations and we received 354 responses. A list of the responses has been placed in the Library of the House: copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Department of the Environment's library.

We have carefully considered the recommendations made by the working party, together with the responses to the consultation exercise and the results of initial trails of the proposed night-time noise offence. The recommendations represent a package of proposals which have a great deal of support and we propose to accept them in full. We believe that they will bring substantial improvements in the four areas identified in the review.

First, as the working party recognised, there is a wide variation in the type of noise complaint service provided by individual authorities. Some authorities provide excellent and very effective services and, of course, the level of service is a matter to be decided locally in terms of what is appropriate for the area taking account of local circumstances and resources. However, many people are concerned by the disparity between levels of service provided by neighbouring authorities with similar levels of problem and uncertainty as to the responsiveness and effectiveness of the service being offered. We therefore propose to encourage local authorities, largely through the dissemination of best practice and professional guidance, to adopt a graduated service standard which will clearly identify the type of noise service which is being offered.

The second area studied by the working party was the role of the police in dealing with noise complaints. There are many examples of excellent liaison locally between environmental health officers and the police. We want to encourage these informal arrangements by supporting the representative bodies in drawing up a code of practice on effective liaison between the agencies.

The police will, of course, continue to have responsibility to support local authority staff where there is a threat to public order, though the judgment about the support required remains an operational matter for the police.

There is overwhelming support for clarification of the current powers under which some authorities temporarily confiscate noise-making equipment. Many respondents to the consultation paper take the view that confiscation has a significant deterrent effect.

The fourth area is the creation of a new offence to deal with excessive noise from domestic premises during the night-time period. Noise makers would be given a warning by a local authority officer to reduce the noise below a measured standard, based on the World Health Organisation guidelines of 35dB(A) as necessary for the restorative process of sleep. Failure to comply with this warning would be a criminal offence. There would be a fixed penalty set initially at £40; alternatively the offender could be prosecuted by the local authority. This new offence would supplement the existing statutory nuisance regime and local authorities would have a choice as to whether to adopt it for their area.

The third and fourth elements of the package will require new legislative powers and we will look for an early opportunity to introduce these. We will also wish to consult further with local authorities on the detailed definition and operation of the new powers and what supporting guidance on their use may be appropriate.

We believe that this package of measures represents a major step forward in tackling the problems of noise nuisance from domestic premises.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to become involved in renewable energy projects. [4714]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *467*.

DEFENCE

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made towards cutting energy consumption in Government buildings for which he has responsibility in each year since 1990. [1454]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for State for the Environment on 17 May 1995, *Official Report,* columns *259–62*. The figures for 1994–95, currently being compiled, are not expected to differ significantly from the achievement over the previous three financial years.

Departmental Efficiency Savings

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total efficiency saving implied by his Department's public expenditure settlement. [4874]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 4 December, *Official Report,* column *3*.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 4 December, *Official Report,* column 3, if he will provide a breakdown of the £3 billion-worth of savings as a result of his Department's efficiency programme. [4873]

Mr. Soames: A year-by-year breakdown of MOD's efficiency gains since 1988 is set out in figure 6 of the Ministry of Defence departmental report 1995, Cm 2801. Taken together with our current estimate of efficiency gains in 1995–96, the total exceeds £3 billion. Analyses of these efficiency gains have been published in successive departmental reports.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations and circumstances of each of the incidents since 1992 which have led to his Department paying compensation for personal injury involving low-flying aircraft; what is the statutory basis for such payments; and what is his policy on the payment of compensation for personal injury in respect of low-flying incidents. [5184]

Mr. Soames: It would not be appropriate to publish details of individuals' claims, but from the beginning of financial year 1991–92 to the end of 1994–95, a total of £268,000 compensation has been paid in respect of 72 personal injury claims arising from military low-flying activity in the United Kingdom.

The basis on which the Ministry of Defence pays compensation in respect of loss or damage sustained as a result of military low flying was set out in Lord Drumalbyn's statement on 22 November 1971, *Official Report,* column 838, in another place.

Compensation paid as a result of loss or damage arising from military low-flying activity is calculated on the basis of normal common law principles.

RAF Fast Jet Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those manoeuvres in respect of each RAF fast jet aircraft type for which standard operating procedures require the use of reheat. [5174]

Mr. Soames: The manoeuvres for which the Tornado GR1, F3 and Jaguar aircraft require reheat are:

Take Off
Single Engine Overshoot
Low level Abort
Maximum rate turns
Maximum performance climb
Acrobatic manoeuvres in the vertical.

Reheat may also be required during air combat manoeuvring—above 5,000 ft—and in the interests of flight safety.

Tomahawk Missiles

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which weapons ranges will be used for test, practice and exercise firing of the Royal Navy's Tomahawk missiles. [5168]

Mr. Soames: Due to the long range of Tomahawk and the infrastructure required to support Tomahawk missiles firings, the current intention is that test, practice and exercise firings of the Royal Navy's Tomahawk missiles will be conducted on US Tomahawk ranges. The US has ranges on both the west and east coasts of the USA.

Highlands Restricted Area

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft are permitted to operate in the highlands restricted area at any one time *(a)* in formation with each other and *(b)* independently of each other; and what changes have been made to these limits since the establishment of the highlands restricted area. [5178]

Mr. Soames: Regulations do not specify a maximum number of aircraft which are permitted to operate in the highlands restricted area. However, the area is allocated to a single squadron at a time, with that squadron then responsible for ensuring the safe deconfliction of its aircraft. There have been no changes to these regulations since the establishment of the highlands restricted area.

RAF (Overseas Training)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 Ministry of Defence personnel have visited facilities in Romania to assess their suitability for training use by the Royal Air Force; [5186]

(2) on how many occasions in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 Ministry of Defence personnel have visited facilities in the Czech Republic to assess their suitability for training use by the Royal Air Force. [5185]

Mr. Soames: Extensive military co-operation now exists with both countries. As yet, there have been no visits to either to assess training opportunities for the Royal Air Force.

Goose Bay

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Air Force Hercules squadrons have sent aircrew to Goose Bay for training in each year since 1992. [5188]

Mr. Soames: No. 47 Squadron sent aircrew to train at Goose Bay in 1994 and 1995.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of deployments to and from Goose Bay of aircrew from each Tornado squadron during 1994 and 1995. [5187]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

	Squadron
1994	
14 April–2 May	12
2 May –16 May	9
16 May–30 May	14
30 May–12 June	2
12 June–27 June	13
7 August–22 August	17
22 August–5 September	617
5 September–19 September	31
1995	
3 July–28 July	31
28 July–11 August	13
11 August–25 August	14
25 August–8 September	9
8 September–22 September	12

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the minimum altitude flown by Royal Air Force Hercules aircraft during training at Goose Bay in each year since 1993. [5189]

Mr. Soames: RAF Hercules aircraft have flown at a minimum separation distance of 250 ft, during training at Goose Bay, in each year since 1993.

Hercules (Crash)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence was obtained during the investigation of the RAF Hercules crash on 27 May 1993 as to the possibility of the aircraft having struck the side of the valley before stalling. [5359]

Mr. Soames: Evidence from examination of the aircraft wreckage by the air accidents investigation branch and computer reconstruction of the flight path led the RAF board of inquiry to conclude that the aircraft did not strike the side of the valley before stalling.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what speed restrictions have been placed on Tornado aircraft since 7 June 1994; and on what dates have such speed restrictions been lifted. [5413]

Mr. Soames: As a precautionary measure, varying speed limits were imposed on the Tornado fleet in July 1994 to keep engine pressure within acceptable limits. Following modification of the engine, the Tornado F3 speed restrictions were lifted in April 1995.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the damage caused to Tornado GR-1A serial number ZG726 on 17 May. [5175]

Mr. Soames: On 17 May 1995 the aircraft concerned was subject to a birdstrike while flying over the sea north of RAF Lossiemouth. As a precaution, the crew diverted into Lossiemouth, but no damage to the aircraft was found.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been introduced to provide a permanent solution to the problems that caused the RB199 engine failure in the Tornado accident of 7 June 1994. [5394]

Mr. Soames: The loss of Tornado ZE809 on 7 June 1994 was caused by a faulty engine seal. A technical solution to the failure has been identified and the intended seal modification is currently being trialled. If these trials are successful, modification of the engine fleet is expected to start in April 1996.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current standing instructions to the Royal Air Force Tornado F3 crews concerning the execution of *(a)* air combat manoeuvring and *(b)* combat air patrols within advisory route airspace. [5167]

Mr. Soames: There are no standing instructions to RAF Tornado F3 aircrew specific to the conduct of air combat manoeuvring and combat air patrols within advisory route airspace. Aircrew are, however, required to follow all normal flight procedures.

Surplus Land

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all his Department's surplus land in Humberside. [5132]

Mr. Soames: The only surplus MOD land currently in disposal in Humberside is 7.42 hectares of tenanted agricultural land at RAF Driffield. Thirteen surplus married quarters are also in disposal.

Harrier GR7 (Crash)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the speed of Harrier GR7 serial number ZD349 at impact on 14 January 1994. [5176]

Mr. Soames: It was 428 knots.

RAF Spadeadam

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to install *(a)* air combat manoeuvring instrumentation, *(b)* a television ordnance scoring system or *(c)* a range measurement and debriefing system at RAF Spadeadam. [5236]

Mr. Soames: There are currently no plans to install air combat instrumentation or a television ordnance scoring system at RAF Spadeadam; consideration is being given to establishing a range instrumentation and debriefing system.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the effects on the availability of airspace for fixed-wing low-flying training, of requirements for low-flying by the Army Air Corps' Apache helicopters. [5169]

Mr. Soames: No changes to the organisation of the UK low-flying system are currently planned as a result of the introduction into service of the Apache helicopter.

Aircraft (Colours)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those aircraft types which are planned to be painted black to increase their conspicuity at low level. [5179]

Mr. Soames: Hawk and Tucano aircraft are being painted black to increase their conspicuity at low level. Further investigations are being carried out to determine the most appropriate colour schemes for other slower moving training aircraft and gliders.

RAF Aircraft (Availability)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *4*, if he will list the 44 aircraft which were unavailable for use and in each case the RAF base at which they were deployed. [5062]

Mr. Soames: The details requested are as follows:

1 x Gazelle: RAF Shawbury
2 x Harrier: RAF Laarbruch
2 x Hawk: RAF Valley
2 x Jetstream: RAF Cranwell
1 x Sentry: IAF Aviano, Italy
8 x Tornado: RAF Bruggen
4 x Tornado: RAF Coningsby
4 x Tornado: RAF Cottesmore
5 x Tornado: RAF Leeming
4 x Tornado: RAF Leuchars
10 x Tornado: RAF Lossiemouth
1 x Tornado: RAF Marham.

Only one of these aircraft was deployed on operations. The remaining aircraft were assigned to their usual duties including training. The unavailability of the aircraft did not affect the RAF's ability to meet its operational commitments.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, *482–83*, if he will provide a breakdown of the British troops who are part of the Bosnian peace implementation force. [5061]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence earlier today.

Submarines

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the revised submarine code of practice; and if he will place a copy of the code in the Library. [5149]

Mr. Soames: My officials and representatives of the fishing industry have agreed a number of revisions to the code of practice which governs the conduct of dived submarines in waters frequented by fishing vessels. The key amendments reflect the appointment by flag officer submarines of a fisheries liaison officer, and the introduction of a fishing vessel safety ship during exercises which involve both dived submarines and surface naval vessels.

The steady progress made in this important area reflects the greatly improved relations which now exist between the submarine and fishing communities. I am most grateful to the fishermen's representatives for their very constructive and helpful contribution to this process.

The revised code will be promulgated in January 1996 and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Arcadia Land plc

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *181–12*, if Arcadia Land has shown any interest in purchasing any of his Department's housing stock under his new housing scheme announced on 30 November, *Official Report*, columns *810–11*. [5404]

Mr. Soames: No.

Attack Helicopters (Orders)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's order for attack helicopters will be made in kit form by McDonnell Douglas in America and assembled in Britain. [5529]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Apart from the first eight aircraft which will be manufactured and assembled by McDonnell Douglas, parts of each of the other airframes will be manufactured in kit form by McDonnell Douglas in the US and assembled in Britain. The UK manufactured content of the aircraft will increase as production progresses.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telesales

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to review the need for controls on cold calling telephone marketing; and what plans the European Commission has on this issue. [4924]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government see a legitimate role for telesales calls but want to encourage responsible business practices for companies using this technique. Regulation of telesales calls is partly achieved through conditions in telecommunications licences but there is considerable practical difficulty in developing regulations that can be effectively implemented and enforced. The Office of Telecommunications has encouraged the setting up of the telephone preference service, launched last January. It is a voluntary scheme supported by the industry and provides a welcome means for telecommunications subscribers to let it be known if they do not wish to receive such calls.

A common position on the European Commission proposals for a directive on distance selling was agreed on 29 June 1995 which satisfied United Kingdom concerns. However, this text is currently under scrutiny by the European Parliament, which can recommend changes.

I am concerned about a number of the amendments which the European Parliament is considering, which, if implemented, would mean that telephone sales calls would be subject to a statutory prior consent requirement. Such recommendations would be unwelcome to UK business and we are briefing MEPs accordingly.

Arms Exports, Nigeria

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department has given to British companies exporting arms to Nigeria since 1993. [2878]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 28 November 1995]*: The Department has not been involved in the promotion of any defence sales to Nigeria since 1993.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences for military equipment to Nigeria have been granted in 1995 and into which military category list they fell; in how many cases in which export licences for the export of arms to Nigeria have been granted since 1993, equipment has not yet been delivered to Nigeria; and under which military category list the equipment falls. [5403]

Mr. Oppenheim: Earlier this year detailed statistical analyses of export licences which were granted for military, para-military and security equipment in the calendar years 1993 and 1994 were placed in the Library of the House. These analyses included all countries of destination for which these licences were issued, including Nigeria. Early in 1996, I intend to place in the Library of the House a similar analysis for the full calendar year 1995. I shall write to the hon. Member when this is done. The Department of Trade and Industry, under the export licensing system which it administers, does not require exporters to report to the Department details of shipments of goods which have been so licensed. An export licence is valid for two years from its date of issue.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade against which private sector organisation the Insolvency Service is being benchmarked in the contracting-out of its work; and if he will set out the basis of the comparisons. [5666]

Mr. Oppenheim: As part of the current contracting-out exercise to determine whether the contracting-out of official receivers case administration functions would offer additional value for money, the service has established its own costs for undertaking such work and these will be used as a benchmark against which the bids received will be compared.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 to staff transfers under contracting out in the Insolvency Service. [5671]

Mr. Oppenheim: It will not be possible to establish whether TUPE applies to the case administration work which may be contacted-out from official receivers offices until bids have been fully evaluated and legal advice sought. However, on present information it is believed that TUPE will apply to any contracting-out.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Insolvency Service offices throughout the country have been earmarked for benchmarking; and what criteria was used in the evaluation process. [5668]

Mr. Oppenheim: The benchmark cost of undertaking the official receivers case administration function has been established for each official receivers' office.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how benchmarking costs have been formulated for the contracting out of constituent parts of the Insolvency Service; and what is the number of staff involved. [5672]

Mr. Oppenheim: The benchmark cost of each official receiver's office has been taken as the cost of that office undertaking the work offered for tender, to the specified level, in 1996–97. Up to 900 staff would be involved.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the time scale involved in the contracting-out of the Insolvency Service; and if he will make a statement. [5667]

Mr. Oppenheim: It is likely that a decision on the award of contracts will be made at the end of January 1996. If that decision is to proceed with contracting-out it is envisaged that contractors will begin work on 1 May 1996.

Arms Embargo

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which parts and groups of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 fall within the European Union embargo on arms, munitions and military equipment sales to Nigeria; and if licences already issued are being withdrawn if the equipment has not yet left the United Kingdom. [4750]

Mr. Oppenheim: The arms embargo applies to all equipment listed in schedule 1, part III, group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994. The embargo does not extend to existing contracts for defence equipment for which individual export licences have been issued in accordance with the measures which were agreed and implemented by EU partners in 1993.

Investment

Mr. Macshane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total amounts of inward and outward investment by year since 1980. [4785]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is published by the Central Statistical Office in table 1.4 of the United Kingdom balance of payments "Pink Book" for 1995, which is available in the Library of the House.

Official Receiver

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his proposals to contract out functions of the official receivers; what functions he proposes to contract-out; how many bids he has received; when contracts will be awarded; how many representations he has received on this subject; and how many of these have been in favour of contracting-out. [5257]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* No decision to contract-out the case administration work of official receivers has yet been taken; a decision will only be made once the six bids received have been financially and technically evaluated. Contracting-out will proceed only where to do so would represent additional value for money. It is expected that any contracts will be awarded by the end of January 1996.

Since the Government's intention to test the viability of contracting-out was announced on 10 October last year, my Department has received some 232 representations on this matter, the majority of which were from or on behalf of members of Insolvency Service staff and which generally opposed any contracting-out.

Company Procedure

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to introduce legislation for a 28-day moratorium on credits' actions for small firms. [5259]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* As I announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *429–30*, this will be done when parliamentary time allows.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what safeguards he intends to put into practice with regard to the new company voluntary arrangements. [5260]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* As I announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *429–30*, the intended legislation will be broadly as described in the recent company voluntary arrangement consultative document which makes reference to various safeguards.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce his decision on a requirement to give five days' notice of the intention to appoint an administrative receiver. [5258]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* As I announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *429–30*, not until it is clear whether, in response to the invitation I have issued to the British Bankers Association, the banks can come up with a binding code of practice which obviates the need for such a notice.

Radio Communications Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff are currently employed by the Radio Communications Agency to evaluate reports from the five type-approvals laboratories with regard to granting CE marks under the Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive. [4699]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* Fourteen staff are engaged in the handling of type approval and EMC certification applications which are received from a wide range of manufacturers, dealers and importers.

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will ensure that Scope Marketing (Communications) Ltd., Totnes, has a CE mark granted to it by the Radio Communications Agency before 1 January 1996; [4701]

(2) when he expects Scope Marketing (Communications UK) Ltd., Totnes, to be granted their CE mark by the Radio Communications Agency under the electromagnetic compatibility directive; how many requests have been submitted for this CE mark; and how many CE marks have been granted under the electromagnetic compatibility directive. [4700]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The Radiocommunications Agency has currently no application from Scope Marketing (Communications UK) Ltd. for an EC-type examination certificate under the Electromagnetic Compatibility Regulations 1992 No. 2372.

The agency has received 96 applications during the period April–November 1995 inclusive and has issued 29 certificates.

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *454*, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5064]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* It is the policy in my Department to ensure that we do not gold-plate European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Unlawful Goods and Services

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the products and services which are illegal to purchase for use in the United Kingdom which can be purchased in the UK under European Union law on the basis that they will be used or consumed in other parts of the European Union, with particular reference to obscenity and items considered to be pornographic. [4517]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* As for items or services which are obscene or pornographic, there is no obligation on the United Kingdom to permit sale in the UK of any product or service for use in other member states of the European Union, the use of which is illegal here.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what procedures are available to local authorities to determine whether unlawful goods or services purchased in the United Kingdom for use in other parts of the European Union are taken abroad for such purposes. [4518]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The United Kingdom authorities may take action against any products or services on the UK market which are illegal for purchase here, regardless of country of destination.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Identity Cards

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will report on the outcome of the public consultation organised on the proposal to introduce a personal identity card scheme; and if he will indicate the size of the response to the invitation to the public to make submissions. [5402]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend to the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *325*.

Boards of Prison Visitors

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have sat on boards of prison visitors in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [5366]

Miss Widdecombe: The total number of members of boards of visitors in post on

30 June 1993 was 1,647

30 July 1994 was 1,692

31 July 1995 was 1,702.

Information about the numbers of members of boards from 1990 to 1992 is available only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers held in detention in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* 1992 by (i) nationality, (ii) gender, (iii) length of detention, (iv) place of detention and (v) immigration status at the time of application; and if he will make a statement. [5368]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information on the number of asylum seekers detained as at 3 April 1992 is given in table 7.1 of Home Office statistical bulletin, "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1990–91", issue 12/92. A copy of this publication is available in the Library. Information on the number of detained asylum seekers for earlier years is not available.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statements on asylum and immigration, *Official Report*, column 335, if he will list for each of the principal abuses cited the steps he has taken by *(a)* administrative and *(b)* by other means to eliminate each one other than by means of pursuing a change in legislation. [4480]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend made clear in his statement on 20 November, substantial resources have been invested in our asylum procedures. Further investment as well as procedural and administration improvements are now proposed in addition to our own proposals for primary legislation.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of introducing one closed circuit television camera into a high street area; what is the average annual maintenance cost of one closed circuit television camera; and if he will make a statement. [5370]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many closed circuit televisions are currently operating in England and Wales in local and national crime prevention programmes; and if he will make a statement. [5369]

Mr. Maclean: Our most recent data indicate that there are over 300 public space closed circuit television systems either currently operating or imminently planned in England and Wales. The figures are currently being updated, however, and the situation is changing rapidly as new systems come on stream.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many drug trafficking cases in 1994 evidence was given by alleged or confirmed drug users against their drug dealers; and if he will make a statement; [5400]

(2) in how many drug trafficking cases in 1994 the evidence given by alleged or confirmed drug users against their drug dealers was deemed vital in conviction; and if he will make a statement. [5401]

Mr. Sackville: There were 8,635 persons convicted in 1994 by the courts in the United Kingdom for drug trafficking offences. The information requested regarding the nature of evidence given in individual drug trafficking cases is not available.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines exist for the police concerning the employment of drug users in attempts to convict drug dealers; and if he will make a statement. [5371]

Mr. Maclean: None that are specifically geared to drug users and drug dealers, but there are guidelines strictly controlling the use of informants more generally. The management and use of informants in specific operations is a matter for the police force concerned.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many drug trafficking cases were tried by the courts in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement; [5372]

(2) how many drug trafficking cases were tried and convicted by the courts in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [5373]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Number of defendants proceeded against for drug trafficking offences by type of court 1991 1994

England and Wales

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Magistrates' courts				
Prosecutions	8,535	9,971	8,939	10,376
Committed for trial at the Crown Court	5,684	6,407	5,857	6,815
Convictions	1,770	2,000	1,674	1,817
Crown Court				
Total for trial	4,661	5,427	5,180	5,641
Convictions	4,094	4,781	4,579	4,969
All courts				
Convictions	5,864	6,781	6,253	6,786

Probation Officers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the social work skills required as essential in respect of the training of probation officers. [5327]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the core competences for probation officers published by the Home Office in March 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

Police Station Civilian Staff

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unpaid civilians are currently working in police stations in each of the local police authorities; and if he will make a statement. [5367]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Bull Bars

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *781–82* if he will ensure that bull bars are removed from Metropolitan police vehicles. [4937]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* This is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. However, I understand that he is reviewing the use of bull bars on police vehicles following the initiative by the Association of Chief Police Officers referred to in my answer to the hon. Member on 29 November 1995, or, columns *781–82*.

Liquor Measures

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated saving to business from the Deregulation (Long Pull) Order 1995; for what reasons; and when it was introduced. [5554]

Mr. Kirkhope: This order, which was introduced on 27 November, repeals the offence—created by the Licensing Act 1921–of supplying more than the amount of intoxicating liquor requested by the customer. The object was to end offering over-measures, then perceived as an unfair trading practice. No direct saving to business has been estimated, but the customer and business may benefit from the freedom to use in confidence a wider range of means of dispensing liquor—for example, serving draught beer by hand pump into "over-size" glasses.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated saving to businesses from the Deregulation (Special Hours Certificates) Order 1996. [5555]

Mr. Kirkhope: Business respondents to the consultation which preceded the order considered that it would produce substantial, although unquantified, financial benefits by reducing planning uncertainty, creating greater investment confidence and promoting tourism.

Metropolitan Police Committee for London

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who employs the staff of the Metropolitan police committee for London; [5264]

(2) what are the annual costs of the Metropolitan police committee for London. [5265]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 11 December 1995]:* The estimated cost of the Metropolitan police committee for 1995–96 is £399,000. This includes the cost of the secretariat—eight full-time staff and two part-time staff, all seconded from the Home Office—accommodation costs and other expenses.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when and with whom the Metropolitan police committee for London has held public meetings since its inception; [5262]

(2) how the Metropolitan police committee for London will maintain liaison with hon. Members in London; [5266]

(3) what publicity materials are being prepared by the Metropolitan police committee for London; [5268]

(4) how the Metropolitan police committee for London will consult the boroughs' police consultative committee; [5261]

(5) if he will list the organisations and individuals with whom the Metropolitan police committee for London has consulted since its inception. [5263]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 11 December 1995]:* These are all matters for the chairman of the Metropolitan police committee.

However, I understand that since the inception of the Metropolitan police committee the members have met representatives of the Association of London Government, the Outer London Metropolitan Police Consultative Association and the Government office for London, made more than 40 visits to individual police and community consultative groups, lay visitors' panels and community groups, held a meeting for all PCCG chairmen, open to the press and public, and held nine full, formal meetings, and several meetings of sub-committees on remuneration matters and performance indicators.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home department (1) what recommendations the Metropolitan police committee for London has made to the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis; [5267]

(2) what issues have been discussed by the Metropolitan police committee for London. [5269]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 11 December 1995]:* The duty of the Metropolitan police committee is to advise Ministers on policy and the minutes of their meetings are therefore confidential. I expect the chairman to produce an annual report and I shall place a copy of that in the Library in due course.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in respect of each principal proposal and related amendment contained in his Asylum and Immigration Bill, he will publish a document which lists *(a)* the principal amendment or addition to annual legislation, *(b)* related paving amendments, *(c)* any consequential amendments and *(d)* the reasons for and the purposes of each change; and if he will circulate the document to each of the bodies referred to in his answer of 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *658*. [4464]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Notes on clauses will be made available after Second Reading in the usual way. Copies will be available to interested parties from the Home Office.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what requests he has made to his Metropolitan police advisory committee to *(a)* consult and *(b)* report to him on the (i) operational, (ii) financial, (iii) police public relations and (iv) other implications, of the implementation of the measures contained in his Asylum and Immigration Bill; [4466]

(2) when and by what measures he has consulted the main organisations representing police constables concerning his proposals in the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [4468]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* A copy of our consultation exercise on the prevention of unauthorised employment has been sent to the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list any legislative link between the list he intends to publish relating to countries whose citizens will not be eligible to apply for political asylum and any list of nations arising from article 100c of the treaty on European Union relating to a common system of visas within the European Union. [4477]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* There is no link between the list of countries which will be designated under clause 1 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill as in general not giving rise to a serious risk of persecution and any list of countries under article 100c. Applicants from countries designated under clause 1 of the Bill will still be able to apply for asylum, but there will be a rebuttable presumption against granting asylum. Accelerated appeal procedures will apply, and there will be no further right of appeal from the special adjudicator to the immigration appeal tribunal.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to circulate to *(a)* hon. Members or *(b)* other interested bodies and persons the public response of bodies and persons to the proposals and operation of the measures contained in his Asylum and Immigration Bill. [4478]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The result of the consultation exercise that we are conducting on our proposals for the prevention of unauthorised employment will be made known to Parliament. However, it will be for individual organisations to decide whether to make public their responses to this exercise.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will send the text and full details of his Asylum and Immigration Bill to each of the statutory police community consultative committees in the Greater London area, asking for *(a)* their general observations and *(b)* their suggestions as to the means of achieving his purposes by alternative means. [4479]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 20 November why he considered the proposals in the Asylum and Immigration Bill to be necessary. We are happy to make available a copy of the statement and this Bill to any interested body on request and to consider any representations that may be received. Copies of our consultative document on prevention of unauthorised employment have been sent to more than 150 bodies, including the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will be present in Committee during the Standing Committee stages of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [4481]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The composition of Standing Committee is a matter for the House and will be announced in due course.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has conducted with high commissions of any member states of the Commonwealth prior to the publication of his Asylum and Immigration Bill. [4465]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* It is not normal practice to consult high commissioners about domestic legislation.

EU Data Protection Directive

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning progress towards the introduction of primary legislation based on the European Union's data protection directive; to what extent manual files are covered in the directive; and if he will make a statement. [5346]

Mr. Sackville: We hope shortly to issue a consultation paper seeking views on the implications of the directive for United Kingdom law. The directive applies to automatically processed records, and to manual records held in "filing systems". The consultation paper is likely to invite views on the scope of this expression.

Night Clubs (Security)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to introduce legislation requiring night clubs to improve security and entry checks in respect of knives and other dangerous weapons; [4780]

(2) how many times in the last year he has met representatives from police authorities to discuss security in night clubs; [4781]

(3) what plans he has to undertake a review of the sale of knives and the rate of knife-related assaults. [4782]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to introduce legislation to require night clubs to improve security and has not discussed this with police authorities. He is currently consulting the Association of Chief Police Officers about the problem of unlawful knife-carrying, and whether the law needs changing. Night club owners may require customers to undergo a search for weapons before entering the premises.

Cheshire Constabulary

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the weekly orders for the Cheshire constabulary, the titles of which have been sent to him. [4530]

Mr. Maclean: No. The weekly orders are internal documents for the information of the force. Any wider dissemination is a matter for the chief constable.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Emergency Calls, London

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average response time to 999 calls by the Metropolitan police. [4814]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis that in the 12-month period to 30 November the average time taken to answer a 999 call was 12 seconds. In the six months to the end of November 1995, the average time for officers to respond to a 999 call graded "immediate" was 12 minutes. The relevant Metropolitan police charter standards are to answer 999 calls within 15 seconds in 80 per cent. of cases—latest statistics give an achievement rate of 84 per cent.—and to arrive at urgent incidents within 12 minutes in 75 per cent of cases, for which latest statistics give an achievement rate of 90 per cent.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 999 calls are received by the Metropolitan police each year; and what is the average number per hour. [4815]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis that in the year 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995 the Metropolitan police received 1,534,978 calls on the 999 system. Since 1 April this year 1,145,809 999 calls have been logged. This represents an average of 200 such calls received per hour. The other metropolitan forces in England receive between 16 and 50 calls per hour via the 999 system.

National Lottery (Fraudulent Claims)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases involving fraudulent national lottery claims have been successfully brought to court. [4722]

Mr. Sproat: I have been asked to reply.

This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

SCOTLAND

Munitions Dumped at Sea

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *162*, what consideration he has given to representations that the scope, extent and nature of the surveys by the Marine Laboratory into dumped munitions and chemicals should be extended; and if he will make a statement. [3515]

Mr. Kynoch: The need for and scope of any further survey will be decided once the full results of the recent Marine Laboratory survey of the Beaufort's dyke area are available.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all statutory instruments in respect of health services from his Departments for the present Parliament. [4065]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the reply is lengthy, I shall arrange for copies of the list to be placed in the Library of the House.

Loans (NHS Executives)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been paid in loans to senior executives of *(a)* each NHS trust in Scotland and *(b)* each health board in Scotland in each of the last four financial years; what guidance his Department has issued on this matter; and what procedures his Department has to scrutinise those loans. [4445]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* This information is not held centrally. Payment of loans is a matter for the employing authority. For senior executives on national terms and conditions of service, the provisions of the General Whitley Council handbook will apply.

NHS Capital Projects

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of capital projects in the NHS in Scotland begun in 1994–95 and funded outwith the private finance initiative indicating in each case the total capital cost. [4533]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

National health service in Scotland major capital projects[1] started during 1994–95

	Value (£ million)
Western Infirmary, Glasgow Beatson oncology centre extension	2.5
Western General, Edinburgh Breast unit out-patients clinic	1.0
Lochmaben community hospital development	1.7
Stirling Royal Infirmary Out-patients department	1.6
Dumfries Royal Infirmary Overcladding	2.7
Monklands hospital day unit and dermatology department	2.8

[1] Net building cost excluding value added tax, professional fees and equipment, in excess of £1 million.

Foreign Ownership of Land

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many titles to land are held by foreign nationals. [4948]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of titles to land in Scotland which are held by foreign nationals is not available. Information on land transactions is, however, available from the Registers of Scotland executive agency.

Hospital Services, Stonehaven

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the responses received by Grampian health board and his Department relating to the proposal to put out to open tender the provision of hospital services at Stonehaven. [4926]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Grampian health board has allowed until 5 pm on 21 December for the registration with it of expressions of interest in providing a new hospital and services for the Kincardineshire area. I will write to the hon. Member after that date. No such responses have been made to the Scottish Office Department of Health.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library copies of the basic information pack in relation to the contract to build new hospital facilities in Stonehaven. [4923]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am arranging to have a copy of the information pack prepared by Grampian health board placed in the Library.

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the briefing documents prepared by the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust and issued to parties interested in tendering for the design, building and financing of the new Edinburgh royal infirmary and the operation of a range of non-clinical support services. [4954]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All such documents are in the public domain and are normally available on request from the relevant NHS organisation. Because of the volume of documents issued by the Royal Infirmary, the trust has made these available for viewing to any interested party by arrangement at the trust's offices and has expressed a preference, in the interests of economy, not to produce further copies.

Health Board Boundaries

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proposals he has to make health board boundary changes in Scotland; and what they are; [5116]

(2) what discussions he has had with Argyll and Clyde health board about boundary changes; and if he will make a statement; [5114]

(3) what representations Greater Glasgow health board has made to him about boundary changes. [5115]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are considering the implications of the establishment of the new unitary local authorities for the boundaries of health boards. Discussions have been held by officials with the health boards whose boundaries are not coterminous with those of the new local authorities to obtain the information necessary to inform our consideration of this matter. The health boards concerned are Greater Glasgow health board, Argyll and Clyde health board and Lanarkshire health board.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a statement of the specific criteria and objectives for consideration of financial assistance to business to which local enterprise companies in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area are currently required to work. [4806]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* I have arranged for a copy of the guidelines under which my right hon. Friend expects Highlands and Islands Enterprise to operate to be placed in the Library. Under the terms of their contracts with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, local enterprise companies are required to observe the terms of those guidelines. Further guidance is also issued by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member about its guidance to local enterprise companies on the provision of financial assistance to business.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned or evaluated into possible over provision of further education in Scotland; and what assessment he has made of the optimum number of further education colleges in Scotland. [5015]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: No specific research has been commissioned on the level of provision of further education in Scotland but colleges' annual development plans and other student numbers and costs information are analysed. This shows that colleges increased student activity by 6 per cent. in 1994–95 and achieved 4 per cent. efficiency gains. Cost information does not suggest that there is an optimum number of colleges in Scotland.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ambulances equipped for emergency and urgent calls are available to the Scottish Ambulance Service in the Greater Glasgow health board area on each shift on each day of the week. [5082]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust's accident and emergency vehicles covering the Greater Glasgow health board area are available as timetabled below:

Time	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*
0000-0100	12	12	12	12	16	16	12
0100-0200	12	12	12	12	16	16	12
0200-0300	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
0300-0400	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
0400-0500	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
0500-0600	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
0600-0700	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
0700-0800	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
0800-0900	14	14	15	14	13	12	11
0900-1000	23	22	24	22	21	19	14
1000-1100	31	32	32	32	32	20	16
1100-1200	31	32	32	32	32	20	16
1200-1300	31	32	32	32	32	20	16
1300-1400	32	33	33	33	33	20	16
1400-1500	32	33	33	33	33	20	16
1500-1600	32	33	33	33	33	20	16
1600-1700	32	33	32	33	34	22	19
1700-1800	23	25	23	25	26	15	16
1800-1900	18	18	18	18	22	21	17
1900-2000	18	18	18	18	22	21	17
2000-2100	18	18	18	18	22	21	17
2100-2200	17	17	17	17	21	21	17
2200-2300	17	17	17	17	21	21	17
2300-2400	17	17	17	17	21	21	17

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish statistics for the numbers of emergency and urgent calls for ambulances in the Greater Glasgow health board area over each of the last five years. [5083]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	Responses		
Period	*Emergency*	*Urgent*	*Total*
1990–91	41,756	34,615	76,371
1991–92	45,321	32,435	77,756
1992–93	47,841	32,665	80,506
1993–94	49,227	34,925	84,152

Period	*Responses* *Emergency*	*Urgent*	*Total*
1994–95	53,003	34,482	87,485
1995–1996[1]	39,250	22,144	61,394

[1] Based on 1 April 1995–30 November 1995.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* citizens charter and *(b)* other standards he applies to the Scottish Ambulance Service; and how the service has performed in respect of those standards in recent years. [5084]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust charter details the time within which the service aims to respond to emergency calls and to urgent calls. These target times and the information on how the trust performed against the targets are set out in the tables below. The target times for responding to emergency calls vary according to population density. The standard for urgent calls is for the service to have collected and delivered the patient to hospital within 15 minutes of the time agreed with the clinician requesting the ambulance.

Emergency calls

Population density	*Target—95 per cent. of calls responded to within*	*Performance* *1993–94*	*1994–95*	[1]*1995–96*
High (>3 people per acre)	14 minutes	90	92	92
Medium (0.5–3 people per acre)	18 minutes	94	96	96
Sparse (<0.5 people per acre)	21 minutes	88	90	91

[1] Based on 1 April to 30 November 1995.

Urgent calls

	Performance against standard *1993–94*	*1994–95*	[1]*1995–96*
Standard—95 per cent. of patients in hospital within 15 minutes of time agreed with clinician	88	89	91

[1] Based on 1 April to 30 November 1995.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rights of redress are available to individuals receiving inadequate service from the Scottish Ambulance Service. [5085]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust's charter sets out the standards of ambulance services that patients should expect to receive. The charter also advises patients on how to progress any complaint they may have about the service they have received. Where a patient is dissatisfied with the trust's handling of a complaint the charter invites them to contact the Health Service Commissioner for Scotland.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of requests for an urgent ambulance from the Scottish Ambulance Service are met within *(a)* 15 minutes, *(b)* 30 minutes, *(c)* 60 minutes, *(d)* two hours, *(e)* three hours, *(f)* four hours *(g)* five hours and *(h)* more than five hours in the Greater Glasgow health board area. [5087]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The standard for urgent calls is for the Scottish Ambulance Service to collect and deliver the patient to hospital within 15 minutes of the time agreed with the clinician requesting the ambulance.

Performance against this standard in the Greater Glasgow health board area is as follows:

Percentage

Period	*Performance against 95 per cent. target*
1994–95	84
1995–96[1]	85

[1] Based on 1 April to 30 November 1995.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the *(a)* staff, *(b)* vehicles and *(c)* financial resources made available to the Scottish Ambulance Service in the Greater Glasgow health board area in each of the last five years. [5088]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of accident and emergency staff, vehicles and the financial resources made available to the Scottish Ambulance Service in the Greater Glasgow health board area has increased steadily during the last five years.

Staff on accident and emergency duties within the area have increased from 156 in 1991–92 to 195 in 1995–96. Accident and emergency vehicles have increased from 27 to 43 during the same period.

The revenue allocation for the provision of the ambulance service in Greater Glasgow has increased from £6.16 million in 1991–92 to £9.884 million in 1995–96, an increase of 43 per cent. in real terms.

Television Licence Fine Defaulters

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men were imprisoned and for how long for their failure to pay a fine for not possessing a television licence in each of the past five years; how many were on income support or in receipt of other social security payments; and if he will make a statement. [5036]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of fine default receptions to prison for failure to pay a fine for not possessing a television licence is not available centrally. Information is available on the number of fine default receptions to prison in respect of all offences under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949. Failure to possess a television licence is one such offence. The available information is set out in the table below. The totals represents less than 1 per cent. of all fine default receptions in any one year. Information is not collected centrally on whether individuals received for fine default are in receipt of income support or other social security benefits.

Fine default receptions to Scottish penal establishments for offences committed under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949

Number	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Male	15	22	24	20	41
Female	5	9	11	11	13
Total	20	31	35	31	54
Length of sentence					
Male:					
Less than 7 days	1	7	1	7	11
7 days	7	6	10	8	22
8–13 days	1	2	6	1	1
14 days	3	6	5	0	4
15–29 days	2	0	1	3	3
30 days/1 months	1	1	1	1	0
Total	15	22	24	20	41
Female:					
Less than 7 days	1	1	1	4	5
7 days	0	1	2	7	7
8–13 days	1	4	4	0	0
14 days	3	1	4	0	0
15–29 days	0	1	0	0	1
30 days/1 month	0	1	0	0	0
Total	5	9	11	11	13

Deportees

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the prisons within which *(a)* illegal immigrants and *(b)* other deportees are detained while awaiting deportation to their countries of origin; what was the number of these detainees in each of the prisons concerned in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [4829]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 12 December 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question relating to the prisons within which illegal immigrants and other deportees are detained whilst awaiting deportation to their countries of origin.

Illegal immigrants and persons awaiting deportation can be detained within any penal establishment but are normally held in the nearest local prison.

Information on the number of persons held as illegal immigrants and persons awaiting deportation is not collected in the form requested. Information is, however, collected monthly on the average population of such detainees and the tables below show the average in each of the past four years.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
(a) Illegal immigrants				
Aberdeen	0.1	0.8	0.7	1.4
Barlinnie	0.1	0.3	1.4	0.3
Cornton Vale	[1]—	—	—	—
Dumfries	0.1	0.8	[1]—	0.3
Edinburgh	0.4	1.3	1.4	1.2
Greenock	0.7	6.8	8.0	8.8
Inverness	[1]—	0.1	[1]—	[1]—
Perth	0.6	0.2	0.2	[1]—
Scotland[2]	1.9	10.2	11.7	12.1
(b) Persons awaiting deportation				
Aberdeen	[1]—	—	—	—
Barlinnie	—	—	[1]—	—
Dumfries	[1]—	—	—	—
Edinburgh	0.4	0.2	—	0.2
Greenock	0.1	0.1	—	—
Inverness	—	[1]—	[1]—	0.1
Scotland	0.5	0.3	[1]—	0.3

[1] Less than 0.1.

[2] Components may not add to totals due to rounding.

Prisons (Drugs)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many relatives and friends of prisoners and those prisoners on remand were apprehended while attempting to smuggle illegal drugs into prisons in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement; [4831]

(2) if a person convicted of attempting to smuggle illegal drugs into a prison is allowed to visit prisoners; and if he will make a statement; [4834]

(3) what was the number of *(a)* prison officers and members of prison staff and *(b)* other officially approved visitors to prisons who were apprehended while attempting to smuggle illegal drugs into prison in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [4833]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the questions relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 12 December 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your three Questions on drugs in prison, which made particular reference to attempted smuggling by visitors to prisons and prisoners, and by prison staff.

All prisons face the risk of prisoners' visitors seeking to bring illegal drugs into establishments and take a variety of measures to prevent it. Appropriate action is taken where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion, and any visitor who is caught is referred to the police. Records are not, however, maintained centrally of the numbers of arrests or convictions. There are no recorded examples of anyone who could be described as an "officially approved" visitor who has been apprehended while bringing illegal drugs into an establishment. At present, a police investigation is proceeding into allegations that drugs were brought by staff into another.

Civil Servants

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the civil service support for the Scottish Office ministerial team; and what estimate he has of the annual cost of these plans. [5508]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On the basis of an interim official study, some additions are being made to the support provided to Ministers to reflect a greatly increased work load. This in part reflects my desire to invite groups from all walks of life in Scotland to meet me and to follow up on their suggestions. It also reflects the intensive programme of visits carried out by my Ministers. There will be no additional costs as they will be met from within existing resources.

Staffing will be further reviewed when we have the outcome of a Scottish Office efficiency unit review which is currently under way.

Landfill Tax

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the costs of the new landfill tax to Scottish local authorities over the next three years. [5510]

Mr. Kynoch: The costs of the landfill tax and the offsetting reductions in national insurance employers' contributions will be estimated and taken into account in discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about the local government finance settlement for 1997–98.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

12. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the numbers of households in receipt of housing benefit. [3580]

Mr. Lilley: The number of housing benefit recipients in Great Britain at the end of May 1995 stood at 4,734,000.

Long-stay Hospital Care (Benefit)

14. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance is given to benefit officers when advising clients who are likely to lose their homes through loss of benefit due to long stay hospital care; and if he will make a statement. [3582]

Mr. Roger Evans: Appropriate guidance is provided to all staff on the action to be taken on benefits when a person goes into hospital.

Social Security Expenditure

15. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current real rate of growth of social security spending and what were the figures in 1992–93. [3584]

Mr. Lilley: Social security spending has grown on average by almost 5 per cent. a year faster than inflation since the welfare state was established. Over the next three years it is expected to grow by just over 1 per cent. a year.

Work Incentives

16. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the place of work incentives in his review of the benefit system. [3585]

Mr. Burt: Throughout my right hon. Friend's review of the social security system, helping people to return to work has been a central focus. Initiatives include the earnings top-up scheme and our planned introduction of a four-week extension of help with housing costs to smooth the transition into work.

We are building on existing work incentives. For example, the child care disregard in family credit and disability working allowance will be increased by £20 per week to £60 next April.

Identity Cards

17. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce a social security card for the payment of benefits. [3586]

Mr. Heald: We intend to phase in the replacement of order books and giros with benefit payment cards starting next year. We estimate this will save £150 million per year in benefit fraud when fully implemented.

Occupational Pensions

18. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of retiring people currently receive an occupational pension and what the proportion was in 1979; and what was the average value of an

occupational pension in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available. [3587]

Mr. Heald: In 1979, 55 per cent. of recently retired pensioners were receiving an occupational pension with an average value of £56.10 per week. By 1993, the latest year for which figures are available, the proportion in receipt had risen to 66 per cent. and the average value to £89.10.

Allowances (Disabled People)

19. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the recent changes in allowances for people with disabilities. [3588]

Mr. Burt: The only recent change affecting benefits for disabled people was the replacement of sickness and invalidity benefits by incapacity benefit on 13 April. All aspects of the new scheme are very closely monitored to ensure that the benefit goes to those who are genuinely incapable of work.

National Disability Council

20. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to announce the membership of the new National Disability Council. [3589]

Mr. Burt: We expect to announce the membership of the National Disability Council in January 1996.

Smoking

21. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to ban smoking in all public buildings under his control. [3590]

Mr. Roger Evans: It is the Department's policy that smoking is not allowed in public reception and interview areas of its offices. In certain other parts of our buildings smoking is prohibited and we also aim to provide a smoke-free environment in working areas.

Departmental Priorities

22. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current priorities of his Department. [3591]

Mr. Lilley: My priorities are:

to focus benefits on the most needy;

to improve incentives to work and save;

to encourage personal responsibility;

to bear down on fraud and abuse;

to simplify the benefits and contributions systems; and

to ensure that the social security system does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay.

Private Pension Funds

23. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom; and what is the equivalent figure for the other European Union countries. [3592]

Mr. Heald: In 1992, the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom was around £500 billion. This is more than the equivalent figure of around £480 billion for all the other European Union countries combined.

24. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom; and what is the equivalent figure for the two next largest European Union countries. [3593]

Mr. Heald: In 1992, the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom was around £500 billion. This is more than three times the amount in either of the two European Union countries with the next highest level of pension funds—£160 billion for Germany and £140 billion for the Netherlands.

Asylum Seekers

25. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect of his proposals to withdraw benefit from asylum seekers on local authorities. [3594]

Mr. Roger Evans: Local authorities have been consulted on these proposals through their associations. I will consider their responses shortly.

Incentives to Work

26. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reforms of the benefit system he is planning to help unemployed people back to work. [3595]

Mr. Roger Evans: Helping people back into work is a key theme of our reforms of benefits for the unemployed. When the jobseeker's allowance is introduced in October it will include a range of incentives to strengthen people's contact with the labour market.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his estimates for spending in future years on income support payments to nursing home residents. [3331]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Spending in future years on income support nursing home residents

Year	*£ million*
1995–96	1,115
1996–97	1,040
1997–98	997

Source:

1995 Departmental Report.

Revised estimates will appear in the 1996 departmental report.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if current residents of residential and nursing homes will continue to receive the higher rate of mobility in disability living allowance in 1996–97; if new residents to such establishments in 1996–97 will also receive these benefits; and if he will make a statement. [5483]

Mr. Roger Evans: Yes. There are no plans to change the current arrangements.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent and in what respects the outcome of claims for incapacity benefit has differed from the estimates made prior to the introduction of the benefit. [3459]

Mr. Burt: The Benefits Agency is controlling the throughput of incapacity benefit claims to ensure that the flow of work does not exceed operational capacity. This controlled take-on of work means that the cases processed so far are unrepresentative of the case load as a whole. It is not yet possible to draw any firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the incapacity benefit in meeting the objectives set prior to its introduction.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Merthyr benefit area have been subjected to the review under the new incapacity benefit rules; how many of those were *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and how many have had invalidity benefit withdrawn. [4101]

Mr. Burt: Information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Second-tier Pensions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to encourage provision of second-tier pensions for non-working women; and if he will make a statement. [3488]

Mr. Heald: The state earnings-related pension legislation provides, for people reaching pension age after April 1999, that regulations may be made to enhance the SERPS entitlement of those who are precluded from regular employment by caring responsibilities at home. It is intended that regulations will be brought forward at the appropriate time.

War Pensions

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many former service personnel are currently receiving war pensions due to exposure to asbestos in disability bands *(a)* 20 per cent. to 39 per cent., *(b)* 40 per cent. to 60 per cent., *(c)* 60 per cent., and *(d)* 100 per cent; [4811]

(2) how many former service personnel are currently receiving a war pension attributable to exposure to asbestos. [4812]

(3) what is the total annual payment to former service personnel in war pensions due to exposure to asbestos. [4813]

Mr. Heald: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the saving to public funds in each of the last five financial years which has resulted from not disregarding war pensions in assessment of income support payments. [5639]

Mr. Roger Evans: The figures set out in the table represent the additional costs which would have been incurred over the five-year period.

Cost of fully disregarding war pensions in the assessment of income support

Financial year	*Cost £ million*
1991–92	30
1992–93	20
1993–94	35
1994–95	30
1995–96	35

Estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million and relate to the benefit levels in that financial year.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current policy of the Child Support Agency to improve the level of return of assessment forms; and what changes are planned in the near future. [3521]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. John Spellar, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State about improving the return of Maintenance Application Forms (MAFs) and Maintenance Enquiry Forms (MEFs).

Due to the nature of child support work, and varying levels of co-operation, reaching a full maintenance assessment will, on average, involve a period of months rather than weeks. There may be a degree of non-cooperation from some absent parents and several parties are often involved, some of whose financial circumstances can be complex. Some delays can be attributed to the time taken by clients to return their forms despite our reminders, but we are currently aiming to complete the maintenance assessment process within 26 weeks for 60% of cases and are progressing well towards this target.

The Agency has already introduced a number of operational improvements to ensure that straightforward cases, in which both parents co-operate with the Agency, are cleared quickly. In addition, greater use is now made of staff working in local child support offices to deal with the collection and verification of information, and the resolution of queries and discrepancies.

Where an absent parent fails to return the MEF even after receiving reminders, the Agency can make an Interim Maintenance Assessment (IMA), usually of a higher amount than that made where an absent parent returns a fully completed form. This often prompts either the return of the completed MEF or at least some co-operation. If necessary though an IMA can be collected by a Deduction from Earnings Order (DEO) direct from the absent parent's salary. Imposing a DEO in these circumstances often results in the completed MEF being returned and for many months we have placed increased emphasis on this work.

A legislative change was introduced in April 1995 to encourage absent parents to co-operate with the Agency. Liability for child maintenance normally commences from the date a MEF is issued, but if the completed MEF is returned within 4 weeks, the absent parent's liability will be 8 weeks after MEF issue.

Finally we are making increasing use of the telephone as a point of contact with clients to follow up enquiries and resolve queries. This way of doing business is proving to be very effective in speeding up all our processes, not least the return of MAFs and MEFs.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each month since April 1993 the amount of maintenance owed to the Child Support Agency indicating the amount attributable to *(a)* interim maintenance assessments and (b) full maintenance assessments. [4095]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessments.

You asked for a list by month since April 1993 of the amount of maintenance owed to the Agency. Although it is not currently possible to provide this breakdown, overall figures show that as at the end of September 1995, maintenance amounting to £738.4 million was owed to the Agency. This figure includes arrears amounting to £100 million that have been rescheduled for future payment. Approximately 65% of the total (£480 million) related to interim maintenance assessments.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer of 18 May 1995, *Official Report,* column *331,* to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) concerning maintenance assessments, by reference to the most recent data from the case load of the Child Support Agency. [4172]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessments.

You asked for an update concerning child support maintenance assessments. The figures you require are provided in the tables shown on the attached pages and are based on a 5% sample of cases carried out on 31 May 1995. The table showing the benefit status of parents with care and absent parents has been amended to reflect fully assessed cases only, which gives a more accurate picture.

I hope this is helpful.

Distribution of maintenance assessments at 31 May 1995

	Maintenance assessments		
	£ per week	*000s*	*Percentage*
Full maintenance assessments[1]			
AP not on income support			
All cases	—	196.0	100.0
Average maintenance	34.38	—	—
£0	—	23.3	11.9
£0.01–£2.35	—	28.2	14.4
£2.36–£5.00	—	2.8	1.4
£5.01–£9.99	—	5.2	2.7
£10.00–£19.99	—	13.6	6.9
£20.00–£29.99	—	16.9	8.6
£30.00–£39.99	—	20.7	10.5
£40.00–£49.99	—	24.2	12.3
£50.00–£59.99	—	22.0	11.2
£60.00–£69.99	—	17.2	8.8
£70.00–£79.99	—	10.7	5.5
£80.00–£89.99	—	6.2	3.1
£90.00–£99.99	—	2.7	1.4
£100–£109.99	—	1.2	0.6
£110–£119.99	—	0.5	0.3
£120+	—	0.7	0.4
Full maintenance assessments[1]			
AP on income support			
All cases	—	90.2	100.0
Average maintenance	0.90	—	—
£0	—	54.3	60.2
£2.20	—	11.2	12.4
£2.30	—	22.5	24.9
£2.35	—	2.2	2.5
Interim maintenance assessments[2]			
All cases	—	92.9	100
Average maintenance	95.85	—	—
£0.00–£29.99	—	0.4	0.4
£30.00–£39.99	—	1.5	1.6
£40.00–£49.99	—	3.4	3.7
£50.00–£59.99	—	9.1	9.8
£60.00–£69.99	—	3.1	3.3
£70.00–£79.99	—	2.9	3.1
£80.00–£89.99	—	1.7	1.9
£90.00–£99.99	—	32.5	35.0
£100–£109.99	—	13.5	14.5
£110–£119.99	—	13.2	14.2
£120+	—	11.7	12.6

[1] Includes Category 'B' interim maintenance assessments.

[2] Excludes Category 'B' interim maintenance assessments.

Category 'B' interim maintenance assessments are made when insufficient information has been provided about the partners of the AP, PWC or about some other member of their household.

All figures are estimates based on 5 per cent. sample taken from the Child Support Computer System on 31 May 1995.

Benefit Status of parent with care and absent parent at 31 May 1995 (fully assessed cases)

Thousands

		Absent parents		
Parents with care	*Total*	*Earned income*	*Income support*	*Other*
Income support	237.1	128.3	79.4	29.5
FAMC/DWA	30.9	19.2	8.2	3.4
Others	18.2	14.0	2.5	1.6
Total	286.2	161.5	90.2	34.5

Note:

From the May scan the number of cases on IVB, SB, and UB is not known. Therefore this table varies from that which is updating.

Net income employment of absent parent (AP) at 31 May 1995 (fully assessed cases)

	Absent parents		
	£ per week	*000's*	*Percentage*
All absent parents	—	262.2	100.0
APs with no employment income	—	118.4	41.4
APs with employment income	—	167.8	58.6

Net income employment of absent parent (AP) at 31 May 1995 (fully assessed cases)

		Absent parents	
	£ per week	*000's*	*Percentage*
Average net employment income	207.30	—	—
Net employment income (£ per week)			
Up to £49.99	—	9.0	3.1
£50.00–£99.99	—	99.9	3.5
£100.00–£149.99	—	31.4	11.0
£150.00–£199.99	—	41.3	14.4
£200.00–£249.99	—	31.0	10.8
£250.00–£299.99	—	18.5	6.5
£300.00 or more	—	26.7	9.3

Net income from employment is gross pay less income tax and NI contributions. Average net income is mean for APs with income from employment.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the definition of maintenance assessment accuracy referred to in paragraph 28 of the memorandum CS 7 submitted to the Social Security Select Committee in October 1995. [4094]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessment accuracy.

You asked for a statement on the definition of maintenance assessment accuracy referred to in paragraph 28 of the memorandum CS 7 submitted to the Social Security Committee in October 1995.

For a case to be accurate the assessment must be for the correct cash value and the effective date must be correct. Then number of cases found to be accurate is expressed as a proportion of the total number of cases checked in the period.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 24 November, *Official Report*, column *362*, on maintenance arrears, in what circumstances provisional debt due to interim assessments may be disregarded. [4167]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliament Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

You asked in what circumstances provisional debt due to interim maintenance assessments may be disregarded. There are no circumstances in which IMA debt may be disregarded but one of the measures introduced in the April 1995 policy changes has a bearing on this issue.

In April 1995 the provision was introduced, that once an absent parent had provided the information required by a Child Support Officer to make a full maintenance assessment, liability under a previous IMA would revert to the FMA rate, which would normally be lower. This measure should show an improvement in compliance for IMAs and assist absent parents in meeting their regular maintenance payment liabilities.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the number of staff dismissed from the Child Support Agency since its launch, indicating which month they were dismissed and which office they worked in. [4078]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of staff dismissed from the Child Support Agency.

Staff can be dismissed for a variety of reasons ranging from failure to meet the required performance standards during probation, through inefficiency and up to misconduct.

The figures for staff dismissed for straight forward inefficiency are not readily available as they are not collated centrally.

The figures for staff dismissed for misconduct and the month in which the dismissal occurred are as follows:

Month	*Number of dismissals*
May 1993	1
January 1994	1
April 1994	1
August 1994	2
September 1994	2
October 1994	1
February 1995	4
March 1995	3
April 1995	2
October 1995	1

To protect the identity of staff dismissed for misconduct, the office location has not been included in this response. I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the temporary employment agencies with which the Child Support Agency has an arrangement. [4079]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the temporary employment agencies with which the Child Support Agency has an arrangement.

The Child Support Agency does not directly have arrangements with temporary employment agencies. Temporary employment agencies are only used to acquire casual secretarial staff on an ad hoc basis in Central London.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the amounts of weekly maintenance demanded by the Child Support Agency using the same bandings as in his reply of 20 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *280*, *(a)* in cases where there are arrears and *(b)* in cases where there are no arrears. [4108]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessments.

You asked for a breakdown of the rates of weekly maintenance demanded by the Child Support Agency in cases where there are arrears and cases where there are no arrears.

The breakdown of the rates of weekly maintenance are shown in the table attached. Figures have been obtained from a 5% sample of Child Support Agency cases undertaken by Analytical Services Division on our behalf carried out on 31 May 1995.

Unfortunately it is not possible to determine which of these assessments in specific bands are in arrears. However a scan of the Child Support Computer System on 15 September 1995 showed that there are 161,309 cases in arrears to some degree.

Weekly maintenance for full and interim maintenance assessments where the absent parent has earned income

	FMA[1]		*IMA*[2]
2.36–5.00	2,500	—	—
5.01–9.99	4,700	—	—
10.00–19.99	12,700	—	—
20.00–29.99	16,100	0–29.99	400
30.00–39.99	19,500	30.00–39.99	1,500
40.00–49.99	23,100	40.00–49.99	3,400
50.00–59.99	21,200	50.,00–59.99	9,100
60.00–69.99	16,400	60.00–69.99	3,100
70.00–79.99	10,300	70.00–79.99	2,900
80.00–89.99	6,000	80.00–89.99	1,700
90.00–99.99	2,600	90.00–99.99	32,500
100–109.99	1,200	100–109.99	13,500
110–119.99	500	110–119.99	13,200
Over 120	700	Over 120	11,700
Total cases assessed	£137,300	Total cases assessed	£92,900

Excludes cases assessed at the minimum rate of £2.35.

[1] Includes Category B IMAs (where information about the income of the partner, or other member of the family, of an absent parent or parent with care has not been provided and is information which could have been provided).

[2] Excludes Category B IMAs.

Social Security Policy

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect on inequality in the United Kingdom of his Government's social security policies. [3583]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Analysis by the Central Statistical Office, based on the family expenditure survey, shows that the tax and benefits systems help to reduce the gap between the bottom and top fifth of the income distribution—by more than four fifths of its original size.

[Redistribution of Income (1993)—annual CSO article last published 30 December 1994].

Lone Parents

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are paid allowances as single parents; what sum of money is involved; and if he will make a statement. [3941]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Total expenditure on lone parents in 1994–95 is estimated to be £9.1 billion and is expected to reach £9.4 billion in 1995–96.

The numbers of lone parents receiving income support, family credit and one-parent benefit are shown in the table:

Benefit:	*Case load at May 1994:*
Income support	1,039,000
One-parent benefit	911,000
Family credit	236,000

Notes:

1. Expenditure includes spending on income-related benefits, child benefit, one-parent benefit, and maternity benefit.

2. For income support single parents have been defined as those persons in receipt of the lone parent premium. For family credit the numbers are single persons with dependants.

3. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

4. Some people may receive more than one of the named benefits.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1994.

Family credit statistics 5 per cent. sample of awards.

Expenditure figure consistent with the departmental report.

Benefit Reform

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reforms of the benefit system he is planning to help unemployed people back to work. [5037]

Mr. Roger Evans: Throughout the review of the social security system, helping people to return to work has been a central focus. In July, we increased family credit by £10 per week for those working 30 hours or more. Last month, we published the draft rules for the earnings top-up scheme, to help those without dependent children. From April 1996 we are smoothing the transition into work through a four-week extension of housing costs. We are encouraging employers to take on those who have been unemployed for more than two years, by introducing a "holiday" from national insurance contributions. We are now building on existing work incentives. In his statement on the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced an increase of £20 in the child care disregard in family credit and disability working allowance. Child care costs to the value of £60 will now be disregarded during benefit assessments. Helping people to return to work is the best way to improve people's living standards and the best way to improve their prospects.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices for which he is now responsible in each of the last three years. [5568]

Mr. Willetts: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of the Cabinet Office which is published in the annual report.

Internet

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the final report of the Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency study of ethical issues and the Internet will be *(a)* published and *(b)* placed in the Library. [4787]

Mr. Willetts: The report by CCTA, the Government centre for information systems, on the ethical issues of information super-highways is currently being completed. I expect it to be published early in January. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as it is available.

Charter Scheme

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what objectives for more efficient service and customer care have been *(a)* set and *(b)* met, by the citizens charter office and the office of charter mark (i) to date and (ii) for the future; [5541]

(2) what targets have been set for the time taken to answer incoming phone calls by the citizens charter office and the office of charter mark. [5540]

Mr. Willetts: The unit is currently working to the following targets;

> (a) to reply to letters from members of the public within 15 working days of receiving them. Between 1 January 1995 and 30 September 1995, 85 per cent. of all replies have met this standard. Of those replies not needing information from other services to provide a full reply, 92 per cent. were sent within 15 working days.
>
> (b) to answer telephone calls within five rings. A monitoring exercise, covering the week 30 October 1995 to 3 November 1995, found that calls to the unit were answered, on average, on six rings.

The unit is consulting its customer on whether these targets should be formalised into a charter standard statement.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the total cost to date of running the charter mark publications line, number 0345 223242; what date was this line established; and how many calls there have been since establishment. [5532]

Mr. Willetts: The citizens charter publication line on 0345 22 32 42 was set up on the 16 March 1994. Calls are charged at a local rate.

	Publications Line 16 March 1994 current
Total calls	£13,811
Set-up costs	£1,880.00
Operating costs	£46,161.62

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is the total annual cost of running the charter mark assessment office. [5534]

Mr. Willets: The cost of the assessment for the 1995 charter mark scheme is estimated to be approximately £500,000. A final figure is not yet available.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the cost of running the charter mark seminars inquiry line since it was established; what was the date on which this line was established; what is the total number of calls to this line to date; and what is the budgeted expenditure for this line in 1995–96 and 1996–97. [5536]

Mr. Willetts: The charter mark seminar inquiry line is provided by the contractor, Glasgow and Associates, and was set up on 9 January 1995 as part of the overall seminar package. There are no separate running costs for this service. So far, 5,000 calls have been received.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the cost of producing, publishing and distributing the rural services check list, devised by the charter unit. [5538]

Mr. Willetts: The cost of producing, publishing and distributing the rural services check list was £4,756.99, excluding VAT and postage.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many complaints about the offices of the citizens charter and charter mark have been received since their establishment; and what procedures to handle complaints have been established. [5539]

Mr. Willetts: Complaints about the workings of the charter unit have historically been dealt with under the procedures for handling general correspondence; they have not been recorded separately. Between April 1992, when records were started, and September 1995 the unit dealt with 7,802 letters. A very small number of these have involved complaints about the unit.

Formal complaints handling guidance was drawn up for the unit in April 1995. This sets out action to be taken on receiving a complaint, targets for responding, and procedures for review.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many copies of "Charter News" are printed and distributed quarterly and at what total cost; and what is the total cumulative cost to date of producing, printing and distributing this publication. [5531]

Mr. Willetts: In its present format, 88,000 copies of "Charter News" are printed and distributed quarterly at an average total cost of £78,299. The total cumulative cost to date of producing, printing and distributing nine issues of "Charter News" has been £623,277.17.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the total cost to date of seminars held in relation to charter mark; what is the estimated cost for such seminars in 1995–96 and 1996–97; and what is his estimate of the number of such seminars which will be held. [5535]

Mr. Willetts: Before 1994, informal charter mark seminars were held at the charter unit—the cost of these is not recorded. The total cost of the 13 seminars held for organisations interested in applying for charter mark in 1994–95 was £153,000. The estimated cost of the 19 seminars being held in 1995–96 is £200,000. We plan to hold about 20 charter mark seminars in 1996–97 at a total estimated cost of £200,000.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the date on which the citizens charter mark office was established; what assessment of its performance has been made to date; and if he will publish the assessment. [5537]

Mr. Willetts: The charter mark award scheme is administered by the citizens charter unit in the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service. The charter unit was set up in July 1991 and the first charter mark awards were made in October 1992.

The performance of the charter unit can be measured by an increase in the number of applications of more than 250 per cent., and the increase in the number of winners of more than 600 per cent. In 1995, 1,824 people attended charter mark seminars around the country.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list each publication produced in relation to the charter mark scheme since its establishment; and if he will estimate for each publication the total cost of production , printing and distribution. [5533]

Mr. Willetts: The publication are as follows:

	Cost
1995	
Guide for Applicants 1995 What is Charter Mark? Why You Should Apply	£31,000
Charter Mark Awards 1995: The Winners	£40,000
Make Your Mark (public nomination leaflet)	£123,000

The costs shown relate to printing and production. Total distribution costs for the year amounted to £132,000, reflecting the distribution of leaflets as part of the public nomination campaign.

1994

Guide for Applicants 1994

Charter Mark Awards 1994: The Winners

The 1994 Charter Mark Winners in Education

What is Charter Mark?

Why You Should Apply

Total costs for printing, production and distribution were £112,500.

1993

Guide for Applicants

Why You Should Apply

1992

Guide for Applicants

Why You Should Apply

Costs for 1992 and 1993 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what has been the total annual cost of running the citizens charter unit since its establishment; and what is the projected annual cost for each year until 1998–99; [5543]

(2) what assessment of value for money has been made of the citizens charter unit; and if he will publish it. [5542]

Mr. Willetts: The annual cost of running the citizens charter unit since its establishment and the projected annual cost for each year until 1998–99 are set out in the following table:

Financial year	*Cost* £
1991–92	700,000
1992–93	2,300,000
1993–94	5,100,000
1994–95	3,800,000
1995–96[1]	4,600,000
1996–97[1]	4,600,000
1997–98[1]	4,100,000
1998–99[1]	4,100,000

[1] Projected expenditure.

More than £250 billion of taxpayers' money was spent on public services last year. The charter programme aims to improve public services by raising standards, making them more responsive to their users, and by encouraging them to apply for the charter mark scheme. The results are reported annually in the charter White Paper.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 December 1995

TREASURY

National Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what occasions certificates under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 were signed by members of his Department; for how long each certificate was valid; and in what circumstances taxation records may be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security. [5342]

Mr. Jack: No such certificates have been issued.

No circumstances have so far been identified in which taxation records may be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

Inland Revenue Personnel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil service personnel in the Inland Revenue department are located in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [5104]

Mr. Jack: *(a)* 50,510, *(b)* 4,391, *(c)* 6,253 and *(d)* 1,179 respectively on 1 November 1995, the most recent date for which figures are available.

Treasury Personnel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Treasury personnel are located in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Northern Ireland. [5109]

Mrs. Angela Knight: All 1,049 Treasury staff, as at 1 November, excluding those on loan or secondment to other Government Departments or the private sector, are located in England.

Diesel Duty (Buses)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evaluation he has made of the likely impact of the increase of duty on diesel fuel in his Budget statement on *(a)* the prices of bus transport to consumers and *(b)* the frequency of local bus services. [5305]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Bus operators are able to claim a rebate on the majority of their diesel duty payments. Depending on the price paid for diesel the actual duty element is likely to represent less than 20 per cent. of the total VAT-exclusive price. Prior to the Budget net duty payments represented around 3 per cent. of total costs for bus operators: this will rise to around 3.5 to 4 per cent. post-Budget. The effect of these cost increases on fares and frequency of bus services will depend on the decisions of individual operators.

Unemployment

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were registered unemployed in the month of August in (1) Scarborough and Whitby, (2) Torquay, (3) Weston-super-Mare, (4) Bournemouth, (5) Brighton, (6) Eastbourne, (7) Newquay, (8) Ramsgate, (9) Margate, (10) Southend-on-Sea, (11) Clacton, (12) Great Yarmouth, (13) Barmouth, (14) Pwllheli, (15) Llandudno, (16) Rhyl, (17) Prestatyn, (18) Southport, (19) Lytham St. Annes, (20) Fleetwood, (21) Morecambe, (22) Skegness, (23) Cleethorpes, (24) Minehead, (25) Worthing, (26) Bridlington, (27) Bognor Regis, (28) Torbay, (29) Polperro, (30) Brixham, (31) Falmouth, (32) St. Ives, (33 Ilfracombe, (34) Burnham-on-Sea, (35) Weymouth and (36) Herne bay in the years 1987 to 1995 inclusive. [5193]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on the numbers of people claimant unemployed in local area can be obtained from the Nomis database accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Motability (VAT)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what VAT regulations apply to the Motability scheme; and to what extent these differ from the regulations applying to the commercial sector *(a)* before and *(b)* after August. [5094]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The VAT Act 1994, schedule 8 group 12, items 14 and 15, allows zero-rating for the leasing of unused motor vehicles for a period of not less than three years to disabled people who are in receipt of the mobility component of the disability living allowance, and for the first sale of those vehicles after the end of the leasing period. Neither of these zero rates are restricted to supplies by Motability. Any car-leasing business whose sales consist predominantly of the provision of vehicles in these circumstances may take advantage of these zero rates, although to date only Motability has done so.

Motor dealers have always been able to buy back ex-lease cars from Motability free of VAT. In August, however, the VAT regulations governing the sale of second-hand motor vehicles changed. This has potential repercussions both for Motability and for the second-hand car market generally and so Customs and Excise will shortly be entering into discussions with all the interested parties.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5582]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Expenditure by Her Majesty's Treasury on official hospitality in 1994–95 was £84,249 and in year 1995–96 to 30 November, £53,665. The projected budget for 1995–96 is £92,000.

Taxpayer Statistics

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the number and percentage of taxpayers in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Mid-Glamorgan who pay at (i) 25 per cent. rate and (ii) 40 per cent. rates of tax; and what will be the change on the numbers paying at these rates following the Budget. [5427]

Mr. Jack: It is not possible to provide a reliable breakdown below United Kingdom level for 1996–97, either before or after the Budget. The latest available information covers 1993–94 and is given in the table.

	Top rate of tax of 25 per cent		*Top rate of tax of 40 per cent*	
	Thousands	*Percentage*[1]	*Thousands*	*Percentage*[1]
United Kingdom[2]	18,090	72.3	1,740	7.0
Wales	799	71.8	48	4.4
Mid Glamorgan	140	71.5	7	3.7

[1] of total number of taxpayers including those liable to only the lower rate of tax.

[2] includes members of HM Forces, the Merchant Navy, civil servants serving overseas and non-residents liable to UK tax who cannot be allocated to regions.

EU Rebate

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value of the rebate from the European Union for each of the years since it was negotiated. [5499]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The value of the United Kingdom's abatement for the financial years 1985–86 to 1994–95, along with the Government's latest estimate for the year 1995–96, is set out in the table.

UK abatement

Year	*£million*
1985–86	823
1986–87	1,343
1987–88	1,137
1988–89	1,600
1989–90	1,317
1990–91	1,838
1991–92	2,428
1992–93	1,993
1993–94	2,350
1994–95	1,648
1995–96	*1,564*

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if tax exemption of compensation for those who were wrongly advised to *(a)* opt out, *(b)* transfer from and *(c)* not join an occupational pension scheme extends to those who were similarly advised in respect of SERPS; and if he will make a statement. [5441]

Mr. Jack: The Securities and Investments Board is currently carrying out research into past sales of personal pensions for contracting out of SERPS. SIB is due to publish the results of this research early next year and it would not be appropriate to anticipate SIB's recommendations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to revise the electricity licence exemptions regime, in the light of the planned liberalisation of the electricity supply market in 1998. [6301]

Mr. Eggar: The electricity industry and the Director General of the Electricity Supply are working towards full supply competition on 1 April 1998, bringing choice of supplier for all customers. As part of that process, we need to review the exemptions to the electricity licence regime.

I want to examine the scope for promoting competition in electricity generation and supply by reducing the regulatory burden placed on small generators, own generators, and small suppliers, while taking account of the interests of customers.

We have today issued a consultation paper which seeks the views of all interested parties by 22 January 1996. I propose to announce my preliminary conclusions in February 1996. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

Burma

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account his Department takes of human rights of abuses, with special reference to the Karen people, in the provision of assistance to British investors in Burma. [5119]

Mr. Nelson: My Department's efforts have focused primarily on making United Kingdom companies aware of trade opportunities that exist in Burma, rather than investment. We continue to adopt a cautious approach with regard to investment in Burma.

We remain acutely concerned about the continued abuse of human rights in Burma, including against the Karen and other ethnic groups. We and other EU partners have made it clear to the ruling military regime that normalisation of our relations depends on progress in key areas, including human rights.

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what activities his Department has *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* will be undertaking to assist British investment in Burma from November 1995 to February 1996. [5118]

Mr. Nelson: During the period November 1995–February 1996, my Department will continue to provide information relating to investment issues in Burma and the associated risks. We held a trade awareness seminar, "An Introduction to Burma," at the London chamber of commerce on 5 December 1995. This will be followed by a trade mission to Burma from 26 February to 1 March 1996. However, both events are focused primarily on the trade opportunities that may exist for British companies, rather than investment where we continue to take a cautious line.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5578]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of hospitality for my Department, including agencies, was £712,309 in 1994–95. Figures for this financial year up to 30 November are £411,047.

The projected budget for 1995–96 is £734,657.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what occasions certificates under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 were signed by a member of his Department; for how long each certificate was valid; and in what circumstances personal details held by his Department can be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security. [5336]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Inquiries completed in the time available indicate that no exemptions under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 have been signed by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in the period since the reply by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, 15 April 1993, *Official Report*, column *707*. If my further inquiries reveal that exemptions have been authorised during that period I will respond further to the hon. Member. In accordance with section 27 of the Act, a certificate may be signed by the President if an exemption is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security. Such a certificate is conclusive evidence of the fact that exemption is, or at any time was, required.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff in his Department worked in other Departments before June 1995; and if he will list the departments. [4818]

Mr. John M. Taylor: A total of 1,735 members of my staff worked in other Departments before June 1995. The cost of listing the individual Departments in which these staff worked could be provided only at disproportionate expense.

Internet

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with his international counterparts about the possibility of joint action being taken to regulate the content of material disseminated via the Internet. [5474]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The nature of the Internet means that measures to control the content of disseminated material are difficult to devise, although normal national laws apply just as much to the Internet as to other media. Before any action to regulate the Internet specifically could be contemplated, either national or international, it would be vital to have a clear view of precisely what measures would be effective. My Department, the Home Office and others are monitoring the development of the Internet, and assessing the feasibility of various measures, including self-regulation. We also compare notes with other Governments as appropriate.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what estimate he has made of the cost to the industry of the practice of the cloning of mobile telephones; [5473]

(2) what measures his Department is taking to combat the cloning of mobile telephones; [5524]

(3) what plans he has to amend the Telecomunications Act 1984 in order to outlaw the cloning of mobile telephones. [5471]

Mr. Ian Taylor: On 24 October, *Official Report*, column *549*, I announced the recommendations of the industry and Government study group on mobile telephone fraud. One of the main recommendations was that the Government should consider extending the range of offences under section 42 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 so that it would cover the possession or supply of equipment capable of use in the course of or in connection with the current section 42 offence of dishonestly obtaining telecommunication services with intent to avoid payment. I am considering this recommendation carefully.

Figures regarding the cost to the industry of the practice of cloning mobile telephones are not held by my Department. The mobile telecommunications industry did provide some estimates for the overall scale of mobile telephone phone fraud as part of its contribution to the work of the industry and Government study group mobile telephone fraud. These have been reproduced in the briefing paper, which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Electronic Mail

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are being taken to regulate the electronic mail services to protect *(a)* British commercial interests and *(b)* the consumer. [5459]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Electronic mail is an important example of the new services which are increasingly available as the information society develops. The effective exploitation of these services and opportunities is important for the competitiveness of British business. My Department monitors developments in this area to assess whether there is any need for action to protect consumers or the interests of companies.

There are several groups helping to develop electronic mail services with which the Department is in contact.

Timeshare Directive

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to implement the 1994 timeshare directive. [4845]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I plan to initiate a consultation exercise on the implementation of the timeshare directive in the near future.

Foam-filled Furniture

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what steps he is taking to prevent foam-filled furniture which does not comply with the

1988 regulations being imported into the United Kingdom; [4844]

(2) if he will launch an advertising campaign to publicise the exemption from the provisions of the Furniture and furnishings Fire Safety Regulations of upholstered furniture manufactured before 1990; [4842]

(3) what measures his Department will take to deter second-hand furniture dealers from illegally selling foam-filled furniture. [4843]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Day-to-day responsibility for enforcing a wide range of consumer safety legislation, including the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, rests with local authority trading standard departments under a statutory duty set out under the Consumer Protection Act 1987. Trading standards departments have all the necessary powers to act against importers and second-hand traders who supply furniture that does not comply with the regulations. Since 1990 these departments have initiated 274 cases against suppliers of illegal furniture and have been involved in nearly 1,500 enforcement actions. There continues to be a high level of enforcement activity which my Department fully supports. The penalties for non-compliance with the furniture regulations are a £5,000 fine, a maximum of six months in prison or both, for each offence.

Following the making of this legislation my Department publicised detailed guidance for all suppliers of domestic upholstered furniture, setting out the requirements of the regulations in simple terms and explaining the penalties for failure to comply. The Department also published a guidance booklet for consumers explaining the new requirements and emphasising the precautions that should continue to be taken to reduce household furniture fires. Typically, more than 1,500 copies of this guide are circulated throughout the country each month by the Department and local authority trading standards departments. I believe these measures are sufficient to acquaint consumers with the requirements of the regulations and the dangers of unsafe furniture.

In the year the furniture regulations were made nearly 5,000 fires involving furniture killed 247 people. Since 1988 these numbers have fallen dramatically, with 146 people killed in 3,746 fires in 1993. My Department believes that the regulations will continue to play a major part in helping to further reduce these numbers.

Minimum Wage

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which countries outside the European Union have minimum wage legislation. [3894]

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Metrication

Mr. Marlow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many shops sell goods by weight *(a)* in metric units only and *(b)* in metric and other units; and what proportion this represents of (i) all shops and (ii) all goods sold. [4820]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Approximately 62,000 shops sell by weight. The Department has no information on the proportion of shops selling in metric units compared with the proportion selling in metric and other units.

Gas and Electricity Regulation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the regulators of the gas and electricity industries over changes to the regulatory regime to take account of recent profit and dividend announcements; and if he will make a statement. [5678]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No such discussions have taken place. We believe the regulatory regime is working well.

Energy Division Personnel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the transfer of *(a)* personnel and *(b)* responsibilities from his Department's energy division to Scotland; and what plans he has to make such a transfer. [5112]

Mr. Eggar: In addition to those representations made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, I have received representations from Grampian regional council and the city of Aberdeen district council about the scope for transferring additional jobs and responsibilities to the Department of Trade and Industry's oil and gas office in Aberdeen. A review of the current staffing position is taking place and, once this is complete, I will meet with representatives of the councils.

Estimated Funding

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list immediately the figures that determined the estimated funding of the *(a)* National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, *(b)* National Consumer Council, *(c)* Gas Consumer Council, *(d)* Post Office Users National Council, *(e)* POAC, *(f)* Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, *(g)* DTI's consumer safety programme and *(h)* Central Rail Users Consultative Committee for each year from 1993–94 at 1995 prices, together with the percentage change (i) per annum and (ii) since 1993–94, including the 1996–97 figure following the November Budget statement. [5283]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The information in respect of the earlier years was provided in the reply which I gave to the hon. Member on 6 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *290–91*. I shall provide the figures for the 1996–97 allocations when they have been determined.

Share Ownership

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Derby, South, (Mrs. Beckett) *Official Report*, 5 December 1995, columns *154–56*, what percentage of total shares and individually owned shares were represented by personal equity plans for the years referred to. [5636]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Table A shows the available information on the percentage of total shares held in personal equity plans.

Table A: Personal equity plans[1] as a percentage of total shares in issue[2]

	Percentage of Total Shares
December 1987	0.1
December 1988	0.2
April 1990	0.5
April 1991	0.8
April 1992	1.2
April 1993	1.8
April 1994	2.6

[1] Personal equity plans were introduced on 1 January.

[2] Fully listed UK companies on the London stock exchange. The available data for PEPs includes investments in other companies as well as those listed on the London stock exchange. These other investments are thought to be very small by comparison and are unlikely to have a significant affect on the figures given in the table.

Estimates of the proportion of shares held by individuals in PEPs are not available because of timing differences in when data are collected. Table B shows the available information.

Table B

Shares held directly by individuals	*£ million*	*Shares held directly by individuals in PEPs*	*£ million*
December 1989	104,300	December 1987	300
December 1990	90,500	December 1988	490
December 1991	105,300	April 1990	1,380
December 1992	125,400	April 1991	2,440
December 1993	141,100	April 1992	3,550
December 1994	154,600	April 1993	5,710
		April 1994	6,870

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Derby, South of 5 December, *Official Report*, columns *154–56*, if he will state all holdings of personal equity plans with special reference to such holdings in the form of bonds, collective investments such as unit trusts or collective funds or directly held shares treated as individually owned shares. [5635]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to figure 4 of the publication "Share Ownership, A report on the Ownership of Shares at 31 December 1994", which is available in the House of Commons Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Appeals

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment how many rating appeals in England and Wales have been outstanding for more than one year; and what percentage they represent of the total number of rating proposals *(a)* submitted and still outstanding and *(b)* submitted in total. [4789]

Sir Paul Beresford: A total of 35,877 appeals against the 1973, the 1990 and the 1995 rating lists have now been outstanding in England and Wales for more than one year. This represents 8.3 per cent. of all rating proposals still outstanding, and 0.6 per cent. of the total number of proposals received.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of time taken from the acknowledgement of a proposal to a valuation tribunal hearing date. [4790]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not collected.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what is the average cost of a valuation tribunal hearing per case in England and Wales. [4792]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the costs of individual tribunal hearings are not held centrally. In 1994–95, expenditure on the tribunal service in England and Wales amounted to £11.6 million, and 807,500 appeals transmitted to valuation tribunals were cleared.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of valuation tribunal members are aged over 70 years. [4794]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held by my Department. However, no one who has attained the age of 72 years may be a member of a valuation tribunal.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that each case heard before valuation tribunals is presided over by a single paid chartered surveyor or lawyer who is an expert in property rating. [4788]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce a statutory time limit for the listing of a valuation tribunal hearing in respect of rating appeals. [4791]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. Valuation tribunals are independent judicial bodies.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many hours training per annum valuation tribunal members receive and what is the average cost of training per tribunal member in England and Wales. [4793]

Sir Paul Beresford: Around £100,000 is provided annually from my Department's votes for training by the National Committee of Valuation Tribunals for the 2,500 members in England, and £12,000 by the Welsh Office for the 285 members in Wales. Other training is also carried out by the individual tribunals themselves. No information is collected on the number of hours training provided.

Tyne and Wear Development Corporation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion his Department has held with *(a)* the Tyne and Wear development corporation and *(b)* the city of Sunderland regarding the transfer and hand over of Tyne and Wear development corporation functions in preparation for 1997. [5121]

Sir Paul Beresford: I discussed issues relating to the wind-up of the Tyne and Wear development corporation at the corporation's corporate plan meeting earlier this year.

The Department has not held formal discussions with the city of Sunderland about the wind up of the urban development corporation in 1998.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last received a report on the condition of Battersea power station; what assessment his Department has made of the current state of the building's fabric; and what applications have been received for demolition. [5313]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State for the Environment has received no reports on the condition of the building. The building is regularly inspected by English Heritage and was last inspected on 9 November 1995. I understand that the next visit is scheduled for 5 January next year. We have received no applications for demolition.

Brent Irish Centre

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the district audit public interest report on the Brent Irish centre; and if he will issue guidance to the council on the status of this report. [5595]

Sir Paul Beresford: This is not a matter for Government, but for the London borough of Brent and its appointed auditor. It is the council's responsibility to make copies of the report available, under section 18A of the Local Government Finance Act 1991. Sections 5 and 6 of the Local Government Act 1992 specify the follow-up action that Brent council must take.

Home Owners

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of home owners who can expect to *(a)* be in negative equity and *(b)* to lose their homes through repossession in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [4862]

Mr. Clappison: The Government do not make such forecasts. Homeowners will continue to benefit from the range of Government policies which have brought about sustainable falls in interest rates and have made home ownership more affordable than for many years.

Dioxins

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action *(a)* has been taken and *(b)* is proposed by (i) Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, (ii) the National Rivers Authority and (iii) the local waste regulation authority in respect of each dioxin hot spot. [5462]

Mr. Clappison: Where dioxins are released all the agencies work together within the proper legal framework to protect the environment.

PRIME MINISTER

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the compliance of the Security Service, GCHQ and the Intelligence Service with their obligations in respect of registration under the Data Protection Act 1984; if all personal data held by them are processed for the purpose of safeguarding national security; what external legal advice he has taken on whether registration of personal data is necessary; and if he will make a statement. [5314]

The Prime Minister: Under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984, personal data are exempt from the provisions of part II and sections 21 to 24 of the Act if the exemption is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security. Personal data are held and processed by the Security Service, GCHQ and the secret intelligence service in accordance with their respective functions set out in the Security Services Act 1989 and the Intelligence Services Act 1994. Such data are exempt from the relevant provisions of the Data Protection Act in order to safeguard national security.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5575]

The Prime Minister: The figure is £36,000 in 1994–95. No projection has yet been made of the outturn for 1995–96.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5574]

Mr. Hanley: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5588]

Mr. Hanley: In 1994–95 the cost of hospitality, which is included in the running cost budget for this Department—Diplomatic Wing and ODA—was £7,680,934. The Natural Resources Institute, an agency of the ODA, spent £3,386; and Wilton Park, an agency of the diplomatic wing, spent £455.

Figures for the financial year to date—1 April to 31 October—are £4,759,666 for this Department; £2,770 for the Natural Resources Institute; and £562 for Wilton Park.

The projected budget for this Department for 1995–96 is around £8.2 million; for the Natural Resources Institute, £5,000; and for Wilton Park, £1,000.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decisions the Government have taken about the United Kingdom's adherence to the European convention on human rights. [6004]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have decided to renew for five years our acceptance of the two optional articles of the European convention on human rights which expires for the United Kingdom on 13 January 1996. Individuals will therefore continue to be able to bring cases under article 25—the right of individual petition—and the Government will continue to accept the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights under Article 46. The United Kingdom first accepted these articles in 1966. They have both been renewed for consecutive periods of five years for the last 20 years.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister informed the House on 7 December, *Official Report*, column 488, the Government were not satisfied with some of the rulings made under the convention by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. We will initiate discussions with other members of the Council of Europe, and representatives of its institutions, to change and improve the way in which the convention system works. We are developing specific proposals to achieve this, which we believe will be widely welcomed.

Entry Clearance (Right of Appeal)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of Sate for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to lay before the House the 1994 report by the independent monitor of refusal of entry clearance where there is no right of appeal. [6249]

Mr. Hanley: Copies of Dame Elizabeth's 1994 report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. I welcome the report, which confirms Dame Elizabeth's satisfaction with the decisions taken by the entry clearance officers in the overwhelming majority of the cases she monitored. We will consider carefully Dame Elizabeth's recommendations, some of which are already being implemented.

SCOTLAND

Relocation, Stirling

Mrs. Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* agencies and *(b)* non-departmental public bodies have been located in Stirling in the last two years; on what dates decisions were taken to set up those bodies in these locations; and if he will list those agencies and non-departmental public bodies which will locate in Stirling in the next 12 months. [2801]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None of the agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible have located in Stirling in the last two years and there are no plans for any to do so in the next 12 months.

Of his non-departmental public bodies—NDPBs—the Red Deer Commission, which has its headquarters in Inverness, set up a small sub-office in Stirling in April 1995. The decision to do this was taken in the autumn of last year.

Over the next 12 months the Scottish further education unit will move to Stirling and the headquarters of the new Scottish Environment Protection Agency will be located there. These decisions were made following a thorough assessment of a range of options, and taking account of the policy in "Scotland in the Union" (Cm 2225) to seek opportunities for dispersal of NDPBs from Edinburgh and Glasgow where it is operationally acceptable and financially attractive to do so. They were recommended to Ministers by the bodies concerned and were approved in June and October 1995 respectively. Plans to locate the Scottish children's reporter administration in Stirling are currently under consideration.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many assisted places are available for pupils in Scottish schools in the current session; and what is the average level of assistance. [3921]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Independent schools participating in the assisted places scheme in Scotland are each allocated an amount of fee remission grant for each school session, within which they may provide assistance to individual pupils, in accordance with the rules of the scheme. Some schools have yet to submit grant claims for the 1995–96 school session, so the information requested is not yet available. However, provisional figures indicate that just over 3,000 pupils are currently receiving assistance, at an estimated average cost of around £3,550 per pupil.

I shall write to the hon. Member when the information she has requested is available.

Exports

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the diversification of Scottish export markets; and if he will make a statement. [5113]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am delighted that the most recent figures show that Scotland's manufactured exports have grown in the last year by 23.6 per cent. to reach an all-time record of £14.3 billion, which is more than £40,000 per manufacturing employee. That is more than the United Kingdom as a whole and more than Japan.

I am aware, however, that we could do even better. Scottish Trade International, the export arm of my Department recently took the lead in the production of an export development strategy for Scotland. This strategy, "The International Challenge" launched in September, sets out the steps that need to be taken to strengthen export support arrangements throughout Scotland. A key part of that strategy is a commitment to achieving greater diversification of Scotland's exporting industries. Special programmes will be devised to maximise exports from eight priority manufacturing and service sectors. The strategy also sets out priority markets where there are particular opportunities for Scottish companies.

I have arranged for a copy of "the International Challenge" to be sent to the hon. Member.

Scottish Homes, Inverclyde

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will allow the Inverclyde district council to take over the ownership and management of those houses in the Inverclyde district which, at the moment, are owned by Scottish Homes if the tenants indicate, by way of an independently controlled ballot, that it is their wish to become tenants of the council; and if he will make a statement. [4830]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Existing arrangements do not preclude local authorities from bidding for Scottish Homes stock. However, this would be allowed only in exceptional circumstances which do not compromise the objective of promoting diversity of choice in rented housing stock.

My right hon. Friend announced on 30 November that he will consider this policy further in response to representations from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. His decision will be announced in due course.

Students (Allowances)

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes are planned in the student support and tuition fee arrangements for Scottish domiciled students in session 1996–97. [6378]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am publishing today the main rates of maintenance allowances payable under the students' allowances scheme and the postgraduate students' allowances scheme, including rates for those courses which do not attract student loans, together with the rates for the various supplementary allowances payable to both undergraduate and vocational postgraduate award holders.

The support available to undergraduate students in 1996–97 through the main rates of maintenance grant and loan, taken together, will be 2.6 per cent. higher than in 1995–96, thus maintaining its value in real terms. Postgraduate maintenance grants and supplementary allowances will be increased by a similar amount.

Tuition fees will continue to be reimbursed to institutions through the student support system on behalf of eligible students. The undergraduate rates will be the same as in 1995–96.

These changes are consistent with those for England and Wales announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Details have been placed in the Library.

"The Way Ahead"

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the study of Scottish Natural Heritage which was announced in May. [6421]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Ministers received the report of the study group in October and I will make arrangements for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

The Government have noted that since Scottish Natural Heritage was established in 1992 it has been asked to undertake a range of new initiatives. Amongst these have been implementation of the EC Habitats Directive, initiatives on biodiversity arising out of agreements reached at Rio and programmes commissioned by the Secretary of State for Scotland on the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond and environmental education. Taken together, this new work means that the balance of SNH's work has moved, from that envisaged by the Government when they published their plans for SNH in "The Way Ahead" in 1990. I have accepted the main proposal of the report of the study group that a new "The Way Ahead" should be prepared, taking account of changes in natural heritage priorities and levels of Government grant-in-aid likely to be available. I have asked Scottish Office and SNH officials to draft a new version of "The Way Ahead" to take us to the millennium. This will be published in the first half of next year. At that time we shall also announce our full response to the report.

Overseas Companies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sums his Department has paid out for each financial year since 1979–80 to companies establishing in Scotland; if he will indicate the number and names of companies involved; and what proportion this represented of the total awards made under regional selective assistance. [1716]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* Data are not collected in precisely this form. Data are, however, collected on regional selective assistance offered to overseas-owned firms—this will include some overseas-owned firms reinvesting in their existing operations in Scotland and will not include firms owned elsewhere in the United Kingdom which are starting or reinvesting operations in Scotland. Details on individual firms are affected by commercial confidentiality but the other data which the hon. Member seeks are given, for overseas-owned firms, in the table:

Year	*Number of offers accepted*	*Of which overseas owned firms*	*Value of offers accepted (£ million)*	*Of which overseas owned firms*	*Percentage of offers to overseas owned firms by value*
1979–80	186	25	32.2	14.9	46
1980–81	165	38	31.0	18.9	61
1981–82	118	30	29.9	21.4	72
1982–83	220	37	50.4	27.2	54
1983–84	159	39	38.3	18.6	48
1984–85	216	46	70.7	40.9	58
1985–86	134	34	58.6	37.3	64
1986–87	138	20	34.6	16.6	48

Year	*Number of offers accepted*	*Of which overseas owned firms*	*Value of offers accepted (£ million)*	*Of which overseas owned firms*	*Percentage of offers to overseas owned firms by value*
1987–88	192	24	56.2	30.5	54
1988–89	195	25	49.8	14.5	29
1989–90	234	36	76.3	32.2	42
1990–91	195	36	173.5	119.9	69
1991–92	160	27	52.3	13.8	26
1992–93	198	41	72.3	36.2	50
1993–94	238	56	126.8	68.1	54
1994–95	246	58	113.0	73.8	65

This table refers to the year in which an offer was originally accepted.

Year of initial offer	*Number of offers*	*Of which number accepted*
1979–80	199	191
1980–81	177	164
1981–82	134	127
1982–83	243	221
1983–84	167	158
1984–85	242	230
1985–86	119	113
1986–87	156	148
1987–88	200	186
1988–89	221	207
1989–90	243	228
1990–91	214	202
1991–92	170	157
1992–93	214	199
1993–94	259	243
1994–95	246	238

Notes:

1. This table refers to the year in which an initial offer was made. Its subsequent acceptance may have taken place in a subsequent year.
2. In the most recent years, some offers are still outstanding and have not yet been accepted or declined by the company.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many applications for regional selective assistance have been *(a)* rejected by his Department and *(b)* accepted for each financial year since 1979–80; and what proportion those rejected represent of the total number of applications received; [1718]

(2) how many offers of regional selective assistance were made to companies by his Department in each financial year since 1979–80; and how many of these were fully accepted by the companies involved. [1733]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The data which the hon. Member seeks are set out in the tables.

Year of application	*Number of applications received*	*Number subsequently rejected*	*Percentage of applications rejected*	*Number of applications progressing to acceptance*
1979–80	300	9	3.0	241
1980–81	97	2	2.1	74
1981–82	189	9	4.8	145
1982–83	257	15	5.8	200
1983–84	262	12	4.6	197
1984–85	259	21	8.1	185
1985–86	154	15	9.7	113
1986–87	179	10	5.6	149
1987–88	234	10	4.3	198
1988–89	255	15	5.9	202
1989–90	314	28	8.9	235
1990–91	239	16	6.7	189
1991–92	203	12	5.9	162
1992–93	246	10	4.1	198
1993–94	307	21	6.8	248
1994–95	307	25	8.1	247

Notes:

1. This table refers to the year in which the application was received. Its acceptance or rejection may have taken place in a subsequent year.
2. As well as being accepted or rejected, applications may be withdrawn by the company before an offer is made, or, if an offer is made, it may be declined by the company.
3. In the most recent years, some offers are still outstanding and have not yet been accepted or declined by the company.
4. Application forms are normally only made available when prior discussion with the company concerned has indicated a reasonable possibility that an application will be successful.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many jobs his Department estimates have been *(a)* safeguarded and *(b)* created in Scotland in each financial year since 1979–80 by payments made under regional selective assistance; [1725]

(2) how much money was paid to companies operating within each new town in Scotland in regional selective assistance for each year since 1979–80; and how many companies were in receipt of this assistance; [1732]

(3) if he will list *(a)* the amounts spent on regional selective assistance by his Department, *(b)* the number of projects covered by his expenditure, *(c)* the average amount awarded for each application for regional selective assistance, *(d)* the amounts of money recouped by the Scottish Office in regional selective assistance, *(e)* the number of companies from which money was recouped and *(f)* the names of the companies from which the Scottish Office recouped this money for each financial year since 1979–80. [1735]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* As regards money recouped from companies which had been in receipt of regional selective assistance, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *580*.

Statistics on regional selective assistance are not collected by reference to new town boundaries.

The other information which the hon. Member seeks is set out in the table.

Year	Number of offers accepted	Value of offers accepted (£ million)	Forecast jobs created	Forecast jobs safeguarded	Average value of offer (£ million)	Total expenditure (£million)
1979–80	186	32.2	11,133	8,699	0.173	17.4
1980–81	165	31.0	11,551	4,717	0.188	21.4
1981–82	118	29.9	8,224	3,799	0.254	17.7
1982–83	220	50.4	9,795	7,560	0.229	19.1
1983–84	159	38.3	8,770	7,057	0.241	22.7
1984–85	216	70.7	10,978	6,682	0.327	30.5
1985–86	134	58.6	8,169	6,458	0.437	35.3
1986–87	138	34.6	4,515	3,470	0.251	34.8
1987–88	192	56.2	8,200	6,574	0.292	37.6
1988–89	195	49.8	8,158	3,654	0.255	37.0
1989–90	234	76.3	10,003	3,862	0.326	40.7
1990–91	195	173.5	16,603	4,621	0.890	68.1
1991–92	160	52.3	6,453	2,005	0.327	64.4
1992–93	198	72.3	8,287	2,792	0.365	59.2
1993–94	238	126.8	11,046	6,235	0.533	69.8
1994–95	246	113.0	12,319	3,965	0.459	77.1

Notes:

1. This table refers to the year in which an offer was initially accepted. The final column relates to total expenditure in the year in question, some of which will arise from offers accepted in earlier years.

2. Where jobs are forecast to be created or safeguarded, that will be over the lifetime of the project, typically 3 to 5 years. Experience indicates that fewer jobs are actually created or safeguarded than originally forecast: around two-thirds. Actual grant payments are set in line with the actual number of jobs created or safeguarded and the level of investment actually undertaken.

Red Deer

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many estates have killed *(a)* fewer than five, *(b)* six to 10, *(c)* 11 to 50, *(d)* 51 to 100, *(e)* 101 to 250, *(f)* 251 to 500 and *(g)* more than 500 red deer in each year from 1990 to 1995. [2077]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The information is set out in the table and has been supplied by the Red Deer Commission from its records.

Number of red deer killed	Number of estates 1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
0–5	59	63	50	48	47
6–10	45	58	31	42	42
11–50	200	190	177	217	238
51–100	124	130	137	130	123
101–250	97	89	117	102	97
251–500	26	27	34	19	23
500–	8	9	13	11	9

NORTHERN IRELAND

Traffic Schemes

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if his Department followed the 1986 SACTRA recommendation in respect of the breaking down of large traffic schemes at the Balmoral Avenue junction. [2512]

Mr. Moss: In view of the scale and nature of the scheme proposed at the Balmoral Avenue junction, the SACTRA report is not considered to be relevant.

Schools Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools broken down by (i) size and (ii) sex and indicating if they are controlled, maintained or voluntary school status in each of the education and library board areas in Northern Ireland. [4510]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

(a) (i) Secondary schools by size

Area board management type	Number of Pupils Up to 25	26–50	51–100	101–200	201–300	301–400	401–600	601–800	801–1000	1001–1500	1501 and over	Total
Belfast												
Controlled	—	—	—	—	2	1	3	1	1	3	—	11
Maintained	—	—	—	—	2	—	3	4	2	1	1	13
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	3	4	5	1	14
Western												
Controlled	—	—	1	—	2	3	6	2	1	—	—	15
Maintained	—	—	1	—	5	5	9	—	6	—	—	26
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	4	1	1	9
North-Eastern												
Controlled	—	—	—	2	2	2	8	10	2	2	—	28
Maintained	—	—	—	1	2	2	6	1	1	1	—	14
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	4	2	—	11

(a) (i) Secondary schools by size

Area board management type	Number of Pupils Up to 25	26–50	51–100	101–200	201–300	301–400	401–600	601–800	801–1000	1001–1500	1501 and over	Total
South-Eastern												
Controlled	—	—	—	—	2	6	4	6	2	2	—	22
Maintained	—	—	1	—	—	1	7	—	2	—	—	11
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	3	—	7
Southern												
Controlled	—	—	—	2	3	1	6	5	2	1	—	20
Maintained	—	—	—	1	—	2	5	4	5	2	—	19
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	6	—	—	12
Total												
Controlled	—	—	1	4	11	13	27	24	8	8	—	96
Maintained	—	—	2	2	9	10	30	9	16	4	1	83
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	1	—	7	11	21	11	2	53
Total	—	—	3	6	21	23	64	44	45	23	3	232

(a) (ii) Secondary schools by sex

Area board management type	All boys	All girls	Co-educational	Total
Belfast				
Controlled	2	1	8	11
Maintained	4	6	3	13
Voluntary	4	6	4	14
Western				
Controlled	—	1	14	15
Maintained	4	5	17	26
Voluntary	4	4	1	9
North-eastern				
Controlled	2	3	23	28
Maintained	1	—	13	14
Voluntary	1	—	10	11

(a) (ii) Secondary schools by sex

Area board management type	All boys	All girls	Co-educational	Total
South-eastern				
Controlled	2	2	18	22
Maintained	1	1	9	11
Voluntary	1	1	5	7
Southern				
Controlled	—	—	20	20
Maintained	4	4	11	19
Voluntary	4	4	4	12
Total				
Controlled	6	7	83	96
Maintained	14	16	53	83
Voluntary	14	15	24	53
Total	34	38	160	232

(b) (i) Primary schools by size

Area board managemen type	Number of pupils Up to 25	26–50	51–100	101–200	201–300	301–400	401–600	601–800	801–1000	1001–1500	1501 and over	Total
Belfast												
Controlled	—	—	1	11	13	11	9	—	1	—	—	46
Maintained	—	—	2	6	7	12	13	6	—	1	—	47
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Western												
Controlled	2	18	25	9	7	5	6	—	—	—	—	72
Maintained	2	18	29	41	8	12	11	4	1	1	—	127
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North-Eastern												
Controlled	2	20	39	30	16	21	15	—	—	—	—	143
Maintained	2	10	18	26	15	5	4	1	—	—	—	81
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South-Eastern												
Controlled	2	8	21	29	15	12	16	2	1	—	—	106
Maintained	—	4	19	10	9	8	5	1	1	—	—	57
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southern												
Controlled	2	23	39	18	11	7	6	2	—	—	—	108

(b) (i) Primary schools by size

	Number of pupils											
Area board managemen type	*Up to 25*	*26–50*	*51–100*	*101–200*	*201–300*	*301–400*	*401–600*	*601–800*	*801–1000*	*1001–1500*	*1501 and over*	*Total*
Maintained	1	19	40	49	19	7	12	4	—	—	—	151
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total												
Controlled	8	69	125	97	62	56	52	4	2	—	—	475
Maintained	5	51	108	132	58	44	45	16	2	2	—	463
Voluntary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	13	120	233	229	120	100	97	20	4	2	—	938

(b) (ii) Primary Schools by Sex

Area board management type	*All boys*	*All girls*	*Co-educational*	*Total*
Belfast				
Controlled	—	—	46	46
Maintained	9	12	26	47
Voluntary	—	—	—	—
Western				
Controlled	—	—	72	72
Maintained	4	4	119	127
Voluntary	—	—	—	—
North-Eastern				
Controlled	—	—	143	143
Maintained	1	—	80	81
Voluntary	—	—	—	—
South-Eastern				
Controlled	—	—	106	106
Maintained	2	2	53	57
Voluntary	—	—	—	—
Southern				
Controlled	—	—	108	108
Maintained	8	8	135	151
Voluntary	—	—	—	—
Total				
Controlled	—	—	475	475
Maintained	24	26	413	463
Voluntary	—	—	—	—
Total	24	26	888	938

Unemployment

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to change the 21-hour rule in Northern Ireland; and what impact they will have on the freedom to study. [4511]

Mr. Moss: Currently, certain unemployed people, broadly those who have been unemployed for three months or more in the last six and who are undertaking part-time study of not more than 21 hours a week, are treated as available for work provided that they are prepared to give their course up if a job becomes available. This is in addition to the provisions that allow claimants to study part-time provided they remain available for and are actively seeking employment.

Under the jobseeker's allowance in Northern Ireland, there will be similar rules designed to allow the same number of unemployed people to study part-time while claiming benefits as do so now.

Stormont

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what work has been carried out to restore the parliamentary debating chamber at Stormont since the fire. [5681]

Mr. Moss: The complete restoration of the chamber forms part of the major refurbishment of Parliament buildings which began on 1 November, but work to the chamber itself has not yet started. Archive material from the time of the construction of the building has been assembled and wood for the re-panelling of the walls has been purchased. Work is scheduled for completion in January 1997.

Mr. Gerard Burns

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made to appoint a successor to Mrs. McIvor in the offices of the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. [6302]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Her Majesty the Queen has approved the appointment of Mr. Gerard Burns to succeed Mrs. McIvor in both posts, with effect from 1 February 1996.

Crown Solicitor's Office

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to carry out a prior options study of the functions of the Crown Solicitor's office and when he expects to have a report of the study. [6303]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have arranged for a prior option study of the functions of the Crown Solicitor's office to be carried out and for the findings of the study to be reported not later than 28 February 1996.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Photocopiers

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chairman of the Administrative Committee when the new contract for paper for photocopiers in the Palace of Westminster was agreed; how many faults have been reported since then; how many were reported in the equivalent period under the old contract; and if he will make a statement. [4118]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The introduction of recycled copier paper was agreed as part of an overall review of stationery carried out by the Administration Committee in November 1994. It as introduced in all areas by May 1995 when stocks of existing paper had been used up.

It is not possible to isolate faults specifically due to paper handling. However, the number of faults reported up to May 1995 averaged 41 per month and from May to July averaged 38 per month.

Members' Handbook

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee when the next edition of the Members' handbook will be published; and if it will be available *(a)* in disk form and *(b)* on the PDVN. [5891]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The "Members' Handbook", which was first issued in February 1992, is being revised and the new edition should be available to Members immediately after the Christmas Adjournment. The text will be available also on the PDVN by way of the parliamentary electronic document distribution service—PEDDS—and, on request, on disk in WordPerfect 6.1.

State Opening (Photographer)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee on what basis a photographer was present in the Gallery during the State Opening of Parliament. [4964]

Mr. Michael J. Martin *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* The Central Office of Information contract photographer was present in the Gallery to enable photographs of the State Opening used in official and educational publications to be brought up to date.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Khat

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to making khat a controlled substance. [5550]

Mr. Sackville: The khat plant is not subject to control under the United Nations drug conventions. In 1988, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs advised that there was no evidence of a social problem arising from its misuse such as to justify bringing the plant under the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. We have no current plan to bring khat under legislative controls, but will continue to monitor the position.

Identity Cards

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many submissions he has received in respect of the introduction of identity cards which expressed specific concerns as to the impact such cards would have on the black and ethnic minority communities; [5385]

(2) when he expects his Department to provide a full report on the public consultation on the subject of identity cards; and how his Department now intends to proceed on this issue. [5386]

Mr. Sackville: We received some 3,000 replies to the Green Paper on identity cards and I intend to make available shortly a summary of the responses. The Government have yet to decide whether an identity card should be introduced and, if so, what type of identity card scheme to propose.

Entertainment Licences

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legislation applies in respect of places of entertainment which wish to remain open over midnight on Sunday 24 December and Sunday 31 December 1995; and in what circumstances such venues may remain open. [5353]

Mr. Kirkhope: The following legislation applies every day of the year. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 and the London Government Act 1963 require places providing music and dancing to be subject to licences which may stipulate the times, including beyond midnight, during which music and dancing may take place. The Licensing Act 1964 provides for the holders of such licences to the granted special hours certificates, or special orders of exemption, both of which may permit the sale of alcohol beyond midnight. In addition, the Sunday Observance Act 1780 prohibits charging for admission to a public dance held on a Sunday.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what occasions certificates under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 were signed by his Department; for how long each certificate was valid; what procedures apply when such certificates are signed; by what methods he is notified whenever a Cabinet Minister signs a certificate; and if he will make a statement. [5348]

Mr. Sackville: I am aware of none as far as the Home Office is concerned. Disclosing details of such certificates would itself not be in the interest of national security.

National Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the procedures for liaison with other Government departments in respect of access to personal details held by them in cases involving the signing of warrants or certificates for the purpose of safeguarding national security. [5349]

Mr. Howard: No.

Volunteers (Screening)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to help voluntary groups check the suitability of volunteers working with children. [5134]

Mr. Sackville: In 1993, the Home Office, in consultation with the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Employment and the Welsh Office, published a code of practice entitled "Safe from Harm". This offers voluntary organisations with responsibility for the care and welfare of children a guide to good policy and practice in areas such as the recruitment, supervision and management of staff and volunteers. Voluntary organisations can also check directly with the Department of Health's consultancy service whether the names of any of their staff or volunteers appear on lists held by the service of people who have ceased to be employed in circumstances which show that they would be unsuitable to work with children in the future. The consultancy service will also carry out a check against "List 99" which is a list compiled by the Department of Education and Employment of people who, because of previous misconduct, are barred from employment in any school or further educational establishment if their job would involve them in regular contact with children. Further safeguards will be proposed in our forthcoming White Paper on access to criminal records for employment vetting purposes.

Second Passport Holders

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of British nationals in possession of a second, foreign passport. [5447]

Mr. Kirkhope: United Kingdom passports are issued to British citizens, including those who have been naturalised, British dependent territories citizens, British nationals (overseas), British overseas citizens, British subjects and British protected persons. In some cases, passports may be issued to persons who also hold the nationality of another country but information about dual nationality and second passports is not collected.

Private Security Firms

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the European regulations which preclude the Home Department excluding from Home Office contracts private security firms which are not members of self-regulatory bodies. [138]

Mr. Howard: The European Community procurement directives lay down criteria to be followed in the award of Government contracts. All three directives for works, for supplies and for services contain provisions to ensure fair treatment and to prevent discrimination in the selection of Government contractors.

In the case of private security service contracts, article 3(2) of the European Community services directives, 92/50/EEC applies. This states that

> "Contracting authorities shall ensure that there is no discrimination between different service providers".

The exclusion of a tenderer who was not a member of a voluntary self-regulatory body would discriminate against those who, for whatever reason, were unable, or unwilling to join such a body. Membership of such a body would not, in itself, indicate the ability of the tenderer satisfactorily to perform the service and there are other non-discriminatory means of ensuring that they can do so, for example by requiring them to demonstrate in their tender the necessary experience or technical ability to perform the contract.

Illegal Entrants (Employment)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employers were convicted of employing an illegal entrant to the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; what was the average fine imposed on such employers; how many employers were found not guilty; and how such illegal employment was detected. [2760]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* It is not an offence under current legislation for an employer to employ an illegal entrant.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5067]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* It is my Department's policy not to make regulations implementing European directives which add to the burdens imposed by such directives. We keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mr. MacLaughlan (War Pension)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how long Mr. MacLaughlan of Newcastle has waited for a war pension appeal hearing, appeal ref. 94/3544/A; why his appeal hearings for October and December 1995 were cancelled; what factors have led to the delay in holding a further hearing; and when he can expect his appeal to be heard. [5490]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Mr. MacLaughlan appealed against his interim assessment to the War Pensions Agency on 2 June 1992. The appeal papers were received by the pensions appeal tribunals on 8 November 1994. Due to an unexpected and unprecedented growth in appeals, waiting times have lengthened and although measures have been put in hand to accommodate the sustained increase, it is unlikely that Mr. MacLaughlan's appeal will be heard until February or March 1996. No record can be found of an earlier date having been allocated and cancelled.

Court Service Accountability

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to ensure that companies successful in bidding for contracts for support work in the Court Service will maintain the accountability of the present system. [4718]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 13 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about how private companies bidding to carry out support work for the Court Service will maintain the accountability of the present system.

Any contractor to the Court Service will be required to deliver services to the specified standard. The Court Service will retain full control of its polices and strategies.

Probate Offices

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment his Department has made of the impact on the public of the closure of probate offices in respect of access to the facilities offered by these officers. [4733]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 13 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the impact of the proposed closure of probate officers.

The recommendation that a number of Probate Sub-Registries and Probate Offices should close follows a review of the locations in England and Wales where a probate service is offered to personal applicants. This review considered, amongst other things, the effect of closure on travelling distances and the cost for individuals applying for probate.

Both local and national consultation on the proposals is currently taking place and consideration will be given to the comments received before I send a recommendation to the Parliamentary Secretary and Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what savings he estimates will accure from the closure of probate offices. [4721]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Barry Sheerman dated 13 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the savings that will accrue from the proposed closure of probate offices.

Closure of the Probate Sub-Registries would result in savings of accommodation staff and other associated running costs.

Similarly, closure of Probate Offices (caller offices used for the purpose of interviewing personal applicants only) would result in savings of ad hoc accommodation costs and reduce the amount of court staff time spent travelling to Probate Offices.

Overall savings would be approximately £400,000 per annum.

Magistrates Bench (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he plans to take in respect of the political imbalance of the Doncaster bench. [4485]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor, through his advisory committee for Doncaster, will continue to encourage applications from suitable people who would improve the political balance on the bench. The advisory committee has undertaken a number of initiatives, including press advertising, in the recruitment round which has just been completed and will be asked to repeat these initiatives. The Lord Chancellor would be grateful for any encouragement that the hon. Member can give to applicants locally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment his Department has made of the effect on confidentiality of the private finance initiative for the Court Service. [4720]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Any contractor will have to satisfy the Lord Chancellor's Department that confidentiality will be protected.

Court Service (Computer Systems)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what professional advice his Department has sought regarding the computer systems of the Court Service. [4718]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 13 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the professional computer advice sought by the Court Service.

The Court Service has obtained professional advice from a wide range of consultants and expert I.T. contractors, as appropriate, in the development of all its computer systems.

Child Support Commissioners (Appeals)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals to a child support commissioner have been *(a)* lodged and *(b)* determined. [4681]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Between April 1993, when the Child Support Act 1991 came into force and 6 December 1995, 50 appeals had been lodged with the child support commissioners and 18 determined.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Family Planning

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and which non-governmental organisations are being funded by the seedcorn fund for family planning and reproductive health projects; in which countries they are based; what are these projects; what is the amount of funding granted; and for what length of time. [4840]

Mr. Hanley: ODA's seedcorn fund for reproductive health presently supports 13 projects. Further details are given in the table.

Organisation	*Title*	*Country*	*Budget £000s*	*Time in years*
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	Voucher system to improve health services and control sexually transmitted diseases	Nicaragua	227	3
University of Cambridge	Action-orientated initiative relating to female genital mutilation and fistulae	Ethiopia	17	1
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	Subsidising adolescent sexually transmitted disease services through a private laboratory	Nigeria	91	2
Population Services International	Social marketing of female condoms	Bolivia, Guinea, Haiti, South Africa and Zambia	99	1
AVSC International	Factors affecting the safe provision of IUDs: A service delivery perspective	Russia	122	2
Family Care International	Safe motherhood health posts—A community outreach strategy to maternal mortality and morbidity	Mexico	80	2
Marie Stopes International	Research to develop blueprints for family planning and reproductive health products and services	Non-country specific	26	1
Population Services International	Social marketing for reproductive health	Russia	127	2
International Planned Parenthood Federation	Contraceptive social marketing	Latvia	218	2
Population Services International	Improving health care in Zambia through the franchising of private sector clinics	Zambia	52	1
Population Concern	Community-based reproductive health services for young people	South Africa	280	2
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Expanding choice for women: initiating and evaluating a new emergency contraceptive service in Fortaleza	Brazil	172	2
Marie Stopes Consultancy	To ascertain the practicalities and economics of initiating a social publishing programme in Almaty	Kazakhstan	6	1

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total budget of the seedcorn funding for family planning and reproductive health projects for each of the years 1994 and 1995. [4839]

Mr. Hanley: ODA's seedcorn fund for reproductive health was established in 1995 to support small-scale, innovative projects to improve reproductive health in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Expenditure in the 1994–95 financial year was £69,000. The budget for the 1995–96 financial year is £472,000.

Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to consult non-governmental organisations on the Government's involvement in the consultative group to assist the poorest. [5192]

Mr. Hanley: ODA advisers have taken part in setting up an informal network of British NGOs and other organisations interested in micro-finance. In September, they briefed a meeting of relevant NGOs, hosted by Action Aid, on the formation and operation of the consultative group to assist the poorest. The network will be meeting again in February 1996, and ODA advisers will use the opportunity to consult with NGOs on the current progress at the consultative group.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that credit from the consultive group to assist the poorest initiative will be directed at the very poorest. [5191]

Mr. Hanley: The consultative group to assist the poorest is a forum where donors supporting the provision if micro-financial services exchange experiences, and review options for extending and improving the impact of their programmes. The difficulties of providing appropriate financial services, both credit and savings facilities, to the very poorest is a central issue for all donors. ODA is actively feeding the lessons from its programmes in countries such as Bangladesh and Kenya into the CGAP process, and likewise learning from the experiences of other donors' programmes.

Micro-enterprise Development

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to develop micro-enterprises in bilateral United Kingdom aid programmes. [5190]

Mr. Hanley: There are a growing number of micro-enterprise development activities within the current UK bilateral aid programme. These are principally in

Bangladesh, India, Kenya, South Africa and also in Poland and Russia. There are also some in other Asian and African countries. We are now supporting well over 100 projects, with a total value of nearly £100 million in the small enterprise sector. We are looking, within available resources, to further develop the small and micro-enterprise component of our bilateral aid.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

High Court Cases

Ms Harman: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions for each year since 1960 High Court judges have referred details of a case to the Director of Public Prosecutions. [5548]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain such records.

WALES

"General Household Survey"

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure the statistics collected in Wales as part of the United Kingdom's annual "General Household Survey" permit a reliable disaggregated report on the state of wealth and poverty in Wales to be isolated from the aggregated United Kingdom database. [5023]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I understand from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which conducts the "General Household Survey" on a Great Britain basis, that there are no plans at present to increase the coverage in Wales. Further information relating to Wales is available from a range of other sources including the "Family Expenditure Survey" and the "Family Resources Survey".

Accidents in Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many fatal and major accidents occurred in the schools of Wales, by local education authority area in *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94; and if he will make a statement. [4801]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the information I provided on 30 November, a copy of which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation the Welsh Office had undertaken into the working of the access to work scheme; and if he will make a statement. [5244]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. The access to work programme for disabled people was introduced from 6 June 1994 to extend and simplify the existing special schemes provided by the Employment Service. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced a review of the scheme in July.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations his Department has received on the working of the present access to work scheme; and if he will make a statement. [5245]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. The access to work programme is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

School Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent per head per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95; what is the figure for the 1996–97 year; and what account has been taken in that figure of the increase in the school population. [5247]

Mr. Richards: Figures for 1993–94 are currently being calculated. As soon as they become available they will be incorporated in a new issue of the Welsh Office's "Education Finance Bulletin", a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House. Local government expenditure outturn figures for 1994–95 will not be available before spring 1996; spending per head figures will be calculated as soon as possible after that and incorporated in the "Education Finance Bulletin". Figures for 1996–97 will not be available until 1998. Changes in school population influence the calculation of standard spending assessments for local authorities but actual expenditure on education is determined by the local authorities themselves.

Free School Meals

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of children having free school meals in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* West Glamorgan, *(c)* Mid Glamorgan, *(d)* South Glamorgan and *(e)* Dyfed. [5545]

Mr. Richards: On the schools census day of 17 January 1995, the following numbers of children took free midday meals in maintained schools in:

	Number
Wales	90,408
West Glamorgan	12,052
Mid Glamorgan	21,926
South Glamorgan	14,155
Dyfed	9,429

Local Government (Compensation Costs)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what supplementary credit approvals he proposes to issue to local authorities for compensation costs which they incur in 1995–96 in connection with local government reorganisation. [6379]

Mr. Hague: I propose to issue supplementary credit approvals totalling £3,570,025 to 32 councils which are abolished by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 and which submitted bids to me. The approvals will be for the financial year 1995–96 and will be limited to expenditure on mandatory compensation costs incurred as a result of the reorganisation.

The allocations will be as follows:

	£
Delyn Borough Council	76,377
Clwyd County Council	67,392
Colwyn Borough Council	56,160
Wrexham Maelor Borough Council	40,884
Dyfed County Council	125,798
Cyngor Dosbarth Ceredigion	93,225
Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council	72,902
Llanelli Borough Council	53,050
Carmarthen District Council	34,819
Gwent County Council	471,737
Islwyn Borough Council	69,798
Newport Borough Council	53,913
Monmouth Borough Council	39,312
Torfaen Borough Council	38,189
Gwynedd County Council	146,015
Ynys Mon-Isle of Anglesey Borough Council	140,848
Meirionnydd District Council	77,500
Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor	62,605
Arfon Borough Council	60,877
Aberconwy Borough Council	29,652
Mid Glamorgan County Council	336,958
Rhondda Borough Council	162,414
Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council	73,008
Rhymney Valley District Council	70,986
Taff Ely Borough Council	69,189
Cynon Valley Borough Council	61,977
Cardiff City Council	226,436
South Glamorgan County Council	202,175
Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council	97,718
West Glamorgan County Council	258,334
Swansea City Council	125,798
Lliw Valley Borough Council	73,979

Welsh Water

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps he took immediately *(a)* before and *(b)* after 31 December 1994 to ensure appropriate publicity in financial markets in relation to the redemption of his golden share in Welsh water; [4120]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on market integrity of the publicity in December 1994 and January 1995 regarding the golden share in Welsh Water and the absence of any corrective publicity; [4176]

(3) what steps he took to correct the publicity in financial markets in December 1994 and January 1995 concerning the continued existence of his Welsh Water golden share; [4177]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* The arrangements for the redemption of the special shares held by the Secretaries of State in water holding companies were set out in section 1, chapter IV, of the prospectus for sale, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The special share held in Welsh Water plc was redeemed on 31 December 1994 in accordance with these arrangements. No further publicity was considered necessary.

The prospectus for sale—section 9, chapter V—also gave details of special provisions in the articles of association of Welsh Water plc which prevent any person from owning or controlling more than 15 per cent. of the company's voting share capital, subject to certain limited exceptions. This remains in effect other than by a special resolution of 75 per cent. of the company's shareholders to change its articles of association. It was agreed to incorporate this provision in the company's articles of association following concerns about the retention of Welsh interests in the water resources of Wales.

Anti-smoking Campaign

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the 1995 campaigns of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales to encourage people to stop smoking, indicating the cost of each campaign in the relevant financial year. [4861]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* Health Promotion Wales's programmes are recorded on a financial year basis. For 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, the information is as follows:

1994–95	*Thousand*
No Smoking Day 1995 and pilot project with pharmacists for Non Smoking Day	37.2
Evaluation of Quit and Win	0.2
Pilot project on prevention of smoking during pregnancy	3.1
Pilot project on prevention of smoking by teenage girls	12.0
Pilot project on Quit and Win Challenge for 15–19 year olds	15.8
Pilot project on smoking policies in public places	32.8
Issue of set of educational posters for schools on benefits of not smoking	41.6
Smokebusters Cymru	67.0
Seminar to raise awareness of smoking and pregnancy booklet	0.7
Presentation to 9th World Conference on Tobacco and Health in Paris	1.0
Advice and information service	11.8
1994–95 total expenditure on smoking related projects	223.2

[1] Includes operational and manpower costs.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what television advertising campaigns at what cost have been funded in full or part by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales designed to encourage people to stop smoking. [4933]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* The Health Promotion Authority for Wales has funded no television advertising campaign for smoking cessation, either in full or in part.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest estimates of the proportion of *(a)* incapacity benefit claimants receiving all work test questionnaires who fail to return them, *(b)* those returning questionnaires who fail to attend for medical examination, *(c)* medical examinations for the purpose of the all work test which result in the claimant being found capable of work, *(d)* those failing the all work test who appeal and *(e)* such appeals which succeed or are superseded by a decision in favour of the appellant. [3462]

Mr. Burt: The information available is in the table.

	13 April to 31 October
Disallowed for failure to return questionnaire (IB50) without good cause	3,268
Disallowed for failure to attend medical examination without good cause	613
Found capable of work following all work test	28,597
Appeals lodged with ITS	8,882
Successful appeals at hearing	146
Superseded by adjudication officer	335

The data reflects activity during a time when the take-on of cases has been carefully controlled to match capacity as experience of the new procedures grows. It is not representative and it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the new procedures.

Notes:

1. Figures include only Incapacity Benefit claimants and are subject to change.

Capital Limits (Benefits)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people in residential care who will be eligible *(a)* for increased benefits as a result of raising the lower capital threshold as proposed in the Budget and *(b)* for benefits as a result of raising the upper capital allowance as proposed in the Budget; [3995]

(2) what estimate he has made of the annual increase in benefit expenditure as a result of *(a)* raising the lower capital threshold as proposed in the Budget and *(b)* raising the upper capital allowance as proposed in the Budget. [3994]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

	Approximate numbers affected	*Approximate net cost (£ million)*
Lower Capital Limit	40,000	20
Upper Capital Limit	10,000	5
Total	50,000	25

These estimates do not include the cost to local authorities of applying the new limits when assessing residents' ability to contribute to the cost of their care.

National Disability Council

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when the membership of the National Disability Council will be announced; what consultations he is undertaking with which organisations in Wales; and if he will make a statement; [3855]

(2) how many people from Wales will be members of the new National Disability Council; and what will be the full complement of the Council. [3854]

Mr. Burt: We expect to announce membership of the National Disability Council in January 1996 and will be seeking to appoint between 10 and 20 members drawn from throughout Great Britain, including Wales. A number of organisations in Wales were invited to put forward nominations for membership.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those in receipt of invalidity benefit on grounds of mental health problems have been subjected to review under the new incapacity benefit test within the Merthyr benefit area. [4116]

Mr. Burt: Information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Age Addition

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the additional age allowance for pensioners over 80 years of age was first introduced; when it was last increased; what would the value of the additional age allowance now be if it had been uprated by inflation in each year since its last increase; and if he will make a statement on the purpose of the age allowance. [4682]

Mr. Roger Evans: The age addition of 25p per week for pensioners over 80 was introduced in 1971 and has remained at that level since. If it had been increased in line with inflation it would now be worth £1.60 a week from April 1995.

We have no plans to uprate it. Our policy is to focus help on the most needy. We have allocated substantial additional resources to increasing the premiums for pensioners on income support and other income-related benefits—an extra £1.2 billion, over and above inflation, since 1988.

National Insurance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if it is his intention to proceed with the one-year holiday from national insurance contributions for employers who take additional workers from among those unemployed for more than two years, as announced in his November 1994 Budget; and what is the start date for the holiday; [5406]

(2) if he will estimate the effect in terms of reducing the claimant count of unemployed people of a one-year holiday from national insurance contributions for employers who take additional workers from among those unemployed for more than two years; [5407]

(3) if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of a one year holiday from national insurance contributions for employers who take additional workers from among those unemployed for more than two years. [5408]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *643–45*. This measure will cover lone parents, carers and certain trainees as well as the long-term unemployed. Based on the working assumption that employers of around 130,000 new employees will benefit from reduced national insurance payments, it is expected to cost around £50 million in a full year. This does not include the impact on the level of unemployment as we cannot estimate with certainty the response of employers and the size of any displacement effect.

Prince's Trust

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the contacts his Department has with the Prince's Trust in respect of problems for young people with particular reference to homelessness; and if he will make a statement. [5686]

Mr. Burt: The disability unit in this Department is in regular contact with the Prince of Wales's advisory group on disability about the transition from school to further education, training or employment of young people with disabilities. Also, some Benefits Agency offices liaise with the trust in their areas. The Department of the Environment is the lead Department on homelessness issues.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what his proposals are for the introduction of the private sector into Benefits Agency medical services under the competing for quality agenda. [6251]

Mr. Burt: We propose that the work of Benefits Agency medical services, with the exception of policy and adjudication functions is contracted out to the private sector. A competitive tendering process is to be undertaken which will lead to the award of a contract, or contracts, at the earliest opportunity and no later than April 1997.

Details of the successful bidders will be placed in the Library.

Income Support

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress the Benefits Agency has made in checking live claims to income support where potential entitlement to the severe disability premium has not been considered; and what further action is being taken on those claims where income support is no longer in payment. [6300]

Mr. Roger Evans: The exercise carried out by the Benefits Agency to examine claims from customers currently in receipt of income support who may be entitled to the server disability premium is nearing completion. These investigations have resulted in approximately 24,000 customers receiving payment of arrears of benefit. Of these, around 18,000 have continuing awards of the premium.

I have also instructed the Benefits Agency to take all reasonable steps to identify and where possible, contact customers no longer in receipt of income support who during the period of their claim to income support, may have been entitled to the SDP. I have not however asked them to take any specific steps in respect of customers now deceased.

Benefit Expenditure

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average daily cost per person in work in terms of hours worked of *(a)* social security payments for recipients below pension age, *(b)* all social security payments, *(c)* contributory health services and *(d)* contributions to education services. [4594]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* The information is not available in the format requested.

However, the estimated equivalent cost per working person per working day for 1995–96 is as follows:

	Cost £
Social security payments for recipients below pension age	9
All social security payments	15
National health service	6
Education services	5

The figures are rounded to the nearest £1.

TRANSPORT

Crossrail

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the construction of the Crossrail link through London to begin. [3866]

Mr. Norris: This will depend on the view the Government take on the project following their consideration of the latest crossrail study, on appropriate powers being obtained through the Transport and Works Act procedures, and on the necessary private sector financial contribution being secured.

Public Service Vehicles (Accessibility)

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his timetable in respect of making regulation under section 40 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and what criterion he will use to determine whether such regulations will be necessary; [5493]

(2) what public service vehicle accessibility regulations he has made under section 40 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; [5492]

(3) what assessment he has made of the extent to which he will need to make PSV accessibility regulations under section 40 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [5491]

Mr. Norris: No PSV accessibility regulations have yet been made.

Discussions between officials and representatives of the bus and coach industry on the detail and shape of regulations have begun. The timescale for introduction will be confirmed in the light of those discussions and when viable technical solutions to achieving accessibility are identified. We expect that it will be necessary to introduce separate regulations for the various technical types over different timescales.

Road Safety

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that transport policies and programme bids are considered with due regard to improved safety for pedestrians and road users. [5443]

Mr. Norris: Safety for all road users is a primary concern in our assessment of TPP bids.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his Department's restrictions governing funding for local safety schemes. [5442]

Mr. Norris: I am not clear what restrictions the hon. Member is referring to. However, all aspects of my Department's system of funding local transport infrastructure are reviewed as a matter of course, in consultation with the local authority associations, before publication in spring of the annual circular setting out requirements for transport policies and programme submissions.

A540

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that Cheshire county council's case for borrowing approval in respect of the A540/Raby Road junction is examined immediately. [5444]

Mr. Norris: It is for Cheshire county council to decide the priority it attaches to minor improvement schemes on its roads. Each local highway authority gets on annual capital allocation of resources for such schemes. They have wide discretion on the use of these allocations.

A1

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the original estimated cost of the east of Knottingley A1 to Hook Moor highway development; what is now the estimate; and if he will make a statement. [5293]

Mr. Watts: The estimated cost of the east of Knottingley objector's alternative route is £176.6 million. The estimate was prepared immediately prior to the public inquiry following agreement by the promoter of the east of Knottingley route to the detailed plans.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Normanton of 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *351*, what transcript system was used by the inspector doing the public inquiry into the A1 Ferrybridge to Hook Moor motorway proposals. [5289]

Mr. Watts: The conduct of inquiries concerned with Highways Act Orders is governed by the Highways (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1994, SI 3263, which came into force on 10 January 1995. It is for the inspector to decide whether there should be any recording of statements. A transcript service is normally provided by the Department of Transport for trunk road inquiries which are expected to last more than 16 sitting days.

Motorways (Public Inquiries)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the types of transcript services used in recording the proceedings at public inquiries into motorway developments. [5300]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 13 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the types of transcript services used in recording the proceedings at public inquiries into motorway developments.

The "Notes for Guidance of Independent Inspectors holding inquiries into orders and special road schemes made under the Highways Act 1980" revised June 1995 state that "a transcript service will normally be provided by the Department of Transport for trunk road inquiries which are expected to last for more than sixteen sitting days". The type of transcript service is agreed with the Inspector at each inquiry; since June 1995 verbatim, unchecked records and live note system with checked records, have been used on inquiries into motorway developments lasting more than sixteen sitting days.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have taken place since 1976 to the rules concerning motorway public inquiries. [5295]

Mr. Watts: The Highways (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1994, SI 1994 No. 3263, came into force on 10 January 1995 replacing the 1976 rules. I am writing to the hon. Member explaining the changes brought about by the new rules.

A63

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the construction of the A63 Melton grade separated junction to begin. [5133]

Mr. Watts: The A63 Melton grade separated junction scheme remains in the main programme. Further development work will be taken forward when resources become available.

Departmental Cars

Mr. Macshane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department in each of the past five years. [5849]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 28 November 1995 *Official Report*, column *549*.

ScotRail

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have left ScotRail since January 1993 under redundancy or early retirement arrangements; and what has been the total cost of payments made to those staff. [5513]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The total number of staff to leave the ScotRail Train Operating Company since 1 April 1994 equates to 218 staff at a cost of £3,475,500. ScotRail became a separately identified organisation within British Rail on 1 April 1994. Figures for the period prior to that date are available only at a disproportionate cost.

Speed Limits (Paddington–Plymouth Line)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *54–5*, what is the estimated cost of obtaining the details in respect of the 16 speed restrictions in place between Paddington and Plymouth. [5030]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. member to my reply of 21 November, *Official Report* columns *54–55*.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the decision was taken to give the go-ahead to a bypass at Newbury; who took the decision; what is the estimated cost of the scheme; and what is the estimate of the total amount for the acquisition of land for the scheme. [5326]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The decision to go ahead with the Newbury bypass was taken by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), and announced on 5 July.

The estimated cost of the scheme is £101 million, excluding VAT.

The estimated cost of land acquisition is £82.5 million.

HEALTH

In-patient Episodes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the average cost per in-patient episode. [4494]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table. Figures relate to the net expenditure incurred on hospital specialities and include overhead costs. The figures are based on patients using a bed, including day cases, and relate to finished consultant episodes.

Average cost per patient episode in England

	Average cost per episode £
1992–93	1,240
1993–94	1,163
1994–95	1,092

Figures for 1994–95 are provisional.*Source:* Annual financial returns of regions, districts and special health authorities for the London postgraduate hospitals and NHS trusts.

Rubella Notifications

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *978*, what are the reasons for the differences in rubella notifications between 1992 and 1993. [5043]

Mr. Horam: The number of rubella cases for 1992 was 201.

There was a large increase in rubella notifications, and laboratory confirmed infections, in 1993. The majority of cases were in young men, who form a pool of susceptibles to the disease.

Vaccination

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *976*, on the report of the Public Health Laboratory Service on advance techniques for the surveillance of adverse reactions to measles, mumps and rubella immunisations; and if he will *(a)* put a copy of the report in the Library and *(b)* initiate a study to evaluate the adequacy of the present arrangements to monitor adverse reactions to the MR campaign. [5045]

Mr. Horam: A copy of the paper by Farrington P Et al in *The Lancet* entitled, "A new method for active surveillance for diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis and measles/mumps/rubella vaccines" is available in the Library.

Monitoring of adverse reactions during the 1994 measles/rubella immunisation campaign was based on the yellow card scheme for reporting of suspected adverse reactions to all medicines by doctors, dentists and coroners. This scheme has been in operation since 1964 and its effectiveness in identifying possible safety hazards is well recognised. All reactions reported as suspected to be due to MR vaccine were handled as high priority. These monitoring arrangements proved more than adequate and there is no need for the suggested study. A report on adverse reactions reported to MR vaccine has been published in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance", which was distributed to all doctors in November 1995, copies of this publication are available in the Library.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to his departmental report, "Measles Rubella Immunisation Campaign in England—One Year On", published in November, page 1, what is the basis for his statement in respect of the recovery of the children who suffered immediate serious adverse reactions. [5050]

Mr. Horam: Information about recovery from immediate serious adverse reactions following immunisation with measles/rubella vaccine was obtained as part of detailed follow-up from doctors who reported these reactions on yellow cards. All children with immediate serious reactions recovered regardless of whether or not the reaction was likely to have been caused by the vaccine.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *976*, on the effects of the notification of the natural immunological response by vaccines in relation to the increase in auto-immune diseases, if he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter of reply sent to the hon. Member. [5024]

Mr. Horam: The letter my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State gave the hon. Gentleman on 8 November is as follows.

I look forward to receiving the further clarification requested from the hon. Member and I will then publish a final reply in the *Official Report*.

Letter from Tom Sackville to Mr. Llew Smith, dated 8 November 1995:

You have tabled the above parliamentary question. I am afraid it is not possible to give an appropriate reply without further information on *which* increases, in *which* autoimmune diseases you are interested in. One of my officials has sought your clarification of the question but has not received a response. Could you please clarify the specific diseases to which your question refers and I shall do my best to provide you with a prompt reply.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *975*, on the disposal of surplus measles vaccines, what was the value of the reimbursement credit for the vaccines returned to the manufacturers; and what arrangements have been made to activate the credit in future. [5022]

Mr. Horam: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not the practice for the Department of Health to disclose such information. All of the sum reimbursed has been used against other subsequent vaccine purchases.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *977*, if he will list the documents which were sent to doctors and other health professionals on adverse reactions to the MMR vaccinations; and for what reasons each respective document was chosen as suitable to pass on to the health professionals involved in administering the campaign. [5042]

Mr. Horam: Information concerning possible adverse reactions to measles/rubella vaccine and guidance on the reporting of such reactions was contained in many of the letters and circulars issued to doctors during the planning and implementation of the measles/rubella immunisation campaign. The documents were prepared specifically for the campaign and contained information about the adverse reactions which health professionals might most commonly see during the course of the campaign. Information addressing the more specific concerns which it was thought might arise was also provided. In addition, the Department's memorandum "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease", which is issued to all doctors, and the British National Formulary contain information about possible adverse reactions to vaccines. The principal documents issued for the campaign, copies of which are in the Library, were:

PL CMO(94) 10/PL CNO(94)13: National measles and rubella immunisation campaign, issued 27 July 1994;

EL(94)60: Measles/rubella schools immunisation campaign, issued 27 July 1994.

Measles Fact Sheet (Health Education Authority) issued 1 September 1994;

PL CMO(94)12/PL CNO(94)15: Measles and rubella immunisation campaign, issued 27 September 1994;

Measles/rubella: Information for health professionals (issued under cover of above);

EL(94)73: School-based measles/rubella immunisation campaign, issued 27 September 1994;

PHLS Factsheet on measles for parents and children, issued October 1994;

The measles/rubella immunisation: your questions answered (Health Education Authority) issued in October 1994.

NHS Pensions

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he has discussed with the chief executive of the NHS pension scheme the position of NHS employees applying for sickness retirement pension on the grounds of myalgic encephalomyelitis; and if he will make a statement; [5297]

(2) how many employees in the NHS have applied for ill-health retirement because of myalgic encephalomyelitis; [5299]

(3) how many employees in the NHS have been awarded ill-health retirement pensions because they suffer from myalgic encephalomyelitis; and if he will make a statement; [5298]

(4) if he will set up an independent inquiry into the work of the NHS Pensions Agency with particular reference to their refusal to acknowledge myalgic encephalomyelitis as a medical condition in respect of ceasing work; and if he will make a statement. [5296]

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of NHS pensions to persons who leave the NHS as a result of myalgic encephalomyelitis; [5006]

(2) if he will introduce an appeal structure for persons who are refused an NHS pension. [5007]

Mr. Malone: Under the national health service pension scheme regulations, an employee must be accepted as permanently incapable of efficiently discharging his or her duties before an ill-health retirement pension can be awarded. The scheme's medical advisers examine each application on the evidence available and with full regard to prevailing professional opinion. Applications in respect of myalgic encephalomyelitis are treated no differently to other conditions. In all cases, the scheme's medical advisers must be satisfied about the permanent nature of the condition.

ME is recognised as a potentially debilitating and distressing condition which affects thousands of people. However, it presents particular difficulties because of its nature and because opinions vary about it in the medical profession. The medical consensus suggests that in the majority of cases the effects should not be permanent.

Since 15 August 1994, when separate records were first kept, there have been 200 applications for ill-health retirement from ME sufferers. In 19 cases, pensions have been awarded.

Scheme members are currently able to challenge decisions about entitlement through the NHS Pensions Agency's comprehensive internal review procedures. If scheme members are dissatisfied with the outcome, they may ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to determine their case. The pensions ombudsman also has powers to investigate individual complaints.

I am satisfied that the chief executive and his staff are administering the scheme in accordance with the scheme's regulations in all of these cases.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what occasions certificates under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 were signed by a member of his Department; how long each certificate was valid; and in what circumstances medical records can be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security. [5338]

Mr. Horam: No such certificates have been signed in the Department of Health. I cannot deal in advance with the circumstances that might apply if an application for a section 27 certificate were to be made.

Occupational Health Staff

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical and nursing staff worked in occupational health within the NHS in England and Wales for the last three years for which figures are available; and what were the grades of these employees. [5388]

Mr. Malone: The information available for England is shown in the attached tables. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Occupational Health nursing staff (excluding agency staff) by grade in England at 30 September 1992, 1993 and 1994

Whole-time equivalents

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
England total	600	580	600
Unqualified			
Grade A	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Grade B	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Others	—	[1]—	[1]—
Qualified			
Grade C	10	10	[1]—
Grade D	30	30	20
Grade E	50	50	60
Grade F	80	90	90
Grade G	230	220	240
Grade H	100	90	100
Grade I	100	80	70
Senior Grade 6	—	—	—
Others	10	10	10

Notes:

1. Learners (nurses on traditional nurse training courses), Project 2000 Students, Agency Nursing staff and GMS staff are not included.

2. Senior Nurse Managers and Seniors grades 1–5 are excluded.

All data are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.

[1] Five or less.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

NHS hospital and community health services occupational health medical staff by grade, England at 30 September 1992, 1993 and 1994

	Whole-time equivalents		
	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Consultant	32	34	44
Staff grade	3	3	3
Associate specialist	—	—	—
Senior registrar	8	9	8
Registrar	5	3	4
Senior house officer	—	—	—
House officer	—	—	—
Other[1]	25	26	28
Total	74	75	87

Note:

[1] Includes hospital practitioners, clinical assistants and other grades.

All data are rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.

Source:

Department of Health Medical Workforce census.

NHS Capital Charges

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health over what period the weighted average of the gross domestic product deflator and the indexation applied to NHS capital charges forecast is to rise 2.73 per cent., as stated in paragraph 15 of the NHS finance director's letter, FDL (95) 59; by how many percentage points his Department's index of hospital and community health service pay and prices forecast is to rise over the same period; and by how many percentage points the national health service pay and price index has exceeded the gross domestic product deflator in each of the last five years. [5292]

Mr. Horam: The forecast weighted average of the gross domestic product deflator and the indexation applied to national health service capital charges quoted in FDL(95)59 applies to the period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997.

The Department does not forecast hospital and community health services pay and price inflation.

Estimates of hospital and community health service inflation, family health service inflation and general inflation as measured by the gross domestic product deflator are shown for the five latest available years in the table.

Hospital and community health service, family health service and gross domestic product deflator indices 1989–90 to 1993–94

Percentage

Change on previous year	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
HCHS pay and prices index	6.3	8.7	10.1	6.9	3.4
FHS index	6.1	9.9	10.6	4.7	0.8
GDP deflator	7.0	8.0	6.2	4.1	2.9

Doncaster Healthcare Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of Doncaster Healthcare trust's compliance with EU procurement regulations. [5504]

Mr. Horam: I am satisfied on the evidence available that the trust has acted in full compliance with the requirements of the public supply, works and services contracts regulations.

Beds

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of *(a)* day care beds, *(b)* pay beds for day care in each national health service hospital in the Sunderland district health authority area in each year since 1989. [5469]

Mr. Horam: Information on numbers of pay beds is not available centrally. The available information is shown in the table.

Average of daily number of available beds—wards open day only—Sunderland area

	Number
1989–90[1]	14
1990–91[1]	17
1991–92[1]	17
1992–93[1]	21
1993–94[2]	30
1994–95[3]	31

[1] Sunderland District Health Authority.

[2] City Hospitals (Sunderland) and Priority Health Care Wearside Directly Managed Units.

[3] City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust and Priority Healthcare Wearside NHS Trust.

Health Authority Appointments

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to receive recommendations from the NHS executive, west midlands region, for the appointment of a chairman of the new South Staffordshire health authority; [5502]

(2) if he will examine the consultation procedures and periods adopted by the NHS executive, west midlands region, leading to their recommendation for a chairman for the new South Staffordshire health authority; [5503]

(3) what guidance is issued regarding the consultation period and names to be considered for appointment of chairmen to the new health authorities. [5501]

Mr. Malone: Ministers are now considering regional chairmen's recommendations on the appointment of chairmen to the new health authorities.

The regional chairmen followed the guidance on appointments procedures published by my Department in February this year, together with supplementary guidance prepared in response to the Nolan committee's recommendations. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Local Members of Parliament were consulted on all candidates recommended to Ministers.

Redundancy and Retirement

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *190*, relating to redundancy and retirement payments what guidelines his Department has issued to trusts regarding redundancy payments and retirement packages; and what monitoring his Department undertakes of such arrangements. [5440]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 5 December, column *190* relating to guidance issued. My Department does not monitor national health service trusts' redundancy and retirement arrangements.

Medium Secure Units

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account is taken of the costs of care in medium secure units for patients discharged from special hospitals in the distribution of funding to health authorities. [5478]

Mr. Bowis: The formula for determining health authorities' share of overall resources takes account of the age and needs of their resident populations and the relative cost of providing services. No particular adjustments are made in respect of individual patients who are transferred from the special hospitals to medium secure units or any other national health service service.

NHS Transport

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of annual NHS transport hire expenditure devoted to staff taxis and private hire. [5003]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Unregistrable Children's Homes

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what written guidance he has issued to directors of social services in respect of how placing authorities should communicate concern about poor practice in unregistrable children's homes to area authorities; and if he will make a statement. [5466]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 6 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *228*.

Each local authority which places a child carries full responsibility to satisfy itself that the proposed placement is likely to promote and safeguard that child's welfare.

Meningitis

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of meningitis have occurred in each of the last 48 months; and what has been *(a)* the number and *(b)* percentage of fatalities. [4804]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* The information is shown in the tables.

Meningitis notifications and deaths, by month, England and Wales

	Notifications	*Deaths*	*Percentage fatalities*
1991			
January	308	37	12.0
February	215	25	11.6
March	294	32	10.9
April	226	25	11.1
May	260	28	10.8
June	199	16	8.0
July	206	24	11.7
August	247	14	5.7
September	173	12	6.9
October	184	23	12.5
November	277	13	4.7
December	171	40	23.4
1992			
January	364	39	10.7
February	240	22	9.2
March	214	25	11.7
April	197	23	11.7
May	218	23	10.6
June	168	16	9.5
July	228	26	11.4

Meningitis notifications and deaths, by month, England and Wales

	Notifications	*Deaths*	*Percentage fatalities*
August	169	21	12.4
September	126	12	9.5
October	222	15	6.8
November	213	15	7.0
December	212	28	13.2
1993[1]			
January	274	37	13.5
February	203	24	11.8
March	195	23	11.8
April	211	28	13.3
May	149	22	14.8
June	168	16	9.5
July	173	18	10.4
August	105	15	14.3
September	79	8	10.1
October	146	16	11.0
November	180	30	16.7
December	199	35	17.6
1994[1]			
January	201	24	11.9
February	218	18	8.3
March	160	26	16.3
April	142	16	11.3
May	115	13	11.3
June	140	24	17.1
July	141	16	11.3
August	115	12	10.4
September	112	8	7.1
October	138	18	13.0
November	145	16	11.0
December	173	17	9.8
1995[2]			
January	267	25	9.4
February	206	23	11.2
March	169	24	14.2
April	167	22	13.2
May	165	14	8.5
June	147	19	12.9
July	182	11	6.0
August	159	13	8.2
September	128	15	11.7
October	173	17	9.8
November	214	19	8.9

Notes:

[1] Denotes provisional data regarding deaths.

[2] Denotes Provisional data regarding notifications.

1. 1995 data for deaths up to and including November are provisional occurrences relating to the most recently available registrations.

2. 1995 data for notifications are provisional notifications and do not contain the corrected notifications which can be received up to 3 months after original notification.

3. New procedures for coding cause of death from 1993, and the absence of medical enquiries, mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with earlier years. For most conditions however, including meningitis, these effects are small. More details may be found in OPCS Series DH2 for 1993, which was published in October 1995. Copies are available in the Library.

4. Notifications are assigned to month by date of end of week of notification.

5. Deaths are assigned to month by date of occurrence.

6. International Classification of Disease codes used for deaths are 013.0, 036.0, 047.0, 047.1, 047.8, 047.9, 049.0, 049.1, 053.0, 072.1, 091.8, 094.2, 320.0 and 322.0.

7. Percentage fatalities is the deaths as a percentage of notifications.

8. The notifications including meningococcal, pneumococcal and HIb meningitis.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed in his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3957]

Mr. Boswell: Consultants employed in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in each financial year from 1990–91 to 1994–95, and the subjects with which they were concerned, are indicated in the attached lists. Central records are not yet available in a form which directly relates the two lists, and such correlation could only be achieved at disproportionate cost. Total expenditure in each of the years concerned was:

1990–91: £4,495,793

1991–92: £5,374,284

1992–93: £7,010,814

1993–94: £12,169,785

1994–95: £11,551,382

CONSULTANTS

1990–91

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte
KPMG Peat Marwick Mclintock
National Remote Sensing Centre
PA Consultants
Price Waterhouse
Touche Ross
Worthy Associates
Wye College

1991–92

Building Energy Solutions
Cambridge Environmental Research Consultants
Clark Whitehill
Coopers and Lybrand
David Thompson
DEGW
Duhig Berry Ltd.
DWJ
Ernst and Young
Institute for Terrestrial Ecology
KPMG
Mouncey and Partners
P. A. Christensen
Price Waterhouse
PSA
Purcon
Quentin Bell
Robertson Gould
Sir Ronald MacIntosh
TM Energy Consultants
Touche Ross
Vauntberry PLC
Worthy Associates
Worthy Management Consultants
Wye College

1992–93

Asbourne BioSciences
BNSS
Brandt Computers
Building Energy Solutions
CCTA
Coopers and Lybrand
DIS Industrial Consultants
Disability Matters Ltd.
E. M. Consultants

Ernst and Young
Ferriby Marine
Fletcher King
Forward
Hoskyns
Johnstone and Wright Consultants
Mouncey and Partners
Mr. Peter Goodall
NIFES Consulting Group
Price Waterhouse
PSA
Sequent Computer Systems
Shreeveport Management Consultancy
Sir Ronald MacIntosh
SRU
Theodore Goddard
Touche Ross
Triad
University of Hull

1993–94
ARC International PLC
Ashbourne BioSciences
BMT Reliability Consultants Ltd.
BNSS
Building Energy Solutions
Cambridge Environmental Research Consultants
Cambridge Ergonomics Ltd.
Civil Service College
Coopers and Lybrand
Currie and Brown
Dr. R. A. Hoodless
E. G. Burnett Aberdeen
Energy Auditing Agency Ltd.
Ernst and Young
Ferriby Marine
Forward Catering Consultancy Service
Halcrow and Partners
Hoskyns Group PLC
Insight
Korda and Co Ltd.
KPMG Peat Marwick
L. G. Mouchel and Partners
Lawrence Hewitt Partnership
McNeil Robertson
Miro Communications Ltd.
MJN Facilities Management
Mott Macdonald
Mouncey and Partners
P. E. International plc
PA Consulting Group
Pentana Ltd.
Personnel Health and Safety Consultants Ltd.
Posford Duvivier
PSA
Quanta Learning Systems
Risk and Policy Analysts
RNIB
SEMA Group
Sequent Computer Systems
Shreeveport Management Consultancy
Siemens Nixdorf
Stoy Hayeard
Teodore Goddard
Touche Ross
Triad Special Systems Ltd
8 Universities and Agricultural Colleges
A.D.C.
CEAS (Consultants) Ltd.
Centre for Agricultural Strategy
Christopher Absolon
Coopers and Lybrand
Ernst and Young
Euro P. A. Associates
G. Lewis
George Trew Dunn Partnership
Institute for Employment Research
Institute of Educational Technology, O
J. M. Consulting Ltd.
K.P.M.G.
Laurence Gould Partnership
Lawrence Hewitt Partnership
M. Fussey
National Remote Sensing Centre
Persona
Professor Bruce Traill
Project Management Services
Prospect Management Services
R.A.S.
Safety First
SEMA
Split Image
Stoy Hayward
Thorburn Colqhoun Ltd.
University of Reading
W. S. Atkins
WEFA Ltd.

PROJECT
1990–91
Assistance with Efficiency Scrutiny on staff attitudes
Dairy Crest Foods
Helping with the CVL transition to Agency status
Human Resource development project
Performance measurement of the efficiency of licensing measures
Pilot Beef and Sheep Extensification schemes
Regional Structure Review—administration of grants and subsidies
Remote sensing of land affected by set-aside and oilseeds schemes
Training Needs Analysis
Training Review

1991–92
Advice on development of ADAS marketing plan, restructuring and corporate image
Advice on Omicron Invoicing System
Advice on work recording system
Aid for Soviet Union
Dairy Crest Foods
Efficiency Scrutiny—reorganizing of Purchasing and Supply
Helping with CVL transition to Agency status
Helping with CSL transition to Agency status
Monitoring and Targeting Service
Monitoring of the Meadowland option of the countryside premium scheme
Performance measurement of the efficiency of licensing measures
Placement of Contracts and central call-off agreements
PM's help to Soviet Union
Potential uses of set-aside land to benefit wildlife
Processing controls for PES data within FP Division
Project management system development
Review of Meat Hygiene (Enforcement and Inspection Charges)
Review of Ministry's Regional Organization
Socio-economic evaluation of the 1-year setaside scheme in England
St. Petersburg "Model Farm" Study
Survey of office chairs
Survey of Whitehall complex
Visits of various RSCs
1992–93
ADAS Technical
Advice on work recording system
CSL QA
CSL Technical
Development of payment record system
DFR Systems conversion
Energy Efficiency Audit
European Network
HECTOR (Personnel)
Legal Advice

Market Test—Cleaners
Monitoring and targeting service
PM's help to Soviet Union
Preparation of guidance manuals
Relocation Review
Review of Agency internal audit
Review of Food From Britain
Review of internal audit practices and procedures
Surveys of Nobel. Ergon and Eastbury Houses
Trader Information System
Valuation of Market
Visits, commenting on strategy, and speaking at seminar

1993–94
Advice on part-time working
Coastal Protection Survey
Consultancy service for attendance at a meeting with Mr. Griffiths in August
Core-MAFF Installation project management
Core-MAFF technical requirement
DCM
Development of new reporting database
Development of PC version of food model
Development of project management software
Development of project reporting system
DSE Workstation Assessment
Efficiency Review—cleaning services at Carlisle RSC
EO Policy
Ergonomic appraisal of furniture
Evaluation of CVL
Evaluation of VMD
Examination of food
Feasibility study on the market testing of pesticide residue analysis
Furniture assessment for screen equipment users
Grade 7 development
Health and Safety Assessment
HEO development
In-house training for ITD staff involved in Customer Service Support market test
Introduction to EC
Introduction to EC Juniors
Market Testing Training
Market Testing Training and Briefing
Market testing training for the in-house team at DFR
Monitoring and Targeting
MRP
PFM
Preparation of draft contract/SLA documentation in the free pollution advice to farmers market test
Principles and Practices of Market Testing
Production of Instructions
Project Management Building Works
Relocation Consultancy Review
Review of audit risk index
Review of specification for audit planning control system
Risks assessment of workstations to comply with H and S Regs, 1992
SMDP Workshop
Support to project sponsor
Survey of Guildford site
Team software
Update of HGCI forms
Valuation consultancy

Badgers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badgers have been *(a)* captured and *(b)* destroyed in each of the last three years following (i) direct action by his Department and (ii) the issuing of licences to third parties. [5309]

Mrs. Browning: The total number of badgers captured and destroyed in removal operations carried out by the Department following tuberculosis breakdowns in cattle in each of the last three years was as follows:

Year	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*[1]
Total captured	1,246	1,864	1,926
Total destroyed	1,094	1,682	1,448

[1] To date.

In the three years from 1993 to date, 10 badgers have been captured and one badger destroyed under licences issued to third parties by this Ministry.

Imported Fish

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to ensure that fish imported for angling do not spread disease to native fish species. [5551]

Mr. Baldry: All imports of live fish into this country have to meet strict rules intended to prevent the spread of disease. All fish from elsewhere in the European Union that are susceptible to the diseases infectious haematopoietic necrosis and viral haemorrhagic septicaemia have to come from zones approved by the Commission as free of these diseases, and all other fish must either come from such zones or from enclosed waters isolated from natural watercourses; all coarse fish susceptible to the disease spring viraemia of carp have to be certified by the member state of origin as coming from a site that has been tested and found free of SVC. Similar rules apply to fish from third countries, with the exception of tropical fish that cannot survive in the natural environment in this country and goldfish and koi from countries outside the geographical range of SVC.

Over the past year, we have stepped up our efforts to ensure that these rules are observed. We have increased the number of spot checks on imported consignments of coarse fish, and have recruited an additional fish health inspector with an investigative background to concentrate full time on monitoring fish imports. As recommended by the Agriculture Select Committee's recent fifth report, a leaflet and publicity campaign "Don't Import Disease" was launched by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 12 July. This reminded all concerned of the need to follow the rules on imports; of the risks they run if they buy fish of dubious origin; of additional precautions they can take to avoid disease; and of the efforts, including prosecution, we are making to stop illegal imports.

Dioxin Hot Spots

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the dioxin hot spots identified by his Department; and what action has been taken in respect of each site. [5463]

Mrs. Browning: Surveillance conducted by the Ministry since 1990 has found unacceptable concentrations of dioxins only in cows' milk from three farms in the Bolsover district of Derbyshire. Milk from these farms was prevented from entering the human food supply. Regular monitoring of cows' milk from this area continues. No other areas have been identified where concentrations of dioxins in cows' milk are above the normal background range.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to monitor wind-blown deposition of dioxin-contaminated particles arising from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food identified dioxin hot spots in the United Kingdom. [5682]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will continue its programme of monitoring the dioxins content of cows' milk produced in the vicinity of selected industrial sites which are representative of processes that may release dioxins. This programme assures the safety of the food supply and assesses environmental contamination.

Pesticides

Mr. Mans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he plans to make to the system of approving pesticides. [6520]

Mr. Boswell: Ministers make decisions on the approval of pesticides on the basis of recommendations from the independent expert Advisory Committee on Pesticides. I have agreed with my colleagues in the other regulatory Departments that its present sub-committee on pesticides will be replaced by a smaller, more flexible, inter-departmental secretariat to ensure that the UK can make a timely and effective input into the European regulatory system for plant protection products. The new body begins work immediately on the European front and will take over the processing of applications under the UK system during the course of next year.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [6521]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A further report on BSE in Great Britain will be available tomorrow. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House at 11.00 a.m.

The report provides detailed statistics on the progress of the BSE epidemic, updated to the end of October 1995 and information about the latest EC measures for the export of beef to other member states, the new legislative controls to reinforce the measures already in place for the disposal of specified bovine offal and the announcement I made on 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*, in which I indicated my intention to legislate to prevent the use of bovine vertebral column in the production of mechanically recovered meat. We shall shortly be making an order to effect this change, to come into force on 15 December.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Graduation Rate

15. **Mr. Wolfson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current graduation rate in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the other European Union. [3882]

Mr. Forth: In 1992, the United Kingdom rate was over 20 per cent.—virtually double the European Union average for Bachelor's degrees of about 10 per cent. and second only to Denmark's rate of some 22 per cent. Since 1992, our graduation rate has risen further as a result of recent increases in participation.

Grant-maintained Status

16. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a progress report on the transition to grant-maintained status by state schools. [3883]

Mrs. Gillan: There are now 1,085 grant-maintained schools and 62 more schools have embarked on the GM process.

21. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the number of schools balloting on grant-maintained status. [3891]

Mrs. Gillan: Parents are voting now, or will be voting, in about 19 schools' ballots, and have voted in 27 more ballots since the start of the autumn term.

Schools (Standards)

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she is taking to boost overall standards in schools. [3884]

Mr. Robin Squire: All our education reforms, from the national curriculum to local management of schools, act to raise standards. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools has confirmed that standards are, indeed, rising.

18. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she is taking to improve standards of reading. [3886]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We are taking action across the board from nursery education to training and education for adults.

Higher Education (Access)

19. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her policy in respect of access to higher education levels determined by A-level grades. [3887]

Mr. Forth: It is for higher education institutions to determine their admissions policies and to decide on individual applications. In doing so, they rightly take into account a wide range of qualifications for entry, including GCE A-levels.

Education Spending (Cheshire)

20. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on education spending in Cheshire. [3889]

Mr. Robin Squire: Education spending in Cheshire is a matter for Cheshire local education authority. Cheshire's provisional education SSA for 1996–97 is £349.051 million—an increase of £17.024 million or 5.1 per cent., which is above the national average.

Arabic Teaching

22. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy that the teaching of Arabic in schools where appropriate and practicable shall be made available to school children at the time when their imitative linguistic ability is at its zenith. [3892]

Mr. Paice: All secondary school pupils must study a modern foreign language as part of the national curriculum. Primary schools are free to teach languages but are not required to do so. Arabic is one of 19 languages which schools may teach as a national curriculum subject. It is for schools to decide whether to teach Arabic, according to their resources and parental demand.

GCSE Results (English and Mathematics)

23. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she has taken to address the decline in GCSE results in English and mathematics in the current year. [3893]

Mr. Paice: The numbers achieving higher grade GCSEs in mathematics and English actually increased in 1995, consolidating the significant improvements in performance in recent years. But we cannot be complacent and there is still room for further improvement if we are to meet the demanding national targets. The new national curriculum at key stage 4 will be introduced from September 1996 and places greater emphasis on English and maths. That will help schools to help pupils achieve even better results in those core subjects.

Teachers (Information Technology Expertise)

24. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to increase the level of expertise in information technology amongst teachers. [3895]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 21 November, *Official Report*, column 99.

Student Loans

25. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what organisations or interested parties have expressed support for her proposed reforms of the provision of student loans. [3896]

Mr. Forth: My officials have had a number of positive discussions with banks and building societies. But these have been on a commercial-in-confidence basis and must remain so for the present.

My officials have also invited representatives of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals and the National Union of Students to discuss our proposals. The meeting with the CVCP was constructive. The NUS has not yet replied.

Secondary Schools (Expenditure)

26. **Mr Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current annual total average expenditure per pupil in secondary schools; and what the equivalent figure was in 1979. [3897]

Mr. Robin Squire: Net institutional expenditure per pupil in LEA-maintained secondary schools was £607 in cash 1979–80 and £2,245 in 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available. In real terms that is a 50 per cent. increase.

Assisted Places Scheme

27. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received about the assisted places scheme. [3898]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) earlier today.

Special Needs Education

28. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to increase provision for special needs education. [3899]

Mrs. Gillan: It is for local education authorities to allocate funds to the schools they maintain, including funds for special educational needs. The recent local government finance settlement took account of the need to spend across all educational services, including special educational needs.

Training and Enterprise Councils

29. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the Budget on TECs. [3900]

Mr. Paice: We plan that programmes delivered by TECs in 1996–97 to be £1,437 million, a rise of 5 per cent. over anticipated expenditure this year.

Primary Schools (Reading Ability)

30. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she intends to take to improve children's reading ability in primary schools. [3901]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have recently announced proposals to establish a network of literacy centres which will work with groups of local primary schools to improve teaching and learning. This will complement action already taken, including the revised national curriculum, regular statutory test and assessment, publication of the results, regular inspection, measures to deal with failing schools, and improvements in teacher training.

Parental Choice

31. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received on parental choice and catchment areas in the past year. [3902]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department receives a great many inquiries from parents, both in writing and by telephone, about parental choice in relation to school admissions. No central register of such inquiries is kept.

Student Loan Scheme

32. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* those banks which have communicated their willingness to take part in a private sector student loans scheme and *(b)* those which have communicated their unwillingness to do so. [3903]

Mr. Forth: My officials are continuing discussions with a number of banks and building societies. These have been on a commercial-in-confidence basis. That must remain the position for the time being.

Social Chapter

33. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last met other EU employment ministers to discuss the social chapter. [3904]

Mr. Forth: The Government have consistently said that it will not accept the draft social chapter, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister refused to agree at Maastricht. That remains our position, and we make it clear to other member states when the issue arises.

School Budgets, Nottinghamshire

34. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools in Nottinghamshire will not face budget reductions in 1996. [3905]

Mrs. Gillan: The budgets of Nottinghamshire schools are set by the county council. The Government have made an extra £18 million available to the authority through the education standard spending assessment. It is up to the authority to make effective use of this additional resource.

Education Resources (Lancashire)

35. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from Lancashire county council about education resources. [3906]

Mrs. Gillan: An all-party delegation visited me on 16 November, and we had a most helpful discussion about capital resources for schools.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by her Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3961]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Remploy

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish the detailed calculations of flow-back benefits to the Treasury of Remploy's employees. [5081]

Mr. Paice: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 24 November, *Official Report*, column *408*.

Workstart

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate she has made of the redundancy, deadweight and substitution effects of the pilot workstart schemes; and what estimate she has made of the proportion of Workstart beneficiaries who remain in paid employment with the same employer *(a)* six months and *(b)* one year after the end of the wage subsidy; [5383]

(2) what research has been undertaken by or on behalf of the Government into the cost effectiveness of the workstart scheme in creating jobs for the long-term unemployed; and if she will summarise the results of that research. [5384]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 13 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about research issues surrounding the Workstart pilots.

Evaluation was carried out in 1994 and the report was lodged in the House of Commons Library at the end of last year. The survey covered a wide range of issues including characteristics of participating firms, attitudes towards the scheme, and estimates of deadweight and substitution. The programme has been set up to preclude vacancies which come about through the redundancy or dismissal of an existing employee.

Employers were asked about the extent to which Workstart created new vacancies. For the sample as a whole, 17% of all jobs registered under Workstart were generated as a direct result of the subsidy.

Information on the proportion of beneficiaries remaining in employment is being collected three months after leaving or completing Workstart. Results from this follow up study will be available in late 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many pilot schemes were run under the workstart scheme following the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1994; how many new job opportunities she estimates were created by these pilots; and what was their total cost; [5405]

(2) how many people were placed under the workstart scheme at the start of each month since its inception. [5409]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Michael Meacher, dated 13 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about operational aspects of the Workstart pilots.

Workstart was piloted in four areas between June 1993 and December 1994. The aim of the pilots was to test the effectiveness of encouraging employers to recruit people unemployed for two years or more by paying a subsidy for one year. Under these pilots, employers were paid £60.00 for the first six months, and £30.00 for the remainder of the year.

In his November 1994 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced two further pilots designed to test the impact of varying the amount and duration of the subsidy. The pilots started in April 1995 and will finish in March 1996.

These figures requested are in the attached table (Annex A).

The number of new job opportunities created, and their cost, under the Workstart pilots will not be available until an evaluation of the more recent pilots is completed in November 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

Workstart scheme starts: July 1993 to November 1994

Annex A

Month[1]	*Number of starts* *In-month*	*Cumulative*
December 1993	36	158
January	66	224
February	89	313
March	132	445
April	92	537
May	110	647
June	142	789
July	174	963
August	132	1,095
September	230	1,325
October	96	1,421
November	75	1,496
December 1994	83[2]	1,579[2]

[1] A breakdown is not available for the months of July 1993 to November 1993; there were a total of 122 starts in this period.

[2] Includes 30 starts from previous periods, which Tyneside TEC had overlooked when providing earlier information each month.

Workstart scheme starts: April 1995 to October 1995

Month	*Number of starts* *In-month*	*Cumulative*
April	3	3
May	47	50
June	49	99
July	72	171
August	103	274
September	102	376
October	94	470

Shire Counties' Education Expenditure

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the percentage of shire counties' education budget which is spent on *(a)* schools and *(b)* for non-school expenditure, together with the amount of money this represents per school pupil in each case. [5308]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows for each shire county the percentage of net recurrent expenditure spent in 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, on: *(a)* pre-primary, primary, secondary and special schools; and *(b)* other education services, including education other than at school, adult education, continuing education, discretionary awards, youth and other community services, service strategy and regulation and education support services. The table also shows the amount of money per pupil which this expenditure represents, though in this case of non-schools expenditure school pupils are not the principal clients.

Shire counties—Expenditure on education and its cost per pupil pre-primary/primary, secondary and special

Net recurrent expenditure 1993–94

LEA	*Percentage of expenditure (a)*	*Cost per pupil*	*Percentage of expenditure (b)*	*Cost per pupil*
Avon	94	2,226	6	148
Berkshire	93	2,126	7	159
Buckinghamshire	93	2,246	7	159
Cambridgeshire	93	2,109	7	154
Cheshire	90	2,007	10	221
Cleveland	96	2,076	4	97
Cornwall	92	2,095	8	192
Cumbria	89	2,081	11	250
Derbyshire	92	2,240	8	182
Devon	95	2,103	5	117
Dorset	91	2,039	9	212
Durham	95	2,219	5	126
East Sussex	95	2,289	5	132
Essex	90	2,259	10	241
Gloucestershire	91	2,096	9	198
Hampshire	93	2,173	7	156
Hereford and Worcester	95	2,110	5	105
Hertfordshire	92	2,114	8	184
Humberside	93	2,206	7	170
Isle of Wight	92	2,228	8	188
Kent	88	2,025	12	268
Lancashire	93	2,275	7	160
Leicestershire	90	2,120	10	235
Lincolnshire	88	2,148	12	289
Norfolk	94	2,233	6	155
North Yorkshire	94	2,127	6	142
Northamptonshire	90	1,983	10	231
Northumberland	92	2,080	8	177
Nottinghamshire	95	2,338	5	121
Oxfordshire	95	2,259	5	125
Shropshire	93	2,219	7	171
Somerset	89	2,103	11	273
Staffordshire	94	1,938	6	119
Suffolk	93	2,166	7	157
Warwickshire	95	2,171	5	109
West Sussex	93	2,132	7	149
Wiltshire	89	2,167	11	262
Total	92	2,153	8	177

Teachers' Pension Fund

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which organisations she consulted when making her decision to privatise the teachers' pension fund. [5287]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no such decision. There is no question of privatising the teachers' superannuation scheme, which does not have a real pension fund. Any contract would be solely for the administration of the scheme. We shall let such a contract only if it would deliver better value for money than keeping the administration of the scheme in the public sector.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children were being educated *(a)* in schools under local education authority control, *(b)* in grant-maintained schools and *(c)* privately at the most recent available date. [5497]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table:

Numbers of pupils[1] in schools in England January 1995 (provisional)

	Number
LEA maintained schools[2]	6,787,443
Grant-maintained schools[3]	663,110
Independent schools[4]	543,433

[1] Head count of pupils of all ages.

[2] Includes nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.

[3] Includes primary, secondary and special schools.

[4] Includes fee-paying schools. Excludes City Technology Colleges.

Nursery Provision

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on progress on provision of nursery education for all four year olds. [4126]

Mr. Robin Squire: Good progress has been made towards the implementation of our proposals to expand pre-school provision for four-year olds.

We have appointed a private contractor—Capita Managed Services Ltd—to administer phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme, which will take place in Kensington and Chelsea, Norfolk, Wandsworth and Westminster. The Department, the voucher contractor and the volunteer LEAs are working closely together to finalise details for phase 1.

We have consulted on a number of issues related to the operation of the scheme. We are currently considering the responses and will publish our conclusions early in the new year.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total expenditure on discretionary awards provided by each local education authority in the last year for which figures are available. [5004]

Mr. Forth: The information requested for the academic year 1993–94, the latest for which data are available, is shown in the following table:

Expenditure by local education authorities on discretionary awards[1]: England and Wales

Academic Year 1993–94

	Total HE and FE expenditure[2] £000s
Corporation of London	24
Camden[3]	n/a
Greenwich	349
Hackney	991
Hammersmith and Fulham	178
Islington	184
Kensington and Chelsea	637
Lambeth	127
Lewisham	1,073
Southwark	273
Tower Hamlets	467
Wandsworth	1,162
Westminster[3]	n/a
London Residuary Body	76
Barking and Dagenham	299
Barnet	127
Bexley	409
Brent	497
Bromley	714
Croydon	609
Ealing	204
Enfield	357
Haringey	16
Harrow	103
Havering	654
Hillingdon	193
Hounslow	386
Kingston upon Thames	982
Merton	397
Newham	473
Redbridge	455
Richmond upon Thames	461
Sutton	157
Waltham Forest	246
Birmingham	1,725
Coventry	438
Dudley	175
Sandwell	198
Solihull	343
Walsall	537
Wolverhampton	67
Knowsley	816
Liverpool	2,200
St. Helens	507
Sefton	958
Wirral	2,066
Bolton	985
Bury	364
Manchester	2,363
Oldham	823
Rochdale	819
Salford	143
Stockport	1,071
Tameside	452
Trafford	411
Wigan	524
Barnsley	412
Doncaster	754
Rotherham	1,002
Sheffield	692
Bradford	2,181
Calderdale	399
Kirklees	2,300
Leeds	3,231
Wakefield	504
Gateshead	762
Newcastle upon Tyne	890
North Tyneside	1,031
South Tyneside	647
Sunderland	1,296
Isles of Scilly	16
Avon	2,738
Bedfordshire	2,073
Berkshire	1,825
Buckinghamshire	924
Cambridgeshire	920
Cheshire	5,363
Cleveland	2,027
Cornwall	2,574
Cumbria	9,523
Derbyshire	3,491
Devon	4,726
Dorset	6,429
Durham	2,381
East Sussex	2,131
Essex	4,830
Gloucestershire	2,467
Hampshire	8,219
Hereford and Worcester	2,036
Hertfordshire	2,549
Humberside	3,462
Isle of Wight	459
Kent	8,728
Lancashire	7,301
Leicestershire	6,265
Lincolnshire	1,739
Norfolk	3,024
North Yorkshire	4,419
Northamptonshire	1,826
Northumberland	1,409
Nottinghamshire	2,896
Oxfordshire	1,285
Shropshire	1,702
Somerset	1,912
Staffordshire	1,114
Suffolk	2,535
Surrey	3,575

Expenditure by local education authorities on discretionary awards[1]: England and Wales

Academic Year 1993–94

	Total HE and FE expenditure[2] £000s
Warwickshire	12
West Sussex	1,856
Wiltshire	1,820
Clwyd	1,018
Dyfed	817
Gwent	3,393
Gwynedd	1,189
Mid Glamorgan	1,584
Powys	647
South Glamorgan	1,236
West Glamorgan	965
England and Wales[4]	184,132

[1] Including major discretionary awards (paid at at least 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate) and minor awards (paid at less than 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate).

[2] Including expenditure on fees for discretionary award placement year sandwich students.

[3] Camden and Westminster were unable to provide all of the information required on discretionary awards expenditure.

[4] England and Wales total is grossed to compensate for incomplete returns.

Source:
F503G

Access Courses

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy that older students on access courses will remain entitled to older students allowance if their performance gives them access to the subsequent course they were preparing for. [5652]

Mr. Forth: Students who were enrolled on full-time access courses prior to 1 September 1995 and who transfer immediately to a course designated for mandatory awards purposes, disregarding any intervening vacation, will be eligible for the older student's allowance.

Student Allowances

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discretion a student's local authority has in paying an older student's allowance when the Secretary of State has agreed that the student is entitled to such an allowance. [5653]

Mr. Forth: Where a student meets the conditions set out in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations, he is eligible for the older student's allowance. The provision of these regulations are statutory; therefore local education authorities have no discretion.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many students were entitled to receive the older students allowance in 1993–94 and 1994–95; and how many are currently receiving them; [5505]

(2) how many of the students currently in receipt of the older students allowance are on courses expected to conclude *(a)* at the end of the present academic year or earlier and *(b)* at a date later than September 1996. [5506]

Mr. Forth: The number of students eligible to receive the older students allowance—OSA—in the academic year 1993–94 was 41,000. Information for later years is not yet available. Information on students currently in receipt of the OSA who are on courses expected to conclude at the end of a particular academic year is not collected centrally.

Prince's Trust

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the contacts her Department has with the Prince's trust in respect of training for young people seeking employment; and if she will make a statement. [5685]

Mr. Paice: The Department strongly supports the aims of the Prince's trust and has frequent contact at ministerial and official level. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State met the chairman of the Prince's trust volunteers, for example, as recently as 15 November. The Department also provides active support for the training of young people through the secondment of officials and client referrals from the Employment Service.

School Attendance

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to reduce the numbers of children who are taken out of school for long periods by their parents. [3888]

Mr. Robin Squire: Parents must act responsibly. The Department has just published a leaflet to help schools and LEAs remind parents of the importance of regular school attendance.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children are currently being educated in grant-maintained schools. [3885]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg).

EU Employees

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many employees of *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* other European Union bodies there are in (i) Greater London and (ii) other areas of the United Kingdom. [5634]

Mr. David Davis: I have been asked to reply.

This information is available from the Commission Office at:

No. 8 Storey's Gate
London SW1P 3AT

and the European Parliament Office at:

2 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AA

DEFENCE

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* serving officers and *(b)* retired officers are employed in each of his Department's executive agencies. [5518]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executives of the agencies concerned. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Rear Admiral N. R. Esssenhigh to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying, as Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office, to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving officers and retired officers employed in the Hydrographic Office. As at 1 December this year, some 7 serving RN officers were employed at the Hydrographic Office together with 1 Petty Officer. In terms of retired officers the total, at the same date was 12.

I hope this has been of assistance.

Letter from Air Vice-Marshall R. H. Kyle to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving officers and Retired Officers employed in the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency.

There are 323 serving officers and 12 Retired Officers serving in the Agency at present.

I hope the information meets your requirements.

Letter from Air Commodore A. A. Nicholson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of serving and retiring officers employed in Defence Agencies. The figures for the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency are:

Serving Officers: 1169

Retired Officers: 22

Notes as at 31 March 1995.

The figures for serving officers do not include trainees.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel & Training Command.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving officers and how many retired officers are employed in each of his Department's agencies. I am answering on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

DERA currently employs 472 serving personnel, this number includes all ranks, not just commissioned officers. The Agency also employs 10 members of staff in Retired Officer grades.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving officers and retired officers employed in the Disposal Sales Agency, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

There is one serving officer and one retired officer employed in my Agency. I also employ one officer retired from the Royal Navy as a specialist consultant.

Letter from Brigadier J. R. Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State about the number of serving officers and Retired Officers employed in each of the MOD's agencies.

The Army Base Repair Organisation currently employs 6 serving officers and 2 personnel in Retired Officer appointments.

Letter from John R. Prince to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about serving and retired officers employed in Defence agencies as this matter falls in my area of responsibility.

2. The situation is:

(a) Serving officers in ATSA: 53

(b) Retired officers in ATSA: 3

Letter from Brigadier M. G. R. Hodson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying to your Questions (PQ9619 and 9620) to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the numbers of military and civilian staff, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency (DTMX).

2. DTMX formed in April this year; the numbers and costs of civilian staff pre-Agency relate, therefore, to the last financial year. This year's numbers and costs are at this stage, only an estimate. The costs for 1994/95 have been uprated to 1995/96 levels, so that both sets of figures are at the same cost base.

3. Details are:

1994/95: 141.5 civilian staff, at a cost of £2,408,721

1995/96: 151.5 civilian staff, at a cost of £2,602,310

4. The number of military and ex-military officers currently employed within my Agency are:

18 (commissioned) serving officers

5 retired officers

Letter from Commodore A. D. Ferguson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving officers and retired officers employed in the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The current totals of serving and retired officers are:

Serving Officers: 761

Retired Officers: 38

Letter from Air Vice-Marshal R. H. Kyle to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving officers and Retired Officers employed in the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency.

There are 323 serving officers and 12 Retired Officers serving in the Agency at present.

I hope the information meets with your requirements.

Letter from Brigadier T. McG Brown to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving and retired officers employed by the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

As at October 1995 this Agency employed 21 serving officers and 1 retired officer, engaged as a RO2.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about serving officers and retired officers as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

There are no serving officers or staff in the retired officers grades working in the Meterological Office.

Letter from Captain W. S. Graham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the number of serving and retired officers in the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO) as this falls within my area of responsibility:

(a) Number of Serving Officers: 11

(b) Number of Retired Officers: Nil

Letter from Brigadier A. J. Hoon to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving and retired officers employed in Defence agencies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

In respect of the Military Survey Defence Agency, 56 serving officers and 7 retired officers are currently employed.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of service and civilian staff employed within the Defence Analytical Services Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

In reply to your Question number 9619, I can advise that DASA has no serving or retired officers.

With regard to your Question number 9620 Figure 1 below details the numbers of civilian staff, with associated costs, employed within DASA for the period of the year prior to becoming an Agency to this current year.

Figure 1—Staff numbers and associated costs for DASA

Staff Numbers:	*1 April 1991*	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*
Full time equivalents	144.5	140.0	130.5	117.0	110.5
Students on placement	16.0	4.0	9.0	9.0	10.0
Total	160.5	144.0	139.5	126.0	120.5

	£ million
Year	*Staff Costs*
1991–92[1]	3.50
1992–93	3.24
1993–94	2.97
1994–95	2.75
1995–96[2]	2.69

[1] Responsibility for staff costs did not transfer to DASA until 1992–93. Costs shown for 1991–92 are estimates based upon 1992–93 pay rates.

[2] Costs shown for the current year, 1995–96, are latest estimates.

Letter from I. S. Mitchelson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving and retired officers employed by this Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

There are no serving or retired officers in the employment of Service Children's Schools (North West Europe).

Letter from Air Vice Marshal John May to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of serving and retired officers employed in Defence Agencies. The figures for the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency are:

Figures Serving Officers: 1,169)

Retired Officers: 22

Notes:

As at 31 March 1995 figures do not include trainees.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel & Training Command.

Letter from Colonel A. H. Roache to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about serving and retired officers employed in Defence Agencies. This falls within my area of responsibility.

The number of officers currently employed at the Defence Animal Centre is:

(a) Serving Officers: 12—of which 2 are not on the Agency payroll.

(b) Retired Officers: one

Letter from Brigadier M. J. Roycroft to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about staff numbers and costs within this Executive Agency.

The answer to your first question concerning serving and retired officers is that there are currently 19 Military Officers and 8 Civil Servants in the retired Officer Class working in this Agency.

You also asked for details on civilian staff:

(a) At year end prior to Agency establishment we had 502 staff at a total cost of £7.886M.

(b) At year end post Agency establishment we had 502 staff at a total cost of £8.373M.

In addition to the small rise in cost due to pay awards, the apparent additional cost is due to the absorption throughout the period leading up to the formation of the Agency of personnel from other areas.

Letter from Air Commodore P. C. Ayee to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving and retired officers who are employed in executive agencies since, as the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment, this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

Fifty four serving RAF officers and 2 retired officers are established within this agency.

Letter from Brigadier A. W. Pollard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about how many (a) serving officers and (b) retired officers are employed in each of his Department's executive agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility. As at today I employ thirty commissioned serving military officers and one Retired Officer Grade 2.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of serving officers and retired officers employed in the Defence Accounts Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The answer to both parts of your Question is NIL.

Letter from Colonel G. H. Wilson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the number of retired and serving officers in this Agency.

The details you requested are:-

(a) One

(b) None

Letter from Brian Rain to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 8 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of serving officers and retired officers employed in this Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The information you seek is as follows

Serving Officers—NIL

Retired Officers—1

If you have any questions about this please do not hesitate to call me.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of civilian staff in his Department in the year before the establishment of the first executive agency and for each year since the number *(a)* in his Department and *(b)* in each agency, together with the staff costs in each case. [5522]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The first executive agencies were set up in this Department in April 1990. The information required for 1989–90 onwards, for the Department as a whole, is contained in tables 4 and 5 of the 1995 MOD departmental report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The chief executives of each agency will be replying separately, giving details of their individual agencies.

Letter from Brigadier J. R. Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State about the number of civilian staff in each agency, together with staff costs, in the year before establishment and in each year since.

The information for the Army Base Repair Organisation, which was launched on 1 April 1993, is as follows:

(a) Civilian staff numbers

1 April 1993: 3,605

1 April 1994: 3,510

1 April 1995: 3,326

1 November 1995: 3,263

(b) Civilian staff costs

1992–93: £58.27 M[1]

1993–94: £56.74M[1]

1994–95: £55.55M[1]

[1] Costs reflect expenditure actually incurred and have not been adjusted for inflation.

Letter from Brigadier K. J. W. Goad to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December, 1995:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the staffing levels within Defence Agencies. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as the Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA).

ABSDA was formed on the 4th April 1995 and the current staffing details are as follows:

Number of Serving Military Officers = 82 as at Dec 95

Number of Retired Officers = 18 as at Dec 95

Number of Civilian Staff (Ind & Non Ind) = 5163 as at Dec 95.

The forecast civilian staff costs for the current financial year are £83.4M.

I believe that the other parts of your question are to be answered by other authorities. I hope that the figures I have supplied fully satisfy your requirement. If you have any queries or require clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number and cost of civilian staff employed in my Agency in the years since my Agency was launched.

You will appreciate the numbers employed fluctuate throughout the year. For ease of comparison I have listed the numbers employed on 1 April each year, starting with 1 April 91 when the Defence Accounts Agency was launched.

1 April 1991: 2,184

1 April 1992: 2,139

1 April 1993: 2,016

1 April 1994: 1,983

1 April 1995: 1,791

1 December 1995: 1,523

Financial year	*£ million*
1991–92	31.46
1992–93	32.38
1993–94	31.61
1994–95	31.92

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from Colonel A. H. Roache to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about civilian staff numbers and costs in Defence Agencies. This falls within my area of responsibility.

The number of civilian staff employed at the Defence Animal Centre is:

Year	*Number*	*Cost £000s*
1991–92	40	426
1992–93	40	461
1993–94	40	507
1994–95	41	510
1995–96	49	592

Letter from Brigadier M. J. Roycroft to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about staff numbers and costs within this Executive Agency.

The answer to your first question concerning serving and retired officers is that there are currently 19 Military Officers and 8 Civil Servants in the retired Officer Class working in this Agency.

You also asked for details on civilian staff:

(a) At year end prior to Agency establishment we had 502 staff at a total cost of £7.886M.

(b) At year end post Agency establishment we had 502 staff at a total cost of £8.373M.

In addition to the small rise in cost due to pay awards, the apparent additional cost is due to the absorption throughout the period leading up to the formation of the Agency of personnel from other areas.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence about staff costs and numbers in his Department and in each of his agencies since their establishment. I am replying on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

The Defence Research Agency (DRA) was established in 1991 and was incorporated into the larger Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in April of this year. DRA has published its Annual Report and Accounts, including details of staff costs, with social security and pension costs where appropriate, and average numbers, each year since 1991. Copies of the Reports have been placed in the library of the House. For ease of reference I have listed below the information you require.

	Average staff numbers	*Staff costs £ million*
1991–92	11,832	252.5
1992–93	11,094	238.1
1993–94	10,121	231.9
1994–95	8,601	222.7

There are as yet no figures for DERA, these will be published in the first Annual Report and Accounts for the enlarged Agency, covering the 1995/95 Financial Year, and will appear in the summer of 1996. A copy of this document will be placed in the library of the House.

I hope this information is helpful to you

Letter from Mr. T. McG. Brown to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number and costs of civilian staff employed in the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency in the year before the establishment of the Agency and in each subsequent year.

This Agency was established in July 1992 and for the year ending 31 March 1992 the number of civilians employed were 256 at an annual cost of £3.334m. For each of the subsequent years the average number of civilian employees and associated costs were:

1992–93: 247, £3.907

1993–94: 316, £4,801

1994–95: 293, £4,721

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Brigadier M. G. R. Hodson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying to your Question (PQ9619 and 9620) to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the numbers of military civilian staff, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency (DTMX).

2. DTMX formed in April this year; the numbers and costs of civilian staff pre-Agency relate, therefore, to the last financial year. This year's numbers and costs are at this stage, only an estimate. The costs for 1994/95 have been uprated to 1995/96 levels, so that both sets of figures are at the same cost base.

3. Details are:

1994/95: 141.5 civilian staff, at a cost of £2,408,721

1995/96: 151.5 civilian staff, at a cost of £2,602,310

4. The number of military and ex-military officers currently employed within my Agency are:

18 (commissioned) serving officers

5 retired officers

Letter from Keith Elleder to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff employed in the Disposal Sales Agency, and their associated costs, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The information you require is as follows:

	Staff numbers	*Staff costs at 1995–96 prices £ thousand*
Pre-agency status (1993–94)	98	2,215
Post-agency status (1994–96)	91	2,187
Forecast (1995–96)	75	2,017

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the number of civilian staff in this Agency and the staff costs.

The details you requested are:-

Year	*Civilian staff*	*Staff costs £ million*
1991–92	97.5	1,968
1992–93	97.5	2.078
1993–94	97	2,235
1994–95	94.5	2.287

Letter from Rear Admiral N. R. Essenhigh to Mr. Martin Redmond dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying, as Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office, to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff and their associated staff costs employed within the Hydrographic Office since it was first established as a Defence Agency in April 1990.

2. As regards the number of civilian staff in post at 1st April each year, the following is the information you require:

1 April 1990: 885

1 April 1991: 867

1 April 1992: 861

1 April 1993: 821

1 April 1994: 820

1 April 1995: 791

3. In terms of staff costs the following information is provided:

Financial year	*Staff cost £*
1990–91	14,492,652
1991–92	15,395,149
1992–93	16,047,932
1993–94	16,060,256
1994–95	16,493,049

4. I trust the above information has been of assistance. If you require any further amplification or classification please do not hesitate to get in touch with me or my staff.

Letter from Brigadier A. W. Pollard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff in his Department in the year before the establishment of the first executive agency and for each year since the number (a) in his Department and (b) in each agency, together with the staff costs in each case as this matter falls within my area of responsibility. The number of Civil Servants on LISA's strength on the date of its information, 21 Nov 94, was 327 which included 10 casuals. On 21 Nov 95 the number of Civil Servants was 334 of which 27 were casuals. This number would have reduced had two other units not merged with LISA during the year. The pay bill for Civil Service staff in LISA's first year was £6.86 million; this figure includes £200k for casuals and £275k overtime.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about staff and pay in MOD agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The figures for the Meteorological Office are:

	Average strength	*Pay £ million*
1989–90	2,447	48.8
1990–91	2,465	55.1
1991–92	2,499	59.9
1992–93	2,508	63.5
1993–94	2,502	64.3
1994–95	2,398	65.3

The value of pay includes the cost of National Insurance and pension provision. About 10% of the pay total represents allowances received by staff for shiftworking.

Letter from Brigadier A. J. Hoon to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about civilian staff numbers and costs, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility in respect of the Military Survey Defence Agency.

The information you require is shown on the attached table, and covers the four full Financial Years since the agency was formed in April 1991.

Military survey defence agency civilian staff numbers and costs

Serial	*Financial year*	*Staff numbers*[1]	*Staff costs*[2]
1	1991–92	906	£14.05m
2	1992–93	886	£14.70m
3	1993–94	865	£17.70m
4	1994–95	850	£18.23m

[1] Average number of civilian staff employed during the Financial Year.

[2] Unadjusted cash costs of Pay and ERNIC in all years. The agency did not assume responsibility for Accruing Superannuation Liability Contributions until FY 93/94. Earlier years therefore exclude this element.

Letter from Captain W. S. Graham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the number of Civilian staff together with costs in the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO) in the year before the establishment of the Agency and for each year since, as this falls within my area of responsibility:

(a) *Civilian Numbers and Cost pre Agency Status.* No figures are currently available as the organisation pre Agency comprised of 3 separate establishments (excluding DGST (N) personnel), whereas NARO now encompasses only 2 establishments and includes DGNBS (was DGST(N) personnel).

(b) *Civilian Numbers and Costs Post Agency.*

Year	*Number*	*£ million*
1992–93	1,520	26.710
1993–94	1,564	26.321
1994–95	1,557	27.124

Letter from Commodore A. D. Ferguson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff and staff costs for the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The figures quoted below for FY1994/95 reflect those for the Flag Officer Recruiting and Training Tasking Area which became the NRTA on 1 April 1995.

	1994–95 (actual)	*1995–96 (forecast)*
Civilian staff numbers	1,481	1,537
Civilian staff costs	£23.9 million	£24.8 million

The figures include both non industrial and industrial staff.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 8 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff and their costs for this Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

The information you seek is as follows:

	Civilian staff	*Costs* £
1992–93	69	1,359,958
1993–94	75	1,467,000
1994–95	76	1,513,000

Staff costs include salaries, wages, allowances, social security and pension costs.

If you have any questions about this please do not hesitate to call us.

Letter from Vice-Marshal R. H. Kyle to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff in the Maintenance Group Defence Agency for each year since its formation, together with the associated staff costs.

The RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency was formed on 1 April 1991. The civilian staff numbers and costs are shown on the attached list.

I hope that this information meets your requirements.

List of the RAF maintenance group defence agency civilian staff numbers and costs since inception

Year	*Average civilian staff numbers*	*Staff costs for year* £
1991–92	6,100	79,894,000
1992–93	6,000	83,420,000
1993–94	5,679	83,906,000
1994–95	4,666	68,281,000
1995–96	4,428	[1]70,000.00

[1] Estimated.

Letter from Air Commodore P. C. Ayee to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of civilian staff who are employed in executive agencies, and their associated costs, since, as the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment, this matter falls within my area of responsibility. The numbers are as follows:

		Number
Civilian staff numbers		
1 April 1994	—	746
22 November 1994	(Agency launch date)	752
1 April 1995	—	761
1 December 1995	—	741
Civilian staff costs		
Financial year 1993–94	—	£13.86
Financial year 1994–95	(Until launch)	£8.16
Financial year 1994–95	(From launch to end financial year)	£6.02
Financial year 1995–96	(Forecast spend)	£13.98

Letter from Air Commodore A. A. Nicholson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of civilian staff employed in Defence Agencies and their associated costs. The figures for the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency are:

Financial year	*Staff costs* £	*Established posts (average per financial year)*
Before launch of agency		
1993–94	37,020,873	2,437
After launch of agency		
1994–95	36,087,209	2,358
1995–96	30,907,849	1,960

Notes:

Figures are at 1995–96 prices and do not include trainees.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel and Training Command.

Letter from I. S. Mitchelson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number and cost of civilian staff employed by this Agency in the year before it was established and for each year since as this matter falls within my area of responsibility. As a matter of interest the Service Children's Schools Agency was launched on 1 April 1991.

Each year since then I have published an Annual Report and Accounts which is laid before Parliament and held in the Parliamentary Library. This document contains a detailed analysis of staff numbers and costs which should be adequate to answer your question. For the year prior to the formation of this Agency, a total of 2,285 staff were employed at a cost of £37M.

Letter from John R. Prince to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 December 1995:

1. I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number and cost of civilian staff employed in the Army Technical Support Agency as this matter falls in my area of responsibility.

2. The Army Technical Support Agency formed in October 1995 and hence I offer figures only for the current year. ATSA employs 817.5 civilian staff (as at October 1995 - which is the latest date for which I have accurate figures). The staff costs (which include all elements of pay) are anticipated to be £18.584M for the year April 1995 to March 1996 although this period includes the period before the agency was launched.

WE177 Free-fall Bomb

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration led to the decision to withdraw the WE.177 in 1998; what was the original date for withdrawal; and on what date that decision was taken. [5165]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The decision to withdraw WE177 from service by the end of 1998, announced on 4 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *1097*, was reached in the light of the good progress being made in providing Trident with a sub-strategic capability. This capability will be fully robust when Vigilant enters service in 1998 and there is no requirement for us to maintain two systems in the sub-strategic role after that point. We had previously assessed that WE177 had the potential to remain in service until the early years of the next century.

Mr. Gordon Foxley

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement to the House when his Department has finished its investigations into the extent of the Gordon Foxley fraud case. [5654]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to my predecessor's reply to the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) of 23 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns 146–47.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the companies involved with the Gordon Foxley fraud case. [5655]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the evidence provided by my Department to the Committee of Public Accounts and reproduced at appendix 1 to the Committee's 46th report, which was published on 7 December 1995.

Drug Testing

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which Army regiments whose personnel have been tested for drug use there have been no failures. [3803]

Mr. Soames: The units with negative results from the drug testing programme are as follows:

Ministry of Defence, (Executive Committee of the Army Board)
Headquarters Scotland
Headquarters Northern Ireland
Headquarters 1st (UK) Armoured Division
Headquarters 52nd Brigade
Headquarters 42nd (Northern Western) Brigade
Headquarters Herford Garrison
Headquarters Episkopi Garrison
Headquarters Lisburn Station
Headquarters Kineton Station
Headquarters Joint Support Group Northern Ireland
5th Regiment Royal Artillery
16th Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery
47th Field Regiment Royal Artillery
Royal Artillery Ranges Hebrides
33 Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers
9th Signal Regiment
15th Signal Regiment
16th Signal Regiment
241 Signal Squadron
253 Signal Squadron
Joint Communications Unit (Northern Ireland)
1st Battalion The Kings Own Scottish Borderers
1st Battalion The Highlanders
2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment
1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment
1st Battalion The Royal Green Jackets
5th Regiment Army Air Corps
9th Regiment Army Air Corps
7 Transport Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
11th Explosives Ordnance Disposal Regiment Royal Logistic Regiment
12 Supply Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
21 Logistic Support Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
24 Transport Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
321 Explosives Ordnance Disposal Squadron Royal Logistic Corps
Cyprus Logistic Unit
23 Parachute Field Ambulance Royal Army Medical Corps
Army Pay and Documents Office (Northern Ireland)
Royal Military Police Training Centre Chichester
2nd Regiment Royal Military Police
174 Provost Company Royal Military Police
115 Provost Company Royal Military Police
36 Detachment Special Investigation Branch Royal Military Police
32 Army Education Centre
45 Army Education Centre
Education Services
7 Dental Group
9 Dental Group
Defence Animal Support Unit
Rhine Area Support Unit
Garrison Labour Support Unit Herford
Army Families and Welfare Services Herford
Army Careers and Information Office Herford
Station Staff Office Herford

Anti-tank Mines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Carshalton of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *768*, if the scatterable anti-tank mines will contain mechanisms that will cause *(a)* their location to be identified by the launching forces and *(b)* to cause them to self destruct when their battlefield use is over. [5526]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The vehicle launched scatterable anti-tank mine system will be able to record the location of minefields it lays, and the number of mines placed into those minefields. The mines will have a short timed life which will be programmed at launch and at the end of which they will self destruct.

Illegal Nuclear Material

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications he has had with his South African counterpart concerning the allegations made in the recent book, details of which have been sent to him, in respect of the illegal acquisition of weapons useable nuclear materials. [5650]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has received no information on this matter from the hon. Member.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying sorties were booked in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1994 by non-United Kingdom based aircraft from each foreign air force. [5182]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of sorties booked in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1994 by non United Kingdom-based foreign aircraft were as follows:

	Number
Australia	2
Belgium	31
Canada	126
Denmark	172

	Number
France	192
Germany	125
Greece	14
Holland	279
Italy	292
New Zealand	1
Norway	10
Portugal	8
Spain	68
USA	96
Total	1,416

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sorties in the United Kingdom low flying system by *(a)* Hercules aircraft and *(b)* helicopters were authorised in 1994; and how many of the Hercules sorties were flown by foreign air forces. [5180]

Mr. Soames: A total of 2,240 sorties by Hercules aircraft and 44,989 sorties by helicopters were authorised in the United Kingdom low flying system during 1994. 10 of the Hercules sorties were flown by non-United Kingdom-based foreign aircraft.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying sorties were booked in the United Kingdom low flying system by United Kingdom-based US Air Force aircraft during 1994. [5181]

Mr. Soames: United Kingdom-based US Air Force aircraft were booked to fly 3,684 sorties in the United Kingdom low flying system during 1994.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the requirement for air weapons ranges as a result of the purchase of Apache helicopters for the Army. [5237]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The qualification of the weapons for Apache will be the responsibility of the prime contractor and the necessary trials will be carried out on US ranges. The need for the use of ranges for training purposes is still being addressed. At this time, it is likely that such range training will be mainly for the cannon and the CRV7 rocket system with much of the training for the main anti-armour weapon, the Hellfire missile, being done through simulation. The policy for proof testing of weapon stocks is currently being addressed with other Apache users to minimise the need for live missile firings.

Redundancies

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving men and women in each of the armed forces have volunteered for redundancy during 1995; and what proportion of the total strength of each of the armed forces each of these numbers represents. [5038]

Mr. Soames: Applicants from Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel have totalled some 3,800 and from RAF personnel some 11,540 during 1995, representing respectively 7.7 per cent. and 16.7 per cent. of total strength at 1 October 1995. The number of applicants has exceeded the requirement by about 1,400 and 2,940 respectively.

Information on the total number of Army applicants is not available. Of the total applicants, the number selected is 234, which is 0.2 per cent. of the Army's strength at 1 October 1995. The Army does not now envisage making more than about 280 redundancies, compared with the 500 previously announced.

In each service some selection of non-applicants has been or will be necessary in order to preserve balance within particular ranks and specialisations.

Army Workshops

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Army workshops. [5547]

Mr. Soames: The Army base repair organisation—ABRO—currently operates nine workshops. Two of these, at Old Dalby, Leicestershire and Ashford, Kent, are to close in 1996 in order to match capacity to lower levels of demand following the "Options for Change" review. The major workshop facility at Bovington, Dorset, operates under the terms of a five year service level agreement, following a successful in-house bid in the pilot ABRO market test. The future of the five workshops in the ABRO land command support group depends upon the outcome of the current market test of the service that the group delivers to Army land command throughout the United Kingdom except Northern Ireland.

The facility at Donnington, Shropshire, will be subject to scrutiny during 1996–97 to determine the most appropriate strategy to deliver the "Competing for Quality" objectives.

Burundi and Rwanda

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent consideration he has given to using British military aircraft to provide support for UN operations in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi; [5687]

(2) what recent consideration he has given to providing further British military equipment for UN operations in Rwanda; [5688]

(3) what recent consideration he has given to providing British logistical support for UN operations in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi; [5689]

(4) what recent consideration he has given to providing British military assistance to the OAU military observer mission in Burundi. [5690]

Mr. Soames: In 1994, the United Kingdom deployed a contingent of some 600 specialist troops to support the United Nations assistance mission for Rwanda—UNAMIR—for three months until United Nations logistics contractors were installed. Seven staff officers were also provided for UNAMIR headquarters. A request from the United Nations centre for human rights for advice to Rwanda in the field of military law, discipline and human rights is under consideration. No other requests for military equipment, support or assistance in Rwanda or Burundi have been received from the United Nations or the Organisation for African Unity.

Properties, Yeovil

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *809*, if the construction of properties in Yeovil by his Department involve the private finance initiative. [5691]

Mr. Soames: External consultants were employed to examine the interest in a private finance initiative approach for the construction of new family quarters at RNAS Yeovilton. Their opinion was that there was little or no commercial interest in a PFI approach.

However, separately, the MOD private finance unit has approached a number of banks, investment houses, property companies and housing partnerships. Their responses are awaited.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mobile telephones used by Ministers in his Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and if he will indicate which Ministers within his Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4275]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* Between November 1994 and March 1995 the mobile telephones installed in the MOD official cars used by Ministers were cloned. Two hand-held mobile telephones, used by the personal staff of Minister (AF) and Minister (DP) were also cloned in this period. These mobile telephones were immediately changed to digital GSM models and no further incident of cloning has occurred.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 December 1995

ENVIRONMENT

British Coal Pumping Stations (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on environmental problems caused by the closure of British Coal pumping stations in the City of Durham constituency. [5131]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the mine pumping stations in the Durham area continue to be maintained by the Coal Authority.

Metropolitan Wards

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the proposed average electorate of each ward in the review of metropolitan ward boundaries; [5629]

(2) if he will make a statement on proposals in respect of ward boundaries in metropolitan areas; [5628]

(3) what plans he has to reduce the number of councillors on metropolitan councils; [5631]

(4) what assessment he has made of the effects of parliamentary constituency boundary proposals for changes to ward boundaries in metropolitan areas. [5627]

Sir Paul Beresford: The timetable and procedure for periodic electoral reviews, including in metropolitan areas, are a matter for the Local Government Commission, within the time constraints set down in the Local Government Act 1992. The commission consulted earlier in the year about the general principles which it will follow during those reviews.

Dioxins (Cheshire)

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all sites in Cheshire notified to his Department as contaminated with dioxin. [5437]

Mr. Clappison: No sites have been notified to my Department as contaminated with dioxins.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the threat to public health caused by dioxin-contaminated sites in Cheshire, and what action will be taken to clean up these sites; [5438]

(2) what steps will be taken to protect public health in respect of sites in Cheshire that are contaminated with dioxin. [5439]

Mr. Clappison: I know of no sites in Cheshire which pose a risk to public health from dioxins.

Coal Mines (Accidents)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal industrial accidents there have been at each coal mine in England in 1995. [5519]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information for individual mines is not produced. Statistics for the industry are published as an aggregate figure in the Health and Safety Commission's annual report. Those for the first quarter of 1995 are included in the 1994–95 statistics, which were published in the commission's annual report last month. Copies have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been *(a)* the number of fatal coal mine accidents and *(b)* the accident rate per 1,000 employees, in each year since 1979. [5520]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available in the format requested for all years since 1979. Since 1984, the number of accidents have been recorded on a financial year basis. Information from April 1995 is not yet available. The table shows the number of fatal injuries and fatal accident rate per 1,000 employees from 1979.

Year	*Fatal injuries*	*Accident rate per 1,000 employees*
1979	46	0.19
1980	42	0.17
1981	35	0.15
1982	38	0.17
1983	30	0.15
1984–85	22	0.13
1985–86	29	0.18
1986–87	18	0.14
1987–88	12	0.11
1988–89	20	0.23
1989–90	19	0.27
1990–91	12	0.19
1991–92	12	0.23
1992–93	6	0.12
1993–94	7	0.27
1994–95	2	0.16

Non-native Animals

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all non-native species of birds, animals, fish and crustacean which *(a)* have established and *(b)* are suspected of having established a breeding population in the United Kingdom since 1945. [5552]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The following species of bird, mammal, reptile and amphibian, and crustacea are thought to have been introduced since 1945 and are suspected of having established breeding populations. Introductions of all non-native freshwater fish species appear to have occurred before 1945. The Government's statutory scientific adviser, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, indicates that other species are likely to have briefly established populations since 1945 but have now become extinct. Due to recording techniques and only the fleeting presence of some of these species, data are not readily available.

Birds	*Animals (note some do not have common names)*	*Reptiles and amphibians*	*Crustacea (note some do not have common names)*
Ruddy duck	American mink	Alpine newt	North American signal crayfish
Ring-necked parakeet	Pere Davids deer	African clawed toad	Turkish crayfish
Bar-headed goose	*Sea anenonies and corals:*	Fire-bellied toad	Noble crayfish
Muscovy duck[1]	Rhizogeton nudum		Red swamp crayfish
Snow goose	Clavopsella navis		Metatrichoniscoides leydigi (a woodlouse)
Swan goose	Anguillicola crassus (nematode worm)		Asellus communis (a freshwater woodlouse)
Barnacle goose[1]	*Bristle worms:*		Gammarus tigrinus (a shrimp)
Red-crested pochard	Goniadella gracilis		Arcitalitrus dorrieni
White-fronted goose[1]	Hydroides ezoensis		
Lesser white-fronted goose[1]	Hydroides dianthus		
Night heron[1]	Janua brasiliensis		
	Pileolaria berkeleyana		
	Marenzelleria viridis		
	Ammothea hilgendorfi (Sea spider)		
	Molluscs:		
	Rapana venosa		
	Crassostrea gigas		
	Tiostrea lutaria		
	Aulacomya ater		
	Ensis americanus		
	Styela clava (sea-squirt)		

---

[1] These species occur naturally in the United Kingdom as vagrants or regular winter visitors, but their breeding populations are thought to be due largely to escapes or releases from captivity i.e. they are not native breeding species.

Opencast Mines

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the planning applications for opencast coal mining sites he has received; which companies made the applications; and what his decision has been in each case since 1990. [5884]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally. It is for mineral planning authorities in the first instance to decide whether planning permission should be granted for opencast coal mining. Statistics are published annually for the County Planning Officers Society by Durham county council.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5705]

Sir Paul Beresford: Ninety-two per cent.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the additional costs to be incurred by energy conservation authorities in producing reports required under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; and from which departmental budget heading the required expenditure will be met. [6116]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A total of £3 million has been transferred to the provision for rate support grant in 1996–97 and 1997–98 in respect of the new duty to produce energy conservation reports under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 in accordance with the new burdens procedure agreed with the local authority associations. The transfer has been made from this Department's energy efficiency expenditure programme.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he plans to stage the implementation of local government reorganisation to take account of the resources available. [6099]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 8 December, *Official Report*, columns *407–08*.

Local Government Pension Scheme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to consult interested parties in England and Wales on proposed changes to the local government pension scheme; and if he will make a statement. [6557]

Sir Paul Beresford: A consultation paper is today being issued to local authorities in England and Wales, and to a wide range of other interested parties involved with local authority pensions, which takes forward our intentions to reduce central Government's involvement in the local government pension scheme and, at the same time, to increase the part played by local government in managing its pension responsibilities.

Our proposals would mean that the LGPS remains a public service pension scheme and that local government pensions will continue to be provided within a statutory framework. The benefits provided by the scheme both now and in the future will continue to have full statutory security. At the same time, local authority employers would have more discretion within that framework to develop more flexible pension arrangements and to adopt new pension structures to meet local circumstances.

Proposals are also put forward in the paper to reduce significantly the regulatory content of the current scheme regulations. Consultees are expressly invited to contribute to the Department's efforts to streamline the provision governing the LGPS, to weed out unnecessary and redundant requirements and to make the scheme's provisions more user friendly. Overall, this should mean less regulation and ultimately a reduced level of involvement by the Department in the operation of the scheme.

Representations on the proposals are requested by March 1996. Draft scheme regulations will be circulated for formal consultation in late 1996 and come into force in early 1997.

Housing Capital Funding

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to make an announcement about the distribution of housing capital funding for 1996–97. [6790]

Mr. Curry: I am today announcing decisions about the distribution of capital funding for housing in 1996–97.

Councils will receive housing investment programme allocations totalling over £1.2 billion for 1996–97. Under the competitive HIP process, we have again been able to direct funding to those councils that are best able to make use of them.

Within the HIP programme, £943 million is for general purpose allocations, the housing "annual capital guidelines". As last year, these have been allocated 40 per cent. on the basis of a statistical assessment of local housing needs and 60 per cent. on a competitive basis related to performance.

As part of the assessment of its programme, each local authority is required to submit a housing strategy statement, setting out a comprehensive framework for housing programmes for at least the next three years, covering not only the plans of the local authority but the contribution to be made by the private housing sector. The strategy is prepared in consultation with all those interested in the local housing scene, including the Housing Corporation, housing associations, tenants' groups and the private sector. Once again, there is a continuing improvement in the performance of the great majority of local authorities, with most of them now producing good quality housing strategies.

In addition to these annual capital guidelines, £270 million has been allocated for private sector renewal and housing defects in the form of "specified capital grant". Once again, 40 per cent. of funding has been distributed on a statistical assessment of local needs, and 60 per cent. on a competitive basis.

Since the competitive system was introduced in 1991, the performance of local housing authorities has improved considerably. As described in the housing White Paper published in June, local authorities have an important role as strategic enablers and the Government wish to encourage all authorities to produce good strategies and fulfil their functions effectively and efficiently. Therefore, I propose to change the system of annual capital guideline and specified capital grant allocations for 1997–98 to a fully competitive basis, under which 100 per cent. of the allocations locally will be decided competitively. The Department will be consulting representatives of the local authority associations on this proposal early next year.

I am depositing tables in the Library of the House showing each authority's annual capital guideline and specified capital grant allocation for 1996–97. Together, these comprise the HIP allocations. In addition, I am depositing a list of the authorities whose performance is assessed as being well above the average for their region.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the United Kingdom's progress towards meeting its commitment under the climate change convention to take measures aimed at returning carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. [6791]

Mr. Gummer: I have today published an update of the carbon dioxide chapter of the United Kingdom climate change programme. The document, entitled "Progress Report on Carbon Dioxide Emissions", sets out details of policy developments and progress since January 1994 on each of the measures in the programme aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

The revised chapter reflects energy projections, published by the Department of Trade and Industry earlier this year, which indicate that carbon dioxide emissions will be 4 to 8 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2000. In the light of the latest evidence of man-made climate change and its effects, this is most welcome progress.

This rate of progress puts us at the forefront of international efforts to combat climate change and demonstrates once again the United Kingdom's determination not to promise more that it can deliver on its environmental commitments, but to do better if at all possible.

We shall continue to put pressure on others to achieve real cuts, and to agree new commitments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions for the period beyond 2000.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many civil servants are currently employed in those areas of his Department for which tenders have been sought under the private finance initiative, and how many he expects to be employed after the completion of this process. [5047]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No tenders have yet been sought for any PFI project. It is likely that about 25 IT staff out of the current total of 91 will be affected by any eventual local office county count system—LOCCS—contract. The LOCCS computer system is expected to save staff time equivalent to 600 posts; however, it does not follow that there will be a reduction in staff numbers of the same magnitude. Initiatives such as Lord Woolf's proposals for the civil courts will almost certainly require the redeployment of skilled staff to new tasks. It is also possible that about another 11 posts will be affected by plans to establish a probate record centre to take over routine records storage functions from the Court Service.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effects on job security of existing employees of his Department of the private finance initiative. [5046]

Mr. Evans: It is likely that the LOCCS project will affect about 25 IT staff. The Court Service has said that it will consult its trade union side on how any transfer of these staff to the successful bidder might be achieved, and on what terms, and whether there are alternatives to permanent transfer. Any permanent transfer would be on broadly equivalent terms, and conditions of service. It is also possible that the proposed probate records centre project will affect about 11 staff. The trade union side will also be consulted on these proposals.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to extend the private finance initiative to the administration of the magistrates courts. [4865]

Mr. Evans: There are no plans to include the administrative functions of the magistrates courts in PFI schemes for the provision of accommodation. Nor are there plans to apply PFI to the provision of existing computer systems there. The Department intends to explore whether PFI might make a helpful contribution in the replacement of those systems by the new standard system which is currently under development.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what routine administration elements of Crown and county court work tenders have been invited under the private finance initiative; and if this includes aspects of the work of court ushers, clerks and bailiffs. [5049]

Mr. Evans: Administrative functions currently performed in the Crown court and the county courts would not be covered by the LOCCS contract.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to respond to the concerns about the private finance initiative project, contained in Lord Woolf's interim report on the future of the civil justice system, with special reference to the role of the private sector in running the information technology infrastructure of the system and his Department's ability to retain control of issues of policy. [4868]

Mr. Evans: Any contractor will have to satisfy the Lord Chancellor's Department that confidentiality will be protected. The Department will retain full control of its policies and strategies.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5747]

Mr. Evans: Administrative costs incurred to date on the LOCCS procurement project amount to about £250,000. Expenditure of a further £300,000 is anticipated. As the scope of other PFI projects is still being defined and none has yet gone to procurement, it is too early to make meaningful estimates of the administrative costs to be incurred on them.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five financial years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5748]

Mr. Evans: Tentative initial forecasts of revenue expenditure under the LOCCS procurement project are: 1995–96 nil; 1996–97—£6 million; 1997–98—£8 million; 1988–99—£9 million; 1999–2000—£10 million; 2001–01—£10 million. As the scope of other PFI projects is still being defined and none has yet gone to procurement, it is too early to make meaningful estimates of the revenue expenditure to be incurred on them.

Contracting Out

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when his Department will consult *(a)* the Lord Chief Justice, *(b)* the Vice-Chancellor, *(c)* the Master of the Rolls, *(d)* the president of the family division, and *(e)* other members of the senior judiciary under schedule 16 to the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 on his proposals to contract out court functions, and what considerations underlay his decision not to consult them before tenders were invited. [5048]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Neither the local office county court system project nor the probate records centre project is at the stage where it becomes possible to have formal consultation under the terms of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Court Listing

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment his Department has made of the constitutional implications of transferring the management of court listing to the private sector. [4866]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There are no plans to transfer the management of court listing to the private sector.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5701]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department's general conditions of contract contain a clause informing suppliers that we shall make payment within agreed terms, or within 30 days of receipt of an invoice, where no such terms exist. The conditions also give advice on how to complain if the Department fails to make payment on time. Annual surveys of invoice payments are carried out, the latest of which showed that 93.8 per cent. of invoices were paid on time. The survey results, together with details of the Department's payment policies, are published in the annual report.

Mental Incapacity Report

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Government's response to the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity will be published. [6115]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government set up an interdepartmental working group, chaired by the Lord Chancellor's Department, to consider the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity. The group was asked to produce an initial report for consideration by Ministers by 1 September 1995 and has met this timetable. Ministers are now considering the report of the working group, together with that of the Law Commission. The Government will make an announcement of their initial view on the Law Commission's report once Ministers have had the opportunity to consider the implications of the proposals.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5702]

Mr. Howard: The latest available figure is 92 per cent. as published in the Home Office annual report 1995.

Ministerial Meetings (Immigration)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) has had, to date, with right hon. and hon. Members since he was appointed a Minister in the Home Office to discuss immigration, asylum and nationality matters; how many requests for such meetings he has refused; and how many such meetings are pending. [6036]

Mr. Kirkhope: Since my appointment on 17 October 1995, I have had 13 meetings with right hon. and hon. Members on immigration, asylum and nationality cases. Two are pending. In addition, I have had numerous other discussions with hon. Members on individual cases. Information on the number of requests for meetings that I have refused is not readily available.

Charities (Police and Probation Services)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reimbursement measures exist for charitable organisations in return for the work they carry out on behalf of statutory bodies with special reference to the police and probation services. [6042]

Mr. Sackville: It is for each police authority and the chief officer of police to determine whether, and how to, reimburse organisations which carry out work for the force. Under rule 41(a) of the Probation (Amendment) Rules 1994, probation services may make payments to voluntary organisations for the provision of a range of services. It is for chief probation officers to decide which organisations should be aided, having regard to local needs and priorities.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the arrangements for notifying the Benefits Agency if a country has undergone, or is undergoing, events likely to give rise to a well-founded form of persecution among its nationals are now in operation. [5938]

Miss Widdecombe: The arrangements will come into operation when the regulations about which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is consulting have come into force. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department envisages that he will notify the Benefits Agency if a country undergoes a fundamental change of circumstances such that people are not normally being returned to that country for the time being.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is currently the average time a remand prisoner spends in custody while awaiting trial *(a)* in Durham and *(b)* in the United Kingdom. [5127]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter for England and Wales has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given. Information for Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibilities of the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 14 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, what is the average time a prisoner spends in custody whilst awaiting trial *(a)* in Durham and *(b)* in the United Kingdom.

Information on the average time spent in custody for untried prisoners awaiting trial in Durham is not available. The available information on the estimated average time spent in custody for untried prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in 1994 was given in a written reply to a Question from Mr. Jim Cunningham MP (Coventry South East) on 5 December (Col.210).

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimate of the additional annual costs incurred as a result of prisoners being held on remand beyond the statutory time limit. [1701]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 14 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the estimate of the additional annual costs incurred as a result of prisoners being held on remand beyond the statutory time limit.

The available information relates to Prison Service costs for additional time served by prisoners awaiting Crown Court trial beyond the statutory time limit. About seventy five per cent of such prisoners receive a custodial sentence so that no net additional period in prison occurs. Overall, the additional annual cost incurred by the Prison Service is approximately £5 million in the current year.

A reliable estimate of the cost of holding prisoners on magistrates' court remand in excess of the custody time limit is not available.

Visitors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *667*, if he will make it his policy to record the dates on which visitors to the United Kingdom leave the country. [3791]

Mr. Kirkhope: No. A comprehensive system which matches arrival and embarkation records would not be a cost-effective way to operate immigration control. A more targeted approach in co-operation with the police and other agencies has proved to be a more successful way to detect and deal with people here unlawfully.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* employers' organisations, *(b)* the civil service, *(c)* local government and *(d)* the health service on the costs of the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Bill and the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Amendment Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [6011]

Miss Widdecombe: The proposals in the Bill for preventing illegal employment were discussed with other Government Departments. A consultation document, including a compliance cost assessment, has been sent to employers' organisations, local government bodies, the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts and other interested organisations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has consulted widely about the proposed benefit changes through the Social Security Advisory Committee and with the local authorities' associations. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has had discussions with the Association of London Government.

Mr. Derek Lewis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what formula was used in calculating the performance-related bonus paid to Mr. Derek Lewis during his employment as Director General of the Prison Service; [5632]

(2) if the terms and conditions of employment of the post of Director General of the Prison Service will include a performance-related element; [5630]

(3) how much was paid to Mr. Derek Lewis as a performance-related bonus during his employment as Director General of the Prison Service; and what percentage this figure was in relation to the salary he received. [5633]

Miss Widdecombe: Under the terms of his appointment, Mr. Lewis was entitled to a performance bonus of up to 35 per cent., of his salary, assessed on the basis of qualitative and quantitative measures reflecting performance against the Prison Service's key targets as set out in the agency's corporate and business plans. Such measures included reductions in escapes and assaults and an increase in purposeful activity for prisoners. For the period from his appointment on 6 January 1993 to 31 March 1993, a bonus of £8,280 was paid solely on the basis of his personal contribution to the Prison Service. For the 1993–94 financial year, when the Prison Service met or exceeded all of its key targets except one, Mr. Lewis received a bonus of £35,000 which represented 28 per cent. of his salary of £125,000. The precise formula used to assess Mr. Lewis's performance was personal to him and I have no plans to publish it. Mr. Lewis waived the bonus for 1994–95, despite meeting his targets, because of the escape from Whitemoor. The question of a bonus for the current year forms part of Mr. Lewis's legal action which is pending before the courts. My right hon. and learned Friend will make an announcement about the appointment of the director general when a substantive appointment is made.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the maximum inmate population of Doncaster prison; and how many *(a)* sentenced and *(b)* remand prisoners under 18 years of age were held there in each month of 1995. [5517]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 14 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what was the maximum inmate population of Doncaster prison; and how many (a) sentenced and (b) remand prisoners under 18 years of age were held there in each month of 1995.

The maximum inmate population (operational capacity) of Doncaster prison is currently 850 prisoners.

The other information requested is given in the attached table. Records are only available from April 1995.

Sentenced and remand prisoners under the age of eighteen held at Doncaster since April 1995

Date	*Remand*	*Sentenced*	*Total*
April 1995	54	3	57
May	64	3	67
June	58	1	59
July	67	1	68
August	94	1	95
September	78	3	81
October	89	4	93
November	55	3	58

Second Passports

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the use of second passports purchased commercially in the United Kingdom. [5448]

Mr. Kirkhope: The national forgery section of the immigration service holds extensive information gathered over many years on "second passports". Its records include details of various companies offering such documents for sale and examples of some of those on offer. This information has been widely circulated within the immigration service to ensure that any attempted circumvention of the immigration control by use of these documents is quickly identified.

When arriving in the United Kingdom, or when seeking entry through the channel tunnel, a person must produce, on request by the immigration officer, a valid national passport or other document satisfactorily establishing his identity and nationality. A person holding a document purchased commercially would not fulfil this requirement.

Internet

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his international counterparts about the possibility of joint action being taken to regulate the content of material disseminated via the Internet. [5470]

Mr. Sackville: None. The regulation of the Internet and other computer networks is a matter for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

However, the interdepartmental group on obscenity is currently considering the issue of pornographic material disseminated via the Internet, and it has arranged a conference with Internet service providers in the United Kingdom to discuss the possible measures which can be taken to control access to such material.

National Lottery Charities Board

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the names of regional advisory panel members for the National Lottery Charities Board, identifying those who are elected councillors and their political affiliation. [5445]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the National Lottery Charities Board. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

TREASURY

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all Departments for which forecasts of capital spending under the private finance initiative are available for *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–2001. [5756]

Mr. Jack: Table 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" gives the estimated figures for the survey period.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy with regard to the disclosure of information on schemes under the private finance initiative and the extent to which issues of commercial confidentiality affect such disclosure. [5758]

Mr. Jack: The duty of Departments to account to Parliament for their spending is not changed by the private finance initiative. Disclosure while negotiations are still proceeding would usually weaken the Government's negotiating position. Nevertheless, the National Audit Office has access to documents relating to private finance initiative contracts, as it does for other contracts. In line with reporting arrangements for other contracts, information on private finance initiative schemes can be disclosed after a contract has been settled, except where there is a specific undertaking of commercial confidentiality on a particular matter.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department receives from other Departments information on all private finance initiative schemes. [5757]

Mr. Jack: The PFI is a decentralised initiative. Individual Secretaries of State have the responsibility for driving forward the initiative in their areas. As such, not every project will require direct Treasury approval and as a consequence we will not receive information centrally on every PFI project.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5727]

Mr. Jack: The information is not available in the form requested because it is a fundamental principle when considering schemes under the private finance initiative that what is assessed is the overall best value for money in providing a specified service, taking into account all aspects of design, building, finance and operation as a unified whole.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total annual cost to public funds of schemes to be funded by the private finance initiative at current prices for each of the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [5464]

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5726]

Mr. Jack: It is for individual Departments to estimate the revenue costs of the PFI projects in their sphere of the responsibility, and to take these costs into account in their expenditure plans. However, on the basis of assessments of four major Departments, total service payments in the current year and the next three years are expected to be, very broadly:

1995–96: [ ]
1996–97: 130
1997–98: 295
1998–99: 460

However, these are only indicative numbers. The precise size and timing of revenue payments depend on agreement to projects, many of which are currently under negotiation, and on the subsequent delivery and levels of use of specific services to specified standards. Central information is not available for the full 10 years requested.

Departmental Fraud

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the Treasury report on departmental fraud in all Government Departments for 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [6033]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Copies of the latest "Dear Accounting Officer" letter and accompanying analysis, which contain information on frauds reported by Departments for the financial year 194–95, were placed in the Library of the Houses on 11 December 1995. The documents are also available to the public.

Draft EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the organisations receiving subsidies for advancing the idea of Europe cited in budget item A–304 in the EC 1996 draft budget indicating the amounts they receive and the specific purpose behind the provision of funds. [5901]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The criteria for the types of project which will be eligible for funding from this budget line next year are set out in the commentary appended to line A–304 of the draft general budget of the European Communities, a copy of which is in the Library. Precisely how these funds are spent is a matter for the European Commission, to which questions about the detail of expenditure in 1996 and previous years should be addressed.

European Community Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report,* column 454, if he will make it his policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulation implementing European directives. [5074]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* It is the policy in the Departments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that we do not "gold-plate" European directives by the addition of unnecessary burdens when implementing them in the United Kingdom. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Inland Revenue (Referred Cases)

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in each year since 1965, High Court judges have referred details of a case to the Inland Revenue. [5549]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The Inland Revenue does not maintain such records.

Air Quality Monitoring

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the additional resources to be made available to local authorities to implement air quality monitoring commitments made in the Environment Act 1995 following his 1995 Budget statement. [4943]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

Phased implementations of local authorities' new duties in respect of air quality under the Environment Act 1995 will begin next year. The first phase will involve a representative number of local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Criteria for selecting the authorities are being prepared by the local authority air quality management working group of central and local government officials set up by the Department of the Environment to assist with implementation of part IV of the Act. We will shortly announce the first phase authorities and will make funds available to cover necessary increased expenditure.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to publish the recent efficiency scrutiny on the TEC contract and management fee; and if she will make a statement. [6727]

Mr. Paice: A copy of the report of the scrutiny team has been place in the Library.

Although it is too early to comment on the detail of the report, I am very eager to reduce administrative burdens on TECs where these are shown to be unnecessary and the Department will be looking at its recommendations very carefully.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress Aztec and Solotec are making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [6726]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce the award of three-year licences to Aztec and the South London training and enterprise council, which have now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set.

International Labour Conference

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for publishing the White Paper on the instruments adopted at the 81st session of the international labour conference 1994. [6652]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have today published the White Paper entitled "International Labour Conference."

Access to Work

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have been assisted under the access to work programme; and if she will make a statement. [6932]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In 1994–95, the first year of operation, over 10,300 people were assisted under the access to work programme. In 1995–96, it is estimated that some 10,000 people have already received support.

On present trends, planned provision for the programme in 1995–96—£13.4 million—will be exceeded to a significant extent. While I have been able to allocate additional funds to meet the demands made so far on the programme this year, it is necessary to implement the priority within the programme for unemployed people in order to keep expenditure within the resources available.

I am therefore announcing that, with effect from 18 December, funding will be targeted on meeting existing commitments; to applications to renew arrangements which fully satisfy the programme's present rules and criteria and which would otherwise lapse; and to people with disabilities who have been unemployed for at least four weeks. The Government believe that this is the most equitable way of allocating the limited resources available.

The Government recognise the importance of the programme to people with disabilities and to employers. The planned provision for the programme next year has therefore been maintained. Before reaching decisions on 1996–97, the Govnerment will publish the research they have commissioned on the first year, and enter into discussions with the organisations principally concerned on the operation of the programme next year.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of bills to her Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5706]

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 6,419 invoices were sampled in four separate prompt payment exercises during 1994–95. The results showed that 6,387 of these invoices were paid within 30 days—95 per cent of the sample.

Schools (Self-government)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses she has received to the consultation paper on self-government for voluntary-aided schools from *(a)* voluntary-aided schools, *(b)* grant-aided maintained former voluntary-aided schools, *(c)* local authority associations, *(d)* local education authorities and *(e)* Church bodies. [5777]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Body	*Number of responses*
(a) Voluntary aided schools	1,629
(b) Former voluntary grant-maintained schools[1]	16
(c) Local authority associations[2]	4
(d) Local education authorities	74
(e) Church Bodies[3]	68

[1] Includes former voluntary-controlled, as well as former voluntary-aided, GM schools.

[2] Includes national and local associations.

[3] Includes national religious bodies and Church of England and Roman Catholic diocesan boards.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses she has received in respect of the consultation paper on self-government for voluntary-aided schools; how many of them were in favour of each of the options listed in the paper; and how many of them were in favour of the proposals. [5780]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received almost 2,000 responses to the Department's consultation paper on self-government for voluntary-aided schools. We are currently completing the analysis of these responses. A summary will be made available in due course, and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained schools were formerly *(a)* voluntary-aided schools *(b)* voluntary-aided Church schools; and in each case what proportion of the total number of voluntary-aided schools this represents. [5781]

Mrs. Gillan: Some 231 grant-maintained schools were formerly voluntary aided, and 204 of these were voluntary-aided Church schools. This means that some 6 per cent. of all existing and former voluntary-aided schools and 5 per cent. of existing and former voluntary-aided Church schools have transferred to the grant maintained sector.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made by her Department in taking forward proposals for the expansion of the assisted places scheme; and how much her Department estimates this will cost in the future financial years for which figures are available when this has been achieved. [5822]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *711–12* about arrangements for the expansion of the assisted places scheme. As to the cost of the expansion in future years, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 4 December, *Official Report*, column *117*.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which independent sector schools charged *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest level of fees to pupils covered by the assisted places scheme in the academic year 1994–95; and what charges were levied. [5826]

Mrs. Gillan: The school which charged the highest fee in academic year 1994–95 was Charterhouse, at £9,459 in respect of its sixth form assisted pupils. Salesian college, Farnborough charged the lowest fee at £2,604.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department has spent on the operation of the assisted places scheme in each year since 1981; how many *(a)* pupils and *(b)* institutions were covered by the scheme; and what was the overspend on the budget allocated to the scheme. [5791]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), on 24 October, *Official Report*, column *623*, for the information about expenditure and the numbers of pupils covered by the scheme. The number of independent schools participating in the scheme for each academic year since 1981 is given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme

Academic year	*Number of participating schools*
1981–82	220
1982–83	220
1983–84	223
1984–85	226
1985–86	226
1986–87	226
1987–88	226
1988–89	226
1989–90	278
1990–91	295
1991–92	295
1992–93	295
1993–94	295
1994–95	294

The figures relate to England only.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools covered by the assisted places scheme received *(a)* more than £1 million, *(b)* over £750,000 *(c)* over £500,000 and *(d)* over £250,000 under the assisted places scheme for each academic year since 1981. [5819]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested for each academic year since 1981 is not available and could be derived only at disproportionate cost. Information is available in respect of the academic year 1994–95; the number of participating schools in each category is *(a)* four, *(b)* 19, *(c)* 76 and *(d)* 176.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many independent sector schools have had *(a)* more than 25 per cent., *(b)* more than 50 per cent. and *(c)* less than 5 per cent. of their rolls made up of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme. [5829]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is available in respect of the academic year 1994–95; the number of schools in each category is *(a)* 44, *(b)* 1 and *(c)* 47.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what evaluation has been made of the effect of the 1995–96 budget settlement on *(a)* discretionary awards and *(b)* the youth service;

(2) what evaluation of the likely effect on *(a)* discretionary awards and *(b)* the youth service was made in calculating education standard spending assessments for 1996–97. [5831]

Mr. Forth: Spending on discretionary awards and the youth service in 1995–96 and in 1996–97 will depend on the decisions of individual local education authorities.

Training (Social Fund Claims)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to reduce the amounts due to be paid to training providers in respect of training provided in 1994 and financed by the European social fund as a result of exchange rate fluctuations; what is the total amount to be held back; how many training providers will be affected; and if she will make a statement. [6147]

Mr. Paice: Because of fluctuations in the exchange rate, the Government have not yet received sufficient funds from the European Commission to pay 1994 European social fund final claims in full. Applicants will therefore receive 95 per cent. of the total eligible costs of their projects. No money is being held back. The final claims presented to the European Commission for 1994 have been paid in full in ecu; the shortfall for applicants results from the translation of ecu into sterling.

Additional information is now being sought from applicants to enable the claim to be recalculated in a way which should provide more sterling to enable further payments to be made in due course. There were 1,512 applicant organisations in 1994.

Employee Fraud

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the number and value of fraud cases excluded from the figures contained in his answer of 24 October, *Official Report*, column *612*, because no perpetrators were found. [6088]

Mr. Forth: The number of cases excluded from the answer of the 24 October are as follows:

	Number of cases	*Amount involved*	*Amount recovered*
1993–94			
DfEE	4	£13,244	£ nil
1994–95			
DfEE	5	£42,063	£10,800

1. Not all of the above cases were reported on the Treasury returns.
2. The perpetrators of the above cases were not necessarily members of the Department or its agencies.
3. There were no recorded cases involving the Employment Service or other agencies.

School Admissions (Appeals)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many appeals were made by parents on the grounds of non-admission of their child to the school of their choice in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; how many of these appeals went before a statutory committee; and of these how many were (i) rejected and (ii) found in parents' favour. [6150]

Mrs. Gillan: The available information is shown in the following table:

Appeals by parents against non-admission of their children to maintained (including grant maintained) primary and secondary schools in England

Academic year 1993–94

Total appeals lodged[1]	*Appeals heard by a statutory committee*[2]	*Appeals rejected*	*Appeals found in parents' favour*
45,876	32,188	18,891	13,255

[1] Includes appeals which were withdrawn by parents or settled to mutual satisfaction before reaching a statutory committee.

[2] Includes appeals heard by a statutory committee for which a decision was still to be made at the end of the academic year.

Nursery Education

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many three and four-year-olds in each local education authority attended *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes and *(c)* reception classes in primary school. [6189]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information on pupils aged three and four in maintained nursery and primary schools for each local education authority in England is shown in the following table:

Pupils aged 3 and 4 in maintained nursery and primary schools in England

Position as at January 1995

	Nursery schools	*Primary schools*	
		Nursery classes	*Infant classes*[1]
Camden	61	955	1,015
Greenwich	647	2,635	1,024
Hackney	149	2,172	1,587
Hammersmith and Fulham	554	1,167	568
Islington	319	1,575	1,466
Kensington and Chelsea	249	608	385
Lambeth	450	2,011	1,018
Lewisham	231	2,431	1,131
Southwark	535	2,562	2,120
Tower Hamlets	721	2,635	1,705
Wandsworth	216	2,176	1,624
Westminster	190	993	574
Barking and Dagenham	0	2,054	1,623
Barnet	575	2,095	2,205
Bexley	0	1,442	2,074
Brent	223	2,377	1,974
Bromley	0	172	2,385
Croydon	499	1,512	2,883
Ealing	454	3,265	2,426
Enfield	0	1,663	2,389
Haringey	223	2,519	1,848
Harrow	0	1,009	1,626
Havering	0	495	1,984
Hillingdon	120	3,234	87
Hounslow	0	2,363	1,725
Kingston upon Thames	242	967	1,038
Merton	0	2,713	983
Newham	959	3,496	1,280
Redbridge	0	1,326	1,397
Richmond upon Thames	68	670	1,114
Sutton	240	1,727	64
Waltham Forest	308	2,405	1,044
Birmingham	2,411	8,538	10,019
Coventry	141	1,984	2,788
Dudley	70	2,992	2,707
Sandwell	128	4,537	2,840
Solihull	0	1,880	1,949
Walsall	839	3,557	2,465
Wolverhampton	848	3,050	2,262
Knowsley	0	3,003	1,679
Liverpool	564	5,698	4,483
St. Helens	80	1,605	1,574
Sefton	318	2,440	2,507
Wirral	319	1,954	2,933
Bolton	491	2,694	2,618
Bury	159	1,379	1,595
Manchester	542	7,039	2,429
Oldham	0	2,458	2,236
Rochdale	912	1,233	2,112
Salford	1,075	2,456	2,264
Stockport	936	1,146	2,483
Tameside	281	2,287	2,135
Trafford	0	2,526	1,919
Wigan	190	1,986	2,732
Barnsley	181	2,812	1,101
Doncaster	0	3,667	2,817
Rotherham	403	2,924	1,160
Sheffield	851	4,849	2,438
Bradford	521	5,965	4,135
Calderdale	0	1,946	1,866
Kirklees	548	3,890	3,509
Leeds	77	9,170	5,730
Wakefield	481	4,363	1,770
Gateshead	73	1,801	1,653
Newcastle upon Tyne	622	2,295	2,289
North Tyneside	226	2,468	1,682
South Tyneside	454	1,781	1,388
Sunderland	1,042	2,405	2,611
Avon	1,799	3,434	7,930
Bedfordshire	1,476	3,744	2,918
Berkshire	2,203	4,657	777
Buckinghamshire	571	2,469	3,100
Cambridgeshire	734	1,497	5,842
Cheshire	869	4,614	8,323
Cleveland	154	9,368	5,241
Cornwall[2]	111	1,555	3,617
Cumbria	817	2,224	4,066
Derbyshire	1,573	8,132	5,768
Devon	315	2,697	4,240
Dorset	0	841	5,000
Durham	2,618	4,645	5,112
East Sussex	258	1,367	5,186
Essex	300	2,386	8,694
Gloucestershire	0	27	4,616
Hampshire	339	1,638	13,645
Hereford and Worcester	0	1,682	2,953
Hertfordshire	1,743	7,780	5,374
Humberside	1,163	8,080	5,400
Isle of Wight	0	175	922
Kent	83	2,125	13,509
Lancashire	3,664	4,466	12,867
Leicestershire	51	5,219	4,762
Lincolnshire	531	1,536	4,912
Norfolk	404	857	5,646
North Yorkshire	373	3,512	5,362
Northamptonshire	616	2,429	5,478
Northumberland	128	2,923	2,498
Nottinghamshire	595	13,169	2,099
Oxfordshire	1,079	2,148	1,317
Shropshire	176	1,844	2,127
Somerset	0	587	3,901
Staffordshire	2,077	4,976	9,068
Suffolk	101	2,977	2,591
Surrey	428	2,635	7,078
Warwickshire	759	1,425	4,228
West Sussex	434	811	3,011
Wiltshire	0	577	3,388
England[2] [3]	52,558	303,462	343,824

[1] Includes reception and other classes.

[2] Includes Isles of Scilly.

[3] Includes Corporation of London.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total cost *(a)* nationally and *(b)* to each local education authority of teachers' pay increases in (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1996–97. [5792]

Mr. Robin Squire: The total estimated cost in England and Wales of the teachers' pay increase in 1994–95 was £309 million. The following table illustrates the cost of the award by updating the 1993–94 expenditure recorded by local education authorities in England and Wales for teaching staff salaries in nursery and primary, secondary and special schools by the 1994–95 teachers' pay award of 2.9 per cent. The 1993–94 expenditure figures are the latest available for LEA-maintained schools in England

and Wales. The figures in the table take no account of changes in teacher numbers or other factors that affect the teachers' pay bill.

The School Teachers Review Body has not yet recommended a pay award for 1996–97.

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

£000

Pre-primary and primary, secondary and special schools	*1993–94 (actual)*	*1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.)*
Corporation of London	378	11
Camden	37,774	1,095
Greenwich	53,751	1,559
Hackney	41,871	1,214
Hammersmith and Fulham	25,087	728
Islington	37,294	1,082
Kensington and Chelsea	15,922	462
Lambeth	39,698	1,151
Lewisham	43,235	1,254
Southwark	38,056	1,104
Tower Hamlets	58,012	1,682
Wandsworth	31,532	914
City of Westminster	30,151	874
Barking	34,487	1,000
Barnet	55,491	1,609
Bexley	40,962	1,188
Brent	39,613	1,149
Bromley	35,283	1,023
Croydon	51,278	1,487
Ealing	46,119	1,337
Enfield	51,873	1,504
Haringey	48,595	1,409
Harrow	38,702	1,122
Havering	41,677	1,209
Hillingdon	26,648	773
Hounslow	46,927	1,361
Kingston upon Thames	21,879	634
Merton	33,279	965
Newham	54,533	1,581
Redbridge	49,548	1,437
Richmond upon Thames	25,724	746
Sutton	22,531	653
Waltham Forest	46,867	1,359
Birmingham	211,785	6,142
Coventry	69,840	2,025
Dudley	55,540	1,611
Sandwell	66,061	1,916
Solihull	41,921	1,216
Walsall	55,669	1,614
Wolverhampton	53,635	1,555
Knowsley	34,935	1,013
Liverpool	104,939	3,043
St. Helens	39,149	1,135
Sefton	57,370	1,664
Wirral	69,278	2,009
Bolton	54,728	1,587
Bury	33,505	972
Manchester	91,541	2,655
Oldham	56,483	1,638
Rochdale	39,389	1,142
Salford	47,641	1,382
Stockport	53,551	1,553
Tameside	39,501	1,146
Trafford	36,262	1,052
Wigan	66,655	1,933
Barnsley	41,363	1,200
Doncaster	62,198	1,804
Rotherham	58,540	1,698
Sheffield	92,046	2,669
Bradford	109,072	3,163
Calderdale	37,935	1,100
Kirklees	81,076	2,351
Leeds	146,072	4,236
Wakefield	63,131	1,831
Gateshead	40,458	1,173
Newcastle upon Tyne	53,518	1,552
North Tyneside	40,501	1,175
South Tyneside	31,493	913
Sunderland	65,654	1,904
Isles of Scilly	608	18
Avon	177,289	5,141
Bedfordshire	105,301	3,054
Berkshire	135,540	3,931
Buckinghamshire	112,209	3,254
Cambridgeshire	103,041	2,988
Cheshire	185,457	5,378
Cleveland	124,442	3,609
Cornwall	86,653	2,513
Cumbria	88,947	2,579
Derbyshire	168,175	4,877
Devon	175,999	5,104
Dorset	98,186	2,847
Durham	120,743	3,502
East Sussex	116,123	3,368
Essex	211,358	6,129
Glouchestershire	74,050	2,147
Hampshire	256,960	7,452
Hereford and Worcester	128,339	3,722
Hertfordshire	186,227	5,401
Humberside	177,122	5,137
Isle of Wight	24,264	704
Kent	227,895	6,609
Lancashire	294,517	8541
Leicestershire	185,004	5,365
Lincolnshire	88,099	2,555
Norfolk	124,807	3,619
North Yorkshire	138,958	4,030
Northamptonshire	109,086	3,163
Northumberland	62,398	1,810
Nottinghamshire	204,137	5,920
Oxfordshire	105,430	3,057
Shropshire	79,422	2,303
Somerset	84,749	2,458
Staffordshire	193,818	5,621
Suffolk	130,118	3,773
Surrey	143,690	4,167
Warwickshire	90,965	2,638
West Sussex	128,568	3,728
Wiltshire	96,340	2,794
Clwyd	79,496	2,305
Dyfed	83,748	2,429
Gwent	89,452	2,594
Gwynedd	52,783	1,531
Mid Glamorgan	126,517	3,669
South Glamorgan	84,294	2,445
West Glamorgan	79,266	2,299
Powys	27,607	801

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the national cost of a 2.5 per cent. increase in teachers' pay in 1996–97. [5793]

Mr. Squire: The Department is still working on its best estimate of the teachers' pay bill for 1996–97 for the School Teachers Review Body. On the basis of the estimated pay bill for 1995–96, the cost of a 2.5 per cent. increase in teachers' pay in 1996–97 in England and Wales would be approximately £280 million.

Local Education Authority Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average amount of money spent by her Department on a pupil in a public sector school at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level for each academic year since 1981. [5795]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows in both cash and 1993–94 prices, the net institutional expenditure per pupil in local education authority-maintained *(a)* pre-primary and primary and *(b)* secondary schools, in each financial year between 1981–82 and 1993–94, the latest year for which outturn figures are available. These figures are available only in financial years.

National Unit Costs Pre-Primary and Secondary Schools

Net Institutional Expenditure

	Pre-primary and primary		*Secondary*	
Year	*Cash terms* £	*1993–94 prices* £	*Cash terms* £	*1993–94 prices* £
1981–82	621	1,174	865	1,635
1982–83	682	1,203	942	1,662
1983–84	732	1,234	1,014	1,710
1984–85	767	1,232	1,086	1,744
1985–86	817	1,244	1,177	1,792
1986–87	905	1,337	1,340	1,980
1987–88	1,006	1,411	1,517	2,128
1988–89	1,101	1,448	1,692	2,225
1989–90	1,210	1,487	1,852	2,276
1990–91	1,339	1,524	2,015	2,293
1991–92	1,468	1,572	2,147	2,300
1992–93	1,583	1,629	2,256	2,322
1993–94	1,630	1,630	2,245	2,245

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many independent schools excluding city technology colleges are operating in the current academic year in England. [5825]

Mrs. Gillan: There are currently 2,272 independent schools registered by the Department, excluding city technology colleges.

Conductive Education

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans there are to make conductive education available for children whose parents choose it. [5834]

Mrs. Gillan: Responsibility for providing for children with special educational needs rests with local education authorities. For those children whose needs cannot be met within the ordinary resources of a mainstream school, LEAs will maintain statements of SEN, drawn up in consultation with parents. Where a child's statement specifies conductive education, the LEA has a duty to secure its provision.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment has been made of the value and achievements of conductive education. [5816]

Mrs. Gillan: The results of a Department-funded five-year research project undertaken by the university of Birmingham were published in 1993. These indicated that conductive education did not generally produce better results than other methods for teaching children with cerebral palsy.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many institutions provide conductive education for children with special educational needs; and how many children are currently receiving conductive therapy in each institution. [5811]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department does not collect this information.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service Year Book

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the civil service year book for 1996 will be published. [6728]

Mr. Willetts: The civil service year book 1996 will be published by HMSO on Monday 18 December. This is the first time it has been available for the beginning of the calendar year. This publication updates and extends the range of information available about ministerial appointments, Government Departments and agencies. A CD-ROM version will also be published simultaneously, providing additional key statistics. Copies of both will be placed in the House Libraries.

Public Bodies

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many non-departmental public bodies are currently in existence; what percentages of appointments to these bodies are held by women and by members of ethnic minorities; and when the annual list of such bodies will be published. [6649]

Mr. Willetts: On 1 April 1995, there were 1,227 non-departmental public bodies—a fall of 118 or 8.8 per cent. since 1994, and of 940 or 43 per cent. since 1979. As of 1 September 1995, 30 per cent. of appointments to these bodies were held by women and 2.9 per cent. by members of the ethnic minorities: this compares with 23 per cent. and 2.0 per cent. respectively four years ago, when the Prime Minister announced the Government's determination to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities in this area. Details can be found in "Public Bodies 1995" published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Civil Service Recruitment

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the reports of the independent studies on marketing the civil service's fast stream recruitment scheme and the audit of the fast stream selection process which were announced earlier this year. [6878]

Mr. Willetts: The Government announced in January their intention to commission an external, expert review of the marketing of the fast stream recruitment scheme and an independent audit of the selection process. Copies of the reports of both studies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The independent audit has investigated very thoroughly the current system of selection to the fast stream. Its general conclusions are that this is a well-administered and highly professional process and that all reasonable measures have been taken to develop a system which is fair and balanced. The report makes a number of recommendations which

"represent suggestions for 'fine tuning' rather than radical change".

Most of these have been accepted and action is in hand to implement them.

The marketing study has identified a number of key actions needed if the attractiveness of the fast stream to potential recruits is to be strengthened and broadened. A programme of action has therefore been agreed, for introduction in the 1996 recruitment competition. The name of the revised scheme, will be the "fast stream development programme", retaining the "fast stream" brand identified by the marketing study as a valuable asset, but making clearer that entry is to a development programme of limited duration.

The Government announced on 23 November their intention to transfer recruitment and assessment services to the private sector as a single viable business and in a way which will ensure that it retains its reputation for the provision of high quality recruitment services. The sale of RAS will include a contract for the fast stream recruitment process for future civil servants, specifying the services required, including any necessary changes stemming from the independent audit and marketing study.

Fuller information about the revised scheme will be contained in the annual report on fast stream recruitment, due to be published in May 1996.

Deregulation

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those European capitals he has *(a)* visited and *(b)* plans to visit to discuss deregulation and give the total estimated cost to public funds of these visits. [5877]

Mr. Freeman: I have discussed deregulation with Ministers, EU Commissioners and business leaders in Paris, Bonn, Madrid, The Hague, Copenhagen, Stockolm, Helsinki and Brussels. I intend to have further discussions with Ministers of the remaining European Union countries. The travel costs associated with the visits already undertaken is estimated to be £9,790. Arrangements for further visits are yet to be made.

Computers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in what way the Government are responding to the problem of non-recognition by computers of the year 2000 in respect of those computers used by *(a)* their own Departments and *(b)* large and small businesses; and if he will make a statement. [5530]

The Deputy Prime Minister: CCTA, the Government centre for information systems, has been discussing this matter with other Government organisations and the IT industry, and will be assessing existing guidance, and what action or advice may be required on the part of Government, during the first quarter of 1996.

Advice and help to large and small businesses are available through specialist publications, from the Computing Services and Software Association and from a number of private sector suppliers.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5715]

Mr. Freeman: The Government's Metropolitan Telecommunications Service is already largely provided by the private sector, which owns much of the infrastructure. The Office of Public Service hopes to involve private finance further in the provision of software used by Government Departments. This could involve capital expenditure of some £1.5 million in 1996–97, but it is not yet clear what revenue expenditure would replace the capital expenditure programme.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5707]

Mr. Willetts: The Cabinet Office's performance in respect of the payment of invoices from its suppliers is published in the annual departmental report, Cm 2820. That report gave information in respect of 1994. The next report, due to be published in March 1996, will provide information relating to the payment of invoices during 1995.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much his Department has spent on official hospitality in the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5585]

Mr. Willetts: Expenditure on official hospitality by the Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service, and its executive agencies, excluding HMSO—for the period 1 April 1995 to the end of November is £30,100. Expenditure by HMSO, which has a different accounting year, is £33,900, for the period 1 January to the end of November.

The projected budget for official hospitality in the full financial year 1995–96 is £41,200. This excludes HMSO and COI. The latter does not separately identify hospitality within its budgeting system, as it is included as part of its overall budget for marketing and client relations. HMSO's projected budget for its financial year 1995 is £37,000.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

British Goods and Services

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* value in pounds sterling of the overseas aid budget has been tied to the purchase of British goods or services in each year since 1979–80. [5120]

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Year	*Bilateral tied aid (£ million)*	*Percentage of total bilateral aid*
1979	525	77
1980	489	70
1981	563	67
1982	471	70
1983	460	66
1984	477	61
1985	523	63
1986	598	71
1987	529	69
1988	692	69
1989	787	71
1990	740	71
1991	933	73
1992	650	67
1993	703	65
1994	557	54

1. Tying status data is only available for the United Kingdom's bilateral aid programme. No reliable data are available for the tying status of technical cooperation so all of this aid is reported to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD as being tied and is included in the above figures.

2. The DAC definition of tied aid means that procurement is restricted to a specified number of countries. Data on aid specifically tied to the procurement of British goods and services are unavailable.

3. In addition, aid is given to multilateral agencies who also procure British goods and services.

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been in deciding the future ownership of the Natural Resources Institute. [6789]

Mr. Hanley: We have carefully considered indicative offers for the ownership of the Natural Resources Institute received by the closing date of 16 October. The Government's objective is a transfer of ownership which will continue to provide a centre of multidisciplinary expertise on the sustainable management of renewable natural resources for ODA and other customers, gives staff a fair future, and represents value for money for the taxpayer. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has decided to invite final offers by the end of January 1996 from:

Cranfield university;

A consortium of the university of Edinburgh, university of Greenwich, Imperial College of Science Technology and Medicine and Wye College, university of London;

Serco International Ltd. in association with the university of Wales.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5972]

Mr. Newton: No such surveys have been carried out for the Privy Council Office in the last three years.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Debates (Bilateral Agreements)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Lord President of the Council in what circumstances it is his policy to accede to a request for a debate by an hon. Member on certain bilateral agreements or international treaties. [5410]

Mr. Newton: It is not possible to specify, in advance, the circumstances in which a request for a debate will be acceded to.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4475]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 December. [4476]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Paris signing the Dayton agreement on Bosnia.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl the aspects of the Lockerbie issue pertaining to events at the Rhein-Main airport at Frankfurt in December 1988, and the desirability of a trial of two Libyan suspects at The Hague, under a Scottish judge, under Scottish rules of evidence. [4162]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no plans to do so.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will announce the television licence fees which will take effect from 1 April 1996. [3911]

Mr. Sproat *[pursuant to his reply, 30 November 1995, Official Report, c. 818]:* After further detailed scrutiny, an administrative error has come to light regarding the rounding of the figure for the new colour television licence fee payable from 1 April 1996. As a result of this additional review, licence fee payers will now have to pay only £89.50 for a colour television licence rather than the £90 initially announced.

This change will not affect the BBC's ability to provide its wide range of television and radio services. The BBC's own financial planning should already have anticipated the level of funding that it could expect in the financial year 1996–97.

This announcement does not affect the new black and white television licence fee, which will be £30 from 1 April 1996. The necessary regulations will be laid before the House in due course.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Morocco

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage the Government of Morocco to release Jamaa Ait Bakrim. [5660]

Mr. Hanley: Our embassy in Rabat have been in contact with the Moroccan Ministry of Human Rights about this case. We understand that Mr. Bakrim is accused of proselytising and that his case has gone to appeal.

Gibraltar

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's position on the future of Gibraltar. [6250]

Mr. David Davis: The then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) made clear the Government's position in the House on 6 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *188-89*. It has not changed.

First, and most important, Britain stands by its commitment to the people of Gibraltar, enshrined in the 1969 constitution. The Government will not enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes.

Secondly, we continue to recognise the validity of the treaty of Utrecht, which established British title to Gibraltar. Article X of that treaty gave Spain the right of "first refusal" if Gibraltar ceased to be British. Any constitutional change would have to be compatible with the treaty of Utrecht and sustainable in practice. Independence would be an option for Gibraltar only if Spain agreed.

Thirdly, Spain is Gibraltar's immediate neighbour. The Government recognise the importance of negotiations with Spain, including through the Brussels process, to overcome the existing differences over Gibraltar. Our ultimate goal is to achieve a lasting solution which is acceptable to all parties and mutually beneficial.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5704]

Mr. Hanley: Both wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are committed to the Confederation of British Industry prompt payment code, which requires all invoices to be paid within the agreed credit period or within 30 days of receipt where no credit period has been agreed. The following table shows the percentage of invoices paid on time by the diplomatic wing, the Overseas Development Administration and the executive agencies Wilton Park and the Natural Resources Institute.

	DW	*ODA*	*WP*	*NRI*
1994–95	92	87	95	96
1995–96[1]	92	91	100	93

[1] April–November.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5754]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *694*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5743]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO—diplomatic wing and the Overseas Development Administration—has incurred £38,870 identifiable staff costs and £20,257 consultancy costs in administering the PFI to date. The resources required to administer the PFI are kept under review.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned,

(ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5986]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given by the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 27 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *760–61*, and by the then Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 20 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *48–49*. The opinion survey in question has been published in the House of Commons Library.

As part of a survey on the effectiveness of its external communications survey, the Overseas Development Administration commissioned National Opinion Poll to conduct a public opinion survey which looked generally at the way the public viewed the aid programme. This cost £3,705 plus VAT and was carried out in mid-November 1995.

EC Consular Service

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to promote a European consular service to represent European Union citizens in third countries at the next intergovernmental conference. [5903]

Mr. David Davis: None. However, under article 8c of the EC treaty as revised at Maastricht, every citizen of the Union is entitled to protection by the diplomatic or consular authorities of any member state on the same conditions as the nationals of that state. This right has been implemented by decisions of the Council agreed in principle on 20 November 1995.

TRANSPORT

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5978]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available in the form requested.

Fishing Vessels (Registration)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to change the regulation for registration of fishing vessels from other EC countries at British ports. [4153]

Mr. Norris: The regulations were amended to take account of our treaty obligations by the Merchant Shipping (Registration of Ships) Regulations 1993.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5695]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 18 July, *Official Report*, columns *1211–12*.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5728]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), on 9 May, *Official Report*, column *349*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI; [5729]

(2) if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5730]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 6 December, *Official Report* column *277*.

Departmental Fraud

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total number and cost of all forms of fraud affecting his Department and its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, as set out in the returns to Her Majesty's Treasury for departmental fraud for each year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement. [6137]

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number*	*Amount £*
1990–91	3	17,378
1991–92	7	36,771
1992–93	10	3,822
1993–94	15	10,410
1994–95	9	[1]176,896

[1] This includes the sum of £174,440 which reflects the losses suffered as a result of two overnight raids on departmental premises by thieves.

Humber Bridge

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was *(a)* the total cost to public funds of constructing the Humber bridge (i) in capital costs and (ii) in accumulated revenue losses, *(b)* the amount of revenue loss in each of the last five years, *(c)* the charge for each vehicle crossing in each year since construction and *(d)* the number of vehicles of different types of vehicle crossing in each year; who pays the losses in respect of the bridge currently; what powers exist to control who pays the losses and what options are available under present legislation; and what changes he plans. [6161]

Mr. Watts: The cost of constructing the Humber bridge was met out of loans from the Department of Transport and the Public Works Loan Board: this initial cost to public funds was £151 million. By September 1991 that opening debt had risen by £288 million to £439 million through the capitalisation of interest charges that could not be met out of toll revenue. From February 1992, grants under the Appropriation Acts have been paid to meet a capital repayment to the PWLB and unmet interest charges on the Department's loans. By March 1996 these will have totalled £168 million. Capitalised interest and grant payments therefore represent a total extra cost of £456 million. In the last five years the revenue shortfall that has resulted in a capitalisation of debt or grant payments has been approximately £39 million per annum.

The charges for each class of vehicle since the bridge opened are as follows:

Class	*June 1981 to 31 December 1985* £	*1 January 1986 to 31 December 1987* £	*1 January 1988 to 6 August 1989* £	*7 August 1989 to present* £
1) Motorcycles	0.50	0.60	0.70	0.70
2) Private cars and light vans	1.00	1.20	1.50	1.60
3) Cars and light vans with trailers	2.00	2.40	2.90	2.90
4) Heavy commercial vehicles class A–2 axles	4.50	5.20	5.20	6.50
5) Class B–3 axles	6.00	6.60	6.60	8.70
6) Class C–4 or more axles	7.50	8.00	8.00	10.90
7) Light commercial vehicles and minibuses	2.00	2.40	2.90	Merged with class three
8) Buses and coaches	4.50	5.20	5.20	Merged with class four

The number of vehicles using the crossing in each of those classes is:

Description	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Motor-cycles	44,070	44,554	46,073	47,514
Cars and light vans	4,493,922	4,740,806	4,958,937	5,081,583
Cars and light vans with trailers (includes mini buses and light comm.)	169,393	179,654	182,789	186,959
Heavy comm.-2 axles (includes service buses and coaches)	139,427	141,291	144,120	143,305
Heavy comm. 3 axles	27,296	27,922	28,941	30,538
Heavy comm. 4+ axles	229,108	228,732	253,623	257,799
Heavy comm. sub total	395,831	397,945	426,684	431,642
Exempt vehicles	118,023	127,563	141,134	161,272
Total	5,221,239	5,490,522	5,755,617	5,908,970

Under the present legislation, any deficits may be met by a precept upon three of the local authorities of Humberside. The Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill currently before Parliament will enable the Secretary of State to write off and suspend parts of that debt and so lift the risk of a substantial burden falling upon local council tax payers.

Trans-European Networks

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies and other initiatives have been or are planned to be undertaken as a result of receiving funding from the trans-European networks; and what is their start and finish date and estimated costs. [6035]

Mr. Watts: As I explained in my reply to the previous question by the hon. Member for North Cornwall on 27 November, *Official Report*, column 267, only the 1995 funds for TENs have so far been allocated, and 75 per cent. of these have been allocated to the priority projects identified by the Essen European Council.

TENs funds are allocated against total eligible expenditure incurred in the year for which the funds are granted, but are not subsequently broken down as between the individual elements of eligible expenditure. A project begun in 1994, but not completed until 1995 or later, may therefore receive 1995 funds for the expenditure incurred on it in 1995 and thereafter.

For the United Kingdom projects on the Essen list, the details are as follows:

1. *Channel Tunnel Rail Link*

(part of the Paris-Brussels-Koln-Amsterdam-London High Speed Train link project)

Continuation of feasibility study work begun in 1989

Study work expected to be completed 1997

Total eligible expenditure relating to 1995 funding: £25.6 million

2. *West Coast Main Line upgrading*

Completion of feasibility studies: studies to confirm cost estimates and for specialised design

Feasibility studies start date April 1994; design studies start date January 1995

Feasibility studies completed April 1995; design studies to be completed post 1999

Total eligible expenditure relating to 1995 funding: £12 million

3. *Ireland-UK-Benelux road link*

Studies of possible ways to increase M6 and M11 capacity, and of possible upgrading of junctions on Newry-Dundalk section of A1 Northern Ireland

Studies start date: 1995

Studies completion date: Early 1996

Total eligible study costs: £6 million

In addition, a number of smaller, mostly traffic management schemes were allocated funds in respect of study work carried out in 1995. The details for the one UK scheme concerned are as follows:

Scheme title: ERTICO (European Co-ordination of Radio Data Systems-Traffic Message Control)

Feasibility study of elements needed to establish a sustainable national service.

Study work started September 1995; expected completion December 1997

Total eligible expenditure relating to 1995 funding: £900,000

Spanish and Dutch-owned Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Spanish and Dutch-owned vessels are registered in British ports, by port. [6026]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 14 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about Spanish and Dutch owned vessels registered in British ports.

I regret the information you have requested is not available.

Roads (Cancelled Contracts)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contracts for future road building have been cancelled consequent on the Budget review of the roads programme; and what has been the cost to his Department of paying compensation for cancelled contracts. [5663]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 14 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, how many contracts for future road building have been cancelled consequent on the Budget review of the roads programme; and what has been the cost to his Department of paying compensation for cancelled contracts.

No construction contracts have been cancelled as a result of the review. Commissions with design agents on 138 schemes are now being terminated, but no compensation has been paid to date.

M25

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) at what time on 5 or 6 December a decision was made not to allow any more traffic to join the M25; [5875]

(2) what public information announcements were made, and at what time, about conditions on the Surrey sections of the M25 on 5 and 6 December; [5876]

(3) at what time gritting lorries from *(a)* Kent county council and *(b)* Surrey county council began gritting their sections of the M25 on 5 December. [5874]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Nicholas Ainger, dated 14 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about conditions on the M25 during the 5 and 6 December.

Following salting overnight on 4/5 December, Kent County Council undertook gritting on their section of the M25 at 2pm, 5pm and throughout the evening on 5 December. Surrey County Council began their early salting programme at 4am on 5 December, carried out some random gritting at 4.15pm to deal with specific problem areas and took the decision at 6pm to start their main gritting programme for their section of the M25 at 7pm. Unfortunately, by that time, the motorway had become too congested and inaccessible for the gritting to be undertaken.

At 3.45pm on the 5 December, Variable Message Signs were activated on the M25 to show speed limits and messages such as "ice on carriageways" and "slow ice skid risk". Signs showing "long delays M25 east" were turned on from Junction 11. At the same time, AA Roadwatch were notified so that they could advise local radio. They were updated at regular intervals. On 6 December, "long delay" signs were activated as far back as Junctions 13 and 14 from approximately 7am. Once again the AA Roadwatch continuously updated their advice to local radio.

The decision to close the Kent bound carriageway of the M25 between Junctions 6 and 5 was taken by the police at approximately 7.50am on the 6 December. The closure lasted for two and a half hours until about 10.30 am. This was necessary to remove abandoned vehicles and to allow gritters onto the motorway.

M1

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when phase 1 of the M1, junctions 25 to 28 will be completed; [5661]

(2) when phase 2 of the M1, junctions 25 to 28 will be completed. [5662]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 14 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking the Secretary of State for Transport, when Phases 1 and 2 of M1 Junctions 25 to 28 will be completed.

Following the recent review of the roads programme, we will be concentrating on enhancing the junctions on this length of the M1 to make good use of the existing motorway. In taking any junction improvements forward, we shall take into account the responses to the public consultation into the widening proposals in September 1994. It is not possible to say yet when this work will be completed. The second phase of the scheme, which is the proposed widening to dual 4 lanes, is now in the longer term programme and the consultancy for this work is being terminated. Work on all longer term schemes will be taken forward as the main programme is completed.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney General if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future of PFI work. [5719]

The Attorney-General: As indicated in my answer of 7 November *Official Report*, columns *668*, the Law Officers' Departments have not used the PFI for any project to date, and costs so far incurred have been minimal. It is not possible to predict what schemes might be approved under the PFI in future or, therefore, to forecast future administration costs.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5720]

The Solicitor-General: No schemes have so far been approved by the Law Officers'Departments under the PFI and it is not possible to predict what schemes might be approved in future or, therefore, to forecast future revenue expenditure.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5709]

The Solicitor-General: The Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible make every effort to settle invoices promptly. In 1994–95, the Serious Fraud Office paid 74 per cent. of invoices in accordance with contract terms or, where there were no such terms, within 30 days. The Crown Prosecution Service paid 81.4 per cent. of witness expense claims within 10 days.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5983]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has carried out one survey of public opinion in the three years to December 1995. This was designed to examine public awareness of, and attitudes towards, the CPS. The details requested are as follows:

(i) date commissioned: March 1993

(ii) cost: £2,200

(iii) researcher: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

(iv) number of people surveyed: about 1800 adults

(v) location and time scale: throughout England and Wales: one month

(vi) individuals/organisations given access: the Director of Public Prosecutions and her Management Board, CPS Press and Publicity, Policy Group.

DEFENCE

Stores Losses

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what was the value of goods and equipment reported lost, stolen or missing by each Army command in each year since 1990; and what was the value of any such goods and equipment subsequently recovered as a result of investigations. [5328]

Mr. Soames: Total stores losses written off in Army budget areas were as follows:

	Value £ thousand
1992–93	
Adjutant General	11.5
Quarter Master General	922.1
Assistant Chief of the General Staff	331.3
HQBAOR	1,506.4
CINC UK Land Forces	1,386.6
1993–94	
Adjutant General	4.9
Quarter Master General	1,037.0
UK Support Command (Germany)	1,431.7
CINC UK Land Forces	1,724.1
GOC Northern Ireland	316.4
1994–95[1]	
Adjutant General	3.0
Quarter Master General	1,199.0
Land Command	1,877.3
GOC Northern Ireland	562.8

[1] These figures do not include Germany for which returns are not yet available.

Figures for earlier years or for recoveries could not be broken down in this way without disproportionate cost. Where, however, recovery is made in the same year as the loss is recorded, the figures are net of recovery.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5718]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *666*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5716]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *175*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5717]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *666*, and 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *343*.

Porton Down

Mr. Nick Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what methods, other than experimentation on animals, have been used at Porton Down and elsewhere to test antidotes to chemical weapons. [5872]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 14 December 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what methods other than experimentation on animals have been used at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE), Porton Down to test antidotes to chemical weapons has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which now includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

CBDE continues to develop and use a range of in-vitro test systems for the identification and evaluation of medical countermeasures against chemical warfare agents. These systems include cell and tissue cultures, synthetic membranes and in-vitro diffusion systems.

The military acceptability of proposed medical counter measures is assessed in service volunteers.

I hope this information is helpful.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down filmed its LSD experiments on service volunteers during *(a)* Operation Recount, *(b)* Operation Small Change and *(c)* tests in the establishment's medical facilities. [5934]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. David Clark, dated 14 December 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down filmed the LSD experiments on service volunteers during a) Operation Recount, b) Operation Small Change and c) tests in the Establishment's medical facilities has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). The Chemical Defence Establishment has undergone a number of changes since the 1960s and is now known as the Chemical & Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) which is a division of DERA.

Information held at CBDE suggests that some of these trials which, as you know were conducted about thirty years ago at Porton Down, were filmed. Unfortunately, in the time allowed to answer your question it has not been possible to recover the films and confirm this. I will write to you as soon as it has been possible to do so.

I am sorry I cannot be more positive on this occasion.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animals were used in experiments to test antidotes to chemical weapons in each of the last five years at *(a)* the Porton Down establishment and *(b)* elsewhere. [5873]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 14 December 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many animals were used in experiments to test antidotes to chemical weapons in each of the last five years at a) Porton Down and b) elsewhere has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

The number of animals used at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down in research programmes with the aim of evaluating medical countermeasures against chemical warfare agents for the last five years is detailed below:

1990: 8,106

1991: 4,964

1992: 2,822

1993: 2,498

1994: 1,597

No work is done elsewhere in the MoD using animals to test antidotes to chemical weapons.

I hope this information is helpful.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5989]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

Date	*Survey title*	*Commissioned by*	*Report due/done*	*Sample size*
November 1992	ACIO Research	Army	February 1993	2,000
December 1992	Army Officer Creative Development Research	Army	February 1993	49
March 1993	Recruitment Advertising Strategy Research	RAF	June 1993	35
May 1993	Officer Advertising Creative Development Research	Army	June 1993	72
December 1993	NECL Creative Development	MOD	January 1994	10

Date	Survey title	Commissioned by	Report due/done	Sample size
	Research			
December 1993	Soldier Slogan Research	Army	December 1993	Not known
February 1994	Advertising Strategy Development Research	RN	May 1994	120
March 1994	University Finalists Survey	MOD	July 1994	Not known
March 1994	NELC Research	MOD	June 1994	2,400
May 1994	Slogan Confirmation and Creative Development Research	Army	June 1994	118
June 1994	Army Recruitment Targeting Research	Army	July 1994	900
June 1994	Asians Language and Communication Survey	RN	July 1994	3,000
August 1994	NELC tracking—Autumn 1994	MOD	November 1994	4,800
September 1994	Army Recruiting Advertising Tracking	Army	November 1994	2,000
November 1994	Potential Officers Career Literature	RAF	February 1995	250
December 1994	Army Tracking Stage 2	Army	April 1995	2,000
January 1995	The Recruitment of Ethnic Minorities into the Armed Forces	RAF	September 1995	5,000
February 1995	NELC Tracking—Spring 1995	Army	May 1995	4,800
February 1995	Welbeck—Stage 2	Army	April 1995	400
February 1995	MORI Undergraduate Study	Army	May 1995	1,500
March 1995	Officers Commissions Research	Army	June 1995	300
March 1995	Research into the effectiveness of RNPT presentations and audience targeting strategy	RN	May 1995	1,200
April 1995	New Reserves Forces Legislation	MOD	August 1995	Not known
May 1995	Soldiers Creative Advertising Development Research	Army	June 1995	30
June 1995	Advertising Tracking—Summer 1995	Army	July 1995	2,000
July 1995	Officer Advertising Creative Development Research	Army	August 1995	45
September 1995	Advertising Tracking—October 1995	Army	October 1995	2,000
September 1995	Recruitment Conversion Rates	Army	November 1995	125
October 1995	Navy Advertising Strategy Review	RN	November 1995	50
October 1995	Soldier Recruitment Advertising Campaign	Army	November 1995	336
October 1995	Advertising Tracking—November 1995	Army	November 1995	2,000
October 1995	TA Recruitment Advertising—Communication Research	Army	December 1995	300
November 1995	RAF Marketing Review Research	RAF	December 1995	2,103

The findings of the surveys are used for internal management purposes and are not normally available outside my Department. The costs of each survey and the identity of the individual companies are commercial in confidence.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5708]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Most of my Department's bills are paid by the Defence Accounts Agency. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency pays its own. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 14 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of bills to his Department are paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or within 30 days of receiving goods or services or presentation of a valid invoice. I am replying on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

DERA contracts do not generally specify payment dates. It is, however, DERA policy to pay within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. In fact, assuming that the 30 day period is measured from the point at which a validated invoice is received by our bill paying section, then virtually all bills are settled within 9 days.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 14 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the percentage of bills to his Department which were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. This matter falls within my area of responsibility.

Ministry of Defence contracts do not generally stipulate a payment date. Payment performance is calculated from the date of receipt of a valid bill in our Liverpool payment office, which pays the vast majority of MOD's contract bills.

The last year for which figures are available ran from October 1994 to October 1995. During this time 99.99% of bills were paid within 30 days of receipt of a valid bill. The Liverpool payment office also measures its performance against the higher departmental standard of payment within 11 days; 97% of bills were paid within this period.

Departmental Fraud

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number and monetary amount of all cases of *(a)* employee and *(b)* non-employee fraud and corruption within the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies; for each year from 1990–91 to 1994–95 and for 1995–96 to date; what was the total sum subsequently recovered for each year; and if he will make a statement on the breakdown of fraud and corruption between (i) employees and (i) contractors and other staff. [6014]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The levels and value of reported non-procurement fraud and theft involving employees within the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies since 1992–93 are as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Value £ thousand*	*Value recovered £ thousand*
1992–93	53	200.0	37.8
1993–94	107	521.0	74.7
1994–95	199	1,057.7	128.7
1995–96[1]	74	330.6	26.5

[1] To date.

The levels and value of reported non-procurement fraud and theft since 1992–93 involving non-employees are as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Value £ thousand*	*Value recovered £ thousand*
1992–93	1	4.9	0.0
1993–94	1	49.9	0.0
1994–95	8	37.9	0.0
1995–96[1]	5	8.7	1.7

[1] To date.

This breakdown is not available before 1992–93. The combined totals were:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Value £000s*	*Value recovered £000s*
1990–91	53	984.0	101.2
1991–92	45	63.0	22.5

With regard to procurement fraud perpetrated by contractors—including corruption and collusion involving MOD employees—the figures are as follows:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Value £ thousand*	*Value recovered £ thousand*
1990–91	23	10.0	No cash loss to MOD
1991–92	18	150.0	No cash loss to MOD
1992–93	27	20.0	No cash loss to MOD
1993–94	7	1,511.5	Recovery in hand
1994–95	10	No cases yet concluded	
1995–96[1]	20	No cases yet concluded	

[1] To date.

Service Leave

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the normal arrangements for leave and home service between tours; and in how many cases in each year since 1992 those arrangements have been reduced, waived or suspended. [5480]

Mr. Soames: Annual leave entitlement varies between the services from 30 days to 42 days depending on rank, with the flexibility to carry forward up to 14 days from one year to the next. Additionally, there is provision under service regulations for periods of embarkation and disembarkation leave of between seven and 21 days depending upon marital status and overseas location. This is to enable personnel either to settle their affairs in the United Kingdom before proceeding on a tour of duty overseas or to settle themselves and their families after returning to United Kingdom.

Personnel who are permitted or required to serve on a second consecutive and complete tour of duty overseas may be granted leave in the UK on completion of the first tour.

Regular overseas tours outside north-west Europe are still commonplace in the Army. However, when a normal overseas tour has been completed, every effort will be made to post individuals for a further tour of at least 18 months in UK or north-west Europe before the next overseas posting on a normal tour.

Posting and leave policy were subjects covered in the independent review carried out by Sir Michael Bett. My Department is evaluating his proposals.

The information on the number of cases in each year since 1992 where these arrangements have been reduced, waived or suspended is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Accommodation (Scotland)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of all *(a)* Army barracks, *(b)* Royal Marine accommodation and *(c)* Royal Air Force accommodation in Scotland (i) currently operational, (ii) in the process of being refurbished and (iii) scheduled for closure within the next two years. [4982]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* Army barracks in Scotland are located as follows:

Redford Infantry Barracks, Edinburgh

Dreghorn Barracks, Edinburgh

Fort George, Inverness

Barry Buddon Training Camp, Dundee

Refurbishment of single living accommodation is not currently being undertaken at any of these sites, nor are any of them currently scheduled for closure in the next two years.

Royal Marines single living accommodation in Scotland is located at:

RM Condor, Arbroath

Clyde Submarine Base, Faslane

RN Armaments Depot, Coulport

Refurbishment of single living accommodation is currently being undertaken at Condor. None of these sites is currently scheduled for closure in the next two years.

RAF single living accommodation in Scotland is located at:

RAF Buchan, Grampian

RAF Kinloss, Grampian

RAF Leuchars, Fife

RAF Lossiemouth, Grampian

RAF Macrihanish, Strathclyde

RAF Saxa Vord, Shetland

RAF Stornaway, Western Isles

RAF Turnhouse, Lothian

RAF Edzell, Grampian

Refurbishment of single living accommodation is being undertaken at RAF Leuchars, RAF Turnhouse is scheduled for closure in 1997. The United States navy is to withdraw from Edzell by 30 September 1997, but alternative defence uses have not yet been ruled out.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* buildings, *(b)* fuel tanks and *(c)* major fixed plants and equipment (i) have been demolished or removed at RAF Finningley 1) in the last three months and (2) in 1995 and (ii) are planned to be removed or demolished in 1996. [5221]

Mr. Soames: The following buildings at RAF Finningley:

(a) have been demolished or removed in the last three months:

Hut

4 x Portakabin

Hawk de-tuner

(b) have been demolished or removed in 1995:

as above plus:

5 x Portakabin

4 x Store

Miscellaneous shed

Office Block

Latrine Blocks

Rest Room

(c) will be demolished or removed in 1996:

2 x Dispersal hut

5 x Portakabin

The following fuel tanks:

(a) have been demolished in the last three months:

1 x Oil storage tank

4 x Bulk Fuel Installation

(b) have been demolished in 1995:

As above.

(c) will be demolished in 1996:

1 x Bulk Fuel Installation

The following major items of fixed plant and equipment:

(a) have been removed in the last three months:

Catering Equipment—Junior Ranks Mess and Sergeants Mess

(b) have been removed in 1995:

As above.

(c) will be removed in 1995:

2 x Flight simulators

3 x Synthetic trainers

Catering Equipment—Officers Mess

Vehicle wash

Fixed Machine Tools

Certain landing and navigational aids will be redeployed from RAF Finningley in 1996, to support RAF operations elsewhere. Further airfield equipment may be removed once future use of the site has been determined.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total amounts paid by his Department in compensation for incidents involving low flying in each financial year since 1989–90; and if he will provide a breakdown of the figures into amounts paid for *(a)* property damage, *(b)* aircraft crash damage, *(c)* personal injury, *(d)* livestock and *(e)* other. [5183]

Mr. Soames: The amounts paid are as follows:

Year		*Amounts £*
1989–90	414,000	(a) 174,000 (b) 42,000 (c) 31,000 (d) 167,000 (e) Nil
1990–91	427,000	(a) 86,000 (b) 5,000 (c) 66,000 (d) 270,000 (e) Nil
1991–92	440,000	(a) 54,000 (b) 33,000 (c) 33,000 (d) 320,000 (e) Nil
1992–93	506,000	(a) 45,000 (b) 216,000 (c) 63,000 (d) 182,000 (e) Nil
1993–94	558,000	(a) 81,000 (b) 44,000 (c) 51,000 (d) 379,000 (e) 3,000

Year		Amounts £
1994–95	703,000	(a) 86,000 (b) 148,000 (c) 121,000 (d) 327,000 (e) 21,000

The figures above for aircraft crashes do not include payments made by Defence Land Agents under delegated powers.

The figures above include compensation paid in respect of both UK and visiting forces military low flying.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where he plans to base the Army Air Corps' Apache helicopters. [5170]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No decision has yet been taken.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5566]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested for each of the last three financial years for Ministers' own offices is as follows:

1992–93: £5,594.31

1993–94: £7,663.20

1994–95: £ 390.60

There has been no expenditure during the current financial year.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary for Defence how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5583]

Mr. Soames: During the financial year 1994–95, my Department spent £4.867 million on official hospitality, and, as at 1 November 1995, £3.099 million has been spent during the current financial year. Present forecasts indicate that approximately £4.843 million will be spent on official hospitality during financial year 1995–96. These figures include expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence itself, by formations and establishments of the armed forces at home and abroad, and by individual officers occupying command and international appointments for which entertainment allowances are payable.

Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set Tablets

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice was issued to women in the armed forces serving in the Gulf between 1990 and 1991 as to pregnancy and childbirth in relation to NAPS tablets; and what medical considerations underlay this. [5475]

Mr. Soames: No official advice was issued during the Gulf war concerning the taking of nerve agent pretreatment set tablets in relation to pregnancy and childbirth. Pyridostigmine bromide, the main ingredient of NAPS tablets, has no known contra-indications for pregnancy.

Redundancies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of redundancies in the armed forces in each year since 1992 and in 1995 to date; what has been the cost of redundancy payments and other related benefits and enhancements in each year; and which arms and sections of the defence forces were the source of such redundancies. [5479]

Mr. Soames: In the financial year 1992–93, there were 3,957 redundancies with payment of redundancy and other related benefits and enhancements of £232 million. There were 9,041 redundancies in 1993–94 and 11,095 in 1994–95 with total payments of £509 million and £453 million respectively. From April to November 1995, there have been 352 redundancies with payment totalling £24 million.

These payments include special capital payments, and early payment of terminal grants, commuted pension payments and the first year's payment of immediate pensions.

The Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force have all been subject to redundancy during this period. Redundancies were selected from all ranks, covering a wide range of categories and groups of personnel.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, columns 1043–44, what assessment his Department has made of the analysis conducted by Professor Garth Nicholson of the university of Texas on the relationship between mycoplasmas and the group of medical complaints collectively referred to as Gulf war syndrome. [5675]

Mr. Soames: As part of my Department's routine monitoring of research material relating to the alleged Gulf war syndrome, consideration has been given to Dr. Nicholson's paper titled "Summary of Persian Gulf War illness pilot study on mycoplasmic infections". It has been concluded, however, that Dr. Nicholson's study does not provide any substantial or conclusive evidence of a connection between illnesses among veterans, mycoplasma infections and service in the Gulf. We will continue to monitor all information bearing on this issue in conjunction with medical experts nominated by the Royal College of Physicians.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. McNarmara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current strength of the Royal Irish Regiment; how many are *(a)* part of the regular Army and *(b)* recruited in Northern Ireland for (i) full-time service in Northern Ireland and (ii) part-time service in Northern Ireland; and what were the corresponding figures for the last five years from 3 November. [5039]

Mr. Soames: All members of the Royal Irish Regiment are formally part of the regular Army. However, the Royal Irish Regiment—Home Service—contains a large part-time element and is not liable for service outside Northern Ireland. Soldiers to serve in either the Royal Irish Regiment (General Service) or the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service) may be recruited in Northern Ireland or elsewhere. The current strength of the regiment, and previous strengths at 1 April in the years since its formation in July 1992, is as follows:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*Current*
General service (Full time)	839	905	900	940
Home service (Full time)	2,917	2,905	3,056	3,010
Home service (Part time)	2,696	2,485	2,257	2,140

Thefts

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel have been convicted of theft of military property in each year since 1990. [5329]

Mr. Soames: Service personnel charged and convicted of the theft of Ministry of Defence property were as follows:

	Charged	*Guilty*
1990–91	10	10
1991–92	3	3
1992–93	1	1
1993–94	11	5
1994–95	9	7

Absence without Leave

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force are currently absent without leave; how many members of each of the services have been absent without leave at 1 April in each of the last five years; how many members of each of the services have been absent without leave in each of the last 12 months; what was the average length of absence for each service; and if he will make a statement on his policies for locating absent personnel and returning them to service; [5330]

(2) how many personnel in each of the armed services who were first reported as absent without leave in each year since 1990, remain absent without leave. [5331]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his estimates of the planned and actual number of employees of his Department's police for each year from 1990–91 to 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [6015]

Mr. Soames: The actual number of staff employed by the MOD police for the years in question, as at 1 August each year, was:

1990: 4,766

1991: 4,962

1992: 5,163

1993: 5,026

1994: 4,908

1995: 4,714.

The overall manpower requirements of the Ministry of Defence are kept under constant review, and we have recently issued for consultation proposals on our future defence police and guarding requirements.

Mr. David Hart

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances Mr. David Hart is permitted to visit British defence manufacturers *(a)* as part of his duties as an independent adviser and *(b)* in an individual capacity; if he will list those firms which have been visited by Mr. Hart in the last 12 months; on which occasions his Department made the arrangements for these visits; who paid for the visits; and on what occasions the firms involved were given advance notice of the visit. [5933]

Mr. Portillo: During the last 12 months, Mr. David Hart visited British Aerospace and Loral in his capacity as the independent adviser to the Secretary of State for Defence. The visits were arranged by my officials; Mr. Hart paid for his own travel arrangements.

Air Marshal Sir John Walker

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what relationship Air Marshal Sir John Walker currently has with his Department; and if he will make a statement. [5992]

Mr. Soames: Air Marshal Sir John Walker retired from the RAF on 5 January 1995. Since that time, he has had no formal relationship with my Department.

Airspace Routes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the criteria used to assess whether an advisory route class F airspace should be upgraded to an airway class A airspace; and if he will list all such advisory routes which have been so upgraded in the last five years. [5166]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for airspace planning. I understand that the CAA would consider upgrading an advisory route, class F airspace, to an airway, class A airspace, if there were more than 10,000 air transport movements a year on that route. During the last five years, there have been no advisory routes upgraded to an airway.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Connected Lender Liability

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the report on connected lender liability issued by the Director General of Fair Trading in May this year; and if he will make a statement. [6880]

Mr. John M. Taylor: We have given careful consideration to the arguments and recommendations in the report but are not at present persuaded by them. We will establish more fully the factual evidence bearing on the questions at issue, in particular on the associated costs and benefits for consumers, creditors and other industries. Therefore, my Department will shortly issue a consultation document and we shall consider responses to it before reaching final decisions.

Oil and Gas Licensing

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those areas in Wales for which companies have expressed an interest in the seventh onshore oil and gas licensing round. [6163]

Mr. Page: We are unable at the present time to release details of the areas applied for in the seventh round as this information could give a competitive advantage to an applicant when deciding on a work programme. Details of the areas applied for will be made available once the work programmes are agreed. However, I can say that applications have been received for five blocks in Wales. None of the applications is for acreage within the watery areas around Wales.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many special advisers are employed by his Department; and what is the total annual salary bill for these posts. [5290]

Mr. Lang: I have one special adviser. Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5696]

Mr. John M. Taylor: A survey of the DTI's payment performance from December 1994 to October 1995 has just been completed. This has shown that, over the period, 93 per cent. of our bills were paid within 30 days or within the agreed credit period.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide forecasts for the current year and next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5732]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Although my Department has a number of PFI projects under consideration, none has been finally agreed and no revenue forecasts have been made.

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5731]

Mr. Taylor: The private finance initiative within the DTI is one of the responsibilities of the MINIS—management information system for Ministers—unit within the finance and resource management division of my Department. This unit is expected to cost £249,000 in 1995–96 and broadly similar amounts for future years.

Swan Hunter (Redundancy Payments)

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the total amounts paid to date by the redundancy payments section to former employees of the Swan Hunter shipyard, Tyneside in respect of *(a)* compensation for insolvent employers' failure to give proper statutory notice, *(b)* redundancy payments from the national insurance fund, *(c)* payments received through protective awards made by industrial tribunals and *(d)* refunds of notional tax deducted in the calculation of routine payments. [6143]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is as follows:

	Amount £
(a) Compensation for the employer's failure to give proper statutory notice	2,759,178
(b) Statutory redundancy payments	7,236,025
(c) Protective award payments	1,968,607
(d) Refunds of notional tax deductions	75,692

The identity of the 20 largest purchasers of postmark advertising is commercially confidential. "The Health of the Nation" strategy is to encourage people to make healthy choices. It does not seek to discourage consumption of individual food products.

Postmark Advertising

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much net and gross income was derived from sales of postmark advertising in the last three years; if he will list the 20 largest purchases of postmark advertising over the last year; and if he will make it his policy that the Post Office should ban the advertising of products whose consumption is discouraged in "The Health of the Nation" targets. [4953]

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand from the Post Office that income from postmark advertising in the last three years has been as follows:

Year	£
1993–94	200,450
1994–95	138,680
1995–96[1]	171,360

[1] To date.

Protective Clothing (Toxic Gas)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which headings of the export control order and the standard industrial trade classification cover *(a)* protective clothing for use against toxic chemical gas whether in an industrial or military setting and *(b)* equipment for the detection of toxic gas, and decontamination equipment for toxic gas; and in which years these products become licensable exports. [5476]

Mr. Oppenheim: Protective clothing for defence against chemical warfare agents and equipment for the detection of them are controlled in entry ML7 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order (EG(C)0) 1994. This entry has been in force since at least 1978, but to go back further would incur disproportionate cost. Industrial equipment for detecting toxic gas is covered in entry 2B351, which came into force on 31 December 1992 under the EG(C)0 1992. Since 1 July 1995, the control exists through the Dual Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations 1995. In addition, the "End Use" control applies to otherwise unlicensable goods where chemical weapons use is known or suspected. Under the standard industrial trade classification the categorisation system is too broad to positively identify the type of equipment in this enquiry.

Miracle Products

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what resolutions were passed at recent meetings of the Council of Consumer Ministers relating to "miracle products"; if he will set out the terms of all resolutions; if he will make a statement on the definition of the term "miracle product"; and if he will make a statement. [6121]

Mr. John M. Taylor: At its meeting on 9 November 1995, the EU Consumer Council of Ministers adopted a resolution on products presented as being beneficial to health, commonly referred to as "miracle products".

The resolution asks the Commission, in close co-operation with the member states, to describe the current situation regarding:

> the practice in the trade of miracle products in the member states
>
> the functioning, at Community and national level, of existing mechanisms regarding the protection of consumers against these practices
>
> and to submit its findings to the Council by 1 November 1996 at the latest.

"Miracle products" are those products, other than officially registered medicinal products, presented as having properties which prevent, diagnose, treat, alleviate or cure diseases or complaints or adjust bodily functions or mental state, but where there is generally no scientific evidence to substantiate such claims or properties.

We hope that the Commission's study will clarify for those member states which experience problems in this area the range of existing powers available to them for dealing with the advertising and promotion of miracle products.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make cloning of mobile telephones a criminal offence. [4484]

Mr. Ian Taylor: On 24 October, *Official Report*, column *549*, I announced the recommendations of the industry and Government study group on mobile telephone fraud. One of the main recommendations was that the Government should consider extending the range of offences under section 42 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 so that it would cover the possession or supply of equipment capable of use in the course of, or in connection with, the current section 42 offence of dishonestly obtaining telecommunication services with intent to avoid payment. I am considering this recommendation carefully.

Exports

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the value of exports from *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland to the far east in each of the past five years; and if he will provide a breakdown by sector; [5110]

(2) what was the *(a)* volume and *(b)* value of manufacturing exports per capita in each of the past five years for (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland; and if he will provide a breakdown by sector; [5111]

(3) what percentage of Scottish exports consisted of *(a)* computers/electronics, *(b)* food and drink, *(c)* textiles and *(d)* all other exports, in the past five years. [5105]

Mr. Oppenheim: Geographic analyses of United Kingdom exports are not available since information on the location of exporters is not comprehensive.

Fur Imports

Mr. Morley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to oppose the delay of the implementation of a ban on the import of furs caught by leghold traps into the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [3179]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government have made clear the United Kingdom's firm support for a ban on leghold traps, and have been in the forefront in pressing for this worldwide. The Commission will be submitting proposals to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament seeking postponement of the ban on imports of furs caught by this method. We shall be considering the details of these proposals when we see them.

Post Office Profits

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to implement the proposal to allow the Post Office to keep 50 per cent. of its post-tax profits; and if he will make a statement. [5643]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* We will continue to set external financing limits for the Post Office which reflect an appropriate balance between the needs of the business and its ability to contribute to public finances.

WALES

Measles and Rubella Immunisation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the oral answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column 11, if he will list the sources of the advice his Department has accepted on the safety of the measles and rubella immunisation programme; and if he will make a statement on representations his Department has received from parents dissatisfied with the effects of the MMR immunisation programme on their children. [5044]

Mr. Richards: On the safety of the measles and rubella immunisation programme I refer the hon. Member to the answers provided by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health on 6 November and 8 November.

The Welsh Office has not received any representations from parents dissatisfied with the effects of the MMR immunisation programme on their children.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5589]

Mr. Hague: In 1994, the cost of hospitality, which is included in the running cost budget for my Department, was £28,784. The figure for 1995–96, up to 30 November 1995, was £12,598. The projected budget for 1995–96 is £28,000.

Inward Investment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), *Official Report*, 4 December, column 5, if he will publish a disaggregated breakdown for each year since 1980 of the inward investment to Wales by *(a)* region and *(b)* company involved. [5646]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: For reasons of commercial confidentiality for a number of recorded cases, I cannot provide details of the companies involved. However, I will write to the hon. Member separately with details of the origin of recorded inward investment since 1983, together with the destination of that inward investment. A copy of that correspondence will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5693]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roache) on 1 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *296*.

Waiting Times

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons a patient waiting for consultation or treatment in the NHS can be disqualified from being considered covered by the total waiting time guarantee or its component parts; and what steps he has taken to ensure commonality of definition of the reasons for disqualification by Welsh health authorities, GP fundholders and trusts. [6151]

Mr. Hague: The operational guidance for total waiting times, issued to NHS Wales in March 1995, describes the circumstances under which patients waiting longer than the limits will not be judged as being in breech of the patient's charter guarantees. Health authorities, GP fundholders and hospitals are expected to work within the framework of the guidance. The Welsh Office will review the process when the relevant monitoring returns are received.

A copy of the guidance has been placed in the Library of the House.

Training for Work Programmes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *553*, what steps he proposes to relate outcome-related payments to training and enterprise councils under training for work programmes for the long-term unemployed to the duration of the job obtained. [6149]

Mr. Hague: With effect from 27 March 1995, outcome-related payments for training for work trainees obtaining jobs became payable to training and enterprise councils in Wales, in two stages. Two-thirds of an agreed rate is payable after seven days continuous employment has been completed, within 13 weeks of a trainee leaving the programme. The remaining one-third becomes payable if the trainee is in employment eight weeks later.

My officials are currently reviewing the effectiveness of this two-stage job outcome payment procedure.

Welsh Grand Committee

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish a list of dates and venues of Welsh Grand Committee meetings in 1996. [5906]

Mr. Hague: In due course. The proposed changes to Standing Orders have yet to be debated by the House.

Consultant and GP Cover

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what consultations he has had with the chairmen of local medical committees in Wales concerning the availability of *(a)* consultant and *(b)* general practitioner medical cover for elderly mentally ill patients and bed provision transferred from the NHS hospitals to private nursing homes; what provision he has made for specialist mid-career training in geriatric and psycho-geriatric medicine for GPs required to cover private nursing homes receiving such transferred bed capacity; and if he will make a statement. [6164]

Mr. Hague: Within the last 12 months there have been no such discussions, nor have any specific arrangements for mid-career training been made.

Diabetics (Chiropody)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from organisations representing diabetics in relation to waiting times and lists for chiropody and on the clinical priority to be given to such treatment. [6139]

Mr. Hague: I am not aware of any representations. It is for health authorities to assess the health needs of their populations, and to decide on priorities for expenditure within their overall resources.

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many independent schools are operating in the current academic year. [5824]

Mr. Richards: There were 63 in Wales in September 1995.

Consultant Cover

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of Welsh health authorities concerning the transfer of appropriate geriatric and psycho-geriatric consultant cover corresponding to transfers of beds for the elderly mentally ill from NHS hospitals to private nursing homes. [6162]

Mr. Hague: None.

NHS Treatment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what statistics he has on the number of patients waiting for in-patient treatment and out-patient diagnosis longer than the patients charter maximum for reasons relating to *(a)* exercising choice of consultants, *(b)* failure to attend for first out-patient consultation and *(c)* other reasons; and if he will make a statement. [6165]

Mr. Hague: All patients who have been on the in-patient or out-patient waiting lists for longer than the patients charter targets are reported to the Welsh Office and the numbers are published in "NHS Wales: Quarterly Statistics" available in the Library. No separate analysis is made of those patients who exercise a choice of consultants: to do so would impose an unacceptable administrative burden on hospitals. If patients who fail to attend for out-patient appointments are referred back to their GPs, they would normally be removed from the waiting list.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the Newport business school report compiling a league table of Welsh NHS trusts' commercial viability in relation to four key financial ratios. [6140]

Mr. Hague: Yes. I have made arrangements with the Newport business school for copies to be made available in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the administrative cost of collecting prescription charges; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total revenue received from prescription charges. [6152]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 22 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *417*, total revenue received from prescription charges and prepayment certificates between April 1994 and March 1995 was £17.8 million. On this basis, the administrative costs shown represent about 18 per cent. of prescription charge revenue.

School Visits

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions over the past three years he, his predecessor or Ministers in his Department, have visited schools in West Glamorgan; and if he will list the schools concerned. [6127]

Mr. Richards: Schools visited in West Glamorgan over the past three years were as follows:

Mr. David Hunt:

April 1993—Bishopston Comprehensive School, Swansea

Mr. John Redwood:

April 1994—Dynevor Comprehensive School, Swansea

Mr. Rod Richards:

July 1995—Bishop Gore Comprehensive School, Swansea

November 1995—Bishops Vaughan Grant-Maintained Comprehensive School, Swansea.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide revenue forecasts for current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5724]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *808*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5723]

Mr. Hague: It is not practicable to isolate the costs of running the private finance initiative in all the many areas of my Department's work which it affects. The costs of the private finance unit, which co-ordinates this activity, are about £52,000 a year.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for the academic year 1994–95 in descending order the independent schools by the proportion of their school rolls made up of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme, and the total number of pupils on the school roll; what proportion of the roll at each school was covered by the scheme; how many pupils were covered by the scheme at each school; how many pupils were on the roll of each school; what level of fees was charged for pupils under the scheme at each school; and what sums were received by each school under the scheme. [5902]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

1994–95 Academic Year

School	*Roll*	*APS pupils*	*Percentage APS pupils on roll*	*Average fees*[1] £	*Total*[2] *received by schools* £
Howell's Denbigh	286	73	26	5,688	368,215
Howell's Cardiff	689	173	25	3,441	460,586
Christ College	364	88	24	5,616	418,460
Llandovery College	239	55	23	5,160	281,347
Monmouth Boys	626	144	23	4,551	471,728
Rydal Penrhos (Girls division)	332	61	18	5,599	320,961
Rydal Penrhos (Co-educational division)	330	52	16	6,095	306,717
Monmouth Girls	631	74	12	3,879	203,552

[1] Some schools charge different fees according to different stages in school.

[2] Accounts for 1994–95 not yet finalised.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department has spent on the operation of the assisted places scheme in each academic year since 1981; how many *(a)* pupils and *(b)* institutions were covered by the scheme; and what was the overspend on the budget allocated to the scheme. [5790]

Mr. Richards: Details on costs of the assisted places scheme by financial year are as follows. Costs by academic year are not available.

Year	*Cost* £	*Pupils*	*Schools*	*Overspend* £
1981–82	160,783	114	9	—
1982–83	274,777	220	8	—
1983–84	459,626	318	8	—
1984–85	626,876	403	8	—
1985–86	842,488	495	8	—
1986–87	1,519,772	580	8	429,772
1987–88	1,394,246	622	8	47,246
1988–89	1,359,681	633	8	—
1989–90	1,589,392	631	8	—
1990–91	1,756,283	634	8	—
1991–92	2,064,813	662	8	116,813
1992–93	2,457,230	700	8	57,230
1993–94	2,621,261	691	8	—
1994–95	2,771,504	720	8	—

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which independent sector schools charged *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest level of fees to pupils covered by the assisted places scheme in the academic year 1994–95; and what charges were levied. [5827]

Mr. Richards: The highest tuition fees of assisted places scheme participating schools in Wales in the academic year 1994–95 were Rydal school—senior pupils—and Colwyn Bay at £6,528, the lowest were £3,441 set by Howell's school, Cardiff.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many independent sector schools have had *(a)* more than 25 per cent. *(b)* more than 50 per cent. and *(c)* less than 5 per cent. of their school rolls made up of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme for each academic year since 1981. [5807]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*More than 25 per cent.*	*More than 50 per cent.*	*Less than 5 per cent.*
1981–82	—	—	—
1982–83	1	—	3
1983–84	1	—	1
1984–85	1	—	—
1985–86	2	—	—
1986–87	2	—	—
1987–88	2	—	—
1988–89	—	—	—
1989–90	—	—	—
1990–91	—	—	—
1991–92	—	—	—
1992–93	—	—	—
1993–94	—	—	—
1994–95	2	—	—

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools covered by the assisted places scheme received *(a)* more than £1 million, *(b)* over £750,000, *(c)* over £500,000 and *(d)* over £250,000 under the assisted places scheme for each academic year since 1981. [5817]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Over £1 million*	*Over £750,000*	*Over £500,000*	*Over £250,000*
1981–82	—	—	—	—
1982–83	—	—	—	—
1983–84	—	—	—	—
1984–85	—	—	—	—

Year	*Over £1 million*	*Over £750,000*	*Over £500,000*	*Over £250,000*
1985–86	—	—	—	—
1986–87	—	—	—	1
1987–88	—	—	—	2
1988–89	—	—	—	2
1989–90	—	—	—	2
1990–91	—	—	—	3
1991–92	—	—	—	4
1992–93	—	—	—	5
1993–94	—	—	—	7
1994–95	—	—	—	7

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made by his Department in taking forward proposals for the expansion of the assisted places scheme; and how much his Department estimates this will cost in future financial years for which figures are available when this has been achieved. [5821]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply to the right hon. Member for Conway (Sir W. Roberts) on 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *757–58*. The estimated cost of the scheme for the financial year 1996–97 is £3.781 million.

Local Education Authority Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average amount of money spent by his Department on a pupil in a public sector school at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level for each academic year since 1981. [5796]

Mr. Richards: Figures of net institutional expenditure per pupil, based on local education authorities' expenditure, for 1980–81 to 1992–93, are contained in the Welsh Office's education finance bulletin, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Figures for 1993–94 are currently being calculated and as soon as they become available, they will be incorporated in a new issue of the bulletin.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each NHS trust in Wales together with an assessment of whether it reaches the Government's requirements to *(a)* achieve the 6 per cent. rate of return on average net assets, *(b)* break even, taking one year with another and *(c)* remain within the external financing limit. [5904]

Mr. Richards: Information on the financial performance of NHS trusts in Wales is contained in the annual reports they are required to produce. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will assess the financial performance of the NHS trusts in Wales in utilising appropriate financial ratios. [5905]

Mr. Richards: No. The financial performance of NHS trusts in Wales will continue to be assessed against the statutory duties, established by the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, to break even, taking one year with another; manage their external financing limits and record a required rate of return.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits (Disabled People)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the recent changes in allowances for people with disabilities. [3853]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) on 12 December, *Official Report*, column *621*.

Housing Benefit

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated number and percentage of single people aged under 25 years who are in employment and claiming housing benefit; and what assessment he has made of the impact that restricting housing benefit to the average cost of local shared accommodation for single people aged under 25 years will have on *(a)* labour mobility and *(b)* work incentives. [4553]

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated number of single childless people under 25 in employment and claiming housing benefit is 29,000. This is 3 per cent. of the total number of single childless people under 25 who live away from the parental home.

Housing benefit will continue to meet in full rents up to the general level of non self-contained accommodation in the locality. It will not prevent those affected from moving in search of employment. It is likely to increase work incentives by improving the position of those in work and above benefit levels, compared with those dependent wholly on benefits.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if carpal tunnel syndrome caused by the use of a word processor is listed as a industrial injury which is open to compensation and if he will make a statement. [4512]

Mr. Roger Evans: Carpal tunnel syndrome is eligible for benefit under the industrial injuries scheme only in relation to hand-held vibrating tools. Compensation from a negligent employer may be sought at common law through the civil courts for any work-related injury.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what mechanisms exist for liaison between his Department and the Departments of Health and of the Environment in respect of *(a)* cold weather credits and *(b)* the Christmas bonus; and if he will make a statement on recent discussions in this area. [4541]

Mr. Roger Evans: All three Departments continue to liaise effectively on the issues raised by the campaign for cold weather credits, although there have been no recent discussions on any specific proposals.

The Christmas bonus is paid under the relevant social security legislation. Liaison with the Departments of Health and of the Environment is not appropriate.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which national climatological message stations cover post codes BB8, BB9 and BB12 in respect of the cold weather payments regulations. [4952]

Mr. Evans: Post codes BB8, BB9 and BB12 are served by the Meteorological Office weather station at Wilsden, west Yorkshire. All weather stations and the area they cover are listed in the schedules to the social fund cold weather payments regulations, a copy of which is in the Library.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bettts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5697]

Mr. Burt: Since 1992, this Department has conducted an annual exercise to establish what proportion of bills for goods and services have been paid timeously—that is within any special terms agreed, or if none exist within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice, whichever is the later. Details of the percentage of payments made timeously from 1992–93 are in the table.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
DSS HQ	90	97	89.5
Benefit Agency	93	95	96
Contributions Agency	93	99	99
Resettlement Agency	96	87	98
Child Support Agency	95	90	96
Information Technology Services Agency	96	95	99
War Pensions Agency	Part of BA	89	96
Total	94	94	96

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with local government representatives on the financial effects of the Asylum and Immigration Bill and the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Amendment Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [6012]

Mr. Roger Evans: Local authorities have been consulted on these proposals through their associations, and many of them also made representations to the Social Security Advisory Committee. We shall publish our response shortly.

Departmental Fraud

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total number and cost of all forms of fraud affecting his Department and its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, as set out in the returns to Her Majesty's Treasury for departmental fraud for each year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement. [6138]

Mr. Heald: The Department's annual returns to Her Majesty's Treasury for years 1990–91 to 1993–94 are set out in Table 1. Since the number of full-time fraud investigators dealing with departmental fraud was increased in 1993, the number of successful investigations has increased. The return for 1994–95 is set out in the table 2.

Table 1

Year	*Number of cases in which disciplinary action taken*	*Loss to public funds*
1990–91	14	£45.892
1991–92	8	£18.962
1992–93	22	£138.608
1993–94	15	£114.780

Table 2: Fraud established in completed investigations (1994–95)

	Number
None	146
Travel and subsistence	11
False accounting	1
Failure to receipt	2
Unauthorised access	15
Unauthorised disclosure	3
Giro/order book fraud	6
Theft	2
False employment details	3
Other	13
Total completed	202
Total where fraud established	56
Established loss to public funds in 1994–95	
Total	£169.145.76

Research Projects

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5974]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is given. Information on the time scale of individual research projects and surveys could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

GENERAL

1. War Pensions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1994
   - (i) Commissioned December 1994
   - (ii) Cost £93 thousand
   - (iii) Contractor—Public Attitude Surveys ltd.
   - (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,350
   - (v) Location—national
   - (vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series October 1995
2. Contributions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1993
   - (i) Commissioned June 1993
   - (ii) Cost £160 thousand
   - (iii) Contractor—British Market Research Bureau International (BMRB)

(iv) Number of people interviewed—5,958 plus 20 depth interviews
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series July 1994

3. Contributions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1994
(i) Commissioned June 1994
(ii) Cost £154 thousand
(iii) Contractor—BMRB International
(iv) Number of people interviewed—6,545
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series July 1995

4. Contributions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1995
(i) Commissioned July 1995
(ii) Cost £107.5 thousand
(iii) Contractor—BMRB International
(iv) Number of people interviewed—4,000
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Due to be published mid-1996 in the DSS Research Series

5. Resettlement Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1993[1]
(i) Commissioned Summer 1993
(ii) Cost £40 thousand
(iii) Contractor—BMRB International
(iv) Number of people interviewed — 428
(v) Location—All Resettlement Units
(vi) Availability—Report received. Report to be published early in 1996 with the 1994 survey

6. Resettlement Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1994[1]
(i) Commissioned Autumn 1994
(ii) Cost £19.5 thousand
(iii) Contractor—BMRB International
(iv) Number of people interviewed—210
(v) Location—All Resettlement Units
(vi) Availability—Report received. Report to be published early in 1996

7. Child Support Agency National Client Satisfaction Survey 1993
(i) Commissioned Spring 1993
(ii) Cost £160 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Market and Opinion Research International
(iv) Number of people interviewed—1,882
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series July 1994

8. Child Support Agency National Client Satisfaction Survey 1994
(i) Commissioned July 1994
(ii) Cost £225 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Market and Opinion Research International
(iv) Number of people interviewed—3,233
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series July 1995

9. Child Support Agency National Client Satisfaction Survey 1995
(i) Commissioned June 1995
(ii) Cost £295K
(iii) Contractor__—Market and Opinion Research International
(iv) Number of people interviewed—2337
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Final report not yet received

10. The Benefits Agency National Customer Survey 1993
(i) Commissioned May 1993
(ii) Cost £187 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Public Attitude Surveys Limited
(iv) Number of people interviewed—3,500
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published by BA Spring 1994

11. The Benefits Agency National Customer Survey 1994
(i) Commissioned June 1994
(ii) Cost £211 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Public Attitude Surveys Limited
(iv) Number of people interviewed—3,324
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published by the BA April 1995

12. The Benefits Agency National Customer Survey 1995
(i) Commissioned July 1995
(ii) Cost £175 thousand (plus VAT)
(iii) Contractor—Public Attitude Surveys Limited
(iv) Number of people interviewed—3,500
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Final report not yet received.

13. Educating Employers: Evaluation of Employer Educational Surveys
(i) Commissioned October 1993
(ii) Cost £35.5 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Public Attitude Surveys (PAS) Limited
(iv) Number of people interviewed—1,543
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series August 1994

14. Managing Money in Later Life
(i) Commissioned May 1994
(ii) Cost £40 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR)
(iv) number of people interviewed—52
(v) Location—Brentwood, Bridlington, Folkestone, Leeds, London, Manchester, Poole, Reading, Stoke-on-Trent, Worcester, South Wales, Devon, Hampshire, Leicestershire and Yorkshire
(vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series August 1995

15. Public knowledge of the national insurance system and attitudes towards the contributory principle.
(i) Commissioned January 1994
(ii) Cost £21.5 thousand
(iii) Contractor—Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS)
(iv) Number of people interviewed—2,028
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—Report circulated internally in DSS. Data deposited in ESRC data archive

16. Survey of public perceptions of non-state pensions.
(i) Commissioned February 1995
(ii) Cost £40 thousand
(iii) Contractor—OPCS
(iv) Number of people interviewed—1,989
(v) Location—national
(vi) Availability—To be published in DSS in-house series (December 1995)

17. Public perceptions of the level of confidentiality afforded to DSS customers.
- (i) Commissioned October 1994
- (ii) Cost £26 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Alan Hedges
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—70
- (v) Location—London, Reading, Huddersfield and Birmingham
- (vi) Availability—Report not yet received.

18. The Use and Contribution of Child Benefit within the Family Budget
- (i) Commissioned September 1993
- (ii) Cost £13 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—69
- (v) Location—Leicester and Melton Mowbray
- (vi) Availability—Report published

19. Lone Parents, Work and Benefits
- (i) Commissioned February 1994
- (ii) Cost £100 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Policy Studies Institute
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—880
- (v) Location—national
- (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received

20. Evaluation of the Newcastle in-work benefits initiative
- (i) Commissioned March 1993
- (ii) Cost £10 thousand (DSS contribution)
- (iii) Contractor—Alan Hedges
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—100
- (v) Location—Newcastle
- (vi) Availability—Report published in DSS in-house series July 1994

21. The role of Advice Centres and Local Offices in the provision of advice and information about Social Security.
- (i) Commissioned October 1993
- (ii) Cost £50 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—300
- (v) Location—South Yorkshire, East Anglia, London
- (vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series April 1995.

22. First Time Customers
- (i) Commissioned May 1993
- (ii) Cost £113 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Social Policy Research Unit, University of York
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—3,700
- (v) Location—national
- (vi) Availability—Report published in DSS Research Series May 1995.

23. Customer satisfaction with BA local office service
- (i) Commissioned October 1994
- (ii) Cost £38 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Social and Community Planning Research
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—91
- (v) Location—three local offices
- (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received.

24. Customer contact with the Benefits Agency
- (i) Commissioned May 1995
- (ii) Cost £211 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—3,200
- (v) Location—national
- (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received.

25. Deterrent effects of prosecution
- (i) Commissioned January 1995
- (ii) Cost £48 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Policy Studies Institute
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—45
- (v) Location—three local offices
- (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received.

26. Communications between Income Support customers and the Benefits Agency
- (i) Commissioned September 1995
- (ii) Cost £17 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—British Market Research Bureau International
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—36
- (v) Location—three local offices
- (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received.

27. Evaluation of One Stop: One Place
- (i) Commissioned September 1994
- (ii) Cost £68 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Research Services Limited
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—3,100
- (v) Location—six local offices
- (vi) Availability—Report published in DSS in-house series June 1995.

28. CA Leaflet research
- (i) Commissioned July 1994
- (ii) Cost £19 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—Winstanley Douglas Grantham
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—184
- (v) Location—national
- (vi) Availability—Report received November 1995. Internal CA distribution only.

29. Social Security Advice Line for Employers (SSALE)
- (i) Commissioned March 1994
- (ii) Cost £42 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—IFF Research
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,000
- (v) Location—Newcastle
- (vi) Availability—Report received September 1994, Internal CA distribution only.

30. Tripartite Telephone helpdesk research
- (i) Commissioned September 1995
- (ii) Cost £33 thousand (plus VAT)
- (iii) Contractor—IFF Research
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,800
- (v) Location—Scotland
- (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received.

31. CA customer service general research
- (i) Commissioned December 1994
- (ii) Cost £17 thousand
- (iii) Contractor—BMRB
- (iv) Number of people interviewed—28
- (v) Location—national
- (vi) Availability—Report received March 1995. Internal CA distribution only.

Research Relevant to Specific Policy Proposals

1. Evaluation of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA): Survey of Unemployed Claimants
    - (i) Commissioned June 1995
    - (ii) Cost £443.6 thousand[1]
    - (iii) Contractor—Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP)
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—850 (baseline survey pre-JSA, with a similar number after the introduction of JSA)
    - (v) Location—National
    - (vi) Availability—Final reports not yet received

[1] DSS share of costs over 4 years—project jointly funded with DfEE and ES

2. BA/ES pilot evaluation
    - (i) Commissioned early 1993
    - (ii) Cost £50 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Public Attitude Surveys Limited
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,260
    - (v) Location—55 Employment Service job centres
    - (vi) Availability—Report published by PAS March 1994
3. Lone Parent Caseworker Pilots
    - (i) Commissioned February 1995
    - (ii) Cost of £141 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Centre for Research in Social Policy, University of Loughborough
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,000
    - (v) Location—Folkestone, Rochdale, Stevenage, West Notts.
    - (vi) Availability—Final report not yet received
4. Anti-Fraud attitude survey
    - (i) Commissioned September 1993
    - (ii) Cost £24 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Research Surveys of Great Britain Ltd (RSGB)
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,022
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received September 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
5. Anti-Fraud campaign strategy development
    - (i) Commissioned July 1992
    - (ii) Cost of £33 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Reflexions
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—117
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received August 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
6. Why Translate? Pilot Study
    - (i) Commissioned november 1993
    - (ii) Cost £20 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—MORI
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—112
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received November 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
7. Incapacity Benefit: Advisors and GPs
    - (i) Commissioned January 1995
    - (ii) Cost £31 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—DVL Smith
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—30
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received February 1995. Internal DSS distribution only
8. Family Credit campaign tracking
    - (i) Commissioned April 1993
    - (ii) Cost £33 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—RSGB
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—1,200
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received June 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
9. DWA/MENCAP Video Evaluation
    - (i) Commissioned November 1993
    - (ii) Cost £10 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Winstanley Douglas Grantham
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—14
    - (v) Location-national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received November 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
10. DWA data base evaluation
    - (i) Commissioned November 1993
    - (ii) Cost £15 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Recruitment and Assessment Services (RAS)
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—502
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received November 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
11. DWA Advisors Monitor
    - (i) Commissioned April 1993
    - (ii) Cost £26 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—MAI
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—46
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received April 1993. Internal DSS distribution only
12. You and Disability Responders
    - (i) Commissioned March 1995
    - (ii) Cost £20 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—BMRB
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—375
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received March 1995. Internal DSS distribution only
13. Pensions Publicity Awareness
    - (i) Commissioned October 1995
    - (ii) Cost £24 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—BMRB
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—20,650
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received October 1995. Internal DSS distribution only
14. Disability Strategic Development
    - (i) Commissioned May 1995
    - (ii) Cost £57 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Andrew Irving Associates
    - (iv) Number of people interviewed—96
    - (v) Location—national
    - (vi) Availability—Report received July 1995. Internal DSS distribution only
15. Working with Benefits tracking
    - (i) Commissioned June 1995
    - (ii) Cost £126 thousand
    - (iii) Contractor—Research International

(iv) Number of people interviewed—2,400

(v) Location—national

(vi) Availability—Report received August 1995. Internal DSS distribution only

16. Unemployed Lifestyles

(i) Commissioned September 1995

(ii) Cost £48 thousand

(iii) Contractor—Andrew Irving Associates

(iv) Number of people interviewed—115

(v) Location—national

(vi) Availability—Report received October 1995. Internal DSS distribution only

17. NICS Holiday

(i) Commissioned September 1995

(ii) Cost £32 thousand

(iii) Contractor—NOP

(iv) Number of people interviewed—80

(v) Location—national

(vi) Availability—Report received October 1995. Internal DSS distribution only

The Department's Research Programme is announced each year. Details and overall costs of all projects are set out in the Department's Research Yearbook, published annually by HMSO, copies of which are available in the Library. Previous editions cover projects from 1989 onwards; the Yearbook for 1994–95, to be published today (14th December) will contain details of current projects.

Mental Illness

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of days lost at work because of mental ill health in each of the last five years. [6108]

Mr. Heald: Information is not available in the format requested.

The available information in the table relates to the number of days of certified incapacity recorded in connection with claims to sickness benefit and/or invalidity benefit, and claims to severe disablement allowance from 6 April 1992. The data cannot be taken as a total of the days lost at work because no account can be taken of those who have entitlement to Statutory sick pay from their employer, for which no figures are available. Figures also include claimants unemployed, and people who have never worked, prior to the time of their claim to benefit.

Number of days certified incapacity of claimants for State incapacity benefits due to mental disorder

Period	*Number of days*
3 April 1989 to 31 March 1990[1]	79,670,000
2 April 1990 to 30 March 1991[1]	91,479,000
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992[1]	105,849,000
6 April 1992 to 3 April 1993[2]	159,994,000
5 April 1993 to 2 April 1994[2]	172,251,000

Notes:

[1] Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit claims only.

[2] Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance claims.

1. Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants within Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims there have been for the new incapacity benefit within the Merthyr benefit district; and how many of these were claimants with mental health problems; [4102]

(2) how many claims for incapacity benefit have been made since April in the Merthyr benefit area; how many of these have been from *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and how many have been successful. [4100]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 13 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about how many claims there have been for the new Incapacity Benefit within the Merthyr benefit district; how many of these were claimants with mental health problems; how many of the new claims have been from *(a)* men and *(b)* women; and how many have been successful.

Information is not available in the format requested. Statistics on the number of new claims are collated at District level. There have been 6,230 new claims for Incapacity Benefit, during the period 13 April to 1 December, in the Eastern Valleys District. This District comprises of the Merthyr Tydfil, Aberdare, Bargoed and Caerphilly offices.

Information about how many customers within the Merthyr Tydfil office who have claimed Incapacity Benefit and who are suffering with mental health problems could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Statistics are not kept on the number of men or women who have claimed Incapacity Benefit.

Figures for the number of successful claims to Incapacity Benefit are not available. Statistics are only available for the number of claims disallowed. In the Merthyr Tydfil office, 310 claims to Incapacity Benefit were disallowed during the period 13 April 1995 to 1 December 1995. This figure may include claims made before 13 April 1995.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

War Pensions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average waiting period between an application for a war pension appeal and an appeal hearing. [5005]

Mr. Heald: This is a matter for Mr. John Sheppard, the acting chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Sheppard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 13 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about War Pensions appeals.

There are two different types of War Pension appeal. An entitlement appeal can be made against the decision that there is no entitlement to a War Disablement Pension. An assessment appeal may be made where the pensioner awarded a War Disablement Pension disagrees with the assessment of his disability.

The War Pensions Agency (WPA) is responsible for preparing the appeal papers for the independent Pension Appeal Tribunals (PAT), who come under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chancellor's Department. The PAT consider all War Pension appeals and are responsible for arranging appeal hearings.

Once an appeal has been lodged the WPA looks at all the evidence afresh and is then required to produce a Statement of Case. This is a complex document detailing all the relevant evidence which is sent to the appellant for comment before being submitted to the PAT. The average time taken by WPA to complete this action in 1995/96, is 263 working days for an assessment appeal and 326 days for an entitlement appeal. These average times are longer than would normally be the case and are a reflection of the considerable increase in appeals that occurred in 1994. The WPA has also been phasing in a new computer system and a major restructuring of the organisation this year, but now that these changes are complete, there should be a gradual and sustained improvement in the clearance of appeals.

Once the Statement of Case is with the PAT they make the arrangements for the appeal to be heard. They too have been affected by the increase in appeals over the last couple of years. The average time taken since April for the PAT to schedule a hearing following receipt of the Statement of Case from WPA is 42.35 weeks.

The PAT has also addressed the problem by increasing the number of courts held each day. These have increased from 4–5 at the end of 1994, to 7–8 now, and the intention is to further increase the number to 10 next April. In addition there has been an increase in the number of cases heard each day by each court.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of war pension appeals outstanding; what was the number of such appeals originally in each year of original claim; and how many were outstanding at *(a)* 31 December 1994 and *(b)* 31 December 1993. [5489]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. John Sheppard, the acting chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Sheppard to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 13 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of outstanding War Pension appeals.

There are two different types of appeal. An entitlement appeal may be lodged where the Agency has been unable to accept that a particular medical condition has been caused by service in the Forces; an assessment appeal can be made where the appellant disagrees with the assessment of disablement arising from an accepted condition.

The table below shows the number of appeals outstanding within the Agency on the dates you refer to.

	31 December 1993	*31 December 1994*	*30 November 1995*
Entitlement	8,857	7,102	6,085
Assessment	6,949	8,263	6,617
Total	15,806	15,365	12,702

I am unable to break down these figures to show the years of the original claims because there are no time limits for making entitlement appeals and different time limits depending on the type of assessment appeal. It does not follow, therefore that the appeals received in any period are related to decision made in any specific earlier period. Indeed, some entitlement appeals are made up to 20 or 30 years after the original decision on the claim.

I hope you find this information useful.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Drownings (Bangor)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's responsibility for the river flowing from Clandeboye estate into the Kilcooley estate in Bangor where two children drowned on the night of 15 November. [2508]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I am advised by the chief executive that the section of the watercourse in question forms the boundary between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and a private housing development. The Housing Executive, as the riparian owner of that part of the stream adjacent to the estate, has joint responsibility for its maintenance to ensure a free flow of water, and carries out maintenance on a monthly basis.

Royal Family (Pictures)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy with respect to the display by civil servants in their offices of pictures of members of the royal family. [3219]

Sir John Wheeler: There are circumstances in which the display of a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen or other members of the royal family is officially approved. The display of any pictures by individual civil servants in their offices is, of course, subject to civil service policy on promoting a good and harmonious working environment for all its employees.

Central Services Agency

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what stage has been reached in the market testing of the legal services of the central services agency for the health and public social services. [5018]

Mr. Moss: On 25 September 1995, the chief executive of the management executive established a project board to take forward this market test. The project board is finalising the form of the tender documents, and a public notice inviting interested parties to tender is imminent.

Legal Services

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what way the current proposals for market testing of legal services avoid offending public probity as expressed by the chief executive of the management executive in a letter to the general manager of the Northern health and social services board dated 2 February. [5019]

Mr. Moss: The present proposal to market test legal services will use a process and deliver a product which will comply with the full rigour of public probity. It will observe generally accepted principles of full and open competition and aim to produce a framework from which health and personal social services clients will be able to obtain value for money legal services.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the arrangements for the market testing of the legal services directorate differ from those applied to other public sector services in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. [5021]

Mr. Moss: The legal services directorate of the Central Services Agency provides legal services to a range of clients operating within the health and personal social services. These clients are acting together through a project board to market test legal services. In this respect, the approach may be perceived as different from that adopted in the majority of market tests, where there is usually a single customer. In addition, the market test involves the creation of a list of firms with the requisite competency to undertake the work. This approach will give users a choice of legal representatives.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who was responsible for producing the draft arrangements for the provision of legal services to HPSS clients. [5020]

Mr. Moss: The "Protocol for the Management of Legal Cases in the Health and Personal Social Services" was produced by the Central Services Agency in consultation with the chief executive of the management executive.

Local Enterprise Development Unit

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was expenditure has been incurred by LEDU in respect of promoting equality of economic opportunity throughout Northern Ireland. [4778]

Mr. Ancram: LEDU is fully committed to supporting the elimination of all forms of unlawful discrimination in employment and to using its services to help to secure the objectives of the fair employment, sex discrimination and disabled persons legislation, and seeks to ensure equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all in the implementation of all its programmes.

In addition, LEDU is fully committed to the Government policy of targeting social need and has committed funding of £3,658,349 so far in 1995–96 to client companies and individuals operating in disadvantaged areas.

Larne Lough

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of shellfish cultivation in Larne lough; and what action he has taken to ensure that the objectives set out in the draft conservation plan for Larne lough special protection area. [4798]

Mr. Moss: Before issuing licences for shellfish farming, the Department of Agriculture consults the Department of the Environment to establish whether the proposals would have a detrimental environmental effect. The Department of the Environment considers the proposals in the context of the information that it holds on the flora and fauna of the littoral and sub-tidal habitats and any other plans or proposals for the area. Both Departments also consider any risk arising from the introduction of non-native species. In addition to the steps outlined above, the Department of the Environment will monitor bird populations and marine and coastal habitats, to assess whether changes of conservation significance are taking place in the lough.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many licences for shellfish cultivation in Larne lough *(a)* have been granted and *(b)* are currently under consideration. [4797]

Mr. Ancram: Two fish culture licences have been granted in respect of shellfish cultivation in Larne lough and two applications for licenses for shellfish farming in the lough are currently under consideration.

Shellfish Order (Northern Ireland) 1930

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to *(a)* amend or *(b)* repeal the Shellfish Order (Northern Ireland) 1930. [4783]

Mr. Moss: Records indicate that no such order exists.

Belfast Lough

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the high and low tide marks are indicated on the foreshore around Belfast lough. [4784]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland under its chief executive, Mr Michael Brand. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. F. Codd to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 7 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your Question about high and low tide marks on the foreshore around Belfast Lough. In the absence of the Chief Executive I am replying on his behalf.

There is no indication of tide marks on the foreshore. Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland large-scale maps show natural features including the coast, which is depicted by two lines; the High Water Mark Mean Tides (HWMMT) and the Low Water Mark Mean Tides (LWMMT) which are predicted levels.

"The Nemesis File"

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of Stae for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the statement of a Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers NCO contained in the "The Nemesis File." [4864]

Sir John Wheeler: I have not read this book, but I am aware the Ministry of Defence issued a statement at the time of the book's publication expressing serious doubts about the author's claim to have been a member of the SAS. In view of the nature of the allegations, however, the RUC serious crime squad will investigate the claims made in the book.

Punishment Beatings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the frequency of punishment beatings in the period *(a)* before, *(b)* during and *(c)* after President Clinton's visit to Northern Ireland; and what assessment he has made of this estimate. [5553]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Casualties as a result of "punishment" attacks (shootings and assaults)

Month	Loyalist	Republican	Total
June 1995	4	13	17
July 1995	11	18	29
August 1995	5	12	17
September 1995	4	12	16
October 1995	4	21	25
November 1995	11	11	22
December 1st–11th	1	2	3
Total	40	89	129

These statistics have been provided by the RUC and are subject to amendment.

Between 22 November and 4 December no such attacks were carried out by either loyalists or republican groups. It is clear the groups perpetrating these savage and cowardly acts are acting under control. As President Clinton said while in Northern Ireland, they should cease now.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5699]

Sir John Wheeler: Departments are required to provide details of their performance in their departmental reports.

In 1994–1995, the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments paid 94.7 per cent. of their bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions, or within 30 days of receiving goods and services, or on presentation of a valid invoice.

Mr. Patrick Finucane

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recommendations of *(a)* the International Commission of Jurists, *(b)* the United Kingdom nominee on the UN Sub-Commission on Rights, *(c)* the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and *(d)* the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in respect of a judicial inquiry into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death of Mr. Patrick Finucane. [5810]

Sir John Wheeler: There has been an RUC investigation into the murder of Mr. Finucane. The circumstances relating to the murder were also investigated by members of the enquiry team headed by Mr. John Stevens. A full investigation report was submitted by Mr. Stevens to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland, who directed that there should be no prosecutions. I have no plans to establish a judicial inquiry.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to establish a judicial inquiry into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death of Mr. Patrick Finucane. [5809]

Sir John Wheeler: I have no plans to establish a judicial inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the murder of Mr. Finucane. These were investigated by Mr. John Stevens and a summary of the report was published.

Conductive Education

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the value and achievements of conductive education. [5814]

Mr. Ancram: No formal assessment of the value and achievements of conductive education has been undertaken in Northern Ireland. In 1993, the Government sponsored a research project into the relative merits of conductive education and conventional approaches for particular categories of children at the Birmingham institute for conductive education.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to make conductive education available for children where parents wish it. [5832]

Mr. Ancram: Under the 1991 international agreement with Hungary, the United Kingdom is guaranteed access to a number of places for children and for trainee conductors at the Peto institute in Budapest. In Northern Ireland, the making of provision for children with special educational needs is a matter for education and library boards in the first instance. I am aware that one board has been considering how conductive education techniques might be integrated into its special education provision, but no specific plans have yet evolved.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many institutions provide conductive education for children with special educational needs; and how many children are currently receiving conductive therapy in each institution. [5813]

Mr. Ancram: Conductive education is provided at an independent school, the Buddy Bear trust school in Dungannon. There are three children enrolled.

Emergency Legislation

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to implement the recommendation of the Human Rights Committee of the UN in respect of repealing laws infringing civil liberties which were designed for periods of emergency. [5808]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 12 June, before the Human Rights Committee made its recommendations, that there is to be an independent review of emergency legislation.

Autistic Children

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what facilities and services are available to identify and provide for the *(a)* educational, *(b)* medical, and *(c)* other needs of children with autism. [5835]

Mr. Ancram: It is the responsibility of the education and library boards to assess and provide for the special educational needs of all children in Northern Ireland with special educational needs, including autistic children. Placements may be made in special schools, in special units attached to mainstream schools or in mainstream schools themselves. One board operates an advisory and support service for autistic children and their families, and another has recently appointed a seconded teacher to assist and support special schools. As far as the health and personal social services are concerned, the assessed needs of children with autism are met within the learning disability programme of care.

Military Complaints Procedures Assessor

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to reappoint Mr. David Hewitt as independent assessor of military complaints procedures in Northern Ireland. [6792]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have today reappointed David Hewitt as independent assessor of military complaints procedures in Northern Ireland until 31 March 1997.

The Army's presence on the streets of Northern Ireland in support of the RUC has, of course, diminished greatly since the cessation of military operations announced by the IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries, but the Government believe that there remains a useful role for the independent assessor although the need for the post will be kept under review.

HEALTH

NHS Contracts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 November, *Official Report*, column *336*, if he will provide a breakdown of NHS contracts by *(a)* type and *(b)* region. [3330]

Mr. Malone: This information is available in the review of contracting, copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Medical Registrars

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner and registrar appointments have been filled by British citizens and how many from each country outside the United Kingdom over the latest convenient period; and what estimate his Department has made of the number who *(a)* complete their appointment and return home and *(b)* remain in the United Kingdom. [5352]

Mr. Malone: The information on general practitioners is not available. The available information for hospital medical registrars is given in the "Hospital Medical Staff England Tables", copies of which are available in the Library.

Paracetamol

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to consult consultants in toxicology at

London teaching hospitals regarding the safety of the current formulation of paracetamol. [5498]

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to consult toxicologists at the London teaching hospitals regarding the safety of the current formulation of paracetamol.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has approved the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's revised code of practice. [6788]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid before the House copies of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's revised code of practice. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Ritalin

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what system is in place to monitor the scale of treatment of children with controlled drugs such as Ritalin and similar products; [5153]

(2) how many children in the United Kingdom are being or have been treated with Ritalin-methylphenidate in the last 10 years for which figures are available; [5154]

(3) how many children under six years of age in the United Kingdom are currently being treated with Ritalin; [5155]

(4) how much Ritalin has been manufactured in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years for which figures are available. [5156]

Mr. Horam: Information about the number of children treated with Ritalin is not available centrally. Ritalin is not manufactured in the United Kingdom.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5740]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the then Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 2 May, *Official Report*, columns *175–76*.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5742]

Mr. Horam: Comparing private finance initiative projects with publicly funded alternatives is not a question of comparing interest rates. PFI projects are given approval only if the PFI approach brings improvements in cost-effectiveness for the national health service. The specific information requested is not available.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5741]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 December, *Official Report*, column *224*.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5703]

Mr. Horam: In 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, 91.9 per cent. of the Department's invoices were paid within the agreed credit period or within 30 days where no credit period had been set. For the period April to September 1995, this figure has increased to 95 per cent.

Suicides

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collates in respect of the suicide rates among patients recently discharged from hospital. [6113]

Mr. Horam: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on suicides that have taken place in each of the last five years among *(a)* men and *(b)* women, indicating the method of suicide; [6112]

(2) how many suicides have taken place among men aged 15 to 24 years in each of the last 10 years. [6111]

Mr. Horam: Data on deaths from suicide—ICD[1] E950–E959; E980–E989—are published in table 2 of the publication, "Mortality statistics; Cause; England and Wales; series DH2", copies of which are available in the Library.

The latest data available[2] are for the years 1983–1992.

(¹ International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision).

[2] The coding of causes of death in England and Wales was changed in 1993 to an automated system. Though the results from this are generally satisfactory, Office of Population/Censuses and Surveys have identified significant problems in the coding of external causes of death. Certifications of deaths in 1993 and 1994 which could have been due to external causes are all being examined and re-coded as necessary. More reliable data, comparable to that for previous years, will be available in the firth quarter of 1996.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suicides have taken place in each of the last five years as a proportion of all annual deaths. [6110]

Mr. Horam: The numbers of suicides[1] which have taken place in each of the last five years as a proportion of all annual deaths are shown in the table.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[1]	*1994*[1]
Total suicides	5,544	5,486	5,486	4,894	4,787
Total deaths	564,846	570,044	558,313	578,170	551,455
Percentage	0.98	0.96	0.98	0.85	0.87

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision Codes E950–E959, E980–E989 excluding E988.8 for 1990–1992; E950–E959, E980–E989 for 1993 and 1994

[1] Provisional.

The figures for 1993 and 1994 suicide deaths are Office of Population/Censuses and Surveys' current best estimates. The coding of causes of death in England and Wales was changed in 1993 to an automated system. Though the results from this are generally satisfactory, OPCS have identified significant problems in the coding of external causes of death. Certifications of deaths in 1993 and 1994 which could have been due to external causes are all being examined and re-coded as necessary. More reliable data, comparable to that for previous years, will be available in the first quarter of 1996.

Post-Operative Complications

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patients have suffered post-operative complications in each of the last 10 years. [6105]

Mr. Horam: It is not possible to identify all post-operative complications from the data available centrally. Some information is published in volume 1 of "Hospital Episode Statistics: England", for the years 1988–89 to 1993–94, copies of which are available in the Library. This shows the number of finished consultant episodes where the primary diagnosis is linked to complications of surgical or medical care which cannot be classified elsewhere in the system.

Post-Operative Infections

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in NHS hospitals have been diagnosed as suffering from post-operative infections in each of the last 10 years; [6103]

(2) what information his Department maintains on post-operative infection rates in NHS hospitals. [6104]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected centrally.

Medicinal Herbs

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to oppose any further regulations from the European Union which would restrict United Kingdom consumers' access to herbal medicines and remedies of their choice; and if he will make a statement. [6120]

(2) what is his policy in respect of availability of herbal remedies; and if he will make a statement. [6119]

Mr. Malone: The Government support the availability of herbal remedies within a framework of statutory controls to protect public health. We consider that existing legislation provides an appropriate measure of protection.

We are unaware of proposals from the European Union for the regulation of herbal remedies. We would consider any such proposals in the light of our overall policy to protect public health, but to do so with the minimum necessary regulation.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultation he undertook with *(a)* manufacturers, *(b)* consumers and *(c)* practitioners using medicinal herbs prior to deciding whether to support recent resolutions at the Council of Health Ministers relating to the status, marketing and availability of medicinal herbs; and if he will identify separately his consultation with the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy; [6118]

(2) what resolutions were passed at recent meetings of the Council of Health Ministers relating to medicinal herbs; if he will set out the terms of all resolutions; and if he will make a statement. [6117]

Mr. Malone: A resolution on medicinal plant preparations was adopted at the European Commission Council of Health Ministers meeting on 30 November. It invites the Commission to study public health safeguards relating to such preparations. It makes no policy proposals or statements. A copy of the resolution has been placed in the Library.

Scanning Equipment

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department issues to district authorities in respect of the provision of scanning equipment for 24-hour emergency use. [6097]

Mr. Horam: It is for individual authorities, after discussions with provider units, to determine the level of provision of scanning equipment necessary for 24-hour emergency use.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *200*, how many *(a)* independent and *(b)* local authority residential care homes there were, by area, in each region in each of the last five years. [6141]

Mr. Horam: Information on numbers of homes for elderly and physically disabled people for the years 1989 to 1994 has been published in "Residential Accommodation for elderly people and people with physical and/or sensory disabilities: all residents in local authority, voluntary and private homes, year ending 31 March 1989 to year ending 31 March 1994, England". Information on the total number of homes for all client groups for the years ending 31 March 1994 and 1995 has been published in Department of Health statistical bulletins on residential accommodation for each of these years. Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with local government representatives on the financial effects of the Asylum and Immigration Bill and the Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Regulations in respect of expenditure under the Children Act 1989; and if he will make a statement. [6013]

Mr. Horam: We have received representations from local government and officials are considering them.

Paediatric Intensive Care

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will undertake an inquiry into the circumstances relating to the death of Nicholas Geldard at Leeds infirmary on 8 December; and if he will make a statement on the case; [6095]

(2) if he will make a statement on the availability of intensive care facilities for children in the Greater Manchester area on 8 December. [6096]

Mr. Horam: The North West regional health authority is looking into the circumstances of this case as a matter of urgency. Its review will include an examination of the local availability of intensive care facilities for children on the day in question.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *35*, which trusts have been given permission by him to borrow from commercial sources. [6145]

Mr. Horam: All national health service trusts are permitted to borrow from commercial sources. Trusts must satisfy themselves that any such borrowing represents value for money.

Supervision Registers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been placed on supervision registers since NHS executive HSG(94)(5) in each *(a)* district and *(b)* region. [6114]

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in the form requested.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have been closed in each of the last five years; and how many are planned for closure in the next five years. [6106]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *683*.

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what staff shortages his Department has identified across all grades in the NHS; and what steps are being taken to address them. [6102]

Mr. Malone: It is for local employers to determine what, if any, non-medical staff shortages exist. It is their responsibility to take appropriate action to retain and recruit existing qualified staff and ensure that adequate provision has been made to train the number of newly qualified staff they require.

National health service trusts now have greater freedoms than ever before to develop local pay and working arrangements to underpin their retention and recruitment strategies.

In the case of medical staff, the NHS executive and the Welsh Office receive advice from the specialist work force advisory group about the number of trainees needed to ensure an adequate supply of properly trained doctors and dentists in each specialty, although it is not always possible to recruit to training posts that are available. The specialist work force advisory group has given priority to considering specialties where there are identified shortages.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the quality assurance procedures currently in place within the Medicines Control Agency. [5948]

Mr. Malone: The agency's performance is measured against a number of high level targets, set to protect public health in the field of medicinal products, which include targets related to standards of safety and quality. These are published in the agency's annual business plan and its accomplishments against them in its annual report, copies of which are available in the Library. The agency has in place a large number of standard operating procedures applicable to its many functions in order to meet its quality objectives. For example, the medicines inspectorate operates in compliance with the international quality system ISO 9002 and has achieved formal certification against this standard.

All agency procedures are subject to audit by the National Audit Office and internal Department of Health auditors.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library responses from the chairman of health authorities and trusts to the Minister of State's letter of 24 August about mental health services. [6107]

Mr. Bowis: An announcement will be made in due course.

Influenza

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *382*, at what stage his Department will issue an alert about an influenza epidemic; and what further steps his Department proposes to take to protect those at risk from influenza. [6146]

Mr. Horam: The Departments of Health and the Environment issued guidance for health and local authorities on the management of communicable disease in HSG(93)56, copies of which are available in the Library. The guidance states that health authorities and local authorities should have up-to-date joint plans covering the structures and procedures for managing communicable disease control—specific diseases are not singled out—in their areas, both on a day-to-day basis and if an outbreak occurs; and that these plans should be reviewed annually. The leaflet "What should I do about flu?", produced by the Department this year, also contains advice to those at risk of serious illness should they develop influenza on how they should protect themselves. Over 6 million does of influenza vaccine have been distributed so far this influenza season.

Hypothermia

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths from hypothermia took place among *(a)* men aged 65 years and over and *(b)* women aged 60 years and over in 1994 by region. [6142]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of deaths which occurred in 1994 with a mention of hypothermia (ICD 991.6[1]) on the death certificate by regional health authority of usual residence (including Wales), for: males aged 65 years and over, and females aged 60 and over

Regional health authority	*Males*	*Females*
Northern	10	13
Yorkshire	9	15
Trent	7	18
East Anglian	10	12
North-west Thames	9	14
North-east Thames	8	15
South-east Thames	8	14
South-west Thames	4	7
Wessex	4	6
Oxford	5	10
South Western	7	14
West Midlands	11	21
Mersey	1	7
North Western	9	18
Wales	5	14
Total	107	198

[1] ICD International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the normal period of appointment and *(b)* the maximum cumulative period of appointment for members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines: and in what circumstances the maximum cumulative period of membership may be exceeded. [5926]

Mr. Malone: Members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines are normally appointed by the United Kingdom Health Ministers for three-year periods with the maximum cumulative period of appointment being six years, as set out in paragraph 4 of the 1970 regulations. Members can be, and are, reappointed for further terms of office. A new three-year period of appointment announced on 11 December, takes effect on 1 January 1996.

Medicines Act 1968

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times regulations under schedule 1 to the Medicines Act 1968 have been made; and what was *(a)* the title, *(b)* the date of making and *(c)* the date of coming into effect of each such regulation. [5924]

Mr. Malone: Once. The Medicines Commission and Committees Regulations 1970 No. 746 was made on 11 May 1970 and came into operation on 26 May 1970.

Mental Illness

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many recorded deaths have been accounted for by mental illness in each of the last five years. [6109]

Mr. Horam: Information relating to 1990 to 1992 is available in Office of Population Censuses and Surveys DH2 series, copies of which are available in the Library. Information for 1993–94 are shown in the table.

Deaths from mental disorders (ICD[1] 290–319) in England and Wales, by sex, 1993–94

	Number
1993[2]	
Male	2,530
Female	5,189
Total	7,719
1994[2]	
Male	2,683
Female	5,288
Total	7,971

[1] International Classification of Disease, 9th Revision.

[2] Provisional.

If, as a result of a mental disorder, a person commits suicide or dies in an accident, the death is not coded to mental disorders and not therefore included in the above figures.

Deaths for 1992 and earlier years represent the number of deaths registered in each year, while deaths from 1993 are those which occurred in each year. In addition, new procedures for coding cause of death from 1993 and the absence of medical inquiries mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with earlier years.

Chronic conditions such as senile dementia decreased sharply as a result of these changes.

Public Information Lines

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the public information lines under the jurisdiction of his Department; what bodies have carried out these assessments; and what has been the cost of these to his Department. [4231]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Examination of the effectiveness of public information lines under the jurisdiction of the Department is not conducted routinely by outside bodies as an assessment is usually made from the result of responses. However, two reviews have been conducted in recent years on individual helplines.

In 1993, Price Waterhouse undertook a fundamental review of the national HIV/AIDS helpline, at a cost of nearly £40,000, and examined the need for related drugs and sexually transmitted diseases services. Their report concluded

> "telephone helpline services for HIV/AIDS, other STDs and drugs can be justified at a cost effective component of prevention services".

Following the report's recommendations, a tendering exercise was carried out to establish operationally integrated national helplines for HIV/AIDS and drugs.

In 1994, the NHS executive commissioned Insight Management Consultants to undertake an evaluation of the regional health information services, at a cost of £20,000. It reported back to the NHS executive in November 1994.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public information lines his Department operates; how many calls have been made to those lines; what has been the cost of them; and what audit procedures are in place to monitor these costs. [4239]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 6 December 1995]*: There are eight main information lines falling under the Department's jurisdiction for which a total of 1,863,463 calls have been received at a cost to the Department of £10,299.124. Where applicable, the Central Office of Information carries out the following procedures to monitor the costs:

(i) COI auditors regularly inspect suppliers' books, working practices and cost charging procedures.

(ii) At the start of any new campaign, COI goes out to tender to a number of already approved suppliers to ensure the selection of the most cost-effective company to handle responses.

(iii) Due to its extensive use of British Telecom facilities, COI has achieved volume discounts of approximately 46 per cent. (value £108,717) on its BT charges since April 1995.

(iv) In addition, COI obtains negotiated discounts from its telephone marketing suppliers.

Community Care Services

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *43*, what has been the level of community health programme expenditure by providers in each *(a)* district and *(b)* region in each of the last four years. [6144]

Mr. Horam: The tables represent an aggregate summary by regional health authority and as such are only broadly indicative of the spending position. Information for district health authorities could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Provider (NHS Trusts and directly managed units) expenditure on community Health Programme by region in England

£ thousand

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Northern	141,491	155,637	168,722
Yorkshire	165,595	175,297	179,120
Trent	200,475	251,191	261,579
East Anglian	85,374	100,168	106,406
North-west Thames	153,548	190,870	208,781
North-east Thames	200,942	229,316	245,934
South-east Thames	217,955	203,426	238,788
South-west Thames	120,909	164,601	169,025
Wessex	146,672	153,715	152,993
Oxford	108,862	110,051	140,806
South Western	163,421	219,583	229,217
West Midlands	248,060	276,152	269,084
Mersey	119,927	152,468	140,007
North Western	204,925	232,503	256,634
Special health authorities	2,177	1,219	1,543
England total	2,280,333	2,616,197	2,768,639

Source:

The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

1. The annual financial returns of the directly managed units of district and regional health authorities.

2. The annual financial returns of the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

The following table details provisional information for 1994–95:

Provider (NHS trusts and directly managed units) expenditure on community health programme by region in England

	1994–95 thousand
Northern and Yorkshire	376,732
Trent	259,551
Anglia and Oxford	293,248
North Thames	453,234
South and West	411,691
West Midlands	294,336
North Western	419,258
Special health authorities	0
Total England	2,954,350

Source:

The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

1. The annual financial returns of the directly managed units of district and regional health authorities.

2. The annual financial returns of the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

SCOTLAND

District Nurses and Health Visitors

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers of district nurses in training and the number of health visitors in training in Scotland for each of the years between 1988 and 1995, inclusive, broken down by *(a)* real frequency and *(b)* whole-time equivalents. [3446]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Actual numbers in training as at the end of March each year are set out in the table and have been supplied by the National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland.

	District nurses	*Health visitors*
1988	149	120
1989	134	111
1990	117	111
1991	88	92
1992	68	68
1993	62	45
1994	63	61
1995	96	100

Note:

Whole-time equivalent student numbers are not available but up until 1992–93 the vast majority of students were full-time. In 1993–94 and 1994–95 just over half the students in each specialty were part-time and the remainder full-time.

Health Expenditure

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on administration *(a)* for each health board in 1991–92 and *(b)* for each health board and NHS trust within its area in 1994–95. [4955]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is shown in the table. For 1994–95, expenditure for all NHS trusts within each health board area are included. Figures have been taken from the annual accounts of health boards and NHS trusts. The expenditure shown for administration includes senior nurses and clinicians who have transferred to the general/senior managers pay scales.

£ thousand

Health board area	*1991–92*	*1994–95*
Argyll and Clyde	18,963	22,066
Ayr and Arran	15,192	21,248
Borders	5,068	6,761
Dumfries and Galloway	6,997	10,509
Fife	12,946	19,803
Forth Valley	12,099	17,154
Grampian	23,978	33,405
Greater Glasgow	58,673	89,312
Highland	11,445	15,113
Lanarkshire	19,715	31,974
Lothian	37,198	55,424
Orkney	831	1,485
Shetland	1,481	1,844
Tayside	21,291	28,818
Western Isles	1,820	2,829
Scotland total	247,697	357,745

A75

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the programmes to upgrade the A75 route; what contracts are presently under construction; what contracts are to be awarded in 1996; and what support the European Union is giving to the A75 route. [5355]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Preparations for major improvements at the Glen are in an advanced stage and we hope to determine in the near future a planned start date for construction. In addition, a number of works are being implemented through the on-going accident investigation and prevention system, either at specific sites where accidents have been recorded or through mini-route accident reduction plan studies of sections of the road where the accident rate is the highest. Minor junction improvements are also planned.

The A75 is included in the trans-European transport network—TENs. It forms part of the only road-related TENs priority project in the United Kingdom, the Ireland UK-Benelux road link. Support from the EU's TENs funds may be available, at a rate of 10 per cent. capital costs or 50 per cent. of feasibility studies. While road programmes are eligible under the current European structural fund objective 5b programme in Dumfries and Galloway, they must compete for the limited funds available in the programme.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the standards of service set for emergency call response times for the Scottish ambulance service; and how often they are met within the Greater Glasgow health board area. [5086]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The target response times that apply within the Greater Glasgow health board area and information on how the Scottish ambulance service NHS trust performed against the targets are as follows:

Emergency calls—Greater Glasgow

Population Density	*Target—95 per cent. of calls responded to within*	*Performance*	
		1994–95 percentage	*1995–[1]96 percentage*
High (>3 people per acre)	14 minutes	89	89
Medium (0.5–3 people per acre)	18 minutes	93	94

[1] Based on 1 April to 30 November 1995.

Water and Sewerage Services

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the outstanding capital debt on water and sewerage services for each regional and islands council in the most recent year; and what arrangements he has made for this debt to be transferred to the three new water and sewerage authorities on 1 April 1996. [5288]

Mr. Kynoch: The latest year for which figures are available is 1994–95. The information as at 31 March 1995 as contained in capital outstanding returns from local authorities is set out in the following table:

	£000s
Borders regional council	31,581
Central regional council	75,798
Dumfries and Galloway regional council	55,292
Fife regional council	103,743
Grampian regional council	210,308
Highland regional council	73,837
Lothian regional council	268,769
Orkney Isles islands council	8,939
Shetland Isles islands council	1,594
Strathclyde regional council	565,047
Tayside regional council	131,000
Western Isles islands council	15,835
Total	1,541,743

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the external consultants, employed to date to assist with the transfer of water and sewerage services to the new water authorities in Scotland, and what fees they have received. [5528]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The Babtie group has been commissioned to assist with the transfer of water and sewerage assets to the new water authorities. Payments have totalled £407,724.77 to date, under two contracts.

Relevant debt outstanding at 31 March 1996 will be transferred to the new water authorities by virtue of section 91 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. The mechanism of transfer is currently under consideration.

Sheep

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he will take to arrest the decline in sheep numbers in the hills and uplands of Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [4807]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* Following the Government's autumn review of farm incomes in the hills and uplands we decided to hold rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances—HLCA—at current levels. This, at a time when net farm incomes were forecast to rise on average by some nine per cent. and by 15.5 per cent. for specialist sheep units, was a significant achievement after what had been a particularly severe public expenditure round. In addition, the number of animals on which subsidy has been paid in the less-favoured area is relatively stable. The maintenance of HLCA rates clearly demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to sheep production in Scotland's less-favoured areas.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5587]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In 1994–95 the cost of hospitality, which is included in the running cost budget for my Department, was £53,806. Expenditure for the financial year to date is £28,668. The projected budget for 1995–96 is £59,000.

Munitions Disposal

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has concerning the dumping of explosives and related materials at a point south-west of Arran since 1965; and if he will make a statement. [4832]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* Beaufort's dyke is the only charted munitions disposal site to the south-west of Arran. Details of disposals there are contained in the Ministry of Defence report placed in the House of Commons Library on 15 November.

There have also been commercial explosives disposals to the east of Arran at Birch point. The report of a marine laboratory survey of that area was placed in the House of Commons Library on 25 July 1990.

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the report of the survey by the marine laboratory of the north channel around Beaufort's dyke; what arrangements he proposes to make for the publication of the report; and if he will make a statement. [5460]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The initial results of the survey will be in the new year. The report setting out the results will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Political Advisers

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many political advisers worked for the Secretary of State for Scotland in *(a)* 1978, *(b)* 1987, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1995; and what was the annual cost of these posts in each year. [6082]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of special advisers employed by my Department in each of the years referred to is as follows:

1978: None

1987: 1

1992: 2

1995: 2

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers salary spine of 34 points ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Gourock Ropeworks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the Inverclyde district council, Historic Scotland, Renfrewshire Enterprise and other interested parties about the proposed demolition of Gourock Ropeworks in Port Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [5494]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has had no recent discussions on the matter of demolition. However, as the question relates to matters undertaken by Historic Scotland, I have asked the agency's director and chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter to Dr. Norman Godman from Graeme N. Munro, dated 14 December 1995:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Scotland for written question on 12 December asking what recent discussions he has had about the demolition of the Gourock Ropeworks building. The question relates to operational matters undertaken by Historic Scotland and I have been asked to reply. The terms of this letter will be reproduced in the Official Report and a copy of it will also be deposited in the Library of the House.

I would refer you to the letter I wrote to you dated 5 April of this year which was published in the Official Report of the House (Vol.257, 86 part 2 Cols 1167–68) of the same date. In the letter I explained the position on demolition. In order to demolish a listed building such as the Gourock Ropeworks building, listed building consent is required. In relation to a demolition the Secretary of State has to be consulted on any application for consent. To date no application for listed building consent has been received by Historic Scotland for the Secretary of State's consideration.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5698]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of the Scottish Office payment performance are as follows:

Year	*Percentage of payments paid early or on time*
1991–92	82
1992–93	85

Year	Percentage of payments paid early or on time
1993–94	89
1994–95	96

DNA Technology

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions his Department has had with the chief constables of Scottish police forces concerning the provision of a database allowing for the collation and use of DNA samples taken under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995; [5782]

(2) if he will make available funding for a pilot project to provide a DNA database in Scotland on a comparable basis with the Forensic Science Service study commissioned by the Home Office; [5783]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the need for a database in Scotland for the collation and use of DNA samples taken in accordance with the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995. [5784]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his statement on 11 December, we have made funds available for the Scottish police to make full use of the new DNA technology. We have just received a report from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland; and the Scottish Office Home Department is having detailed discussions as to the best way of using the powers under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1995, after they come into effect on 1 April.

We do not see any need for a pilot project: we expect that the Scottish police will be able to proceed as soon as possible to make full use of DNA technology.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many schools covered by the assisted places scheme received *(a)* more than £1 million, *(b)* over £750,00, *(c)* over £500,000 and *(d)* over £250,000 under the assisted places scheme for each academic year since 1981. [5818]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Under the assisted places scheme, grant is paid to parents of assisted pupils. Schools administer the allocation of grant to parents. The amounts distributed to schools for this purpose are set out in the table.

Academic year	Over £1 million	£750,001 to £1,000,000	£500,001 to £750,000	£250,001 to £500,000
1981–82	—	—	—	—
1982–83	—	—	—	1
1983–84	—	—	1	—
1984–85	—	—	1	—
1985–86	—	1	—	1
1986–87	1	—	—	2
1987–88	1	—	—	3
1988–89	1	—	—	4
1989–90	—	—	2	5
1990–91	—	—	3	4
1991–92	—	1	2	6
1992–93	—	1	3	7
1993–94[1]	—	1	3	8
1994–95[1]	—	2	2	9

[1] Provisional.

Until school session 1988–89, Edinburgh Merchant schools—EMC—administered Stewart's Melville college, Mary Erskine school for girls and George Watson's college and one grant total was allocated to EMC to fund assisted places in each of these schools. From session 1989–90, grant was paid separately to George Watson's college.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the academic year 1994–95 in descending order the independent schools by the proportion of their school rolls made up of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme and the total number of pupils on the school roll; what proportion of the school roll at each school was covered by the scheme; how many pupils were covered by the scheme at each school; how many pupils were on the roll of each school; what level of fees was charged for pupils under the scheme at each school; and what sums were received by each school under the scheme. [5870]

Mr. Robertson: The information requested for the 1994–95 school session is set out in the table:

School	Total school roll	Number of assisted places	Percentage of assisted places	Assisted place fees charged £	Total grant paid £
Kilquhanity[1]	27	11	41	2,430	34,082
Keil	207	69	33	4,479	239,782
Morrisins[1]	584	140	24	3,351	417,900
Park[1]	284	68	24	3,708	247,987
Rudolf Steiner	266	62	23	3,594	191,526
Kilgraston	267	54	20	4,161	184,177
St. Denis and Cranley	165	31	19	4,203	128,276
Laurel Bank[1]	354	63	18	4,014	232,914
Merchiston Castle[1]	393	69	18	6,480	333,381
H.S. of Dundee[1]	1,143	194	17	3,608	591,342
Glenalmond	245	41	17	7,575	257,408
George Heriot's[1]	1,512	250	17	3,624	699,790
Kelvinside	546	87	16	4,135	318,494
St. Aloysius[1]	1,082	168	16	2,978	472,009
Rannoch	250	38	15	5,490	175,887
Wellington[1]	354	53	15	4,290	202,604

School	*Total school roll*	*Number of assisted places*	*Percentage of assisted places*	*Assisted place fees charged* £	*Total grant paid* £
Crawfordton	45	6	13	4.542	22,853
George Watson's[1]	2,033	248	12	3,876	751,969
St. Margaret's [Edinburgh][1]	664	74	11	3,895	271,812
Stewart's Melvill and Mary Erskine School[1]	2,556	282	11	3,912	900,020
St. Leondard's	329	36	11	5,682	164,382
Lomond	504	54	11	4,119	183,741
Sthrathallan[1]	495	46	9	7,485	299,342
Fernhill[1]	326	30	9	2,850	78,155
Craigholme[1]	493	45	9	3,330	134,235
Hutcheson's[1]	1,813	163	9	3,389	478,942
Glasgow Academy	1,010	90	9	4,014	329,362
Loretto	378	33	9	7,235	198,443
Butterstone[1]	58	5	9	4,930	23,817
Aberlour[1]	112	9	8	4,875	33,255
Fettes[1]	475	35	7	7,305	204,576
Gordonstoun[1]	456	31	7	6,690	182,064
Belmont[1]	382	25	7	3,570	78,623
Dollar	1,111	69	6	3,719	209,028
Edinburgh Academy	902	53	6	4,935	229,807
Albyn[1]	415	24	6	3,536	69,591
St. Columba's[1]	571	33	6	3,690	117,233
Robert Gordon's[1]	1,353	70	5	3,548	204,100
Clifton hall	120	6	5	4,827	28,452
HS of Glasgow	989	49	5	3,987	143,797
Croftinloan	81	4	5	5,475	20,768
St. Margaret's [Aberdeen]	415	20	5	3,353	53,433
St. George's	877	42	5	4,097	122,151
St. Mary's	93	4	4	4,536	15,992
Craigclowan	240	10	4	3,495	23,450
Lathallan	145	6	4	4,622	28,244
Ardvreck	147	6	4	4,588	22,589
Beaconhurst	249	10	4	4,095	31,815
New Park	128	4	3	3,951	15,839
Belhaven	74	2	3	5,039	9,789
Cargilfield	192	4	2	5,695	12,897
Hamilton College	757	14	2	2,273	27,095
Drumley House	115	2	2	4,415	7,069
Park Lodge	0	0	n/a	n/a	Nil

[1] Provisional figures. Final audited claims for 1994–95 schools session yet to be submitted.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many independent sector schools have had *(a)* more than 25 per cent., *(b)* more than 50 per cent. and *(c)* less than 5 per cent. of their school rolls made up of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme for each academic year since 1981. [5794]

Mr. Robertson: The information requested was not collected centrally for school sessions 1981–82 to 1992–93. Information for school sessions 1993–94 and 1994–95 is set out in the table.

School session	*Assisted pupils over 25 per cent. but not more than 50 per cent. of school roll*	*Assisted pupils more than 50 per cent. of school roll*	*Assisted pupils less than 5 per cent. of school roll*
1993–94	2	Nil	11
1994–95	2	Nil	14

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made by his Department in taking forward proposals for the expansion of the assisted places scheme; and how much his Department estimates this will cost in the future financial years for which figures are available when this has been achieved. [5820]

Mr. Robertson: Consultation on ways of expanding the assisted places scheme are currently underway with the Scottish Council of Independent Schools and a statement will be made in due course. The estimated cost of the scheme in the current financial year will be around £11 million. An additional £9 million in total is being made available for expansion of the scheme over the next three years.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which independent sector schools charged *(a)* and highest and *(b)* the lowest level of fees to pupils covered by the assisted places scheme in the academic year 1994–95; and what charges were levied. [5828]

Mr. Robertson: The highest tuition fee charged to pupils covered by the assisted places scheme in academic year 1994–95 was at Glenalmond college at £7,575 per annum. The lowest fees were charged at Hamilton college—£2,273 per annum for pupils aged 12 to 18 years.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on the operation of the assisted places scheme in each year since

1981; how many *(a)* pupils and *(b)* institutions were covered by the scheme; and what was the overspend on the budget allocated to the scheme. [5789]

Mr. Robertson: The information requested is set out in the table. Expenditure on the assisted places scheme is cash limited each year and there have been no overspends on the budget allocated in any year since the scheme commenced.

School session	*Total expenditure* £	*Pupils covered*	*Schools covered*
1981–82	799,203	790	39
1982–83	1,718,485	1,450	41
1983–84	2,454,386	1,900	42
1984–85	3,298,461	2,265	42
1985–86	4,217,234	2,620	42
1986–87	4,861,150	2,626	41
1987–88	5,310,061	2,680	41
1988–89	5,758,542	2,695	41
1989–90	6,681,213	2,841	59
1990–91	7,641,895	2,861	59
1991–92	8,706,443	2,911	58
1992–93	9,755,844	3,038	58
1993–94[1]	10,127,276	3,058	55
1994–95[1]	10,456,738	3,042	55

[1] Provisional.

Conductive Education

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many institutions provide conductive education for children with special educational needs; and how many children are currently receiving conductive therapy in each institution. [5812]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Various institutions in Scotland, including a number of local authority and grant-aided special schools, provide education that is inspired by the principles of conductive education. However, detailed information on precise numbers is not held centrally.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the value and achievements of conductive education. [5815]

Mr. Robertson: The Scottish Office has not made an assessment of the value and achievements of conductive education specifically.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to make conductive education available for children whose parents choose it. [5833]

Mr. Robertson: Educational provision using the principles of conductive education is already available in Scotland.

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many independent schools are operating in the current academic year. [5823]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There are currently 117 independent schools in Scotland registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools.

Woodlands

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines currently apply for the protection of public access to woodlands being sold by the Forestry Commission; when those guidelines were circulated to Forestry Commission staff; when they became operational; and if he will publish them. [6090]

Mr. Kynoch: The current access guidelines for continued public access to Forestry Commission woodlands after sale were introduced in October 1991, after being circulated to Forestry Commission staff. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what criteria have been adopted in assessing whether a woodland is important for public access when it is being considered for disposal by the Forestry Commission; and how the decision on whether it is important is made; [6089]

(2) what is the minimum number of walkers in a woodland identified for disposal by the Forestry Commission required for that woodland to be classified as important for public access; [6091]

(3) how many Forestry Commission woods have been classified as *(a)* important for public access and *(b)* unimportant for public access; and if he will list all such woods classified as either, indicating the location of each and the reasons they were deemed to be *(a)* or *(b)* [6094]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *590.*

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number and total area of Forestry Commission woods sold in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales since access agreements were introduced in 1991 to protect public access, indicating for each country the number and area with and without access agreements. [6093]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is as follows:

Forestry Commission Woods sold between 1 October 1991 and 30 September 1995

	With access agreement Number	*Area*[1]	*Without access agreement Number*	*Area*[1]	*Total Number*	*Area*[1]
England	6	136	189	5,006	195	5,142
Scotland	4	325	216	24,110	220	24,435
Wales	18	382	211	4,146	229	4,528

[1] Areas are given in hectares.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average amount of money spent by his Department on a pupil in a public sector school at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level for each academic year since 1981. [5797]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Direct expenditure by the Scottish Office on the education of school pupils in public sector schools is limited to grants made available to Jordanhill school, a grant-aided school; and Dornoch academy and St. Mary's Episcopal primary school, which are both self-governing schools. Comprehensive information on the division of resources between the primary and secondary departments at Jordanhill school is not available. The annual recurrent grant to Dornoch academy in the financial year 1994–95, following the school's incorporation as a self-governing school in April 1994, was £387,000. On the basis of the school roll at September 1994, expenditure per pupil was therefore £6,672. St. Mary's Episcopal primary school was incorporated in October 1995.

Expenditure per pupil in education authority schools is the responsibility of each education authority. Local authority expenditure is supported by central Government, for example, through the annual local government financial settlement. Such financial support is not specific to particular local authority services an it is for each authority to determine the allocation of all the resources at its disposal.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what approaches Irvine Housing Association Ltd. has made to Scottish Homes seeking additional funding for its activities since the association's establishment; how much Irvine housing association has received in support from Scottish Homes up until this point; what form this support has taken; and what outstanding requests for support are being considered by Scottish Homes. [5801]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

New Towns

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what adjustment will be made in the Scottish Office's budget to reflect the revenue raised by his Department through the disposal of the housing and industrial assets of Scotland's new towns. [5803]

Mr. Kynoch: Income from the disposal of Scottish new town housing and industrial assets was fully reflected in my right hon. Friends's statement of 11 December on public expenditure.

Class Sizes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the average number of pupils in classes in *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools adjusted for the time during which teachers are non-class-committed under existing staffing agreements for each education authority in Scotland and for each education division within Strathclyde for each academic year since 1979. [5805]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 27 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *586-87*. The information provided took into account teacher time on non-class-committed duties.

Inward Investment

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown, by source, of the inward investment attracted to Scotland in each of the last five years, and if he will provide details of each inward investment project attracted to Scotland since April 1994. [6462]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Planned inward investment by source

	North America	*Asia Pacific*	*United Kingdom*	*Europe*	*Total*
1994–95					
Number of projects	41	9	32	15	97
Planned investment (£ million)	358.5	613.1	77.9	77.2	1,126.7
Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)	5,738	2,259	3,099	1,233	12,329
1993–94					
Number of projects	36	8	34	17	95
Planned investment (£ million)	366.2	23.7	66.4	131.3	587.6
Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)	5,464	1,074	3,135	1,399	11,072
1992–93					
Number of projects	25	9	22	9	65
Planned investment (£ million)	186.1	70.2	66.4	29.3	352.0
Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)	3,919	668	2,085	1,387	8,059
1991–92					
Number of projects	13	5	23	18	59
Planned investment (£ million)	248.9	17.0	48.5	66.6	381.0
Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)	3,026	431	1,407	1,138	6,002
1990–91					
Number of projects	15	9	25	14	63
Planned investment (£ million)	58.8	92.7	182.5	60.2	394.2
Planned jobs (new and safeguarded)	1,760	2,154	5,195	1,135	10,244

The figures relate only to projects handled by Locate in Scotland or the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. They are based on information provided by the companies themselves at the time of the investment decision and take no account of subsequent developments. A few projects may not have proceeded and others may have been reduced in scale as a result of changes in the commercial environment. Equally, however, some projects may have led to more investment and more jobs than originally anticipated; and the figures take no account of the substantial number of new jobs created indirectly in supplier companies. Experience over a number of years indicates that, on average, around two-thirds of planned direct jobs are created.

All our dealings with inward investors are undertaken on a commercially confidential basis and it would not therefore be appropriate to publish details of individual projects except in cases where details of the project have been announced by the company itself. The following table contains details of the inward investment projects attracted to Scotland which have been the subject of public announcements since April 1994.

Date of announcement	*Company*	*Location*	*Type of project*	*Planed investment (£ million)*	*Planned jobs*	
					New	*Safeguarded*
April 1994	NEC Semiconductors (UK) Ltd.	Livingston	Expansion	28.0	[1]—	[1]—
April 1994	International Components Corporation	East Kilbride	New Project	6.0	400	—
May 1994	Teledyne Controls	Cumbernauld	New Project	0.5	15	—
May 1994	Compaq Computer Manufacturing	Erskine	Expansion	10.0	300	—
May 1994	Safetynet plc	Dunfermline	New Project	[1]—	12	—
May 1994	Solway Seafoods Ltd.	Bladnoch	New Project	[1]—	30	—
June 1994	Cerprobe Corporation	East Kilbride	New Project	[1]—	11	—
June 1994	Scotia Pharmaceuticals	Stirling	New Project	[1]—	60	—
August 1994	BioMar Ltd.	Grangemouth	New Project	[1]—	20	—
August 1994	Iceland Software Inc.	Glasgow	New Project	[1]—	25	—
August 1994	PCL Group	Glasgow	New Project	[1]—	250	—
September 1994	Motorola	East Kilbride	Expansion	250.0	250	—
September 1994	NEC Semiconductors (UK) Ltd.	Livingston	Expansion	530.0	430	—
September 1994	Digital Equipment Corporation	Irvine	New Project	[1]—	[1]—	—
September 1994	Solectron Corporation	Dunfermline	Expansion	10.0	200	—
October 1994	British Sky Broadcasting	Dunfermline	New Project	10.0	1000	—
October 1994	OKI (UK) Ltd.	Cumbernauld	Expansion	[1]—	58	114
October 1994	Madison Cable Corporation	Dundee	New Project	12.0	200	—
October 1994	Micronas Oy	Fife	New Project	2.0	24	—
October 1994	Probe Technology	East Kilbride	New Project	[1]—	11	—
October 1994	Shin-Etsu Handotai Co Ltd.	Livingston	Expansion	23.0	100	—
November 1994	Pine Plastics Ltd.	East Kilbride	Expansion	[1]—	60	—
November 1994	JVC	East Kilbride	Expansion	9.2	155	—
December 1994	Schlumberger Technologies Ltd.	Dundee	Expansion	[1]—	90	85
December 1994	Zepf Technologies Inc.	Cumbernauld	New Project	[1]—	28	—
December 1994	British Gas	Uddingston	Expansion	[1]—	100	—
January 1995	Jabra Corporation	Livingston	New Project	[1]—	[1]—	—
February 1995	Meric International Corporation	Irvine	New Project	8.0	450	—
February 1995	GE Capital Motor Finance	Edinburgh	Expansion	—	55	—
March 1995	Naco Materials Handling Group Europe Ltd.	Irvine	New Project	[1]—	15	—
March 1995	EWOS Ltd.	Livingston	New Project	[1]—	40	—
March 1995	EWOS Ltd.	Bathgate	Expansion	[1]—	[1]—	—
March 1995	Ciba Classical Pigments	Paisley	Expansion	40.0	80	—
April 1995	Birkbys Plastics Ltd.	Glenrothes	New Project	[1]—	100	—
April 1995	Patrol Manufacturing	Glasgow	New Project	0.5	40	—
June 1995	Selfcare Inc.	Inverness	New Project	9.6	375	—
June 1995	Konrad Keller GmbH	Alness	New Project	[1]—	16	—
June 1995	Burr Brown Corporation	Livingston	Expansion	[1]—	32	79
July 1995	MAN Truck and Bus UK Ltd.	Bellshill	New Project	2.0	45	—
July 1995	PET Processors LLC	Dumfries	New Project	[1]—	15	—
July 1995	Cannon (UK) Ltd.	Glenrothes	New Project	10.0	220	—
July 1995	Exabyte Corporation	Larbert	Expansion	[1]—	100	—
August 1995	British Gas	Edinburgh	New Project	[1]—	500	—
August 1995	National Australian Group	Clydebank	New Project	[1]—	250	—
August 1995	BT	Motherwell	New Project	2.7	170	—
August 1995	Motorola	Bathgate	Expansion	[1]—	400	—
August 1995	Forbo Nairn	Kirkcaldy	Expansion	15.0	14	—
September 1995	TSB	Glasgow	New Project	15.0	900	—
September 1995	Precision Tube Technology	Peterhead	New Project	4.5	40	—
September 1995	IBM	Greenock	Expansion	[1]—	200	—

Date of announcement	*Company*	*Location*	*Type of project*	*Planed investment (£ million)*	*Planned jobs*	
					New	*Safeguarded*
September 1995	Bi-Link Metal Specialities	Cumbernauld	New Project	6.0	100	—
October 1995	Lexmark International	Rosyth	New Project	26.0	500	—
November 1995	Chunghwa Picture Tubes Ltd.	Mossend	New Project	260.0	3,300	—
November 1995	Motorola	East Kilbride	New Project	[1]—	10	—
November 1995	Shin-Etsu Handotai	Livingston	Expansion	160.0	235	—
November 1995	Foxconn UK Ltd.	Erskine	New Project	[1]—	15	—

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk

2. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money the United Kingdom will receive from the EU to help pay for milk in secondary schools and milk in school catering in 1995–96. [4128]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We estimate that EU expenditure on the discretionary elements of the school milk scheme will amount to approximately £6.1 million in the United Kingdom in 1995–96. Doing away with the discretionary element will result in public expenditure savings of about £4 million.

17. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the cost to the EU of the common agricultural policy milk and milk products regime in 1995. [4145]

Mr. Baldry: The provisional outturn for the cost of the EU diary regime in the 1995 FEOGA year is 4 billion ecu.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make publicly available the submission by the United Kingdom to the European Commission requesting a derogation allowing the United Kingdom to continue to use EU aid for milk used in the preparation of school meals; and if he will place a copy of the submission in the Library. [3382]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* I am arranging for a copy of the document to be placed in the Library of the House.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

15. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the dairy industry to discuss BSE. [4143]

Mrs. Browning: The Minister last met representatives of the dairy industry to discuss BSE-related issues on 6 December.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the number of cases of BSE in the United Kingdom. [4141]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) this afternoon.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban from human food all specified offals from calves under the age of six months. [4849]

Mrs. Browning: The controls on the specified bovine offals are designed to ensure that all tissues that potentially harbour BSE infectivity are removed from cattle at slaughter and are destroyed. These tissues should not, therefore, enter the human or animal food chain. The current controls are based on scientific evidence and are endorsed by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. The six-month cut-off was originally based on the distribution of scrapie agent in infected sheep. Experimental studies show that BSE infectivity cannot be detected in either the brain or spinal cord up to and including 18 months after cattle were fed a large dose of infected brain. Indeed, infectivity has been found in no tissue other than the small intestine in these experiments so far. The small intestine from cattle of any age is banned from entering the food chain. The six-month cut-off for brain and spinal cord therefore represents a very wide margin of safety in relation to the experimental results and there is no reason to revise them.

Hill Farming

16. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy for encouraging the younger generation to enter hill farming. [4144]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the reply given earlier by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

In addition, farmers in the less-favoured areas benefit from the substantial public funding in the form of livestock subsidies. These are expected to amount to £610 million in 1995, rising to £655 million in 1996.

Common Agricultural Policy

18. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what amount the planned expenditure of the EU on the CAP in 1996 differs from actual expenditure last year. [4146]

Mr. Baldry: The 1996 draft budget for the CAP exceeds expenditure in 1994 by about 7.9 billion ecu, or £6.7 billion at current rates of exchange.

Fruit and Vegetables

19. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce the trade deficit in fruit and vegetables. [4147]

24. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom trade balances in fruit and vegetables; and what action the Government are taking to improve it. [4152]

Mr. Boswell: The trade deficit in horticultural products, currently standing at some £3 billion, reflects a range of factors, including imports of non-indigenous and out-of-season produce. Our strategy—which includes the appointment of a horticultural export promoter to the Department's market task force—is to encourage the industry to play to its strengths and match the excellence of its product with high-class marketing.

Farm Animals (Slaughter)

20. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to promote the slaughter of farm animals before transport. [4148]

Mrs. Browning: We have an excellent record on meat products, which are well up on last year, when they exceeded live exports in value terms by a factor of nearly 7:1. We are working with the industry and the Meat and Livestock Commission to convert even more of the trade in live animals to a trade in meat.

Fish Diseases Laboratories

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are employed in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the new fish diseases laboratories in Weymouth; and what was the investment in the laboratories. [4149]

Mr. Boswell: At 1 October, the total number of staff employed in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, inclusive of the agencies, was 11,195. Of this number, 54 were employed at the fish diseases laboratories at Weymouth. The anticipated outturn cost for the provision of the laboratories at Weymouth is approximately £13 million.

Farmers (Early Retirement)

22. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce a scheme of voluntary early retirement for farmers. [4150]

Mr. Boswell: No. Council regulation 2079/92 permits member states to provide early retirement pensions to farmers aged between 55 and normal retirement age who release their land for amalgamation with other holdings or for non-agricultural use. This option has not been taken up in the UK because we take the view that its terms are not appropriate to the conditions of agriculture here.

Rural White Paper

23. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the rural policy White Paper. [4151]

Mr. Boswell: During the preparation of the White Paper "Rural England—A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside" about 380 organisations and individuals responded to the invitation to give their views. Regional seminars involving key representatives from various interest groups in all regions were also held. Since the White Paper was published there have been a number of occasions attended by Ministers which have provided the opportunity for further representations to be made. In that period we have also received five letters to Ministers on the White Paper.

Pesticides

25. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to monitor the use of pesticides. [4154]

Mrs. Browning: The Government undertake a comprehensive monitoring programme which covers pesticide usage, residue levels and wildlife incidents. This information is reported to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and is used by the regulatory Departments to inform their policies relating to approval and control of pesticides. All monitoring results are made publicly available.

Dairy Crest

26. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the sell-off of Dairy Crest. [4155]

Mr. Baldry: It is the responsibility of the Residuary Milk Marketing Board to decide, in the light of commercial and market conditions, when and how the disposal of Diary Crest is to be effected.

Farmers (Lichfield)

27. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet farmers from the Lichfield area to discuss EU documentation; and if he will make a statement. [4156]

Mr. Boswell: I have no plans to meet farmers from the Lichfield area at the moment. However, as I announced on 9 November, we have set up an efficiency scrutiny which aims to reduce the burden of paperwork, including EU documentation, on farmers in England and Wales.

Organic Turkeys

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage the production and consumption of turkeys reared to organic standards and by welfare-friendly methods. [4142]

Mrs. Browning: The welfare of all livestock on agricultural land is protected by the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968, which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to livestock, and subordinate legislation. The welfare of turkeys is further protected by a welfare code which sets out more detailed requirements.

We are encouraging the production of all types of organic food. We support the work of the independent UK register of organic food standards which control production standards for all sectors, including poultry.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5567]

Mr. Boswell: Expenditure on furnishings and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of the Department, which is published in the annual report.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5722]

Mr. Boswell: While several projects are currently being assessed for their potential, no schemes have so far been agreed under the private finance initiative, and no revenue forecasts have been made.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5710]

Mr. Boswell: From 1991 to 1994, prompt payment performance was measured by a manual sampling process. For 1993–94, this sampling established MAFF's overall payment performance including payments to farm businesses as 85 per cent.

During 1994, MAFF was in the process of installing a computerised payments system and, as a result, consistent, statistically valid data on prompt payment performance could not be collected. Data emerging from the new system indicate 85.41 per cent. of all payments made by MAFF in the first quarter of 1995–96 were made by the due date.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5988]

Mr. Boswell: A total of 15 projects and surveys, looking into aspects of public attitudes and opinions, have been commissioned by MAFF in the past three years to December 1995. Details of these surveys are shown. It is not possible for commercial reasons to give the cost of each survey individually; however, in total these surveys cost £359,000.

Subject	*Date* *(i)*	*Organisation* *(iii)*	*Numbers taking part* *(iv)*	*Location* *(v)*	*Timescale of fieldwork* *(v)*
1. Fridge use and maintenance leaflet-communication research	July 1993	Reflexions	96	Great Britain	1 month
2. Foodsense awareness	July 1993	RSGB	2,000	Great Britain	1 month
3. Foodsense strategy research	September 1993	Andrew Irving and Associates	96	England (North, South Midlands)	2 months
4. Improved methods of food preference mapping	October 1993	Mobile Sensory Testing Services Ltd.	864	United Kingdom	3 years
5. MAFF exhibition research	June 1994	Martin Hamblin	1,101	Bath, Northampton and Newcastle	8 months
6. Exhibition research	August 1994	Diagnostics	434	London	1 month
7. Valuation of non-use environmental benefits. The value of natural areas.	October 1995	University of Portsmouth	2,000	England	1 year
8. Customer satisfaction survey of regional service centres	February 1995	BJM Research and Consultancy Ltd.	1,800	England	6 weeks
9. Balance in the countryside-evaluation of brochure and information pack.	November 1994	Reflexions	30	Great Britain	6 weeks
10. Environmentally sensitive areas research	February 1995	RSGB	1,500	England	1 month
11. Survey on the consumer understanding of numerical nutrition labelling	January 1995	Research Services Ltd.	1,000	United Kingdom	4 months
12. Foodsense advert awareness	August 1995	RSGB	4,000	Great Britain	4 months
13. Foodsense booklet review	August 1995	Benson, Slesenger Research	48	England	6 weeks
14. Socio-economic and environmental evaluation of the farm woodland premium scheme	June 1995	Entec UK Ltd.	542	England and Wales	2 months
15. Evaluation of ESA landscapes—research in the south downs and Somerset levels and moors	September 1992	University of Newcastle	3,077	England	2 months

Of the 15 projects and surveys commissioned, four were in relation to specific policy proposals and 11 of a general nature. For completed projects and surveys, the findings are available on request, subject to any commercial constraints.

Drift Net Fishing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *372*, if he will list the individuals and organisations to whom he has circulated the interim report on drift net fishing from the sea mammals research unit; and when he will place a copy in the Library. [5869]

Mr. Baldry: The Ministry has not yet circulated the interim report to other individuals or organisations and will not do so until after it has been placed in the Library. This will be done before the recess once the Ministry has prepared its analysis of the report.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (1) if he will make it his policy to oppose any further regulations from the European Union which would restrict United Kingdom consumers' access to vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements; and if he will make a statement; [6205]

(2) what is his policy in respect of ensuring the availability of vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements; and if he will make a statement. [6122]

Mrs. Browning: The Government's policy is to ensure that consumers have as much choice as possible in their access to vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements, provided that the public health is not compromised. There are no formal proposals from the European Union at present to change the rules on the sale of dietary supplements. If any such proposals were made, the United Kingdom position would reflect this policy. We would be opposed to any unnecessary regulation.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 18 December 1995

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EC Funding

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which organisations in the United Kingdom have received subsidies from the EC for the purpose of advancing the idea of Europe; and if he will make a statement on the process by which such organisations are nominated and chosen, indicating the role of Her Majesty's Government in these deliberations. [5898]

Mr. David Davis: Many organisations in the United Kingdom are funded by the EC for particular purposes, such as student exchanges, infrastructure projects, research, and to stimulate debate on issues affecting Europe. The involvement of Her Majesty's Government differs in each project.

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British Government Ministers have visited Indian-administered Kashmir in each of the last five years. [6461]

Mr. Hanley: I am not aware of any official visits by British Government Ministers to Indian-administered Kashmir in the last five years.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6569]

Mr. Hanley: Details of advertising expenditure incurred by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—both diplomatic and aid wings—were given in response to a question asked by the hon. Member for Gordon on 13 February, *Official Report* column *487*. Information on the proportion which was spent on newspaper advertising could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost. The projected spend on all advertising and promotional material for 1995–96 is £2,719,000.

EU (English Language Use)

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research his Department has *(a)* evaluated and *(b)* commissioned into the increase in the use of the English language in the EU; and if he will place copies of all such research in the Library. [6331]

Mr. Hanley: The answers are as follows:

(a) None;

(b) None.

However, the British Council-led English 2000 project has initiated research into the use of, and attitudes towards, the teaching and learning of English in the EU and in other parts of the world. The project will carry out in due course more in-depth studies of this issue. The British Council's report "English in the World" will be placed in the Library.

European Commission (Information Policy)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he was consulted by the European Commission about the booklet "Do You Still Believe All You Read in the Newspapers". [6532]

Mr. David Davis: The European Commission is responsible for its information budget and how it is spent. Questions on the European Commission's information policy should be addressed to the Commission.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost of the booklet "Do You Still Believe All You Read in the Newspapers?" published by the European Commission; and what was the British Government's share of that cost. [6533]

Mr. Davis: We understand that the production cost for the booklet was £21,500, with a print run of 50,000 copies, at a cost of 43p for each copy.

The United Kingdom made no direct contribution to the cost of producing the booklet. The Commission budget is funded from the general budget of the European Communities, to which the UK contributes.

Khalifa Bazelya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the expulsion of Khalifa Bazelya. [6650]

Mr. Hanley: The head of the Libyan interests section was declared persona non grata on 11 December for activities not compatible with his diplomatic status. This action was taken solely on security grounds.

China

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the Government of the Peoples Republic of China concerning the employment of child and prison labour in *(a)* economic zones and *(b)* export industries; what visits have been made to such enterprises by embassy staff; and if he will make a statement. [6022]

Mr. Hanley: We continue to be deeply concerned about reports of the exploitation of child and prison labour in China. We take every suitable opportunity to raise our concerns about all forms of human rights abuse in China, with the Chinese authorities. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary did so with the Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, in London on 3 October.

Madrid Heads of Government Meeting

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals to increase democracy and to reduce poverty he will be submitting to the European Council Heads of Government review meeting in Madrid. [6275]

Mr. David Davis: At the Madrid European Council decisions were taken on the launch of the 1996 intergovernmental conference, at which we will continue to work to improve the democratic legitimacy of the European Union including a voting system which better reflects population and an enhanced role for national parliaments. There was also discussion at Madrid of employment, competitiveness and deregulation, all of which are important factors in reducing poverty.

International Bodies (Budgets)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the impact on the United Kingdom contribution to the budgets of *(a)* the United Nations, *(b)* the World Bank and *(c)* the European Union of the Budget statement of 28 November. [6333]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Treaties

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many treaties have been agreed with other countries in the calendar year to date. [6743]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Treaty records contain details of 81 bilateral treaties concluded and 28 multilateral treaties signed during the calendar year. Arrangements are being made for a list to be deposited in the Library of the House shortly.

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations he has made into reports about Hawk aircraft flying over East Timor. [6689]

Mr. Hanley: We have looked carefully into the reports about Hawk aircraft flying over East Timor, but have found no evidence to substantiate them.

European Commission (London Office)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions on political activity apply to the head of the London Office of the European Commission. [6946]

Mr. David Davis: Officials activities are governed by staff regulations, which have been agreed with the Council. Officials are required to carry out their duties and conduct themselves solely with the interests of the Communities in mind. They must seek permission to engage in any outside activity, whether gainful or not. Permission shall be refused if the activity is such as to impair the official's independence. Further information is available from the European Commission at:

No. 8 Storey's Gate
London
SW1P 3AT.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the running costs of the European Commission's London offices; and from what European Union budget these costs are paid. [6669]

Mr. Davis: This information is available from the European Commission Office at:

No. 8 Storey's Gate
London
SW1P 3AT.

British Embassies (Commercial Services)

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the services which are available from British embassies abroad to British companies seeking assistance with business information, for which a charge is made on the companies concerned; and if he will list the level of charges and when they were introduced. [6680]

Mr. Hanley: The commercial services offered by British embassies which attract a charge are in the following list.

Charging for the existing range of export services was introduced on 1 April 1989; the list reflects the current prices which came into effect on 1 October 1995.

The Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office provide, through overseas trade services, a wide range of assistance to British companies. The services which attract a charge and are delivered by overseas posts are listed in the following table.

Charging for the existing range of export services was introduced on 1st April, 1989; the list reflects the current prices which came into effect on 1st October 1995.

	Charge £
Market Information Enquiries (MIE) and Overseas Investment Enquiry Service (OIES)	
Market information held by post	45
Up to four hours work at a post overseas	90
Over four and up to eight hours work at a post overseas	180
Over eight and up to 12 hours work at a post overseas	270
Over 12 and up to 16 hours work at a post overseas	360
Over 16 and up to 24 hours work at a post overseas	450
[1] Over 24 and up to 48 hours work at a post overseas	900
[1] Over 48 hours work at a post overseas	1,350
Export Representative Service (ERS)	
Up to 24 hours work at a post overseas	450
Over 24 and up to 48 hours work at a post overseas	900
Over 48 hours work at a post overseas	1,350
Overseas Status Report Service (OSRS)	
Up to four hours work at a post overseas	90
Over four and up to eight hours work at a post overseas	180
Over eight and up to 12 hours work at a post overseas	270

	Charge £
Over 12 and up to 16 hours work at a post overseas	360
Over 16 and up to 24 hours work at a post overseas	450
New Products from Britain (NPFB)	
Per article—first market	80
Per article—each subsequent market	40
Programme Arranging Service: in Market Help Service, Seminar Organisation Service	
Minimum charge—up to two hours work	70
Hourly thereafter	35

[1] Available in selected markets only. The charges for MIE, OIES, ERS and OSRS are based on the time taken to complete the work by diplomatic staff overseas. ERS and OSRS are not available for some markets.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. [6814]

Mr. Hanley: We have no diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit of the delegation from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. [6815]

Mr. Hanley: We have no diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Any visits to the United Kingdom from that country are on a private basis.

TRANSPORT

Railtrack

Mr. Legg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects Railtrack plc to publish the first annual statement about future network capacity required under the terms of its network licence; and if he will make a statement. [7346]

Sir George Young: Railtrack plc published its first network management statement today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

I welcome the news that Railtrack expects to spend over £1 billion a year on maintenance and renewal of its assets over the next ten years.

Railtrack's statement shows the professional approach which it is adopting to the management of its assets and a long-term commitment to a safe and efficient railway. I believe it also provides evidence of the benefits that privatisation is expected to bring for passengers. This scale of investment and the plans that Railtrack has outlined today should lead to a better quality service and a better-managed infrastructure for the railways of the future.

Search and Rescue Helicopter Cover

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the individuals and organisations represented in his working party on the review of the search and rescue helicopter cover around the United Kingdom coast. [6745]

Mr. Norris: The search and rescue helicopter review group is made up of representatives of the Department of Transport, including the chief coastguard, the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office, Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department of Health, the Health and Safety Executive, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office, the Northern Ireland Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers and ACPO (Scotland).

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5610]

Sir George Young: No staff in my Department are employed exclusively in answering letters from hon. Members. It is difficult to estimate the overall cost of replying to them but in 1994 Transport Ministers received over 15,000 letters from hon. Members.

Vehicle Excise Duty (Exemptions)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicles over 25 years old are currently listed in the SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4 and SP5 postcode areas; and how many of them will qualify for exemption from vehicle excise duty as a result of the recent Budget. [6810]

Mr. Norris: An estimated 3,750 vehicles over 25 years of age are currently licensed in the SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4 and SP5 postcode areas. Of these, 2,500 are in private and light goods, motorcycle or tricycle taxation classes and will qualify for exemption from vehicle excise duty as a result of the vehicle taxation changes announced in the Budget on 28 November 1995.

European Night Sleeper Trains

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date it is expected that the European night sleeper trains will receive their operating certificate following completion of construction. [6034]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* As the operators have not yet put in an application for an operating certificate, it is not possible to state when it will be granted.

National Transport Concession Scheme

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider proposals to introduce a national transport concession scheme for people over retirement age. [6455]

Mr. Norris: No.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the European Court judgment on the Atkins case on the equalisation of transport concession schemes at the age of 60 years. [6453]

Mr. Norris: The European Court of Justice has not advised the Department of the date on which it expects to make its judgment on this case.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what transport concessions are available to people over retirement age in other EU member states. [6451]

Mr. Norris: The Department does not hold detailed information on concessionary travel schemes for people over retirement age which are available in other EU member states.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have been held in the European Transport Ministers Council on a European-wide transport concession scheme for people above retirement age. [6450]

Mr. Norris: None, to the best of the Department's knowledge.

Transport Passes, Greater London

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had on the future of the free transport pass for Greater London pensioners. [6454]

Mr. Norris: None. This is a matter for the London local authorities which fund the scheme.

Crash Testing Programmes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase crash testing programmes in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [6556]

Mr. Norris: There are no plans at present to increase the Department's crash testing programme for motor vehicles. The current programme includes research to evaluate the feasibility of a new car assessment programme which could provide crash-worthiness data as consumer information. The size of future programmes will be decided in the light of this research.

Rail Services (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all passenger service requirements affecting rail services to and from Wales which have *(a)* been proposed and *(b)* been accepted. [5956]

Mr. Watts: The passenger service requirement for the Great Western franchise was finalised on 16 May by the franchising director following consultation with local authorities and rail users-consultative committees, and was included in invitations to tender for the franchise. The franchising director will develop and consult on further passenger service requirements for franchises that serve Wales during 1996.

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *264*, relating to the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, what is the time scale for the conclusion of the national debate on transport policy. [6125]

Mr. Norris: Views on "Transport: The Way Ahead" were invited by the end of September, where possible. Many groups asked for more time in which to respond. When Ministers have considered the responses, a further report will be published drawing together the threads of the debate.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations, and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purpose of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3958]

Mr. Norris: I will write to the hon. Member with details and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Civil Servants (Briefings)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *17*, on how many occasions in each of the last three years civil servants have provided factual briefing to former Prime Ministers. [6123]

The Prime Minister: The information is not held centrally.

Procurator Fiscal System

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Prime Minister what further consultations he intends to have before finalising decisions about changes to the procurator fiscal system in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [6043]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* A Crown Office steering group has been carrying out a senior management review of the Crown Office and procurator fiscal service. The extent and nature of any consultation will depend on the outcome of the review.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6572]

The Prime Minister: None.

Civil Servants (Contact with Opposition)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what preliminary contacts he has had with the Leader of the Opposition regarding official contact between Members of Her Majesty's Opposition and civil servants from 1 January 1996 onwards. [6554]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply that my right hon. Friend, the First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister, gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 30 November, *Official Report*, column *835*.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5624]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Committee and Conference Rooms

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee when he expects the Committee to conclude its review of the use of Committee and Conference Rooms; and if he will make a statement. [6651]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I am pleased to announce that at its meeting on 28 November, after having consulted Madam Speaker about our proposals, the Administration Committee concluded its review of the use of Committee and Conference Rooms.

The Committee endorsed the ruling that the rooms should be booked by Members only for

"private meetings or conferences in connection with a Parliamentary subject".

The Committee believed that it would be helpful for the House to have a clearer definition of a "parliamentary subject", and agreed that it should mean a matter of current or possible future concern to the House, which falls into one or more of the following categories:

(i) Matters intended to increase the awareness of, interest in, or promote discussion of Parliament, its history, institutions and procedures, or the constitution of the United Kingdom;

(ii) Matters relating to the effect, or possible effect, of extant or proposed legislation (including Private Bills and Private Members' Bills);

(iii) Subjects under investigation by a Select Committee of the House;

(iv) Local issues, especially those involving more than one constituency, or which could not more easily or readily be dealt with in a Member's regular advice surgery;

(v) Meetings with recognised charities, when the sponsoring Member is a trustee, governor, parliamentary advisor or other officer of that charity

(vi) Matters to raise interest in, or to encourage or facilitate movement towards, the establishment of parliamentary democracies in other countries;

(vii) Matters which are affecting, or could affect, the safety, well-being or interests of UK citizens or organisations at home or abroad, or those of EU, commonwealth or foreign nationals resident, or organisations operating, in the UK;

(viii) Matters in which the UK is, or may become, involved on a political, economic or military level, and relationships between the UK and any other country or countries;

(ix) Meetings with representatives (elected or otherwise) from EU, commonwealth or foreign Parliaments or Governments, or from the European Parliament, the European Commission, or international organisations, eg UN or NATO;

(x) Meetings with representatives of the Secretaries' and Assistants' Council, the Whitley Committee Trade Union Side, recognised Trade Unions or staff associations;

(xi) Any other meeting approved by the Speaker.

The Committee believed that the main criterion for approving use of Committee or Conference Rooms is that meetings should be connected in some way with the parliamentary duties of the Member who books the room. Rooms should not be used for purposes unrelated to the House, such as entertainment or the launch of any commercial or financial product.

We endorsed the current practice for Rooms to be booked for the purposes of launching pamphlets or reports of a political, or party political, kind.

We believed that it would be appropriate also for Rooms to be used to launch any book written by an hon. Member, or by a former hon. Member who is now a Member of the House of Lords, and that the sale of books at such a launch should be permitted.

We also agreed that hon. Members may book Rooms to launch books written by Strangers, provided that it falls within headings (i) or (vi) above or any of the categories below:

(a) Histories of the Palace of Westminster, the House of Commons or any of its Departments;

(b) Anthologies of Members' speeches and extracts from their diaries;

(c) Biographies of former Members of either House;

(d) Biographies of former servants of the House (eg Erskine May, Hansard or Bellamy);

We do not, however, believe that it would be appropriate to permit the sale of books written by Strangers at launches held on House premises.

We also agreed that Sub-Committees of official party groups, that is, the 1922 Committee, the parliamentary Labour party and the parliamentary Liberal Democratic party, should be accorded precedence in booking the rooms over all-party groups, parliamentary groups and individual Members.

These new regulations will come into effect upon the return of the House from the Christmas recess.

Following a recent incident, I would like to remind hon. Members that whenever they have booked a Room for a meeting with constituents or other guests, it is the hon. Member's responsibility to remain in the Room at all times. If an hon. Member does have to leave the meeting for a Division in the House or in a Standing Committee, he or she should return to the Room immediately their vote has been recorded. It is also incumbent on hon. Members to ensure that their meetings finish on time, so as not to inconvenience any other hon. Member who may have booked the Room for a succeeding meeting, and that once the meeting has concluded, all guests are escorted off the premises or left in the charge of another hon. Member or the relevant House authority, for example, in the Strangers' Gallery.

United Nations 50th Anniversary

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the United Nations 50th anniversary to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [6983]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 5 February to Friday 9 February 1996.

Average Hourly cost

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what estimate he has made of the average hourly cost of the House of Commons on a sitting day. [5435]

Mr. Paul Channon: It is not practical to allocate the majority of House costs as between sitting and non-sitting days. The outturn for the financial year ended 31 March 1995 for the Works and the Administration votes, that is, excluding Members' pay and allowances, was £102,256,000. There were 158 sitting days in that year. Further information is given in the Commission's annual report.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC Transmission Facilities

6. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she proposes to privatise the BBC's transmission facilities. [4640]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The BBC is handling the arrangements for the sale of its transmission services. It expects to complete the sale in about a year.

National Lottery

13. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received regarding disparity of regional distribution of national lottery funds. [4647]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The lottery distributors are looking to ensure that there is a fair regional distribution of funds. They have been making awards for only nine months. I shall consider the regional spread of awards after one full year of distribution and consider if any changes are necessary to ensure balance.

The House will be interested to hear that today's 128 awards are being made in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations have been received concerning a review of aspects of the national lottery. [4649]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have received a number of representations about reviewing the national lottery.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to change the National Lottery Act 1993; and if she will make a statement. [4636]

Mr. Sproat: The number of people playing and the money being raised for the good causes has exceeded everybody's expectations. I have no plans to change the National Lottery Act. The national lottery is working well.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when *(a)* officials and *(b)* Ministers were first informed of the use of GTec's private jet by the director general of the national lottery; what guidance was given to the director, and when, on acceptable levels of hospitality; and if she will make a statement. [6334]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My Department became aware of the actual flights taken in the week before the Public Accounts Committee hearing on Monday 11 December. In August 1994, in discussing the director general's proposed US trip, officials of my Department advised that the director general would need to ensure that all due propriety was observed and that the cost of flights and accommodation should be borne by the Office of the National Lottery and not their hosts. Oflot is a non-ministerial Department and therefore responsible for implementing its own hospitality and travel arrangements taking into account the principles and rules set out in the civil service management code. Oflot is under no obligation to clear with, or inform my Department about its detailed arrangements.

Piers

14. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total amount of lottery proceeds contributed to the maintenance and development of seaside piers. [4648]

Mr. Sproat: The national heritage memorial fund has awarded £475,042 to the Clevedon pier trust in Avon for the restoration and conservation of this listed pier.

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to celebrate the Year of the Pier in 1996. [4652]

Mr. Sproat: Piers at seaside resorts are an important part of Britain's built and cultural heritage. They are also a unique element of our distinctive national tourism product. I can assure my hon. Friend that I will seek opportunities to celebrate and publicise the Year of the Pier in 1996.

Sports Broadcasting

18. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to ensure that the broadcasting of major national sporting events remain on terrestrial channels. [4653]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have no plans to alter current arrangements. Listed sporting events cannot be shown on a pay-per-view basis, and sports rights holders are free to dispose of their rights to broadcast in the interest of their sport.

Listed Buildings

19. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the listing of post-war commercial and industrial buildings. [4654]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend announced on 24 November that she had that day added 21 post-war buildings—comprising 13 commercial, three industrial and five railway buildings—to the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Details are in the Library. Her decisions were in respect of 40 recommendations she had received from English Heritage, and followed a consultation exercise in which owners and the general public were, for the first time, invited to give their comments on the proposed listings.

Concessionary Television Licences

22. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received concerning concessionary television licences for retired people; and if she will make a statement. [4657]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government receive regular representations on the subject of concessionary television licences for retired people. However, the Government have no plans for any changes to the existing concessionary scheme, nor to introduce reduced fee television licences for all pensioners. Any increase in concessions available would reduce the BBC's income and impact upon its home broadcasting services.

Children's Play Services

23. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on Government financial support for children's play services. [4658]

Mr. Sproat: On November 21, *Official Report*, column 67, my right hon. Friend announced that, subject to the successful completion of post tender negotiations, the National Playing Fields Association will carry out work in the areas of information dissemination, playwork education and training and play safety for the Department of National Heritage. Funding will be set at £400,000 per annum, which is broadly consistent with the Sports Council's spend on play since 1993.

Film Making

24. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures her Department is taking to encourage film making in Britain. [4659]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The British Film Industry is presently in a buoyant state and the Government will continue to provide significant public funds of over £23 million next year in support. That includes support for the British Film Institute, British Screen Finance, the European Co-Production Fund, the British Film Commission and the National Film and Television School. In addition, up to £100 million of lottery money is available to be spent on film production and other film projects over the next five years. I have also established a high level advisory committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Peter Middleton, to look at obstacles to the industry's growth.

Library Inspectorate

26. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to create a new library inspectorate. [4661]

Mr. Sproat: I have no plans to create a library inspectorate. However, I take my statutory responsibilities towards public libraries seriously, and will continue to monitor the quality of the service through the professional library advisers in my Department, and to draw on the expertise and experience of the Advisory Council on Libraries.

Public Lending Right Scheme

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will lay before Parliament her report on the operation of the public lending right scheme 1994–95; and what will be the rate per loan payable to authors under the scheme in February 1996 in respect of loans of their books to public libraries from July 1994 to June 1995. [7148]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid before Parliament her report on the operation of the public lending right scheme in 1994–95. The Registrar of Public Lending Right has proposed to my right hon. Friend, on the basis of the size of the public lending right fund this year and information about loans of books by local library authorities, that the rate per loan for payments which will be made under the Scheme next February should remain at 2p. In the light of consultation with interested organisations, my right hon. Friend has agreed to the registrar's proposal.

Public Library Review

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the public library review following the publication of the ASLIB report and the subsequent consultation exercise. [7149]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of the public library service is a statutory responsibility of local authorities, in England and Wales under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The legislation provides a broad framework, requiring local authorities to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service but leaving the details of how the service is to be provided to local decision making; we do not intend to change these arrangements. My responsibility, under the same Act, is to superintend and promote the improvement of the service and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of their functions in relation to libraries. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has an equivalent responsibility in Wales.

Libraries are of great value in our national life. They introduce children to the world of books and reading, and foster their interest through adulthood. They offer lifelong support for learning and education. They are important sources of reference material and public information. They give individuals and businesses access to an information base of commercial and economic importance.

This is a time of major change for the direction and management of the public library service, especially given the continuing revolution in information technology. To address these new demands, the Government have launched a number of major initiatives in the library and information sector.

Potentially the most far-reaching of these is the public library review. This demonstrated the importance attached to libraries by the public and examined a number of fundamental issues:

- the nature of the public library service in England and Wales, and how it should respond to changing demands;
- how each library authority can provide a clear specification of what it sets out to achieve;
- how performance can be effectively monitored and the results published;
- how to involve the private sector, to diversify sources of funding and to take maximum advantage for the community of the national resource which public libraries represent;
- the use of information technology in public libraries; and
- future arrangements for co-operation between library authorities, including the role of the regions in England.

The responses to these issues, and others posed by documents such as report on library services for children and young people "Investing in Children", deserve serious and detailed consideration. My Advisory Council on Libraries and the Library and Information Commission, among others, will have an important contribution to make. The Library and Information Services Council (Wales) will similarly be providing advice to my right hon. Friend. I intend to report on the issues further in a policy paper to be published next year.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to announce a successor scheme to the public library development incentive scheme, to run from April 1996, which will match central Government funding to local resources. It will focus on practical proposals for library development in the context of the issues outlined above, and will give priority to projects with the widest potential application and relevance.

Like all public services, libraries must justify the level of financial support they receive and express clearly their role, in terms which can be easily understood. Under section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, a library authority has a duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. In fulfilling this duty, a library authority is required to have regard to the desirability of a number of factors: encouraging people to make full use of the library service; providing advice on its use; and having facilities available for people to borrow or refer to books and other materials which are sufficient in number, range and quality to meet both the general and special requirements of adults and children. In Wales, public library services are provided in both English and Welsh as appropriate, having regard to the linguistic character of the area served. It is not the Government's intention to move away from this definition, but to illustrate it in support of our statutory role to "superintend and promote" public libraries in England and Wales.

The consultants' report on the public library review, the publication of which my predecessor announced in his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, columns *150–51*, covered a range of subjects in considerable detail. However, I believe that in dealing with the core functions of public libraries, it attempted to be all-inclusive and it confused the different functions and objectives of public libraries.

In the Government's view, the most important functions of the public library service are:

(i) providing reading for pleasure

(ii) enlightening children and developing lifelong reading skills and habits in adults

(iii) encouraging lifelong learning and study

(iv) providing reference material including public information about local and national Government and EU publications, current affairs, and business information

(v) providing materials for the study of local history and the local environment

To carry out these functions, libraries must by statute provide books and other printed material, such as periodicals, as well as "other materials". Many libraries now provide a wide range of non-book materials such as cassette and video tapes, multi-media and open learning packages, talking books, compact discs, CD-ROMs and other new media. Libraries are also expected to provide suitable places and facilities, and assist users in directing them to the appropriate material. To encourage access and use by the widest range of the local population, public libraries frequently serve a variety of cultural needs and provide special materials such as large print books and sub-titled videos. They also provide services for the housebound, as well as providing disabled access to, and within, library buildings.

My right hon. Friend and I should like to make it clear once again that the Government have no plans to privatise the public library service. However, as with all public services, the Government are concerned that it should be run as efficiently as possible. The public library service has already developed, and continues to develop, creative partnerships with the private sector, including the voluntary tendering of certain areas of support services. Following the publication of the consultant's report into contracting out, which I announced to Parliament on 19 July, *Official Report*, columns *1457–58*, the Government are continuing to consider steps that might be taken to encourage more effective management of public libraries and to involve the private sector more in providing library services. There are a number of options, and I shall make a further statement to the House on these matters next year.

The public library service is a great British success story. Its quality and professionalism is admired worldwide. The local public library is freely available to everyone and is used regularly by a wide cross-section of society. For many people, the public library is their cultural centre and their university—a means of access to the world of information, knowledge and works of creative imagination. For children, the public library is often where they begin to read and to learn. For many older people, the public library also provides their meeting place and their community centre, and reading is at the heart of their quality of life.

The Government recognise the importance of the public library service, and are committed to its development and improvement as we face the challenges of the future.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are her proposals for a British academy of sport. [4646]

Mr. Sproat: As I announced on 5 December, *Official Report*, column *153*, the Sports Council has issued a consultation document on what the structure and content of the British Academy of Sport might be and has asked for responses by 31 January 1996. This follows the announcement in the Government's sports policy statement "Sport: Raising the Game" that the Government wish to see established a British Academic of Sport, together with a national network of facilities.

BBC Funding

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future funding of the BBC. [4660]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As set out in the White Paper, "The Future of the BBC", the Government are committed to the continuation of the licence fee for at least the first five years of the new charter.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to extend the private finance initiative to *(a)* the BBC, *(b)* BBC Worldwide and *(c)* BBC World Service. [5396]

Mr. Sproat: We have encouraged the BBC to use to the full the opportunities available under the private finance initiative to meet its needs for capital investment.

In relation to the home services, the BBC is examining a number of private finance options and it is for the corporation to determine where the PFI offers the most benefit in relation to individual projects which would otherwise be funded from the licence fee. The BBC World Service is funded by grant in aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and is therefore expected to explore the scope for private finance in relation to all capital investment decisions. The rest of BBC Worldwide embraces the BBC's commercial activities, which are not publicly funded; it operates to maximise the benefits of the BBC brand and is structured according to the principles of the PFI.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to impose conditions on the BBC as to the way it can use the money accruing from the privatisation of the transmitter facilities. [5387]

Mr. Sproat: The basis of the sale, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *439*, has been agreed by us and the BBC. This provides that the BBC retains the proceeds of the sale related to licence fee funded transmission facilities; the BBC has said that it will invest the proceeds of the sale within the BBC on digital production technology. We have no plans at present to impose any conditions on the BBC in respect of the proceeds it will receive from the privatisation of its transmission services.

Crown Jewels

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *449*, on the crown of Queen Adelaide, if the imperial crown of George I and the coronation crown of George IV are classified as regalia. [5324]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* Following an objection by my Department's expert adviser to the issue of export licences, the applications to export the frames of the imperial crown of George I and the coronation of George IV were referred, in the normal way, to the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art. The reviewing committee consulted my Department, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Lord Chamberlain's Office on whether the crown frames constituted regalia. The reviewing committee was advised that the discarded crown frames could not be regarded as part of the regalia.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the history of ownership of the Imperial State Crown of George I and the Coronation Crown of George IV since 1965. [5239]

Mr. Sproat: The crown frames were lent by the Amherst family to the Museum of London from 1933 to 1985. We have no information about the ownership of the crown frames between the withdrawal of the loan to the museum of London and the purchase of the frames by Asprey (Bond Street) Ltd. in 1987. I understand that they have now been acquired by Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei and that the prince has most generously decided to present them to the nation.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by her Department was in each of the past five years. [5847]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage was established in 1992 and figures are not therefore available before the 1992–93 financial year. The total cost of departmental use of the Government car service in the years for which information is available is as follows:

	£000
1992–93	167.2
1993–94	243.6
1994–95	242.8

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much has been spent on furnishing and the decorating ministerial offices in her Department in each of the last three years. [5559]

Mr. Sproat: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5576]

Mr. Sproat: In 1994–95 the cost of hospitality for my Department, including the Historic Royal Palaces agency and the Royal Parks agency, which is included in the running cost budget for my Department, was £55,142. Figures for the financial year to date are £63,087. The projected budget for 1995–96 is £93,600.

The difference between the cost of hospitality in 19954–95 and the projected budget for 1995–96 reflects a significant underspend in 1994–95 and an increase in 1995–96 to include provision for the launch of a major new exhibition in the Mantegna gallery at Hampton Court palace.

European Community Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to the statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 454, if she will make it her policy to review past legislation in respect of additional burdens imposed by regulations implementing European directives. [5073]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* It is the policy of my Department to ensure that we do not add any unnecessary burdens when implementing European directives in the UK. We will take every opportunity to look at existing legislation in the light of this policy.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of bills to her Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5700]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* My Department is committed to the payment of invoices within agreed contractual provisions or within 30 days of the presentation of a valid invoice or delivery, if later. Although the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, on the basis of a sample of invoices received by the Department of National Heritage during 1994–95, 90.6 per cent. were paid on time.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for her Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which her Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5982]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Details of the public opinion surveys commissioned by my Department and its two agencies are set out.

Of the two surveys commissioned directly by the Department, the first was a follow-up to the 1992 Green Paper on the future of the BBC. The second was part of the work carried out to develop the tourism strategy outlined in "Tourism: Competing with the Best", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The surveys carried out by both agencies are general market research surveys carried out to assess the public's views and opinions regarding the attractions for which they are responsible.

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL HERITAGE

1. *The future of the BBC*

(i) Commissioned: November 1992

(ii) Cost: £14,706.25

(iii) Carried out by: Research International Advertising and Media

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 6,300

(v) Location and timescale: British Isles: November 1992–June 1993

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

Copies of the report was placed in the Library of both Houses and provided to the Chairman of the National Heritage Select Committee. Copies of the summary of the report were made available on requests to individuals and organisations.

2. *Quality of serviced accommodation*

(i) Commissioned: 17 April 1995

(ii) Cost: £81,820.50

(iii) Carried out by: MVA Consultancy

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 845

(v) Location and timescale: London, Stratford-upon-Avon, The Lake District, York, and Bournemouth and was completed in August 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

The research has been made available to the tourism industry.

THE ROYAL PARKS AGENCY

3. *General market research*

(i) Commissioned: 19 January 1994 (Three year contract)

(ii) Cost: £ 154,560.00 (to date)

(iii) Carried out by: University of London

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 26,500 (to date)

(v) Location and timescale: The Royal Parks (and will be completed in December 1997)

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

The results of the first year's surveys were included in the Royal Parks agency 1994 annual report, a copy of which is available in the House library. For subsequent years, the results will be made available in the same manner.

4. *Survey to discover attitudes towards opening a new royal park to celebrate the millennium*

(i) Commissioned: 6 October 1995

(ii) Cost: £925.00

(iii) Carried out by: University of London

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 288

(v) Location and timescale: Thurrock Lakeside Shopping Centre—1 day

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES AGENCY

5. *Summer visitor survey*

(i) Commissioned: 21 July 1993

(ii) Cost: £12,450.00

(iii) Carried out by: MEW Research

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 916

(v) Location and timescale: Historic Royal Palaces—July–September 1993

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

The results of the summer surveys are used in assessing the overall level of customer satisfaction and these are included in the Historic Royal Palaces agency annual report.

6. *Advertising tracking*

(i) Commissioned: 24 June 1993

(ii) Cost: £4,525.00

(iii) Carried out by: BMBR International

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 1,589

(v) Location and timescale: London—June–October 1993

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

The agency management team.

7. *Citizens charter*

(i) Commissioned: 1 January 1993

(ii) Cost: £7,825.00

(iii) Carried out by: Numbers Market Research and Vital Statistics Market Research Data Services

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 3,697

(v) Location and timescale: Historic Royal Palaces—January–December 1993

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings:

The agency management team.

8. *Summer visitor survey*

(i) Commissioned: 18 July 1994

(ii) Cost: £10,325.00

(iii) Carried out by: CC and C Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 990

(v) Location and timescale: Historic Royal Palaces—July–September 1994

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings: The results of the summer surveys will be used in assessing overall customer satisfaction and this is included in the Historic Royal Palaces agency annual report.

9. Royal Palaces advertising campaign

(i) Commissioned: 30 June 1994

(ii) Cost: £9,420.00

(iii) Carried out by: Gallup

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 1100

(v) Location and timescale: Historic Royal Palaces—July–September 1994

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have been given access to the findings: The agency management team.

10. Citizens charter

(i) Commissioned: 1 January 1994

(ii) Cost: £9,150.00

(iii) Carried out by: Vital Statistics Market Research Data Services

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 3,955

(v) Location and timescale: Historic Royal Palaces—anuary–December 1994

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

11. Summer visitor survey

(i) Commissioned: 6 June 1995

(ii) Cost: £7,950.00

(iii) Carried out by: CC and C Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 300

(v) Location and timescale: Historic Royal Palaces—July–August 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: In addition to forming the basis of the customer satisfaction survey to be included in this year's annual report, the results of the survey were included in the student information pack.

12. Poster campaign

(i) Commissioned: 12 September 1995

(ii) Cost: £2,950.00

(iii) Carried out by: MEW Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 600

(v) Location and timescale: London—September 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

13. Tower of London moat

(i) Commissioned: 11 September 1995

(ii) Cost: £375.00

(iii) Carried out by: MEW Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 60

(v) Location and timescale: Around the Tower of London—1 day

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

14. Hampton Court Palace—Advertising

(i) Commissioned: 1 December 1995

(ii) Cost: £8,200.00

(iii) Carried out by: Simon Priest and Associates

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 42

(v) Location and timescale: Central London—December 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

15. Hampton Court Palace—garden visitors

(i) Commissioned: 5 July 1995

(ii) Cost: £10,000.00

(iii) Carried out by: MEW Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 7,500

(v) Location and timescale: Hampton Court Palace—November 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

16. Kensington Palace

(i) Commissioned: 16 July 1995

(ii) Cost: £9,950.00

(iii) Carried out by: MEW Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 1,002

(v) Location and timescale: Kensington Palace—July 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

17. Overseas visitors

(i) Commissioned: 16 June 1995

(ii) Cost: £1,256.00

(iii) Carried out by: MEW Research Ltd.

(iv) Number of people surveyed: 1,408

(v) Location and timescale: Central London—July–September 1995

(vi) Individuals and organisations which have given access to the findings: The agency management team.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Redundant Churches

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, how the implementation of the Wilding proposals will be affected by the reform proposed in the Turnbull Commission. [5648]

Mr. Alison: The proposals of the Wilding report of 1990 on the care of redundant churches, which included giving the commissioners a more pivotal role, have now been largely implemented. The Turnbull Commission proposals include the transfer of the commissioners' functions in this field to a National Council for the Church of England. The commissioners and their partners in this work are anxious that such a change should not diminish the continued successful implementation of the Wilding proposals which have assisted the preservation of and the finding of suitable alternative uses for important listed churches.

There are a number of aspects of the Turnbull Commission proposals which require sufficient time for detailed consideration and successful resolution. These include:

(1) Arrangements for providing the Church's share (30 per cent.) of the cost of running the Churches Conservation Trust. At present these are a charge on the commissioners' investment income and a comparable degree of security needs to attach to any new arrangements.

(2) Proposals for a Church Heritage Board to act in a co-ordinating role. The Church/state position of some of the bodies proposed to be co-ordinated needs to be fully considered.

(3) Accountability of Parliament. It is not yet clear whether the Second Church Estates Commissioner would still be able to answer questions on redundant churches in this House.

(4) A proposed strategic approach to church redundancies. If this were to precipitate a considerably greater number of church closures and more frequent non-statutory inquiries the present financial and administrative arrangements between the Church and state could come under greater strain.

General Synod

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what powers exist for the Standing Committee of the General Synod to overturn a chancellor's decision on the need for a re-run contest for a General Synod election on the ground that the elected member is a Church Commissioner. [5649]

Mr. Alison: This is not a matter for the Church Commissioners. The hon. Member should write to the Secretary-General of the General Synod.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6568]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information on past years is not held centrally in the form and detail requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure figures for centrally purchased DTI advertising in 1995–96 are not yet available, but expenditure in 1994–95 was £0.56 million.

Natural Environment Research Council

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the forthcoming prior options reviews for the Natural Environment Research Council. [7150]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government announced on 29 September 1995 that all public sector research establishments would be subject to prior options reviews.

Prior options reviews of the Natural Environment Research Council's—NERC—Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences—CCMS—the British Geological Survey and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology—CEH—will be carried out in the first half of 1996.

CCMS with its headquarters at Plymouth has the following component laboratories: the Dunstaffnage marine laboratory; the Plymouth marine laboratory; the Proudman oceanographic laboratory. CEH with its headquarters at Wallingford has the following component institutes: the Institute of Freshwater Ecology; the Institute of Hydrology; the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and the Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology.

The reviews will build on any relevant recent studies.

I should welcome comments from interested parties. Comments relating to CCMS should be sent by the end of January 1996; and those relating to BGS and CEH by the end of February 1996. They should be sent to:

Dr. David Lynn, Policy and Communications Division,
Natural Environment Research Council, Polaris house, North
Star avenue, Swindon, SN2 1EU.

Cable and Wireless plc

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has given his consent as holder of the special share in Cable and Wireless plc to any change in the company's articles of association. [7151]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Following a request from Cable and Wireless plc, I have given my consent, as holder of that company's special share, to a minor amendment to its articles of association. The amendment would require the company's chairman or its chief executive to be British. The present articles place a similar requirement on any executive chairman of the company, or on any chief executive if there is no executive chairman. I understand that Cable and Wireless will now be seeking the agreement of its shareholders to this amendment.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from the European Commission concerning ERDF grants given to state owned bodies that are subsequently privatised. [5889]

Mr. Eggar: The Secretary General of the Commission wrote to all member states earlier this year requesting details of European regional development fund grants to companies which were subsequently privatised. A list of such grants in the United Kingdom was sent in reply. The Commission subsequently asked for further information. We have asked for clarification of this request.

National Grid

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how electricity consumers with pre-payment meters will receive their part of the rebate associated with the flotation of the national grid. [5890]

Mr. Eggar: The arrangements for distributing the national grid discount to its domestic customers have been determined by the regional electricity companies themselves. However I understand that they intend to make the discount to customers registered with them on 31 December 1995, including those using prepayment meters, as soon as practical during the first quarter of 1996. The precise manner in which the discount will be made will depend on the prepayment method used and the individual company making the discount.

Generally speaking, customers using card, token or key meters will receive a voucher which may be redeemed against the purchase of new cards or tokens or against the recharging of their keys. Those using smart cards will receive a direct credit to their cards. Those using coin meters will either receive a cheque or cash. Where cheques are given, these will be sent as soon as possible. Where cash is used, the customer will receive cash when the meter is next emptied.

Energy Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each year since 1985 the total quantity and the average price of *(a)* coal *(b)* gas and *(c)* oil purchased by major electricity generating companies. [5885]

Mr. Page: The information requested is given in the following table:

Fuel used in generation by major power producers[1] in the United Kingdom

	Coal		*Natural gas*		*Oil[2]*	
Year	*Quantity (Million tonnes)*	*Price (£ per tonne)*	*Quantity (GWh)*	*Price (pence per KWh)*	*Quantity (Million tonnes)*	*Price (£ per tonne)*
1985	73.9	45.76	[3]—	1.019	10.6	165.79
1986	82.7	46.23	32	0.916	6.1	79.60
1987	86.2	43.76	35	0.735	4.8	74.63
1988	82.5	47.11	50	0.610	5.4	54.58
1989	80.6	45.81	54	0.665	5.5	61.19
1990	82.6	43.77	88	[4]—	6.7	53.49
1991	82.0	43.47	202	[4]—	5.8	56.62
1992	77.0	45.84	11,602	[4]—	5.2	57.76
1993	64.1	42.44	72,901	0.706	4.7	55.91
1994	60.6	36.35	105,668	0.667	3.9	67.90

Notes:

[1] Major power producers are defined as all companies whose prime purpose is the generation of electricity. Companies who produce electricity as part of their manufacturing or other commercial activities but whose main purpose is not electricity generation are excluded.

[2] Includes Orimulsion, oil used in gas turbines and diesel plant, and oil used for lighting up coal fired boilers.

[3] Not available on a comparable basis.

[4] Since privatisation of the electricity industry price data that relate to fewer than 3 companies are treated as confidential.

Source:

Digests of United Kingdom Energy Statistics.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money the Medical Research Council has spent in each of the last 10 years and how much it estimates it will spend in the current year and each of the next three years on research *(a)* into the risk of transmission of the BSE agent from cattle to (i) humans and (ii) other primates, *(b)* into an early diagnostic test for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and *(c)* effective treatment for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [6187]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In 1994–95 the total spend by the MRC on research directly or indirectly related to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, including BSE, was £0.75 million. This included CJD related transmission studies to address the possible relationship between CJD and BSE in individuals who might potentially have been exposed to high levels of BSE because of their occupation. The corresponding figure for 1985–86 was £235,000. Data for the intervening years are not available. The major part of the MRC programme is funded in partnership with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council at the neuropathogenesis unit in Edinburgh.

Although the MRC does not currently fund applied research into diagnostic tests or treatment of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, some of the fundamental research into transmissible spongiform encephalopathies aims to improve the understanding of the pathogenesis of these disorders in man and, thus, indirectly diagnosis and treatment. The Council has funded research into transmission of spongiform encephalopathies in primates in the past but is not doing so at present.

The Council's expenditure in future years is partly dependent upon applications received, assessed and awarded in the annual competitions, and it is not possible to predict the level of spend. The council does place strategic importance on ensuring that there is high quality research in these areas.

Fuel Prices

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each year since 1985 *(a)* the average beach price of gas, *(b)* the average pithead price of coal and *(c)* the average imported price of coal in unit prices. [5886]

Mr. Page: The information requested is given in the table.

	Average beach gas price[1] pence/kWh	*Average pithead coal price[2] £/GJ*	*Average imported coal price[2] £/GJ*
1985–86	0.586	1.86	1.27
1986–87	0.523	1.77	1.06
1987–88	0.478	1.73	0.87
1988–89	0.500	1.79	0.91
1989–90	0.528	1.77	1.08
1990–91	0.575	1.77	1.00
1991	0.595	—	—
1991–92	—	1.83	1.03
1992	0.590	—	—
1992–93	—	1.84	1.02
1993	0.600	—	—
1993–94	—	1.51	0.99
1994	0.618	—	—
1994–95	—	1.40	0.99

[1] Average price of gas purchased by British Gas. Excluding the levy on indigenous supplies. Data ceased to be available on a financial year basis in 1991.

[2] The figures cover coal production and imports in the United Kingdom. The average price for imported coal is recorded at the port.

Regional Offices

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what ways the regional directors of the integrated regional offices are accountable to Parliament. [6693]

Mr. Eggar: The regional directors of the Government offices for the regions are civil servants reporting jointly to the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Education and Employment, and for Transport, and to the President of the Board of Trade, each of whom is accountable to Parliament for the work of his or her Department.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what performance measures the Government are using to assess the effectiveness of the integrated regional offices. [6692]

Mr. Eggar: Each Government office is being set performance targets in the areas of competitiveness, regeneration and sustainable development, the development of partnerships, the internal management of the office and the administration of departmental programmes. These targets are being developed as part of the Government offices MINIS exercise, and will be published in the new financial year.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the programme expenditure for each of the integrated regional offices. [6694]

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Department for Trade and Industry: 1995–96

	Expected expenditure outturn (£m)
European Regional Development Fund Payment to third parties	47.6
Regional Selective Assistance	103.5
Inward Investments	12.4
Locally delivered Business Services[1]	135.8
Export Promotion Schemes and Services	55.7
Small Firms' Merit Award for Research and Technology (SMART)	11.9
Support for Programmes under Research (SPUR)	7.9

Notes:

The table identifies the main DTI programmes in whose administration and delivery the Government Offices are involved. The Government Offices are not directly involved in administering or delivering the whole amount of the programme expenditure identified in the table. Regional breakdowns for DTI programmes are not available.

[1] Includes development of Business Links.

Department of Transport: 1995–96

Government office	*Forecast outturn (£k)*
NE	152
NW	75
YH	55
M	40
WM	46
EM	20
ER	38
SW	53
SE	91
L	6,062

Expenditure includes the costs of the Woolwich Ferry, transportation studies, statutory advertising and public enquiries.

Department for Education and Employment: 1995–96

Budgets (£k)	*NE*	*NW*	*YH*	*M*	*WM*	*EM*	*ER*	*SW*	*SE*	*L*
Employers Investment in People/Investors in People	3,292	7,936	6,505	2,179	6,064	5,366	4,509	3,731	6,283	9,061
Skills for Small Businesses	439	975	876	267	966	719	905	857	1,430	1,566
Childcare Grants	976	2,020	1,712	548	1,917	1,438	2,003	1,626	2,653	2,225
Training for Work Fees	24,984	29,996	32,556	20,021	29,212	19,209	18,943	23,635	23,285	47,445
Allowances	26,030	31,251	33,919	20,804	30,435	20,013	19,736	24,624	24,260	46,996
Youth Training, Youth Credit and Modern Apprenticeships	54,987	102,821	76,354	31,974	73,680	61,130	63,398	54,509	77,395	59,120
Accelerated Modern Apprenticeship Starts	734	975	897	300	913	718	991	804	1,302	986
Pre-16 work Experience	325	407	284	118	740	280	642	385	1,082	437
Competitiveness Fund	1,164	2,588	2,124	713	2,609	1,521	1,943	1,903	3,209	2,813
Development Fund	588	1,307	1,072	360	1,317	768	981	961	1,529	1,420
Careers Service including London Central Careers Unit	10,783	21,680	20,741	7,084	20,404	14,658	19,549	16,621	27,690	26,202
Careers Staff and Teacher Training	237	481	462	137	441	313	418	350	587	534
Careers Libraries	83	179	159	46	172	128	171	149	246	190

Department of the Environment: 1995–96

Forecast outturn (£ million)	*NE*	*NW*	*YH*	*M*	*WM*	*EM*	*ER*	*SW*	*SE*	*L*
Housing investment programme	64.9	134.4	119.7	37.1	136.7	84.3	93.6	97.8	136.8	337.0
Housing partnership fund	1.6	2.8	2.7	0.7	3.1	1.9	2.1	2.8	3.2	9.7
Cash incentive scheme	0.6	1.9	0.3	0.7	1.9	1.5	4.8	2.6	10.9	34.6
Specified capital grant for private sector renewal	12.6	52.0	32.3	13.5	49.1	25.6	24.4	33.8	43.6	49.8
Single regeneration budget	151.7	139.5	127.9	101.4	137.5	72.1	9.3	31.8	9.8	328.4
European regional development fund[1]	12.5	17.9	19.2	14.9	10.8	8.3	—	4.5	0.6	—

[1] Figures for European regional development fund are the period 1 April 1994 to 15 December 1995.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the average regional selective assistance expenditure per head of working population in the assisted areas for the period 1993 to 1995. [6696]

Mr. Eggar: During the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1995, average expenditure per head of working population in the assisted areas of England was £31.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the allocation of regional selective assistance between foreign-owned and United Kingdom-owned firms for the period 1994–95. [6697]

Mr. Eggar: The value of offers accepted in England was:

UK owned £ million: 101.2

Foreign owned £ million: 59.3.

Regional Industrial Policy

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total cost of regional industrial policy including *(a)* regional selective assistance and *(b)* other direct assistance to firms for the period 1990 to 1995. [6699]

Mr. Eggar: The information is available in the "Annual Report on the Industrial Development Act 1982".

Patent Office

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what methodology is in place to produce a benchmark in the Patent Office in respect of the contracting-out procedure; if the guidelines laid down by the National Audit Office will be adhered to; and if he will make a statement. [5840]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Benchmarking of in-house services will follow guidance issued by HM Treasury, the office of Public Service, and the Department of Trade and Industry. The calculation of any benchmark will be open to National Audit Office scrutiny and must follow any guidelines laid down by that office.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the dates over the last two years when he and other Ministers in his Department have met with elected trade union representatives at the Patent Office. [5842]

Mr. Ian Taylor: There have been no meetings between Ministers of the Department of Trade and Industry and Trade Union representatives in the last two years.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make arrangements for elected trade union representatives to be included in staff/management meetings in connection with the contractorisation of the facilities' management services section at the Patent Office. [5837]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In any contracting out exercise, the Patent Office management will follow the terms of the 1989 DTI agreement on consultation on proposals for contracting out.

Business Links

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business links have been established; what services they deliver; and if he will list the total costs of delivering these services and the total number of Department of Trade and Industry staff located in business links. [5841]

Mr. Page: A total of 171 business link outlets were operational on 15 December 1995. Seventy-three DTI staff are currently located in business links. A number of core services lie at the heart of business links. These include:

an enquiry and information service;

personal business advisers;

diagnostic services;

and help for start ups and micro businesses.

Business links also provide direct access to 11 categories of specialist advice and support including; marketing, finance, exports, management, training, technology and design. A copy of the "Business Link Service Guide" can be found in the Library of the House.

The cost of delivering services is different for each business link and is met from a number of sources including DTI funding, fee income from assisted businesses and contributions from business link partner organisations. The total cost of all business link services could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost. DTI's budget for 1995–96 is £38.5 million for pump-priming funding and £57.4 million for services.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the business links that have been established in the Yorkshire and Humberside region and the scheduled opening dates for others. [6206]

Mr. Page: The following is the information:

	Dates
Open Business Links	
Barnsley	Opened 3 May 1994
Doncaster	Opened 18 April 1994

	Dates
Calderdale/Kirkless:	
Brighouse	Opened February 1995
Huddersfield	Opened February 1995
Batley	Opened February 1995
Halifax	Opened March 1995
Todmorden	Opened 29 November 1995
Humberside:	
Hull	Opened 18 September 1995
Leeds	Opened 2 October 1995
Rotherham	Opened 19 April 1995
Sheffield	Opened 19 September 1995
Wakefield	Opened 16 October 1995
Schedule Opening Dates	
Bradford	January 1996
Humberside:	
Grimsby	January
Scunthorpe	March
Boothferry	April
East Yorkshire	April 1996
North Yorkshire	May 1996

Retirement and Severance Schemes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many voluntary schemes and early retirement schemes are currently operating in his Department and its agencies; and if he will list the United Kingdom offices which are currently running such schemes. [5838]

Mr. John M. Taylor: A voluntary early retirement and severance scheme is currently operating in all parts of the Department which fall within gross running cost control. This includes the Insolvency Service, the office of manpower economics, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and DTI staff in Government offices.

A retirement and severance scheme following the Department's senior management review is currently nearing completion.

Schemes are also running in the Patent Office, Companies House and Radiocommunications Agency covering selected grades to help restructure these agencies.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Davidson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies have failed to provide redundancy payments for their employees *(a)* due to company closure and *(b)* as a result of the employer failing to meet statutory obligations under the terms of current employment legislation for each from 1979 to 1995. [6270]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases involving the recovery of employees' redundancy payments have been taken to industrial tribunals for each year from 1979 to 1995. [6253]

Mr. Taylor: Information is not available in the precise form or for the full period requested. The number of applications relating to redundancy payments disposed of by industrial tribunals in Great Britain since 1986–87 is as follows:

1986–87: 5,389

1987–88: 3,403

1988–89: 3,223

1989–90: 3,837

1990–91: 5,022

1991–92: 5,234

1992–93: 7,084

1993–94: 8,567

1994–95: 7,478.

These figures include cases withdrawn or settled without recourse to a hearing.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total cost to the national insurance fund as a result of companies failing to meet their obligations to their work forces in respect of the non-payment of statutory redundancy payments for each year from 1979 to 1995. [6252]

Mr. Taylor: The information is given in the table.

The total cost to the national insurance fund was as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1979–80	19.3
1980–81	42.0
1981–82	53.0
1982–83	72.2
1983–84	69.0
1984–85	57.1
1985–86	54.6
1986–87	50.2
1987–88	34.9
1988–89	32.4
1989–90	25.7
1990–91	67.6
1991–92	131.8
1992–93	161.9
1993–94	130.6
1994–95	89.5
1995–96	[1] 50.7

[1] April-November 1995.

Contracting Out

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what areas of his Department are being considered for contracting out; and which offices and staff are involved; [5669]

(2) what agencies under the jurisdiction of his Department are being considered for contracting out; which offices and staff are involved; and if he will make a statement. [5670]

Mr. Lang: The activities within my Department and its agencies which are either being considered for contracting out or where work is underway to contract out under the "Competing for Quality" programme are as follows. Where work is underway contracting out will be dependent on the Department or agency receiving bids which offer value for money compared with keeping the activity in-house.

(i) In the Department:

Principal Civil Service Pension Schemes (PCSPS) Administration

Financial administration functions of Overseas Promotions Support.

(ii) In Agencies:

Companies House:

London Office and English satellite offices

Edinburgh Office

Cardiff Office:

Customer Enquiry Unit

Postal Search & Search Account Service

Remittance processing

Office Services.

Patent Office:

Facilities Management Services (Newport)

Marketing & Information Directorate (Newport)

Information Technology Services (Newport)

London Front Office.

The Insolvency Service:

Case administration functions of Official Receivers in all Official Receivers' Offices.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many nominations were submitted in each region by the Trades Union Congress and Confederation of British Industry for lay membership of industrial tribunals during the past five years; and how many in each case he has rejected. [6474]

Mr. John M. Taylor: During the period nominations were submitted in 1992 and 1995. The information requested is set out in the tables.

Table 1: Nominations by the Trades Union Congress

	1992 Appointment exercise		*1995 Appointment exercise*	
Regional office	*Nominated*	*Not appointed*	*Nominated*	*Not appointed*
Bedford	57	40	65	50
Birmingham	54	33	44	34
Bristol	69	41	47	24
Cardiff	42	25	61	28
Leeds	88	66	85	63
London North	118	[1]89	141	110
London South	81	58	128	85
Manchester	91	71	88	59
Newcastle	59	29	41	34
Nottingham	60	43	55	48
Southampton	73	22	53	53
Scotland	53	18	75	21
Totals	845	535	883	609

[1] Of the 118 CBI and TUC nominees not appointed in 1992, 51 nominated by the TUC and 18 nominated by the CBI (who satisfied the basic criteria for selection) were appointed for 11 months only in 1994. This was to meet the need for additional lay members for a new Office of Industrial Tribunals in the London north region.

Table 2: Nominations by the Confederation of British Industry

	1992 Appointment exercise		*1995 Appointment exercise*	
Regional office	*Nominated*	*Not appointed*	*Nominated*	*Not appointed*
Bedford	51	40	23	18
Birmingham	47	26	35	31
Bristol	60	47	27	16
Cardiff	33	8	30	18
Leeds	38	[1]29	34	21
London North	42	29	45	26
London South	63	51	44	26
Manchester	61	44	27	15
Newcastle	41	10	18	16
Nottingham	28	19	23	21
Southampton	60	28	23	23
Scotland	41	19	22	5
Totals	565	350	351	236

[1] Of the 118 CBI and TUC nominees not appointed in 1992, 51 nominated by the TUC and 18 nominated by the CBI (who satisfied the basic criteria for selection) were appointed for 11 months only in 1994. This was to meet the need for additional lay members for a new Office of Industrial Tribunals in the London north region.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many lay members of the industrial tribunals in each region have not been reappointed in the last *(a)* 15, *(b)* 10 and *(c)* five years, giving the nominating organisation in each case. [6475]

Mr. Taylor: Information on the number of non-reappointments to the lay membership of the industrial tribunals in 1989, 1992 and 1995 is given in the following tables. Details for 1983 and 1986 are no longer available.

Region	*Non-reappointments*	*Nominating body*
1989		
Birmingham	3	TUC
Bristol	1	CBI
Cardiff	1	CBI
Leeds	4	CBI(1); TUC(3)
London (North)	14	CBI(8); TUC(6)
London (South)	21	CBI(11); TUC(10)
Newcastle	10	CBI(5); TUC(5)
Nottingham	3	CBI(2); TUC(1)
Southampton	18	CBI(13); TUC(5)
Scotland	1	CBI
1992		
Bedford	1	CBI
Birmingham	9	CBI(4); TUC(5)
Bristol	3	TUC
Cardiff	2	TUC
Leeds	6	FSB(1); LGMB(1); TUC(4)
London (North)	24	BRC(1); CBI(5);LGMB(2); TUC(16)
London South	9	BRC(1); CBI(4); TUC(4)
Manchester	6	BRC(1) :CBI(3); TUC(2)
Newcastle	1	TUC
Southampton	5	CBI(1); TUC(4)
Scotland	10	CBI(2); TUC(8)
1995		
Bedford	3	ABCC(1); TUC(2)
Birmingham	2	CBI

Region	*Non-reappointments*	*Nominating body*
Bristol	3	TUC
London (North)	1	TUC
London (South)	9	ABCC(1); CBI(5);IOD(1); TUC(2)
Manchester	2	CBI(1); TUC(1)
Newcastle	1	TUC
Southampton	6	CBI(4); TUC(2)
Scotland	5	COMPS(1); TUC(4)

Note:

The nominating bodies referred to in the above tables are: Association of British Chambers of Commerce (ABCC); British Retail Consortium (BRC); Confederation of British Industry (CBI); Council of Managerial and Professional Staffs (COMPS); Federation of Small Businesses (FSB); Institute of Directors (IOD); Local Government Management Board (LGMB); Trades Union Congress (TUC).

In addition, in a special exercise to supply additional lay members to the London (north) regional office of industrial tribunals in advance of the main 1995 recruitment, 85 lay members who satisfied the basic criteria but were not selected for appointment in 1992 were appointed for 11 months in November 1994. These appointments were made on the basis that they would be reconsidered with new applications received in 1995. Sixty of the one year appointees were not reappointed.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who has access to information contained within personal files held on lay members of industrial tribunals. [6473]

Mr. Taylor: Information provided by lay members which is needed for allocating lay members to hearings and for monitoring purposes—for example, ethnic origin—is prepared and held on computer records centrally and made available to regional secretaries and listing officers in regional and other offices of industrial tribunals. Any other information relevant to the appointment or reappointment of lay members is held centrally within my Department and is accessed by seven members of staff involved in the process of appointments to industrial tribunals. The views of the judiciary may be sought on reappointments and where views are submitted copies may be held by the following people and their personal secretaries: the secretary to the industrial tribunals in Scotland, the regional chairmen in England and Wales and the two presidents of industrial tribunals.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish details of the procedures used by his Department in determining the appointments and re-appointments of lay members of the industrial tribunals in England and Wales. [6472]

Mr. Taylor: The procedures for appointing lay members to industrial tribunals were publicised in a press notice issued by the former Employment Department on 30 December 1994. A copy of which is available from the Library of the House. Lay members are normally reappointed at the end of a three-yearly term of office unless their performance or attendance has been unsatisfactory. Decisions on reappointments are taken by the Secretary of State after consulting the industrial tribunal judiciary.

Gas and Oil

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the prospects for the gas and oil industry on and offshore in Suffolk and Norfolk, in 1996 and beyond. [6200]

Mr. Page: The offshore area to the north and north-east of Norfolk contains the main gas basin of the United Kingdom continental shelf—the southern basin. The interest shown in this area in recent rounds of offshore oil and gas licensing demonstrate that the area's prospectivity is still considered to be good by the oil and gas industry. Sixteen blocks were licensed in the southern basin in the 15th round and eight blocks were licensed on the margins of the southern basin in the 16th round. Exploration activity in relation to these licences will continue into 1996. It is too early to forecast prospects for the oil and gas industry as a result of this activity.

There have, however, been a number of discoveries in the basin as a whole which are likely to be developed over the next 20 years. I have also offered for licence five blocks offshore to the east of Norfolk and Suffolk in the recently announced 17th round. Applications for this round are due on 27 November 1996.

There are currently no onshore oil and gas licences in Suffolk and Norfolk, nor were any applications received for this area in the recent 7th round of onshore licensing.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate his Department has made of the quantities of *(a)* oil and *(b)* natural gas likely to be extracted from the sea area adjacent to the north Wales coast, indicating the likely value of such products for each of the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [5431]

Mr. Eggar: Exploration of the sea area immediately adjacent to the north Wales coast has not progressed sufficiently to allow future hydrocarbon recovery to be estimated.

The operator's estimates of overall recovery from the nearby Hamilton, Hamilton N, Lennox and Douglas fields are published each spring in the "Energy Report" and stand at some 32 billion cubic metres of gas and 19 million tonnes of oil. For reasons of commercial confidentiality my Department does not publish forecasts of oil and gas production for individual fields.

Regional Challenge

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the eligibility criteria for regional challenge funding and objective 5b funding at the beginning of 1995; how the criteria had been changed before the announcements of the results; and if he will make a statement. [6195]

Mr. Eggar: The eligibility criteria for objective 5b grants, and the additional criteria for objective 5b regional challenge grants, are contained in the single programming documents for each of the areas where the competition was held and in the regional challenge bidding guidance. The criteria were not changed before the announcement I made on 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *463–65*.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6670]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *432–33*, which summarises the key actions taken as a result of the review. Progress has been made to implement all the recommendations relevant to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5618]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No officials are employed either full time or part time in the Department solely to answer letters from Members of Parliament. Supplying the information required to reply to such correspondence is part of the normal duties of many of the staff of the Department.

Within the Department's top level organisation which includes all Ministers' private offices approximately 10 years of staff effort are expected to be spent on processing all ministerial correspondence in 1995–96, including correspondence with Members of Parliament. However this is only part of the total staff effort spent on ministerial correspondence across the Department, a detailed estimate of which could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Greyhounds

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to the European Community of the support given to the breeding of greyhounds in Ireland; what has been the cost per puppy bred; and what assessment he has made of the number of greyhounds being purchased. [2965]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 November 1995]*: Inquiries are continuing and I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

TREASURY

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5621]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This information is not available without expensive research.

EU Expenditure

Mr. Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the total British contribution, in ECU and pounds sterling, to the additional Community expenditure programmes authorised at the Edinburgh summit and subsequently to implement the Commission's White Paper, "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the Twenty First Century"; and what expenditures from these funds have been allocated to projects inside the United Kingdom; [5759]

(2) over what time scale the additional Community expenditure, authorised at the Edinburgh summit and subsequently to implement the Commissions White Paper, "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the Twenty First Century", is to be spent; [5760]

(3) what additional expenditure by the European Community, in billions of ecu and pounds sterling, were authorised at the Edinburgh summit and subsequently to implement the Commissions White Paper, "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the Twenty First Century"; and how much of this total sum is to be spent through *(a)* the European Investment bank, *(b)* the European Investment Fund and *(c)* other Community expenditure programmes. [5761]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The objectives set out in the European Commission's White Paper, "Growth, Competitiveness and Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the Twenty First Century" are reflected wholly or in part in a range of European Community expenditure programmes and other actions. It is not possible, however, to break down this expenditure into that which funds implementation of the White Paper and that which does not.

Own Resources Decision

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries have not yet ratified the Edinburgh own resources decision; when their ratification is expected; and what concessions are expected to be made to secure such ratification. [6534]

Mr. Heathcoat Amory: The Netherlands has yet to ratify the own resources decision. The timing and handling of ratification is a matter for individual member states.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the public sector borrowing requirement in each year from 1990 to 1995. [6976]

Mr. Waldegrave: The table gives the information requested. The budget forecast for the PSBR in 1995–96 was £29.0 billion.

Public sector borrowing requirement

1989–90: –£7.9 billion
1990–91: –£0.6 billion
1991–92: £13.8 billion
1992–93: £36.3 billion
1993–94: £45.4 billion
1994–95: £35.9 billion.

Steam-powered Vehicles

Sir John Cope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many steam-powered road vehicles over 25 years old he estimates will require licences in 1996–97; and what he estimates their average mileage on the roads per vehicle will be. [6005]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Around 600 vehicles, with very small annual mileage.

Sir John Cope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates will be the revenue, net of costs of collection and enforcement, received from licences for steam-powered road vehicles over 25 years old in 1996–97. [6007]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Around £20,000.

Sir John Cope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations led him to exclude steam-powered road vehicles from the proposed exemption for licences for other vehicles over 25 years old. [6006]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Budget introduced a concessionary rate of £35 vehicle excise duty for all steam-powered road vehicles whatever their age. Prior to this harmonising measure only steam-powered agricultural vehicles were liable to £35 duty and steam-powered road rollers had to pay £150

EU Publicity

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money is spent by *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the European Parliament in publicising their activities in the United Kingdom. [5952]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These are matters for the European Commission and the European Parliament respectively.

Unemployment Figures

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate her Department has made of the number of individuals out of work for more than six months who do not feature in the unemployment figures. [6078]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Like many other countries, the United Kingdom publishes two official measures of unemployment. Each measure defines unemployment in a different and unique way and is equally valid. There will be some people who appear in one measure but not in the other. However, neither measure excludes those who have been unemployed for more than six months according to the particular definition being used.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last session of Parliament; and how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2466]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The information requested is in the table.

	Number
HM Treasury	
Statutory Instruments made during 1994–95 Session: of which:	28
a. Constituted a new rule or regulation:	7
b. Introduced to implement and EC Directive: of which:	5
c. Amplified minimum standards set out in Directive:	0
Inland Revenue	
Statutory Instruments made during 1994–95 Session: of which:	71
a. Constituted a new rule or regulation:	41
b. Introduced to implement and EC directive: of which:	0
c. Amplified minimum standards set out in directive:	0
HM Customs and Excise	
Statutory Instruments made during 1994–95 Session: of which	56
a. Constituted a new rule or regulation:	44
b. Introduced to implement and EC directive: of which:	21
c. Amplified minimum standards set out in directive:	[1]2

[1] Comprising i. The Excise Goods (Drawback) Regulations 1995. These regulations implement Council Directive 92/12/EEC, and set out in more detail the UK requirements and procedures for reimbursement of excise duty; and ii. The Travellers' Reliefs (Fuel and Lubricants) Order 1995. This restricts duty free movement of fuel in standard tanks of commercial vehicles to fuel on which the fuel was acquired, at a rate that is appropriate to the use to which the fuel was acquired, at a rate that is appropriate to the use to which the fuel is being, or is intended to be, put. This Order implemented Directive 94/74/EEC which did not make it clear that the relief of duty should only apply to fuel released for consumption at the rate appropriate to its use or intended use. Customs had to seek formal clarification of this point before the Order could be laid. It should be noted that whilst these two Statutory Instruments amplify the provisions of the European directives which they implement, they do so in order to clarify, and provide greater certainty, as to their meaning. Neither has the effect of "gold plating", or adding additional burdens, to those required by the directives.

Tax Statistics

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for the last available year the amount of tax *(a)* collected and *(b)* uncollected for (i) PAYE, (ii) capital gains tax, (iii) corporation tax, (iv) schedule D and (v) VAT; and what were the corresponding figures for Wales, expressed also as a percentage of the overall United Kingdom tax take. [2858]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The amounts of PAYE, capital gains tax, corporation tax, income tax—other than PAYE—*(a)* collected and *(b)* uncollected and consequently written off as irrecoverable for the year ended 28 October 1994, the last year available, are as follows:

Tax	*Collected £ million*	*Remitted/written off £ million*
PAYE	56,959	270
CGT	718	43
Corporation tax	12,506	262
Income tax (other than PAYE)	12,112	583

Separate figures for Wales in respect of these taxes are not available.

The amount of VAT collected in financial year 1994–95 was £41,817 million of which about £1,970 million or 4.7 per cent. is estimated as attributable to Wales.

The amount of VAT written off or remitted in calendar year 1994 was £550 million. In this question, "uncollected" has been defined to mean "uncollected and subsequently written off or remitted". Seventy per cent. of remissions and write-offs are attributable to the insolvency of the taxpayer; the balance represents amounts which it is not practicable or conscionable to collect.

Post Office

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the post-tax profits made by the Post Office his Department expects to receive in each of the next three years following the proposals published in the Budget; and if he will make a statement. [5557]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The proportion of post-tax profits represented by the Post Office's external financing limits over the survey period will be determined by how the Post Office now chooses to meet the financial targets set it.

Venture Capital

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what publicly available literature has been produced to explain the venture capital trust proposals contained in the 1994 Budget. [5544]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* A booklet was published in January this year containing detailed notes on the legislation proposed together with the legislation itself and explanatory press releases. This was preceded by a consultative document published in March 1993 and was followed by further press releases on 28 March, 29 June and 14 September 1995 about changes made on Report to the Finance Bill, the regulations and various statements of practice arising from the legislation respectively. A leaflet is being now market tested and finalised for issue early in the new year summarising the details of the scheme. Other literature has also been published by venture capitalists including the prospectuses of the venture capital trusts which have been launched.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on private finance initiative work. [5725]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* As the administration costs of the private finance initiative are both public and private it is not possible to provide the breakdown requested.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the changes in the number of people of working age in employment *(a)* in those aged under 25 years and *(b)* those 25 years and over in the last 12 months. [6148]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is contained in the following table.

Employment in Great Britain: at summer (not seasonally adjusted)

Thousands

Age	*1994*	*1995*	*Change*
16 to 24	4,030	4,042	12
25 to retirement age	20,555	20,831	277

Source:
Labour Force Survey, CSO.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5607]

Mr. Willetts: This answer covers the offices of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister.

No officials are employed solely to answer letters from hon. Members. Advice is provided to Ministers by the appropriate divisions. Costs are subsumed in the overall costs of the divisions.

Advisory Committee on Advertising

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the current terms of reference for the Advisory Committee on Advertising. [6579]

Mr. Willetts: The terms of reference for the Advisory Committee on Advertising are:

1. To consider the relevance to Government publicity campaigns of developments in communications media and methods; and in accountability and planning techniques.
2. To act as a forum for discussion of related topics which might have a bearing upon the cost-effectiveness of Government paid-publicity activity.
3. To make recommendations, via the Central Office of Information, on which private sector suppliers should be appointed, or invited to compete for appointment, to handle:
   a) Advertising campaigns initiated by central Government Departments, executive agencies and other bodies.
   b) Central negotiation or buying of advertising space or airtime for COI in connection with the above campaigns.

   The criteria for such recommendations should be those of maximum effectiveness and cost efficiency while maintaining a competitive environment.
4. To require from COI and other Government bodies annual assessments of each of the appointed suppliers, as a basis for considering whether their contracts should be renewed.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consideration he has given to the future of the Advisory Committee on Advertising following the changed arrangements concerning the Central Office of Information's role in Government advertising. [6592]

Dr. Willetts: The Advisory Committee on Advertising continues to have an important role. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be meeting the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Advertising early in January.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the status and outcome of the recent seminar he attended with the regional directors of the integrated regional offices. [6700]

The Deputy Prime Minister: On 22 November 1995, together with Ministers from other Departments, I met the directors of the Government offices for the English regions to discuss how they are taking forward the competitiveness agenda in their regions. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange ideas.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Deputy Minister if he will list his responsibilities in respect of the integrated regional offices. [6701]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I chair the Cabinet Committee which discusses the work of the Government offices for the regions. They report to the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment, for the Environment, for Trade and Industry, and for Transport.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6673]

Mr. Willetts: Guidance, including the implications of dealing with, and the needs of, small and medium-sized enterprises, is to be issued shortly to purchasing staff in my Department.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Divorce Law

31. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received about proposed changes in divorce law and their implications for traditional families. [4667]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received a number of representations relating to the proposed changes in divorce law.

Unlawful Goods

32. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will issue guidelines to the courts on the procedures to be adopted in considering cases where unlawful goods are sold on the basis that they are to be consumed or used in other parts of the European Union. [4668]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No; guidance is not necessary. The courts follow the relevant legislation when cases are brought before them.

Land Registry

33. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will introduce measures requiring the Land Registry not to record cross-deeds in its records; and if he will make a statement. [4669]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A joint working party of the Law Commission, Her Majesty's Land Registry and the Lord Chancellor's Department is currently considering possible reform of the Land Registration Act 1925 and will look in particular at the treatment of easements and overriding interests in the land registration system—this will encompass the situation to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The joint working party hopes to report by the summer of next year.

Pensions Act 1995

34. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking in respect of court consideration of divorce petitions which have been lodged prior to the implementation date he has set for the Pensions Act 1995 in order for one of the parties to gain a financial advantage; and if he will make a statement. [4670]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Courts currently have a duty to give full consideration to all of a divorcing couple's assets and income on divorce, including pension rights. They also have a wide discretion to ensure that an equitable solution is reached between the parties. This will continue to be the case.

Law Centres

36. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has for a national network of law centres. [4672]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor recognises the importance and great value of the work which is done by law centres and other advice agencies. In his Green Paper on legal aid, he has proposed that such agencies should be able to bid for legal aid contracts to provide advice and assistance in their areas of expertise. The Lord Chancellor intends to make an announcement on the future of the Green Paper proposals next year.

Work on the regulations which will bring into force section 166 of the Pensions Act 1995 has highlighted certain complex issues requiring further thought. To ensure that these issues are fully considered and that consultees have sufficient time to comment on the proposals, the Government are now aiming to bring into force section 166 on 1 July 1996.

Legal Aid

37. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the size of the legal aid budget. [4673]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor and I have received many representations about the legal aid scheme, some of which touch on the size of the legal aid budget.

39. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to improve the legal aid system. [4675]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper on the future of legal aid in May. Over 180 responses have been received. These are being analysed. Discussions are being held with some of the major respondents to allow them to expand on their views. The Lord Chancellor intends to make an announcement on the outcome of the consultation process next year.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the extension of legal aid. [4671]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government's plans for reform of the legal aid scheme were outlined in the Green Paper "Legal Aid—Targeting Need". The responses to that paper are being considered.

Fraud Investigation

38. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many investigations the fraud investigation department has carried out in the last five years. [4674]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The number of investigations carried out by the fraud investigation section of the Legal Aid Board in the last five years to March 1995 is 4,600.

In addition, the Benefits Agency, which deals with means assessment for civil legal aid, carried out 29,108 investigations in the last five years between November 1990 and March 1995.

Bailiff Service, Cumbria

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the operation of the bailiff service in the county of Cumbria. [4662]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Court Service is responsible only for county court bailiffs and monitors their performance through a series of targets and objectives. All are currently met by bailiffs in Cumbria.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5622]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor's Department comprises two next steps agencies—the Court Service, established as an agency in April 1995, and the Public Trust Office, established in July 1994—the departmental headquarters and associated offices. Hon. Members' letters about the operation of the agencies are referred to the respective chief executives for reply and I have accordingly asked them to write direct setting out their arrangements for dealing with this correspondence. In LCD headquarters and associated offices, and throughout the Department before the establishment of the agencies, Members' correspondence is allocated to individual divisions according to subject matter. Detailed breakdowns of the amount of time spent by officials on this work and its cost are not available and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Letter for Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 18 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to respond to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 8 December 1995, regarding the number of officials employed to answer letters sent from Honourable Members and the estimated overall cost of replying to them over the last three years.

The Public Trust Office does not employ any officials to specifically deal with ministerial cases, however, all officials will spend a proportion of their time dealing with them. The estimated cost of replying to letters sent from Honourable Members could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Mr. Michael Huebner to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 18 December 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of staff employed in the Court Service to deal with letters from Members.

The Customer Service Unit of the Court Service, established in April 1995, currently contains 12 full-time members of staff who are involved in the preparation of replies to letters sent from Members of Parliament. This figure can be broken down as follows:

1 x Grade 7

2 x HEO

9 x EO.

Approximately 50 per cent. of their time is devoted to the preparation of these replies. This has an estimated cost, for the period 1 April 1995 to 1 December 1995, of £140,035.

Immigration Appellate Authorities

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of the administration of the immigration appellate authorities in the past year; how many cases were considered; what were the equivalent figures in real terms in the year to May 1979; and if he will make a statement. [4664]

Mr. Johnathan Evans: Excluding accommodation, the cost of the administration of the immigration appellate authorities was £5,632,624 in the financial year 1994–95. The equivalent figure in real terms for 1978–79 was £2,255,569.

The appellate authorities determined 25,446 cases in 1994–95 and 9,527 in 1979.

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Alton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he as to issue new procedure rules in respect of appeals under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; and when he expects they will be published. [6166]

Mr. Johnathan Evans: Following the recommendations in the report by the consultants, KPMG Peat Marwick, a copy of which was placed in the Library in February this year, changes are being considered to the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1993. The Lord Chancellor expects to consult interested organisations about his proposals early in the new year.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects that procedure rules governing appeals under clause 3 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill will be published. [6167]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Any changes to the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1993 arising from the Asylum and Immigration Bill will be considered once the Bill has been enacted.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6656]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The review is not yet complete. The report is expected by the end of January 1996.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Pension Awards (Immunisation)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of war pension awards made as a result of conditions arising out of immunisation since 1990; and, in each case, what was the immunisation procedure concerned. [5477]

Mr. Heald: Records show that, since 1990, in one case a war pension award has been made for a condition related to immunisation. The condition involved a possible general anaphylactic reaction to vaccine, which is not vaccine specific.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average lapse in time between a war pension being *(a)* applied for and *(b)* refused and the subsequent appeal being dealt with by a tribunal; [5079]

(2) what proportion of war pension applications which have been refused are *(a)* the subject of appeals to tribunals and *(b)* are subsequently granted following appeals to tribunals. [5080]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. John Sheppard, the acting chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. John Sheppard to Mr. Brian Wilson, dated 18 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about War Pension appeals.

I should first explain that there are two different types of appeal. An entitlement appeal may be lodged where the Agency has been unable to accept that a particular medical condition has been caused by service in the Forces; an assessment appeal can be made where the appellant disagrees with the assessment of disablement arising from an accepted condition. As you have asked about claims that are refused, I will limit my reply to entitlement appeals.

You have asked about the average time lapse between a War Pension claim being made and a subsequent appeal being dealt with by a Tribunal. I am unable to give you that information in the way you requested because there are no time limits for lodging entitlement appeals. It does not follow, therefore, that the appeals received in any period are related to the decisions made in any specific earlier period. Indeed, some entitlement appeals are lodged 20 or 30 years after the original claim. No information is available which measures the average time between notification of a rejected claim and an appeal being lodged.

I can, however, tell you that the average time taken to clear a first claim to War Pension so far in 1995–96 is 157.12 working days (31.42 weeks). If rejection of a claim leads to an appeal, the War Pension Agency (WPA) is responsible for preparing the Statement of Case for the independent Pensions Appeal Tribunal (PAT), who consider all War Pension appeals and are responsible for arranging appeal hearings. The average time taken by WPA to review the evidence and prepare an entitlement appeal Statement of Case, including any comments from the appellant, is 326 working days (65.2 weeks).

The average times taken to deal with appeals are longer than would normally be the case and are a reflection of the considerable increase in appeals that occurred in 1994. As I explained in my letter to you on 7 November, the introduction of our new computer system and the re-structuring of the Agency has also had an effect on our achievements so far this year.

As I have said, the arrangement of appeal hearings is a matter for the PAT who come under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chancellor's Department. They have told me that the average time taken since April this year for the PAT to schedule a hearing following receipt of the Statement of Case from WPA is 42.35 weeks.

I am aware that the PAT have addressed the problem of large numbers of appeals awaiting hearing by increasing the number of courts held each day. These have increased from 4–5 at the end of 1994 to 7–8 now and the intention is to further increase the number to 10 next April. In addition there has been an increase in the number of cases heard each day by each court.

You have also asked the proportion of rejected claims that go to appeal and are subsequently granted. Again, I am unable to provide that exact information you have asked for because of the time limits I explained earlier. I can, however, give you the following information on the number of rejected first claims and entitlement appeals, as well as those allowed by the PAT during the last three financial years. Not all appeals proceed to the Tribunal because we are sometimes able to review the decision and allow the claim, or the appellant withdraws the appeal after it has been lodged. I must stress that because of the time lapse, there is no direct correlation between the figures shown.

Year	*Rejections*	*Ent. appeals lodged*	*Ent. appeals sent to PAT*	*Ent. appeals allowed at PAT*
1992–93	14,850	8,451	2,209	555
1993–94	19,889	10,001	4,754	994
1994–95	14,156	[1]5,158	5,074	1,242

[1] From 5 April 1994 an appeal is classed as lodged from the date that appeal forms are returned to the War Pensions Agency. Previously, an intention to appeal was classed as a lodged appeal.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Benefits Smart Card

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the cost of introducing a benefits smart card system. [4729]

Mr. Heald: The feasibility studies estimated set up costs for a magnetic stripe card system and supporting technology to be £135 million. The same studies estimate that when fully implemented the system would save approximately £140 billion a year in benefits fraud. Competitive proposals are being considered now, under the private finance initiative, from the three short-listed potential service providers. The cost will not be known until the procurement process has been completed.

Housing Benefit

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the numbers and amounts of housing benefit backdated payments under regulation 72(15); and what percentage this was of each local authority's housing benefit expenditure in each year since 1991–92. [5053]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information has been placed in the Library.

Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* for each benefit and each capital or income limit which is not to be increased in April 1996, the reasons for not going so and *(b)* the current value of each such benefit or limit and the value which would have resulted from increasing it in line with prices and average earnings since it was last increased or since it was introduced. [4084]

Mr. Burt: The figures requested for the existing social security benefits and capital or income limits which will not be uprated in April 1996 are in the table. In deciding whether or not to increase those benefits and limits which are not required to be uprated by statute, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State takes into account many factors, including the national economic situation and whether increasing these items is in accordance with his general policy.

Benefit/Limit	*Current value*	*Date from which current value applied*	*April 1996 rate if increased by rise in earnings since date at column 3*	*April 1996 rate if increased by rise in prices since date at column 3*	*Basis of calculation for figure in column (5)*
Widows Payment	1,000	April 1988	1,632.10	1,473.20	RPI
Capital Limits in IS and FC	3,000	April 1988	4,896.10	4,297.15	Rossi
	8,000	April 1990	10,929.20	10,403.60	
Capital Limits in HB	3,000	April 1988	4,896.10	4,297.15	Rossi
	16,000	April 1990	21,858.35	20,807.25	
UB Earnings Limit	2 per day	March 1982	5.20	4.00	RPI
UB Earnings Limit (full extent normal)	12	December 1989	17.90	16.75	RPI
IS Earnings Disregards	5	April 1988	8.15	7.15	Rossi
	15		24.50	21.50	
HB/CTB Earnings Disregards	5	April 1988	8.15	7.15	Rossi
	10	April 1988	16.40	14.30	
	15	April 1988	24.50	21.50	
	25	October 1990	34.10	32.50	
War Pension disregard for income-related benefits (irbs)	10	April 1990	13.65	12.95	Rossi
Income from a boarder (irbs)	20	April 1990	27.30	26.00	Rossi
Disregard of income from a sub-tenant	4	April 1988	6.45	5.75	Rossi
Disregard of Training Bonus (irbs)	200	September 1988	326.45	294.60	RPI
Maintenance disregard (HB, CTB, FC, DWA)	15	April 1992	17.35	16.90	Rossi
Student Loan disregard (irbs)	10	September 1990	13.65	12.95	Rossi
Occupational Pension Disregard (UB)	35	April 1981	101.80	77.10	RPI
Lower savings limit for Voluntary Unemployment Deduction (UB and IS)	200	April 1988	326.45	286.45	Rossi
Protected earnings limit where IS recovered after Trade Dispute	27	April 1988	44.05	38.65	Rossi
SF Maternity Payment	100	April 1990	136.65	130.05	Rossi
SF Capital Limits (Maternity and Funeral Payments)	500 (Under 60)	April 1987	879.65	739.15	Rossi
	1,000 (60 years and over)	April 1990	1,366.15	1,300.45	
Additional Expenses limit for SF Funeral Payment	75	April 1987	132.00	110.90	Rossi
Over 80 Age Addition to RP	25p	September 1971	3.65	1.65	RPI
Christmas Bonus	10	December 1972	110.55	66.95	RPI
Limit for recovery of benefit from Compensation payments	2,500	September 1990	3,415.40	3,232.10	RPI
ICA Earnings Limit	50	April 1993	55.10	54.05	RPI
Lone Parent Premium	(IS) 5.20	April 1995	[1]5.35	[1]5.35	Rossi
	11.50 (HB/CTB)		[1]11.85	[1]11.85	

Benefit/Limit	*Current value*	*Date from which current value applied*	*April 1996 rate if increased by rise in earnings since date at column 3*	*April 1996 rate if increased by rise in prices since date at column 3*	*Basis of calculation for figure in column (5)*
One Parent Benefit	6.30	April 1995	6.50	6.55	RPI
Community Care Grants and Budgeting loans	500 (Under 60) 1,000 (60 years and over)	April 1988	815.95 1,632.10	716.15 1,432.35	Rossi
IS Amount for meals	1.10 1.55	April 1988	1.70 2.50	1.60 2.20	Rossi
IS: Personal Expenses for Claimant and Partner, Dependant Child aged 18, Polish Home, Ilford Park	17.35 15.55	April 1995 April 1995	17.85 16.00	17.85 16.00	Rossi
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis and Miscellaneous Diseases Scheme Maximum Death Benefit	300	1952	12,697.50	4,474.00	RPI

Notes:

[1] No difference between Earnings/Rossi calculations due to effect of rounding to nearest 5p.

The uprating of each benefit in column 5 has been carried out using price indices in the same way as for actual upratings since 1971. "RPI" in column 6 indicates that the Retail Price Index (all items) has been used throughout. "Rossi" refers to the RPI less all housing costs up to the 1991 uprating; the RPI less rent, mortgage payments and 80 per cent. of community charge for the 1992 uprating; and the RPI less rent, mortgage payments and council tax thereafter. It is assumed that benefits would have been uprated before 1971 in line with the RPI at the dates of uprating of Retirement Pension.

The uprating of benefits by earnings in column 4 is based on the average earnings of full-time adult male manual employees before 1963, the old series index of earnings from 1963 to 1976 and the average earnings index (whole economy) unadjusted since 1976. The same uprating dates have been used as for the calculations at column 5. The index for September 1995, used for the 1996 calculation, is provisional and subject to change.

All calculations are rounded to the nearest 5p at each uprating date. Where the current value of a benefit was set at a date between upratings the calculation has started from the previous uprating date.

Abbreviations:

IS = Income Support; FC = Family Credit: HB = Housing Benefit; UB = Unemployment Benefit; CTB = Council Tax Benefit; DWA = Disability Working Allowance; SF = Social Fund; RP = Retirement Pension; ICA = Invalid Care Allowance.

Availability For Work

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State Social Security if he will make it his policy to exempt Territorial Army reserve duties from eligibility for availability for work rules in consideration of unemployment benefit. [5248]

Mr. Roger Evans: Benefit rules already give specific help to members of the reserve forces. We have no plans to relax the current requirement to be available for work.

Motability

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when his Department ceased to audit the accounts of Motability Finance Limited; and if he will make a statement about the subsequent arrangements to ensure full public accountability for the use of public funds; [5141]

(2) what assessment he has made of the level of profits made by Motability Finance Limited. [5093]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 19 July 1995, *Official Report* column *1489.*

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what examination his Department has made of the level of contingency reserves in the Motability car hire and leasing schemes; and if he will make a statement. [5143]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 19 June 1995, *Official Report,* column *99.*

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of possible conflicts of interests amongst the boards of the Motability group of companies and partnerships; [5139]

(2) when he was informed about the letter sent by the deputy chairman of Motability Finance Limited to the director of Motability, on 23 June 1993, setting out his concerns about the relationship between Motability, the charity and Motability Finance Limited; [5097]

(3) what assessment he has made of the Bircham report on Motability. [5140]

Mr. Burt: I am aware of the correspondence to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The governance of Motability is the responsibility of its governors. They must ensure there are no harmful conflicts of interest and that Motability acts in accordance with charity law and the article of its own association.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what requirements his Department has imposed for windfall profits in the Motability programme to be returned to those whose disability living allowance benefits were paying for the lease or hire purchase agreements. [5126]

Mr. Burt: None. Motability regularly reviews the level of contingency reserves held by Motability Finance Limited to ensure that they are set at the appropriate level. Those reserves held in excess of the scheme's requirements are transferred by way of gift aid into the Motability Tenth Anniversary trust. Payments from the tenth anniversary trust are transferred into Motability's charitable funds.

The Department receives reports from Motability on how these charitable funds are used.

National Insurance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received with regard to reducing employers' national insurance contributions to stimulate employment; and if he will make a statement. [5108]

Mr. Heald: We occasionally receive representations from business about the level of national insurance contributions. To improve employment prospects, the Government have substantially reduced employers' contribution rates in recent years, particularly in respect of lower paid employees. The lowest rate for employers is now 3 per cent. compared with 13.5 per cent., including the national insurance surcharge, in 1979. We have already announced our intention to further reduce the main rate of employers' contributions by 0.2 per cent., some £500 million, from April 1997.

Britain's non-wage labour costs are amongst the lowest in Europe.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5563]

Mr. Burt: The Department's Ministers are housed in Richmond house where all facilities are provided by the Department of Health. Expenditure on furnishing and decorating DSS Ministers offices in each of the last three years is therefore included in the running cost expenditure of the Department of Health which is published in its annual report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5616]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

Departmental Ministers receive, on average, over 20,000 letters a year from hon. Members. Depending upon the subject matter, the responsibility for preparing the reply is spread across the Department and its agencies.

Persons From Abroad

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions have been held with the Department of the Environment on the local government cost implications of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [6477]

Mr. Roger Evans: Regular discussions about the proposed Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations have occurred between the Departments of Social Security and the Environment at both ministerial and official level in the normal course of business.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of housing benefit, were aged under 25 years, by region, in the latest available year. [6535]

Mr. Roger Evans: The figures are set out in the table.

Housing benefit recipients by region May 1994

000s

Region	*Claimant aged less than 25 years*	*Total all cases*
North	30	318
Yorks and Humberside	44	429
East Midlands	32	281
East Anglia	14	136
Greater London	75	754
Rest of South East	68	638
South West	36	311
West Midlands	40	420
North West	61	579
Wales	26	233
Scotland	41	549
Great Britain	467	4,650

Although the figures are for 1994 analysis of the trends indicates that the claims figures for the current year will be at a similar level.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what resources have been allocated to each district, metropolitan and London borough authority for the detection and prevention of housing benefit fraud; what information his Department has on the number of fraud officers employed by each local authority responsible for housing benefit; and if he will list each local authority responsible for housing benefit according to the number of housing benefit fraud officers employed. [5843]

Mr. Heald: Information is not held centrally in the format requested.

Local authorities are responsible for the efficient payment of the benefits that they administer. It is for each of them to decide what resources to apply to the detection and prevention of housing benefit fraud, whether from the administration subsidy paid by this Department or from other sources. Local authorities can, however, earn additional subsidy for successful detection of fraud.

Information on the number of designated fraud officers employed by local authorities is currently being processed and should be available in January 1996 in the form of an estimate for total numbers for Great Britain as a whole. I will write to the hon. Member when the information becomes available.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide information for all other tribunals in Britain along the lines referred to in his answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column *1018*, on the number of appeals against the disallowance of income support under the habitual residence test which were heard in the most recent period of a month or more for which information can be obtained; and how many succeeded, failed, were adjourned or were withdrawn. [7017]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Child Support Agency cases have been referred to the independent tribunal service since April 1993; and if he will list for each month *(a)* the number of appeals against assessments by absent parents, *(b)* the number of appeals against assessments by persons with care and *(c)* the number of appeals against reduced benefit directives. [4171]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 14 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about appeals against assessments.

Between April 1993 and September 1995, 11,862 appeals have been received by the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS). ITS do not collect the more detailed information you requested. However, we estimate that of the appeals ITS subsequently sent to the Agency for completion of a submission to the Tribunal, around 70 per cent were made by absent parents and 30 per cent by parents with care. Of those made by parents with care 9 per cent were made against reduced benefit directions.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the monthly breakdown of requirement to co-operate decisions as set out in his answers of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *232*, and 26 October, *Official Report*, column *805* for each month since April 1995 for each Child Support Agency centre. [4195]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 14 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency requirement to co-operate decisions.

You asked for an update of the monthly breakdown of requirement to co-operate decisions, as set out in Answers of 22 November, Official Report 232, and 26 October, Official Report, column 805 for each Child Support Agency Centre for 1995–96. This information is shown in the tables attached..

I hope this is helpful.

Dudley	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigations completed*
April	335	63	580	311	978
May	503	98	617	306	1,218
June	450	243	820	389	1,513
July	493	354	548	265	1,395
August	576	371	749	531	1,696
September	541	370	599	464	1,510
Total	2,898	1,499	3,913	1,649	8,310

Hastings	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigations completed*
April	321	n/a	522	721	843
May	460	111	790	785	1,361
June	469	222	723	631	1,414
July	544	219	679	466	1,442
August	472	207	687	361	1,366
September	495	273	582	532	1,350
Total	2,761	1,032	3,983	1,990	7,776

Falkirk	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigations completed*
April	369	94	471	283	934
May	534	161	833	335	1,528

Falkirk	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigations completed*
June	626	345	944	242	1,915
July	589	331	645	219	1,565
August	642	408	939	276	1,989
September	633	448	862	306	1,943
Total	3,393	1,787	4,694	1,043	9,874

Plymouth	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigations completed*
April	340	100	452	276	892
May	467	112	617	458	1,196
June	508	216	684	389	1,408
July	494	294	680	392	1,468
August	438	259	575	373	1,272
September	508	267	490	274	1,265
Total	2,755	1,248	3,498	1,428	7,501

Birkenhead	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigation completed*
April	389	96	470	510	955
May	556	185	615	511	1,356
June	592	287	713	445	1,592
July	625	361	786	278	1,772
August	582	334	637	430	1,553
September	678	428	686	455	1,792
Total	3,422	1,691	3,907	1,608	9,020

Belfast	*Good cause accepted*	*Absent parent named*	*Good cause not accepted*	*Reduced benefit direction implemented*	*Investigation completed*
April	418	137	540	260	1,095
May	599	195	740	473	1,534
June	488	271	689	250	1,448
July	544	427	680	393	1,651
August	631	425	744	392	1,800
September	668	526	805	336	1,999
Total	3,348	1,981	4,198	1,371	9,527

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases a deduction from earnings order has been made when at the time of its making (a) a review under section 18 of the Child Support Act 1991 had been requested and not determined and (b) an appeal to a child support appeal tribunal was pending. [4687]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Supoort Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 14 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about deduction from earning orders.

The Agency does not keep information on the number of deductions from earnings orders (DEOs) issued before a section 18 (second tier) review (STR) request has been determined, or an appeal heard by a tribunal. There is no business requirement for the Agency to collect information on the number of cases affected.

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost to public funds of the funeral expenses of a person without means and relatives. [6061]

Mr. Horam: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not available centrally.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list annual income from *(a)* fees, *(b)* charges and *(c)* fines; what was the total number of staff employed (i) part-time and (ii) full-time; and what contribution his Department has made towards the annual running costs in each of the past three years in respect of (1) the agricultural wages board, (2) the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland Agency, (3) the Northern Ireland tourist board, (4) the Poisons board, (5) the Regional Medics Physics agency, (6) the Animals (Scientific Procedures) inspectorate, (7) the Agriculture Health and Safety inspectorate, (8) the Fertilisers and Feedstuffs inspectorate, (9) the Pharmaceutical inspectorate, (10) the Plant Health inspectorate, (11) the Potato inspectorate, (12) the Seeds inspectorate, (13) the Trading Standards inspectorate, (14) the Milk and Milk Products quality assurance division, (15) the Health and Safety inspectorate, (16) the Fisheries inspectorate, (17) the Veterinary Service, (18) the Companies Registry, (19) the Transport Licensing and Enforcement division, (20) the Health and Social Services Board inspectorate of registered nursing homes, (21) the Horticultural inspectorate, (22) the Egg Marketing inspectorate and (23) the Drugs inspectorate. [2746]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding reply 28 November 1995]:* The information is as follows:

1. Agriculture wages board

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Annual income from fees, charges and fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	—	—	—
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	13	18	15

2. Driver and vehicle licensing Northern Ireland

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Fees (£000s)	914	914	1,129
Charges	—	—	—
Fines (£000s)	1,350	1,280	1,540
Part-time staff	2	2	2
Full-time staff	225	224	224
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	4,538	4,627	4,820

Fees do not include vehicle excise duty.

Fines have been interpreted as awards of back duty or mitigated penalties collected by the Agency in lieu of prosecution.

In 1994–95 DHSS paid DVLNI £1,000 to meet the Agency's cost of amending its stationery to include organ donor information and £4,000 to modify its computer system. In addition, the DVLNI required an extra member of staff to process the information, and DHSS paid the associated cost of £3,000 in 1994–95.

3. Northern Ireland tourist board

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Fees (£000s)	229	224	230
Charges (£000s)	38	45	59
Fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	1	9	9
Full-time staff	115	129	134
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	5,021	5,114	5,363

4. Poisons Board

The Board has not met in recent years and has given rise to no costs or income.

5. Regional Medics Physics Agency (Established 1 April 1994)

The accounts of the Agency for 1994–95 shows the following:

Income from Boards: £1,790,006

Income from HSS Trusts: £373,965

Income from private sector firms: £78,545

Income from public bodies: £13,227

Part-time staff: —

Full-time staff: 57

Departmental contribution to running costs:

The Agency is funded through contract income and does not receive any direct Departmental funding.

6. Animals (scientific procedures) inspectorate

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Annual income from fees, charges and fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	1	1	1
Full-time staff	—	—	—
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	29	27	34

9. Pharmaceutical inspectorate

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Fees (£000s)	34	36	37
Charges	—	—	—
Fines (£000s)	—	—	—
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	2	2	2
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	30	29	31

13. Trading standards branch

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Fees (£000s)	148	156	116
Charges (£000s)	—	—	20
Fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	52	54	56
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	1,830	1,271	1,252

14. Milk and milk products quality assurance division

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Annual income from fees, charges and fines (£000s)	35	45	25
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	28	27	25
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	700	646	599

15. Health and Safety inspectorate

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Fees (£000s)	4	1	6
Charges	—	—	—
Fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	61	59	59
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	1,464	1,410	1,487

16. Fisheries inspectorate

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Annual income from fees, charges and fines (£000s)	196	243	206
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	36	42	45
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	670	779	883

17. Veterinary service[1]

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Annual income from fees, charges and fines (£000s)	3,026	2,919	2,860
Part-time staff	6	7	9
Full-time staff	556	561	548
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	22,439	23,894	22,337

[1] Includes poultry meat inspection income and expenditure figures.

18. Companies registry

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Fees (£000s)	402	404	431
Charges	—	—	—
Fines[1] (£000s)	—	—	122
Part-time staff	1	1	1
Full-time staff	25	26	27
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	355	369	383

[1] Late filing penalties introduced 7 April 1994.

19. Transport licensing and enforcement division

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Fees (£000s)	165	192	223
Charges	—	—	—
Fines (£000s)	—	—	—
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	37	37	37
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	695	734	805

As TLEB is part of the Department of the Environment NI (DOE) its costs are resourced from the Departmental budget for running costs.

20. Health and social services board inspectorate of registered nursing homes[1]

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Fees (£000s)	38	613	693
Charges	—	—	—
Fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	6	6	6
Full-time staff	42	45	49
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	1,144	663	672

[1] Covers both residential homes and nursing homes.

23. Drugs inspectorate

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Fees (£000s)	6	6	8
Charges	—	—	—
Fines	—	—	—
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	1	1	1
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	19	20	20

The following individual inspectorates form part of the AGRI-FOOD DEVELOPMENT SERVICE of the Department of Agriculture:

7. *Agriculture Health and Safety Inspectorate*
8. *Fertilisers and Feedstuff inspectorate*
10. *Plant Health inspectorate*
11. *Potato inspectorate*
12. *Seeds inspectorate*
21. *Horticultural inspectorate*
22. *Egg Marketing inspectorate.*

As such, the information relating to them cannot be disaggregated into the format requested. However, the aggregate information is as follows.

Agri-food development service

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Annual income from fees, charges and fines (£000s)	253	137	208
Part-time staff	—	—	—
Full-time staff	61	46	45
Departmental contribution to running costs (£000s)	1,421	1,407	1,369

Public Expenditure

Mr Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the per capita cost of public expenditure in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; what the Great Britain figure is; and if he will make a statement. [3229]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 7 December 1995]*: The latest figures for identifiable general Government expenditure per head for Northern Ireland and Great Britain are as follows:

	£ per head	
	Northern Ireland	*Great Britain*
1989–90	3,760	2,440
1990–91	3,870	2,680
1991–92	4,220	3,050
1992–93	4,510	3,350
1993–94	4,780	3,550

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

The higher per capita spending in Northern Ireland reflects the Province's relatively higher needs.

Homes (Mains Electricity)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many homes there are in Northern Ireland; how many have no mains electricity supply; how many existing homes were connected to the mains electricity in each of the past five years; and what plans there are to connect mains electricity to the remaining homes which have no electricity. [5354]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

The 1991 census recorded a total of 530,000 households in Northern Ireland.

Figures from the 1994–95 continuous household survey suggest that 99.7 per cent. of households in Northern Ireland are connected to an electricity supply.

The information requested on the number of existing homes connected to the mains electricity in each of the last five years is not available;

NIE has a duty under the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 to give supply on request and a right to recover any expenses reasonably incurred in providing supply.

School Milk

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils *(a)* get milk, *(b)* get free milk, *(c)* get subsidised milk and *(d)* pay the full cost of milk at school; and what assessment he has made of the effects of the Budget proposals for school milk in Northern Ireland. [5124]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 74,401 pupils get milk; 4,514 get free milk and 69,887 get subsidised milk. Figures are not available in respect of full cost sales of milk at schools. It is estimated that the removal of the discretionary elements of the EC school milk scheme will reduce expenditure on the scheme in Northern Ireland by £175,000 or 28 per cent.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what quantity of milk is consumed in schools; and what assessment he has made of the effects on the milk industry in Northern Ireland of the budget proposals in respect of the reduction in the availability of subsidised milk in secondary schools. [5122]

Sir John Wheeler: A total of 12,950 litres of milk is consumed daily in schools in Northern Ireland. As 72 per cent. is consumed in primary schools, which are not affected by this announcement, there will be minimal effect on the Northern Ireland milk industry.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils attend secondary schools; and what percentage of these pupils presently benefit from school milk. [5123]

Sir John Wheeler: There are 150,036 pupils attending secondary schools in Northern Ireland. Information is not available on the percentage of secondary school pupils who presently benefit from school milk.

Road Bank, Newtownards

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange to remove the bank created by his Department at 114 Crawfordsburn road, Newtownards in order to rectify the sight lines. [5098]

Mr. Moss: The Department does not own the bank in question and has no proposals to remove it.

Security (Discussions)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Government of the Irish Republic in respect of formulating joint security measures to deal with a breakdown in the ceasefire. [5100]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government regularly discuss security matters with the Government of the Republic of Ireland, but it would be inappropriate to reveal the nature and scope of such discussions. However, I can assure the hon. Member that the security forces on both sides of the border have maintained excellent co-operation and will continue to do so.

Orders in Council

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those Orders in Council that he has brought or proposes to bring before the House in the current Session; and if he will make a statement on those orders which will be subject to public consultation this Session. [5102]

Sir John Wheeler: Two Orders in Council have been brought before the House in the current term; the Street Works (NI) Order and the Education (NI) Order.

Orders to be brought forward in the 1995–96 Session are as detailed in the Secretary of State's letter to the hon. Member of 27 November, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

All draft orders will be subject to public consultation, unless there are compelling reasons of urgency.

Electoral Registers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at which *(a)* post offices and *(b)* other locations in the centre of Armagh city the electoral registers are made available for public inspection, and if he will make a statement about changes in the arrangements for public display of electoral registers. [5125]

Mr. Ancram: Arrangements for the public display of electoral registers are a matter for the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland. On publication of the electoral register, the chief electoral officer forwards a copy of each of the registers for the Armagh city wards of Downs, Callan Bridge, Abbey Park, Observatory, the Mall and Demesne, which comprise respectively wards 17 to 22 of the 22 wards in Armagh local government district, to the Armagh Library, Markethill road, for public inspection. Additionally, a copy of the register for ward 17 is forwarded to Ogle Street sub post office and a copy of each of the registers for wards 21 and 22 is sent to Barrack Street post office.

Occupational Health Workers

Mr. Roger Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many medical and nursing staff worked in occupational health within the NHS in Northern Ireland for the last three years for which figures are available; and what were the grades of these employees. [5389]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is contained in the following tables. Figures are quoted for both actual numbers of staff and whole time equivalents for both nursing and medical staff, working within occupational Health Departments of the Northern Ireland health and personal social services, as at 30 June of each year.

Nursing staff in occupational health

Grade title	*Grade number*	*1995* *WTE*	*1995* *HC*	*1994* *WTE*	*1994* *HC*	*1993* *WTE*	*1993* *HC*
Enrolled Nurse E	5,506	1.0	1	1.0	1	—	—
Staff Nurse D	5,508	1.0	1	1.0	1	0.5	1
Staff Nurse E	5,509	13.0	16	10.1	13	11.1	14
Nursing Sister/Charge Nurse G	5,515	8.0	8	9.0	9	2.0	2
Senior Nurse/Nursing Officer 1	5,532	1.0	1	1.0	1	1.0	1
Ocuppational Health Sister/Charge Nurse G	5,536	1.0	1	1.0	1	2.0	2
Senior Nurse Occupational Health H	5,537	2.0	2	2.0	2	2.0	2
Senior Nurse Occupational Health I	5,538	1.0	1	1.0	1	1.0	1
Unit SR Manager 2	5,710	1.0	1	—	—	—	—
Assistant Director Nursing Services 6	5,468	—	—	—	—	1.0	1
Staff Nurse	5,400	—	—	—	—	2.5	3
Nursing Sister Charge Nurse 2	5,211	—	—	—	—	5.0	5
N I total in Department		29.0	32	26.1	29	28.1	32

Medical staff in occupational medicine

Grade Title	*Grade Number*	*1995* *WTE*	*1995* *HC*	*1994* *WTE*	*1994* *HC*	*1993* *WTE*	*1993* *HC*
Clinical Medical Officer	8016	1.0	1	0.5	1	—	—
Senior Clinical Medical Officer	8018	1.6	2	2.0	3	2.3	4
Consultant	8022	4.0	4	2.0	2	2.0	2
Senior Registrar	8029	—	—	1.0	1	1.0	1
General Medical Practitioner/Hospital	8037	0.5	2	0.5	2	0.5	2
General Medical Practitioner/GP	8038	1.9	4	1.9	4	—	—
Medical Officer	8044	0.9	5	1.2	7	1.6	7
Part-time Medical Practitioner	8078	0.5	2	—	—	—	—
N I Total in Department		10.4	20	9.1	20	7.4	16

GRADE WTE=Whole Time Equivalent
HC=Staff-in-Post.

Child Minders

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's policy in respect of family credit regulations and child minders who are family members; and if he will make it his policy to treat unregistered family member child minders as registered child minders for family credit purposes. [5099]

Mr. Moss: When calculating family credit entitlement, charges paid by a claimant to a partner or by a partner to a claimant for any child for whom either of them is responsible are not allowed. Charges paid to other members of a family may be allowed providing the care is given on premises registered under the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 (c.34 (NI)). There are no plans at present to change this policy.

Orlit Dwellings

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to amend the Housing Defects (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to provide adequate compensation for the owners of Orlit built dwellings houses; and if owners of such houses are presently being treated in equal legislative and procedural terms to those in Scotland, England and Wales. [5101]

Mr. Moss: I have no plans to amend the Housing Defects (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

The housing defects scheme introduced under the order provides compensation for the owners of Orlit dwellings who purchased in good faith from public sector landlords before the defects became generally known. The compensation arrangements for such owners in Northern Ireland is essentially the same as those applying in the rest of the United Kingdom save in two minor respects. First, due to lower house values in Northern Ireland it was decided that repurchase provided better value for money than the reinstatement grant offered to eligible Orlit owners in Great Britain. Secondly, the scheme of assistance for Orlits ended in Great Britain on 30 November 1994 whereas the scheme in Northern Ireland continues until September 1996.

Devolution

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will specify those powers and functions the Government have proposed to devolve to local councils in Scotland which his Department has assessed could be appropriately devolved in Northern Ireland; and what plans he has to act on these. [5103]

Mr. Ancram: Our aim is to strengthen local democracy by establishing institutions which enable all Northern Ireland political representatives to have proper local responsibility and accountability. Agreement is the key and any question of increasing or adjusting the responsibilities of district councils in a way which is acceptable right across the community in Northern Ireland is one for discussion within the context of the political talks process.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many plastic bullets have been fired in Northern Ireland during each month since August 1993, to date; how many people have been injured by plastic bullets over the same period; and if he will make a statement. [4619]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* The number of plastic baton rounds fired in Northern Ireland during each month from August 1993 to 30 November 1995 and the number of people injured over this period are as follows:

Month	*Total number fired*	*Number of alleged injuries*
1993		
September	3	0
October	303	7
November	8	0
December	0	0
1994		
January	1	0
February	2	0
March	10	1
April	0	0
May	142	7
June	9	1
July	23	0
August	37	0
September	5	2
October	20	2
November	0	0
December	0	0
1995		
January	0	0
February	0	0
March	3	0
April	0	0
May	0	0
June	2	1
July	154	5
August	114	1
September	0	0
October	0	0
November	0	0
Total	836	27

Badger Setts, Carnmoney Hill

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what measures he intends to adopt to preserve the badger setts affected by the development proposals for Carnmoney hill, Newtownabbey, County Antrim; [5451]

(2) if he will call in the development proposals for Carnmoney hill, Newtownabbey, County Antrim; and if he will make a statement. [5450]

Mr. Moss: There are no "call in" powers in Northern Ireland planning law. Outline planning permission for a new golf club at Carnmoney hill, Newtownabbey was granted on 21 November 1995. The developer's agent has been advised of the requirements of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 with regard to the protection of badger setts and a detailed badger survey, commissioned by the developer, has been received by the Department of the Environment.

Teachers

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what review has been undertaken by the Fair Employment Commission or its predecessor of the exception contained in section 37(1)(c) of the Fair Employment Act 1976 relating to the employment of teachers in schools, as required in that Act. [5433]

Sir John Wheeler: The exception relating to the employment of teachers in schools was reviewed by the Fair Employment Agency in 1981 and 1987. No changes to the exception were recommended.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ask the Fair Employment Commission to report to him upon the exercise of its functions under section 38 of the Fair Employment Act 1976 with recommendations on action which might be taken to further equality of opportunity in the employment of teachers or on removing the exception of teachers in schools from the fair employment laws. [5454]

Mr. Ancram: It is not my right hon. and learned Friend's intention, at the present time, to ask the Fair Employment Commission to undertake such an exercise.

Colin Glen Trust

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what public moneys have been made available each year to the Colin Glen trust since 1 January 1990; and how many cases alleging religious discrimination have been brought to the attention of the Fair Employment Commission in relation to the trust. [6455]

Sir John Wheeler: The following public funding has been given to the Colin Glen trust:

1990 (January to March): £38,714

1990–91: £285,071

1991–92: £453,981

1992–93: £544,749

1993–94: £393,949

1994–95: £408,378

1995–96 (to end October): £281,684.

A total of four cases alleging religious discrimination have been brought to the attention of the Fair Employment Commission in relation to the Colin Glen trust.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5569]

Sir John Wheeler: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in 1993–94 and 1994–95 are included in the running cost expenditure of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland departments, which are published in departmental reports. Figures prior to 1993–94 are not available.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5586]

Sir John Wheeler: The information in respect of the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departments and agencies is as follows:

1994–95: £479,834

1995–96 (estimated): £560,000

1995–96 (actual to 30 November 1995): £342,939.

Rathgael Road, Bangor

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to enhance the rural nature of the Rathgael road in Bangor with particular reference to its complement of trees; and what plans he has for new traffic arrangements to diminish the number of heavy goods vehicles entering the road. [5456]

Mr. Moss: Rathgael road, which is within the development limits of Bangor, is identified in the North Down and Ards area plan 1984–1995 as a relief to the existing ring road, and there are no plans to enhance the rural nature of this road or to diminish the number of heavy goods vehicles using it.

Graduates

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of school children subsequently graduate; what proportion of jobs filled in the last three years in the Northern Ireland civil service required a degree; and how many graduates were recruited to jobs for which a degree was not required. [5458]

Sir John Wheeler: The percentage of school children who subsequently graduate and the number of graduates recruited by the Northern Ireland civil service in the last three years is as follows:

It is estimated that 25 per cent. of school children in Northern Ireland graduate by the age of 25.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Proportion of NI Civil Service jobs filled which required a degree[1]	8.5 per cent. (132 out of 1554)	5.7 per cent. (36 out of 633)	7.4 per cent. (40 out of 540)
Number of graduates recruited where a degree was not required[2]	145	66	59

Note:

[1] Non-industrial permanent recruits.

[2] Non-industrial permanent recruits including recruits who obtained a degree since appointment. The figures for the years 1992–93 and 1994–95 correct those I gave in response to a question from the hon. Gentleman on 3 November, *Official Report* column *500–2*.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5699]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Departments are required to provide details of their performance in their departmental reports.

In 1994–95, the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland departments paid 94.7 per cent. of their bills in accordance with agreed contractual conditions, or within 30 days of receiving goods and services, or on presentation of a valid invoice.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5749]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Department of Finance currently employs an adviser to promote the private finance initiative across all Northern Ireland departments and the Northern Ireland Office at a cost of some £60,000 per annum. The Department of the Environment also incurs some £120,000 per annum on units dedicated to work on the initiative.

The administration costs incurred in relation to other work on the PFI are part of the normal work of Departments and are not separately identified.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5750]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* No schemes under the private finance initiative, announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1992, have been approved to date. A range of projects across all Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office are under consideration. It is too early, however, to estimate what the revenue costs are likely to be.

Departmental Staff (Member's Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5615]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6661]

Sir John Wheeler: As part of the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Government purchasing service has oversight of £800 million worth of procurement in NI each years. As I am sure the hon. Member appreciates, the majority of Northern Ireland firms are small and medium-sized enterprises and as such we have a fundamental objective to help these businesses prosper. In fact a key objective of the Government purchasing service is to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises are given maximum effective encouragement and opportunity to compete for public sector contracts in Northern Ireland. To this end, the Department, in conjunction with the CBI has promoted several "Meet the Buyer" events in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at which public sector buyers and representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises have been facilitated to do business together and to forge long term relationships.

The suppliers charter published late last year by the Government purchasing service is a declaration of its commitment to the principles of the citizens charter which aims to

improve the quality of all public services

make services more responsive to the needs of users

ensure value for money.

It also emphasises the commitment to provide all small and medium-sized enterprises with the opportunity to compete for the provision of goods and services in fair, open and equal competition.

ENVIRONMENT

Fur Imports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to oppose the delay of the implementation of a ban on the import of furs caught by leghold traps into the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [3180]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr Oppenheim), on Thursday 14 December, *Official Report*, column 778.

Social Lettings

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many new social lettings *(a)* were made by housing associations in the last year and *(b)* are expected to be made next year, and what is his Department's lowest estimate for housing need on Merseyside; [5382]

(2) how many new homes will be built by housing associations on Merseyside during the next 12 months; and what estimate his Department made of the number to be built in that period *(a)* at the start of 1995–96 and *(b)* currently. [5360]

Mr. Clappison: Housing associations provided around 70,700 new social lettings in 1994–95 through Housing Corporation and local authority funding together with the private finance attracted. In 1996–97 it is estimated that the equivalent figure will be around 53,400 with a further 7,200 new social lettings being provided from other sources. In addition, some 250,000 housing association and local authority dwellings become available for reletting each year.

The Department's estimates of newly arising need for social lettings are made at national level and are not disaggregated regionally.

The Housing Corporation will be publishing details of its capital funding allocations in each local authority area in the new year after it has assessed housing associations' bids for 1996–97 projects and finalised the approved development programme. Earlier years' estimates of 1996–97 output were national and not disaggregated regionally.

London Governance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many conference lectures and seminars he has attended on the subject of the governance of London since he assumed responsibility for the capital city. [5449]

Mr. Gummer: I have attended many conferences and seminars in London since I became Minister with responsibility for London. When I am invited, with reasonable notice, to suitable occasions of this kind, I try to attend. When the governance of London is mentioned, it is widely acknowledged that our decision to abolish the Greater London council was right.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5573]

Sir Paul Beresford: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report.

Local Authority Trading

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what review the Government have carried out on the issues of cross-boundary tendering and municipal trading by local authorities; and when he plans to circulate guidance on this matter. [5594]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have considered the powers of local authorities to trade under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970. My officials wrote to the local authority associations last week informing them that we remain of the view that the limited powers of the 1970 Act are the right basis for local authority trading activities, but accepting that these powers do not restrict these activities simply to the deployment by an authority of temporarily surplus capacity in its work force.

Water Companies (Profits)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Office of Water Services in respect of changes to the regulatory regime to take account of recent profit and dividend announcements by the water companies; and if he will make a statement. [5679]

Mr. Clappison: The functioning of the regulatory regime frequently arises in day-to-day contacts between officials and the Director General of Water Services and his staff. The present system of price cap regulation provides powerful incentives for companies to reduce their costs and improve their performance, and enables the Director General of Water Services to take account of company profitability at the next price review. The director general has said that the benefits of improved efficiency should be shared between customers and shareholders.

Visual Display Units

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has undertaken to establish whether there is a link between eye disease and visual display screens; and if he will make a statement. [5674]

Sir Paul Beresford: Extensive research has found no evidence that work with visual display units either causes any permanent damage to eyes or eyesight or makes existing defects worse. The scientific and medical consensus is such that further research would not be justified.

Some people using visual display units experience temporary visual fatigue, leading to symptoms like sore eyes or headaches. Under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, employees who habitually use a display screen as a significant part of their normal work can ask their employer to provide them with eye and eyesight tests, and special spectacles if required. Employers can also help minimise eyestrain by providing satisfactory lighting and taking steps to avoid reflections and glare on the screen. The Health and Safety Executive has explained these points in its guidance publications.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many visual display unit operators undertook a subsidised eye test as provided by European Union regulations in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [5673]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on provision of eye tests under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 is not yet available. There is no requirement for employers to report the number of tests they have provided. However, the Health and Safety Executive has started work to evaluate the regulations by means of surveys of employers and employees. The evaluation is due for completion in 1996 and should produce estimates of the extent of awareness of the regulations and what actions employers have taken to comply, including information on the extent of provision of eye tests.

Municipal Waste Incinerators

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the municipal waste incinerators currently operating in the United Kingdom separately identifying those burning *(a)* more and *(b)* less than six tonnes per hour; which of them meet the relevant dust and dioxin emission standards; and which are the subject of enforcement action by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. [5683]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* I have listed all the municipal waste incinerators currently operating in the UK. All except the incinerator at Chinglebraes in Orkney have capacities in excess of six tonnes per hour.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution authorises these plants in England and Wales and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate authorises those in Scotland. These incinerators must be operated in accordance with all the conditions set in their authorisation including those for dust and dioxins; failure to comply with these standards can lead to enforcement action.

HMIPI has issued an enforcement notice with regard to meeting these standards for the Orkney incinerator.

HMIP has not undertaken any enforcement action at municipal waste incinerators this year.

Municipal Waste Incinerators in the UK:

Portrack, Stockton
Vine Street, Huddersfield
Bernard Road, Sheffield
Eastcroft, Nottingham
Edmonton, London
Raikes Lane, Bolton
Barr Road, Coventry
Tyseley, Birmingham
Lister Road, Dudley
Crown Street, Wolverhampton
Rainesway, Derby
Sideway, Stoke
SELCHP, London
Harts Farm Way, Havant
Bury Road, Marchwood
Pooles Lane, Otterbourne
Chineham, Basingstoke
Avonmouth
Exeter
Baldovie, Dundee
Alloca, Clackmannon
Rova Head, Shetland
Chinglebraes, Orkney.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5858]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is provided in respect of all Department of the Environment Ministers.

1990–91: £270,000

1991–92: £265,000

1992–93: £254,000

1993–94: £258,000

1994–95: £258,000.

All figures are exclusive of VAT.

No Department of the Environment Ministers use their own vehicles for official purposes.

Water Companies (Prosecutions)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times and on which dates each of the privatised water companies have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for water pollution offences in (i) the current year and (ii) each of the last five years. [5961]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested is set out in the tables. The details attributed to 1995 are for the period since April. This information supersedes that given in my answer of 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *738–39*.

Company	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995*
Prosecutions							
North-west	—	1	2	5	10	12	1
Southern	—	1	4	1	1	1	—
South-west	—	1	—	2	—	—	—
Wessex	—	2	—	3	3	1	—
Thames	—	3	7	5	7	4	1
Welsh	—	6	15	9	1	1	1
Anglian	—	3	6	5	1	2	—
Northumbrian	1	4	2	2	—	—	—
Yorkshire	1	1	6	1	12	1	—
Severn Trent	—	2	8	2	5	3	4
Convictions							
North-west	—	1	2	5	8	11	1
Southern	—	1	4	1	1	1	—
South-west	—	1	—	2	—	—	—
Wessex	—	2	—	3	3	1	—
Thames	—	3	7	5	7	4	1
Welsh	—	6	15	9	1	1	1
Anglian	—	3	6	5	1	2	—
Northumbrian	1	4	2	2	—	—	—
Yorkshire	1	1	6	1	12	1	—
Severn Trent	—	2	8	2	5	3	4
Prosecution dates							
North-west	—	13.12.90	16.10.91 29.01.92	20.05.92 01.10.92 03.02.93 02.03.93 02.03.93	23.04.93 28.07.93 14.09.93 20.10.93 03.11.93 09.11.93 25.01.94 25.01.94 03.02.94 25.03.94	07.04.94 25.05.94 07.06.94 21.07.94 26.08.94 13.09.94 21.09.94 21.09.94 03.10.94 18.11.95 15.02.95 17.02.95	18.04.95
Southern	—	10.07.90	29.10.91 10.01.92 11.02.92 13.02.92	16.11.92	26.04.93	24.06.94	—
South-west	—	20.11.90	—	07.12.92 30.11.92	—	—	—
Wessex	—	12.11.90 12.12.90	—	14.08.92 22.09.92 16.03.93	10.08.93 10.08.93 13.12.93	22.09.94	—

Company	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995*
Thames	—	07.03.91 07.03.91 25.03.91	23.05.91 24.05.91 31.05.91 15.11.91 26.11.91 26.11.91 10.03.92	01.10.92 07.10.92 07.10.92 25.11.92 18.01.93	18.05.93 10.06.93 07.10.93 22.11.93 8.12.93 22.12.93 14.01.94	11.04.94 13.07.94 12.12.94 20.02.95	22.05.95
Welsh	—	11.04.90 11.04.90 12.04.90 27.04.90 28.01.91 25.03.91	17.04.91 20.05.91 23.05.91 4.06.91 07.06.91 21.06.91 09.07.91 29.08.91 29.08.91 29.08.91 06.09.91 22.01.92 06.03.92 13.03.92 19.03.92	03.04.92 14.04.92 15.04.92 14.05.92 19.05.92 05.10.92 18.12.92 30.12.92 15.03.93	10.11.93	15.12.94	17.08.95
Anglian	—	16.11.90 19.12.90 25.03.91	02.07.91 23.07.91 25.11.91 25.11.91 25.02.92 06.03.92	15.05.92 20.05.92 07.07.92 24.07.92 22.10.92	28.07.93	15.07.94 28.07.94	—
Northumbrian	05.02.90	31.10.90 19.12.90 08.03.91 08.03.91	06.12.91 12.02.91	21.09.92 10.11.92	—	—	—
Yorkshire	28.12.89	13.07.90	19.04.91 19.04.91 19.04.91 15.05.91 25.06.91 04.09.91	02.04.92	19.04.93 07.06.93 16.06.93 16.06.93 02.07.93 17.08.93 19.08.93 19.08.93 19.08.93 19.08.93 19.08.93 16.11.93	23.08.94	—
Severn Trent	—	29.06.90 20.11.90	21.05.91 03.06.91 18.07.91 16.09.91 18.09.91 19.09.91 08.10.91 27.11.91	21.09.92 02.03.93	27.04.93 11.06.93 10.08.93 21.09.93 06.01.94	23.08.94 03.03.95 26.03.95	22.05.95 07.06.95 12.09.95 25.09.95

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money the Building Research Establishment has received in each of the last five years from public funds; and what budget it is likely to receive for research next year. [5965]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Building Research Establishment receives income from public funds through undertaking research and other commissions for various Government customers. In addition, it has annual allocation of capital funds for investment in buildings and facilities. The table provides details of both.

Year	[1]*1990–91*	[1]*1991–92*	[1]*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	[2]*1995–96*	[3]*1996–97*
Cash income—from research etc	27.4	32.9	34.6	35.6	35.4	35.3	31.9
Capital funding	0.8	1.6	1.2	2.5	2.9	3.9	2.0
Total money received from public funds	28.2	34.5	35.8	38.1	38.3	39.2	33.9

Notes:

[1] Form unaudited accounts.

[2] Forecast outturn.

[3] Estimate. Budgets still under discussion.

Local Authorities (Political Propaganda)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the restrictions currently placed on local authorities to prevent expenditure on political propaganda; and what tests are applied in determining if a particular item is beyond or within the rules. [5953]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Local Government Act 1986 prohibits local authorities from publishing, or assisting others to publish, material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. The code of recommended practice on local authority publicity, issued by my Department under that Act, states that any publicity used to comment on the proposals or policies of central or local government must be accurate and objective and not appear to be prejudiced, unreasoning or a political attack on any of the policies or proposals in question.

Housing (Mundic Problem)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has commissioned or evaluated into the Mundic problem with special reference to houses in Cornwall. [5964]

Mr. Clappison: The Department funds a continuing research programme at the Building Research Establishment, with industry support, into these problems.

This work has led directly to the publication of revised guidance from the Mundic committee of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The application of which has resulted in an estimated 70 per cent of previously blighted properties now being classified as suitable for lending purposes.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide, for the schemes so far agreed under the PFI, the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5692]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The capital and financing costs of a PFI project are a matter for the private sector. The Department's responsibility is to ensure that it, and its sponsored bodies, get value for money for any payments they make. Value for money appraisals are not required to include a notional public sector comparator for projects where no public funding is available.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5755]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Department of the Environment and its sponsored bodies attracted around £4 billion in private investment in support of its programmes in 1994–95 and expects to increase that figure in 1995–96. This will assist the delivery of a very large number of projects, most notably ones relating to housing, inner cities and regeneration. Secondary legislation to encourage and facilitate private finance initiative schemes in the local authority sector came into effect from 1 April 1995 and the Government aim to implement further measures, announced on 31 October *Official Report*, columns *181–83*, by 1 April 1996. It is not practicable for the Department to collect detailed information on each project being advanced under private financing arrangements.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future of PFI work. [5744]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Department of the Environment and its sponsored bodies seek to attract maximum private finance in support of departmental programmes. The administrative costs of this activity are not separately identified.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and times scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5987]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information available about surveys carried out by my Department in the past three years, which include questions to individuals about their opinions, is given.

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Location*	*Researchers*	*Number of respondents*
Community Identity Research	Ascertain public perceptions	January 1993	Derbyshire, Cleveland, North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Avon, Gloucs, Somerset	MORI	10,000
The Children's Initiative	To establish knowledge of, attitudes towards and involvement in Environmental action	January 1993	England	Millward Brown	1,090

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Location*	*Researchers*	*Number of respondents*
Customer Survey: Study of Appellants' Experience of the Written Representations Appeals System	To assess customer satisfaction with the written representation appeals procedures	February 1993	South East, North West and West Midlands Regions of DoE	W. S. Atkins Planning Consultants	1,575
Evaluation of Rebuilding Grants	To evaluate and examine the wider applicability of rebuilding grants	February 1993	Birmingham	University of Salford	150
Owner-Occupiers who are Cavity Wall Insulation Enthusiasts	To encourage uptake of insulation	February 1993	UK	NBA Tectronics	420
Evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative	To evaluate policy	March 1993	Central London	Research and Information services	300
Applicants' Perceptions of the Planning Appeals System	Customers' views on the planning appeals system	March 1993	South East, North West and West Midlands Regions of DoE	W.S. Atkins	1,575
Evaluation of 'Right to Buy' Publicity Campaign	To evaluate publicity campaign	April 1993	England	MORI	1,000
'Right To Buy' Campaign Evaluation—follow-up stage	Follow-up to above survey	May 1993	England	MORI	1,000
Landlords Research	To inform policy making	July 1993		SCPR	
Public Attitudes to the Environment	To inform policy	July 1993	England and Wales	NOP	3,200
Helping the Earth—Literature Evaluation	To evaluate literature campaign	September 1993	UK	MAI	518
Customer Survey: Study of Appellants' and Local Authorities' Experience of the Hearings System	To assess customer satisfaction with the hearings of appeals procedures	September 1993	England	W.S. Atkins Planning Consultants	1,569
Helping the Earth Campaign Evaluation Research 1993–94—Waves 4 and 5	To evaluate the 'Helping the Earth' campaign	September to November 1993	GB	BMRB	1,200
Ventilation in Homes	To evaluate the effectiveness of Building Regulations	October 1993	Eight Regions across UK	PAS	250
Helping the Earth Radio Campaign	To assess the effectiveness of campaign	October 1993	GB	RSGB	2,000
Rent Policies of LAs in England	To monitor and inform policy	November 1993	England	Inlogov	920
The Nature of Demand for Housing in Rural Areas	To investigate people's housing experiences in rural areas	December 1993	Allerdale, Vale of White Horse and NewburyBirmingham University	550	
Flat Service Charges and Right to Buy	To monitor and inform policy	December 1993	UK	MORI	936
Monitoring the Actions of Failed Grant Applicants	To monitor and inform policy	January 1994	England	PAS	2,000
Rent to Mortgage leaflet follow-up	To establish tenants opinion and action taken towards buying their home	February 1994	GB	NOP	2,000
Public Attitudes to Planning (and Development)	To inform policy and promote the planning system	February 1994	England and Wales	Prism Research	3,000
Helping the Earth Campaign. Pre and Post Monitor	To assess campaign effectiveness	February 1994	GB	COI	4,000
Study of Lodgers Scheme	To inform policy making on Lodgers scheme	March 1994	England	The London Research Centre	50
Recreational Cycling Market Research	To assess customer satisfaction	April 1994	England	COI	636

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Location*	*Researchers*	*Number of respondents*
Albert Dock Visitor Survey	To assess number, origins and method of travel and spend per head	April 1994	Area bounded by Dukes Dock, Mersey River Frontage, Canning Dock and Strand Street	Allott and Lomax Consultants	1,858
Ventilation in Homes	To evaluate the effectiveness of Building Regulations	April 94	GB (except Scotland)	Public Attitudes Surveys Ltd	3,000
The Environmental Effects of Dust from Surface Mineral Workings—pilot survey	To define reasonable dust levels	May 94	England and Wales	Ove Arup & Partners	60
Vacant Dwellings in the Private Sector	To determine the scope for bringing vacant dwellings back into use	May 94	England	University of Wales + MORI	500
London Docklands Development Corporation Residents survey	To assess residents views of area, local facilities, priorities for change and perceptions of the LDDC	June 94	LDUD Area	MORI	508
Home Improvement Agency Client Survey	To review the work of Home Improvement Agencies	June 94	England	SCPR	600
Research into the Role and Operation of Homes	To evaluate policy	August 94	England, Wales and Scotland	MORI	1,250
1994 London Docklands Visitor Survey	To assess visitor levels and experiences		September 94	Travel and Tourism Research	
"Wasting Energy Costs the Earth" Campaign Evaluation	To establish attitudes to and action on energy use in the home	September 94	UK	NOP	1,000
The Environmental Effects of Production Blasting from Surface Mineral Workings (Pilot Survey)	To define reasonable working levels for production blasting	September 94	Ammanford (S. Wales)	Vibrock Ltd	50
Customer Survey: Study of Customer's experience of the inquiry procedure	To assess customer satisfaction	October 94	England and Wales	W S Atkins Planning Consultants	1,250
Review of Council's Tenants Charter	To assess customer awareness. Views on contents and usefulness of the Councils Tenant's Charter	November 94	10 selected local authorities in England	MORI	80
Houses in Multiple Occupation: Establishing Effective Local Authority Strategies	To assess customer satisfaction	December 94	England	Public Attitudes Surveys Ltd	60
Testing the Planetary Caretaker Pack	To explore childrens reactions to Environmental Information Packs	March 95	GB	NOP	1,000
Review of LAs charging for Public Path Orders	To assess customer satisfaction	April 95	England and Wales	Countryside and Community Research Unit	220
Residents Attitude Survey (North Hull Housing Action Trust)	To assess views of tenants	April 95	North Hull HAT Designated Area	Market Researchers (CWA) Consultancy Ltd	510
Planning Inspectorate Customer Survey (Pilot)	Opinion of the Inspectors and administrative handling of appeals	June/July 95	England	N/A	900
Personal Exposure to Atmospheric Particles	To assess background on lifestyle and living conditions	July/August 95	Birmingham	National Environment Technology Centre	30
Air Quality Awareness Omnibus Survey	To assess awareness of Air Pollution issues	August 95	UK	BMRB International Ltd	1,050
Wall Insulation and Development	To assess attitudes towards use of cavity wall insulation	August 95	England	Cragg, Ross, Dawson	80

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Location*	*Researchers*	*Number of respondents*
Experiences of Enforcement Provision of the Leasehold Reform Act 1993	To assess the effects of the recent legislation	September 95	England and Wales	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research—Sheffield Hallam University	1,350
The use of Accelerated Possession Proceedings	To assess awareness, knowledge and whether procedure is working effectively	November 95	England	London Research Centre	50
Evaluation of Tune your Car Campaign	To assess perceptions of impact of cars on the Environment and attitudes to greener motoring	December 95	Leeds, Middlesborough, Sheffield, Oxford and Bristol	NOP	2,500

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what bids for resources he has received from authorities that *(a)* have been and *(b)* are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995, 1996, 1997 or 1998 for estimated reorganisation costs in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97; and to what extent these bids have been successful. [6098]

Sir Paul Bereford *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* For authorities for which structural change orders have been made, the bids received and allocations made to date under the local government reorganisation costs schemes for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are as follows:

Authorities reorganised on	*1 April 1995* £	*1 April 1996* £	*1 April 1997* £
1995–96 Scheme			
Bid	1,910,000	113,913,000	10,706,500
Allocation	1,750,000	47,760,000	0
1996–97 Scheme			
Bid	1,029,000	120,921,000	98,480,700

Authorities initial bids under the 1996–97 reorganisation costs scheme were requested by 1 December. Initial allocations will be made shortly. No orders have been made which provide for reorganisation in 1998.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources will be available to cover the transitional costs of local government re-organisation in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [6100]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Resources of £100 million in the form of supplementary credit approvals are available to cover the transitional costs of local government re-organisation in 1996–97. The provision for 1997–98 and 1998–99 will be decided during the public expenditure survey for those years.

Council House Rents

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines he has issued in respect of council house rent increases; and what subsidies he will be providing in respect of rebates. [6271]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) on 21 November, *Official Report*, columns 96–97. We are currently considering the responses received during consultation on our proposals and hope to be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5617]

Sir Paul Beresford: Officials in my Department provide Ministers with draft replies to departmental correspondence as part of their normal duties. No information is available on what proportion of officials' time is spent on this work.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce regulations to require the controlled safe disposal of all containers used to store toxic materials and harmful chemicals. [5429]

Mr. Clappison: Containers classified as controlled waste must be managed and disposed of in accordance with sections 33 and 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In some circumstances, the containers may be "Special Waste" and subject to the additional controls in the 1980 Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations. These regulations are being revised following public consultation earlier in the year.

New Housing

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision is currently made for the delivery of social and economic infrastructure facilities when applications are made for new housing development. [6576]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The provision of infrastructure is important in all major new developments. It has always been an important purpose of the planning system to co-ordinate new development with the infrastructure it demands.

The fact that development plans look forward over a number of years means that those responsible for infrastructure provision influence the pattern of new development so that it takes account of likely infrastructure limitations. When it comes to an individual planning application, the adequacy of infrastructure can be a material consideration in deciding whether permission should be granted.

In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for a local planning authority to impose a condition or seek to enter into a planning obligation with a developer to help towards the provision of social and economic infrastructure facilities where this is necessary for the granting of planning permission.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new houses are to be built by *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2011 to fulfil projected household needs forecast by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in (i) Devon, (ii) Somerset, (iii) Birmingham, (iv) Kent, (v) Sussex and (vi) Hampshire. [6588]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department of the Environment published "Projections of Households in England to 2016" in March 1995. These projections suggest the likely number and type of households that would materialise by county, metropolitan district and London borough by 2016, if current social and demographic trends continue.

New figures, for which these 1992-based projections will be an input, will be produced for each region and county for the next review of the relevant regional planning guidance. The next step, therefore, is for the regional conference of local authorities for each region to consider these projections and a wide range of other supply and demand factors before advising the Secretary of State on revised figures for additional housing requirements for their region and for each county, metropolitan district or London borough. The process of assessing the implications of the latest household projections is just starting.

The current figures for the authorities requested were produced with input from the 1989-based household projections, published in 1992. The current annual average number of additional dwellings proposed in current regional planning guidance for the authorities requested are:

Devon: 4,950 (1991–2011) RPG for the South West (July 1994)

Somerset: 2,500 (1991–2011) RPG for the South West (July 1994)

Birmingham: 2,050 (1991–2011) Draft RPG for West Midlands (September 1995)

Kent: 5,800 (1991–2006) RPG for the South East (March 1994)

East Sussex: 2,333 (1991–2006) RPG for the South East (March 1994)

West Sussex: 2,933 (1991–2006) RPG for the South East (March 1994)

Surrey: 2,400 (1991–2006) RPG for the South East (March 1994)

Hampshire: 6,133 (1991—2006) RPG for the South East (March 1994).

These figures are being "tested" in the preparation of the structure plan or unitary development plan for the relevant area.

Industrial Sites

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate his Department has made of the future requirement for new industrial sites in *(a)* the south-west and *(b)* South Hams and the number of jobs these will generate. [6589]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department has not made any estimate of the future requirement for industrial sites in the region, but the regional planning guidance for the south-west advises that development plans should make adequate provision for land employment-related development.

The third alteration to the Devon structure plan, as approved in March 1994, provides for about 774 hectares of employment land in the county between 1989 and 2001, of which 115 hectares are allocated to South Hams district. The structure plan does not make any estimate of the number of jobs this will generate.

Homelessness

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date his officials discussed the local government implications of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations with the Department of Social Security; what evidence was offered; and what information has been sought from local authorities. [6480]

Mr. Clappison: My officials have had regular discussions with their counterparts in the Department of Social Security about the implications for the housing of homeless persons of the proposed Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations. Those discussions have taken account of information about homelessness supplied to the Department by local authorities. We have also discussed the matter with the Association of London Government.

Local Partnerships

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will specify the role and remit of local partnerships. [6578]

Mr. Curry: Local partnerships play a key role in promoting economic, environmental and social regeneration. A range of Government policies and programmes is specifically directed to support local partnerships. These programmes include the single regeneration budget challenge fund. Over 370 schemes involving local partnerships have been approved under rounds 1 and 2 of the challenge fund. These schemes stand to attract some £2 billion in challenge fund support and £5 billion in private investment over their lifetime of up to seven years. Rounds 3 and 4 of the challenge fund, for schemes starting in 1997 and 1998 respectively, were announced in the Budget statement. Apart from the challenge fund, the partnership approach is central to, for example, initiatives supported by training and enterprise councils, English Partnerships and European structural funds.

Population Statistics

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider establishing a statistical user group made up of representatives from the Central Statistical Office, local authorities and bodies such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England in order to improve the accuracy of population statistics and need for homes in the south west of England. [6577]

Mr. Robert B Jones: Arrangements are already in place for consulting local authorities and other interested parties during the production of population projections.

Population estimates and subnational population projections are the responsibility of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. One of the key assumptions that has to be made in preparing the subnational population projections concerns the pattern of migration within England. This is decided following extensive consultation with the relevant local authorities, a task which is undertaken by the Department of the Environment. This consultation relates to past and present trends and the projections assume a continuation of these trends.

In addition, OPCS chairs a separate liaison group for representatives from both central and local government for consideration of the methodology and timing of population statistics.

My Department produced household projections from the subnational population projections. Both of these are trend-based projections, based on the best evidence available at the time. They are not forecasts of what we expect to happen, nor do they represent DOE's expectation of the number of houses needed in any particular area. Rather, they are one item of information taken into account in setting guidance for housing provision, along with other information such as housing stock and vacant dwellings. The weight to be given to these and other factors is considered by a working group in each region comprising representatives from local authorities, statisticians and planners from my Department and interested parties such as the House Builders Federation and the Council for the Protection of Rural England. The Secretary of State's figures for housing provision in regional planning guidance is a result of these considerations.

Regional Regeneration Strategies

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the integrated regional offices published regional regeneration strategies; and which local partners have been consulted in the process. [6695]

Mr. Curry: None. The Government offices for the regions do, however, all take an active role in developing effective co-operation with and between a wide range of local partners to ensure that Government programmes, including the single regeneration budget, provide a coherent and effective contribution to regional and local regeneration.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to give compensation to British-owned fishing vessels prevented from fishing by lack of getting similar compensation to that claimed by Spanish-owned British-registered vessels for stopping fishing under the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. [4326]

Mr. Baldry: British-owned fishing vessels were not affected by the nationality provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. The question of compensation does not, therefore, arise.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for requiring all British registered fishing vessels to land a specified proportion of the catch into the United Kingdom. [6008]

Mr. Baldry: British fishing vessels are already required to land into the UK at least 50 per cent. by weight of total landings of all stocks subject to EC quota. If they fail to do this they must visit a United Kingdom port at least four times in every six month period. The visits must each be of at least eight hours duration and there must be an interval of at least 10 days between them. Notice must be given at least 24 hours in advance of a visit.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received for funding under the EC grant schemes prior to 28 November for *(a)* fisheries processing and marketing, *(b)* port facilities and *(c)* aquaculture production for each country of the United Kingdom. [5991]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The number of applications and provisional applications for financial instrument for fisheries guidance (FIFG) funding under the Structures Regulation—EC Reg. 3699/93—prior to 28 November 1995 for fisheries marketing and processing, port facilities and aquaculture for each country of the United Kingdom is as follows:

Country	*Fisheries processing and marketing*	*Port facilities*	*Aquaculture*
England[1]	35	2	4
Northern Ireland[2]	0	0	0
Scotland	93	20	35
Wales[1]	2	0	2
Total	130	22	41

[1] As schemes were not open in England and Wales it was not possible for formal applications to be made. Provisional applications were acknowledged on a "without prejudice" basis.

[2] No formal applications have been received in Northern Ireland but provisional approval to start work has been given to 11 processing and marketing and 4 aquaculture projects without guarantee of grant.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban the sale of beef offal until such time as his Department has evaluated scientific proof that there is no link between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [5129]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have based all their measures to protect public health from any remote possible risk from BSE on scientific evidence and advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee and its predecessors. The controls on bovine offals contained in the Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995 are designed to ensure that tissues potentially harbouring BSE infectivity are removed from all cattle at slaughter and do not enter any food chain. Other offals, not covered by these regulations, have been tested and shown not to harbour BSE infectivity, even when taken from clinically affected cattle. The controls in force therefore provide a safeguard against the possibility, for which there is no scientific evidence, that CJD is caused by BSE. Further details of the scientific experiments underpinning these controls were given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in reply to a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *192-93*.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date: and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5584]

Mr. Boswell: In 1994–95 the cost of hospitality, which is included in the running cost budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, excluding its agencies, was £64,092.62. The figure for the financial year to date (30 November 1995) is £37,077.65.

The projected budget for 1995–96 is £57,000.

EU Grants

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received for funding under the EC processing and marketing grants schemes in each year in which the schemes have been in operation in the United Kingdom, for each country of the United Kingdom. [5990]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 14 December 1995]*: The following information, for the years 1990 to 1995, is available. Applications for grants under both the agriculture and fisheries schemes are included. Information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EC processing and marketing grant applications in the United Kingdom 1990–95

Year	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
1990	10	72	4	30
1991	153	66	8	45
1992	232	102	11	39
1993	0	15	0	0
1994	195	65	13	0
1995 to date	225	91	13	17

Orange Juice

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what EU regulations have affected the price of orange juice in the last six months. [6536]

Mr. Baldry: Several EU regulations may have affected the recent price of orange juice. Commission regulation (EC) No. 3223/94 introduced entry price arrangements for oranges; Council regulation (EC) No. 3290/94 applied reductions in tariffs and levies for imported orange juice; Commission regulation (EC) No. 1921/95 introduced less onerous import licence arrangements for orange juice; and Commission regulation (EC No. 2803/95 provided aid to Community processors of oranges.

Deregulation

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress his Department is making with the deregulation of food law, and if he will make a statement. [7117]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have today laid before Parliament the last of a set of regulations due to come into force on 1 January 1996, which will do much to simplify food law and remove outdated restrictions.

Eighteen food composition regulations, dating back to 1944, have been revoked and replaced by greatly simplified regulations, in just three areas, covering bread and flour, spreadable fats and cheese and cream

Fourteen food additive regulations, dating back to 1967, have been revoked and replaced by three sets of regulations, which introduce new EC requirements for colours, sweeteners and other additives. We are also allowing the use of cyclamates as food additives, since they have now been given a clean bill of health by the Government's expert advisors.

We are planning to streamline the food labelling regulations in the same way. Certain changes will be made on 1 January but more extensive revision has had to be deferred until later in 1996, while some issues of detail are resolved.

Our aim is to keep the essential parts of food law which protect the health of the general public and make sure that they have the information they need, but to dispense where we can with the elaborate rules which have built up over the years. Because simpler law is easier to understand and easier to obey, it gives better protection. Removing arbitrary restrictions gives industry greater freedom to develop new products to meet changing consumer tastes.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement about progress with making arable area payments in England. [7118]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There were 46,874 applications for arable area aid in 1995. We met the 30 September deadline for advance payment of 98 per cent. of those claims which included an oilseed element. The 2 per cent. which were unpaid were all subject to unresolved queries.

Payments under the main scheme started on 17 October and, as at 13 December, 27,209 claims—58 per cent. of the total—had been paid. Regional service centres are making every effort to clear outstanding cases by the deadline of 31 December. However, the burden of validating claims to the exacting standards required under the Community rules has proved greater than originally estimated and it now seems likely that some claims will not be paid until after the deadline. I regret this delay, but hope nevertheless that all valid claims will have been paid by the end of January.

HEALTH

Residential Care Homes, Coventry

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from the Coventry health authority and Coventry social services department have been referred *(a)* to non-profit and *(b)* to other residential and nursing homes in Coventry for each year since 1985. [4799]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the chairman of the Coventry social services committee for this information.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5564]

Mr. Horam: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report.

Worcester District General Hospital

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the completion date of the new Worcester district general hospital; and if he will make a statement. [5482]

Mr. Horam: An advertisement has been placed in the *Official Journal* of the European Union inviting private sector partnership in the development of a new Worcester district general hospital. I understand that Worcester Royal Infirmary national health service trust is currently having preliminary discussions with a number of interested parties and an intended target date of the year 2000 has been set for completion of the development.

Health Service Staff Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total revenue bill to the NHS of employing *(a)* medical and *(b)* nursing and midwifery staff in each region in each year since 1990. [4184]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the tables. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1269*, for nursing and midwifery data prior to 1993–94.

Expenditure on medical staff salaries and wages by health authorities and NHS Trusts by region in England

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Northern	103,491,666	113,081,220	133,338,052	142,248,854
Yorkshire	115,335,698	129,867,812	155,079,374	161,836,272
Trent	139,725,190	159,639,814	184,208,211	201,501,132
East Anglian	62,126,723	69,902,365	80,680,879	84,893,173
North-west Thames	120,721,842	137,031,673	156,317,128	158,966,090
North-east Thames	148,854,384	168,155,019	193,219,977	194,668,053
South-east Thames	127,686,214	141,992,686	161,892,714	169,264,669
South-west Thames	93,518,290	107,712,593	122,531,226	126,786,587
Wessex	82,274,077	94,300,110	110,619,223	116,101,553
Oxford	72,106,360	80,557,248	93,198,452	98,431,021
South Western	92,926,704	107,828,936	123,438,491	128,216,606
West Midlands	160,645,391	194,020,618	225,292,868	228,309,669
Mersey	83,382,258	107,228,536	129,735,951	113,792,162
North Western	142,292,413	162,661,024	184,633,753	189,761,324
Special health authorities	40,263,288	43,909,979	49,997,935	51,284,715
Total	1,585,350,498	1,817,889,633	2,104,184,244	2,166,151,879

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, 1991–92 to 1993–94.
2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
3. The annual accounts of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, 1990–91.

Note:

1. The figures are based upon pay costs including employers national insurance and superannuation contributions.

Expenditure on medical staff salaries and wages by health authorities and NHS Trusts by region in England 1994–95

	Expenditure £
Northern and Yorkshire	309,568,608
Trent	213,741,406
Anglian and Oxford	212,217,253
North Thames	395,960,787
South Thames	319,377,569
South and Western	262,959,641
West Midlands	229,986,427
North Western	325,433,452
Special health authorities	5,153,728
Total	2,274,398,871

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

Notes:

1. The figures are provisional.

2. The figures are based upon pay costs including employers national insurance and superannuation contributions.

Expenditure on nurses and midwives salaries and wages by health authorities and NHS Trusts in England by region 1993–94

	Expenditure £
Northern	413,134,272
Yorkshire	450,659,381
Trent	584,875,324
East Anglian	245,502,969
North-west Thames	423,533,053
North-east Thames	531,039,453
South-east Thames	453,885,371
South-west Thames	387,123,939
Wessex	357,085,742
Oxford	282,770,792
South Western	430,190,725
West Midlands	617,172,328
Mersey	302,964,999
North Western	562,107,724
Special health authorities	91,967,680
Total	6,134,013,752

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

Note:

1. The figures are based upon pay costs including employers national insurance and superannuation contributions.

Expenditure on nurses and midwives salaries and wages by health authorities and NHS Trusts by region in England 1994–95

	Expenditure £
Northern and Yorkshire	856,848,600
Trent	598,343,184
Anglian and Oxford	586,047,908
North Thames	974,093,120
South Thames	843,464,893
South and Western	807,829,246
West Midlands	624,968,890
North Western	885,259,306
Special health authorities	6,268,346
Total	6,183,123,493

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

2. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

Notes:

1. The figures are provisional.

2. The figures are based upon pay costs including employers national insurance and superannuation contributions.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to the NHS of employing non-NHS staff in each region in each year since 1990. [4183]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the tables.

Expenditure on non-NHS staff 1990–91 to 1993–94 (England)

	1990-91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Northern	2,736,772	3,502,870	4,555,193	5,175,235
Yorkshire	8,012,619	8,938,035	11,814,196	12,055,330
Trent	7,528,236	7,066,494	10,278,082	11,352,333
East Anglian	8,678,114	7,379,732	8,408,467	7,812,732
North-west Thames	49,446,428	41,251,884	39,442,561	39,649,521
North-east Thames	59,049,130	46,705,439	42,045,540	51,463,197
South-east Thames	32,399,659	25,020,793	30,912,252	28,136,097
South-west Thames	28,471,196	21,428,960	20,395,876	18,189,325
Wessex	10,181,817	9,345,128	9,704,799	11,716,646
Oxford	8,254,692	6,524,320	7,788,610	7,697,788
South Western	9,537,148	6,501,718	7,537,561	8,568,361
West Midlands	17,428,639	18,528,830	19,266,092	23,446,188
Mersey	5,644,042	7,013,053	3,592,664	4,415,339
North Western	7,695,389	8,081,628	8,747,479	9,379,745
Special health authorities	19,861,202	16,429,818	16,463,330	14,352,898
Total	274,925,083	233,718,702	240,952,702	253,410,735

Source:

1. Annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

2. Annual financial returns of NHS trusts 1991–92 to 1993–94.

Expenditure on non-NHS Staff 1994–95 (England)

	Expenditure £
Northern and Yorkshire	21,061,841
Trent	17,566,270
Anglian and Oxford	22,675,477
North Thames	122,044,374
South Thames	64,389,932
South and Western	25,429,543
West Midlands	31,786,519

Expenditure on non-NHS Staff 1994–95 (England)

	Expenditure £
North Western	17,211,015
Special health authorities	2,023,622
Total	325,188,593

Source:

1. Annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching posts.

2. Annual financial returns of NHS trusts.

Note:

The figures are provisional.

Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5581]

Mr. Horam: For the amount spent on hospitality expenditure for 1994–95, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to him on 1 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *23*. Due to technical changes in the Department's accounting system, the figure given for the Department for 1994–95 covered 13 months' expenditure. In April the procedures for recording hospitality expenditure for the Department were changed so that hospitality expenditure was recorded separately from expenditure on working lunches. The amount of expenditure on hospitality to the end of November this financial years is:

	£
Department	49,779
Agencies	44,097
Total	93,876

It is expected that hospitality expenditure for the Department will continue at the current rate for the remainder of the year. The agencies are projecting total expenditure for the year of the order of £75,000.

Tobacco

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), *Official Report*, column *223*, what is the total amount permitted to be spent each year by tobacco companies on (i) advertising, (ii) promotion and (iii) sponsorship; what mechanisms are used for establishing how these amounts are distributed amongst the companies; what sanctions exist for companies (1) exceeding these amounts, and (2) breaking the voluntary agreement in other ways; what systems are in place to verify the information provided by the tobacco industry; and if he will make a statement. [5525]

Mr. Horam: Under the new voluntary agreements which came into force on 1 January 1995, the tobacco companies have undertaken to reduce their expenditure on advertising on media other than TV and radio (TV and radio advertising are prohibited by virtue of the Broadcasting Act 1990) to 30 per cent. in aggregate of the level in the year ending 31 March 1980; with due allowance for inflation, not to exceed on sports sponsorship the level of expenditure in their financial year the greater part of which fell in 1985, and not to spend more than 15 per cent. of their total expenditure on sports sponsorship on media advertising and other promotional material directly related to the events.

The tobacco companies produce annual audited accounts relating to this expenditure so that adherence to the agreements may be monitored. Information contained in these accounts is commercial in confidence.

The tobacco companies have undertaken voluntarily to comply with these principles and have a good record of doing so.

Incubators

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provisions exist to ensure that all babies requiring incubator-based care receive such care within the hospital in which they are being treated. [6031]

(2) what procedures exist to ensure that incubator-based care can be given in *(a)* a local hospital and *(b)* any other hospital if all incubators in a given hospital are already occupied. [6032]

(3) what guidelines his Department issues in respect of the priority awarded for the treatment of babies experiencing anaphylactic shock who are deemed to require incubator-based care by their doctors. [6030]

Mr. Horam: The Department expects that sufficient incubators will be available in all units which provide care for new-born babies. It is the responsibility of local purchasers to ensure that the needs of their local population are met and that suitable arrangements are in place to provide support should facilities in any particular location be full.

Babies who are very sick, or are readmitted to hospital after discharge, would normally be expected to be treated in a neonatal or paediatric unit where a full range of services—including specialist cots for very small babies—would be provided.

Decisions on the treatment of children with anaphylactic shock, including the use of incubators—or specialist cots—if required, are clinical judgments.

Health Authority Finance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to FDL (95) 59 issued by the NHS executive on 30 November 1995, what are *(a)* the further recurrent adjustments referred to in line D1 of table 1, and how they are calculated, *(b)* the purposes for which regional specific levies are made for each region referred to in line 01 of table 1 and how they are calculated, *(c)* the elements weightings and data used to calculate the 1996–97 target for each health authority at 1995–96 prices referred to in column B of table 3, and *(d)* the elements, weightings and data used to calculate the 1996–97 target for each health authority at 1996–97 prices, referred to in column H of table 3. [6184]

Mr. Horam: All the information requested is contained in the 1996–97 health authority planned initial cash limits interim exposition booklet which, in accordance with normal practice, has been placed in the Library.

Hospital Sites, Sheffield

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money is expected to be raised by the sale or development of Middlewood hospital, Sheffield; and how much of this will be directed to the development of mental health services in Sheffield. [5772]

Mr. Horam: The Community Health Sheffield national health service trust has not yet determined its, property requirements on the site so the amount of proceeds from any forthcoming sale cannot be determined.

The authority has invested significantly more money in mental health services in Sheffield than the sale proceeds expected from Middlewood hospital.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long Fulwood hospital, Sheffield has been closed; what progress has been made on selling or redeveloping the site; what its intended future use is; and how much of any money raised will be directed into Sheffield health services. [5774]

Mr. Horam: Although Fulwood hospital was closed to patients in the early 1980s, it has continued to be used for alternative health care provision until January 1995, when the building was declared surplus to national health service requirements.

Agents and planning consultants are appointed to progress the planning potential and the subsequent sale of the site. It is expected that the site will be marketed early in 1996.

Significantly more investment has been directed into health care services than the expected sale proceeds from surplus sites. Future investment will be determined by the competing priorities and the funds available at the time.

St. Christopher's House, Cornwall

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to investigate services for disabled children in Cornwall, with particular reference to St. Christopher's house. [5848]

Mr. Bowis: St. Christopher's house provides respite care services for children with learning disabilities. The responsibilities for providing such services rests with Cornwall county council. The Department of Health has no plans to investigate these services in Cornwall.

Barnet Health Authority

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital patients were treated through Barnet health authority in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1983–84, *(c)* 1986–87 and *(d)* each year since 1989–90 and each subsequent year. [6134]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table. The information relates to patients treated by provider units within Barnet district.

In-patients—all specialities

Discharges and deaths		*Day cases*
1978	34,521	2,321
1983	36,623	4,719
1986	35,715	6,090
Ordinary admissions		
1989–90	40,138	9,534
1990–91	39,648	9,191
1991–92	44,611	10,282
1992–93	42,906	10,627
1993–94	42,757	10,247
1994–95	37,115	10,703

Source:
DH returns SH3, SH3A, KP70.

Infusion Devices

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents reported to the Medical Devices Agency or its predecessor involving *(a)* infusion devices, *(b)* over-infusion by infusion devices and *(c)* fatalities with infusion devices have occurred (i) since the start of 1985, (ii) between August 1993 and November 1994 and (iii) since August 1993. [5962]

Mr. Horam: Since January 1988, when the Medical Devices Agency's computerised database started, there have been 705 adverse incident reports involving infusion devices; 236 of these reported possible over-infusion. In the same period, there were 23 reported fatalities involving infusion devices. Between August 1993 and November 1994 there were six reported fatalities involving infusion devices. Since August 1993 there have been 18 reported fatalities involving infusion devices.

Information prior to January 1988 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Paracetamol

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many self-poisoning episodes with paracetamol occurred in each of the last five years; and how many resulted in death. [6229]

Mr. Bowis: It is not possible to identify non-fatal cases of self-poisoning by the toxic substance involved.

The latest year for which deaths from paracetamol are available is 1992.

The data are published separately for each year in table 10 of "Mortality statistics: injury and poisoning, England and Wales", series DH4, copies of which are available in the Library.

GP and Consultant Guidance

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review circular EL (91) 84. [6230]

Mr. Malone: None.

Research Projects, Sunderland

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all Department of Health funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1989 in *(a)* the city of Sunderland, *(b)* Wearside district and *(c)* Sunderland health authority identifying (i) the title, summary and duration of the pilot/trial, (ii) target population and total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot or research finding was published indicating the date of publication; and if he will give details of all other non-Department of Health research bodies or other organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [6307]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. George Bedell, chairman of Sunderland district health authority, for details of any Sunderland district health authority projects.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the reports that he received by 30 November from regional directors of the NHS executive relating to health authorities' purchasing plans for mental health services. [6747]

Mr. Bowis: An announcement will be made in due course.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the arrangements for making payments out of the mental health challenge fund. [6746]

Mr. Bowis: An announcement will be made in due course.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the London ambulance service. [7357]

Mr. Dorrell: I have approved the application for national health service trust status from the London ambulance service. It will become operational as an NHS trust from 1 April 1996.

Population Statistics

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current population of *(a)* South Hams, *(b)* the South West, *(c)* Greater London and *(d)* Bristol. [6591]

Mr. Horam: The latest available resident population estimates relate to mid-1994. The estimated populations of the requested areas are as follows:

	Thousands
Greater London	6,966.8
South-west (standard region)	4,795.7
Bristol (local authority)	399.2
South Hams (local authority)	78.8

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the population figures produced for *(a)* the South west and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole, produced as part of the last census. [6587]

Mr. Horam: Research into the accuracy of the population figures from the 1991 census in Great Britain were carried out as the results became available. Details are given in the 1991 census validation survey coverage report, copies of which are available in the Library. The published population estimates for 1991 and later years for local and health authorities are based on the 1991 census but include adjustments for estimated coverage error in the census. The 1991 census in Northern Ireland and the population estimates based on it are the responsibility of my hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the population is *(a)* male and *(b)* female. [6808]

Mr. Horam: The latest available population estimates relate to mid-1994. The estimated percentage are: male 49 per cent. female 51 per cent.

Census Questions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which areas he has chosen for the proposed new census forms pilot study; when the pilot study will take place; and if there is to be an Irish category in the ethnic origin question. [4705]

Mr. Horam: A thorough operational trial of various options being considered, for the conduct and content of the census being planned for 2001, will be held in 1997. The areas to be included have not yet been decided.

Prior to that, some small-scale tests of particular aspects are being held in various areas according to the questions being tested.

Questions to be asked in 2001 will not be decided until 1998. The feasibility of a number of suggestions is being considered, including that of an Irish category in an ethnic origin question.

Children's Refuges

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many refuges exist across the country for children who have run away from home or care; and if he will make a statement. [5332]

Mr. Bowis: There are three refuges certified by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health under section 51 of the Children Act 1989 for young people who have run away from home or care.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5611]

Mr. Horam: Ministers receive a large number of letters from hon. Members each year on a range of health issues. Officials are responsible for contributing to replies relating to areas of their responsibility. Due to the large volume of letters received, and the wide variety of subjects raised, it is not possible to quantify the involvement of officials or the overall cost of replying to letters from hon. Members.

Residential Property

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost of maintaining the Queen Mary's nurses home, Page street, Westminster. [5878]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, chairman of North Thames regional health authority, for details.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many residential properties are owned by *(a)* the national health service and *(b)* national health service trusts; and how many are currently vacant; [5881]

(2) what plans he has to publish the NHS estates survey into residential property held by the national health service and national health service trusts. [5946]

Mr. Horam: The national health service residential estate has in its ownership approximately 12,000 houses and flats.

A survey undertaken in December 1992 identified that approximately 1,800 NHS houses and flats were vacant. The survey did not separately identify those properties in ownership of NHS trusts and other NHS authorities.

A further survey is now being undertaken. It is expected that the results will be available early in 1996.

Mixed-sex Wards

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints about mixed-sex wards his Department has received in each of the last five years. [6584]

Mr. Horam: We have no accurate records of the number of complaints received.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recommendations have been made by his Department and the NHS executive to local health authorities and trust hospitals about the temporary use at a time of bed shortage of single-sex wards as mixed-sex wards in NHS hospital, and what information is gathered from health authorities about such temporary arrangements; [6583]

(2) what recommendations have been made by his Department and the NHS executive to local health authorities and trust hospitals about mixed sex wards in NHS hospitals; and what information is gathered from health authorities about mixed sex wards in NHS hospitals. [6582]

Mr. Horam: Under the patients charter hospitals are expected to treat patients with dignity and respect for their cultural and religious beliefs. In addition a new standard in the revised patients charter issued in January states:

> "Except in emergencies, you have a right to be told before you go into hospital whether it is planned to care for you in a ward for men and women. In all cases, you can expect single sex washing and toilet facilities. If you would prefer to be cared for in single sex accommodation (either in a single sex ward or "bay" area within a larger ward which offers equal privacy) your wishes will be respected whenever possible.
>
> There may be some cases, particularly emergencies, where a hospital cannot provide single sex accommodation. This is most likely to arise if you need to be looked after by a specialist nurse in an intensive care ward or in an observation space unit. It is also possible that single sex accommodation may not be available at the time proposed for your admission. If this is the case, you have the choice of accepting the immediate admission or of waiting for single sex accommodation to become available."

Guidance on the revised patients charter was given in HSG(95)13 issued on 3 March 1995. The Department does not collect information centrally on mixed-sex wards.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from medical professionals and patients' representatives regarding mixed-sex wards in NHS hospital. [6581]

Mr. Horam: We have received a small number of representations from patients' representatives but are not aware of any from health professionals.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if mixed-sex wards are being installed as part of new hospital facilities in the process of design and installation. [6585]

Mr. Horam: No. Modern wards are not designated as mixed-sex wards during design stage.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new mixed-sex wards have been created in NHS hospitals in the last 10 years also expressing the data as a percentage of the total number of (i) new hospital wards and (ii) all hospitals wards. [6586]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital Ward Survey

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the survey undertaken by the NHS on hospital wards; which parties have been consulted as part of this survey; and if he will make a statement. [6580]

Mr. Horam: The results of the survey will be published when the final report is received. The survey was voluntary and was sent to all health authorities and trusts in two national health service regions, West Midlands region and North and West region.

Food Safety

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to initiate a review of appeals procedures contained in the Food Safety Act 1990 and the 1990 Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations, following the Lanark Blue Cheese case. [6590]

Mr. Horam: The Government will consider carefully the implications of this judgment for the procedures for handling such cases in the future and will be taking this into account in the review which has been initiated of the codes of practice, made under section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990, for enforcement authorities early in 1996.

Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into (i) methods of treatment for spongiform encephalopathy, (ii) human incubation of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, (iii) the public health risks of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and (iv) the risk of transfer of Creutzfeldt Jakob disease arising from blood transfusion; [6951]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the treatment of spongiform encephalopathy. [6958]

(3) if he will evaluate recent scientific research on BSE, copies of which have been sent to him. [6974]

(4) if he will list the scientific research evaluated by the Chief Medical Officer in respect of the safety of British beef. [6968]

(5) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the infection of humans with asymptomatic bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [6962]

(6) what support his Department proposes to give to the spongiform encephalopathy research compaign to expand its work. [6945]

Mr. Horam: The Government receive independent expert advice on all matters relating to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, including bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, from the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee, chaired by Professor John Pattison.

The committee has advised that there is currently no scientific evidence that BSE can be transmitted to humans or that eating beef causes CJD. Equally, the available evidence does not suggest that CJD can be transmitted via blood.

In February, as part of its continuing work to maintain an overview of research into TSEs, the committee produced a report, "A Summary of Present Knowledge and Research". Copies of the report are available in the Library.

SEAC, at its next meeting, will be considering the priorities for additional research into spongiform encephalopathies and the agents which cause them.

The Department has not received a formal approach from the spongiform encephalopathy research campaign, but will consider detailed proposals and any new evidence that are presented.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

In 1994–95 the MRC spent approximately £800,000 on research aimed at unravelling the nature of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. It is hoped that the research will not only increase understanding of some of the basic biological processes involved in dementing diseases in man, but will also provide pointers to preventative public health measures.

A series of studies also funded by the Department have recently been completed at the Institute for Animal Health, Edinburgh into time-temperature combinations required to inactivate BSE and related agents.

The Department and the Scottish Office jointly fund the national CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh. The unit monitors and investigates the epidemiology of the disease, paying particular attention to occupation and eating habits, so that any change in the pattern of CJD can be detected. The unit produces annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department is conducting strain typing studies on all human cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [7215]

Mr. Horam: The Department is not currently conducting strain typing studies on all human cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the blood of patients inoculated with growth hormone is used in transfusions. [6793]

Mr. Horam: No. Those who have received pituitary derived human growth hormone are excluded from giving blood.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account was taken of the advisory committee on dangerous pathogens recommendations on the handling of the liver of cattle that may be infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the Chief Medical Officer's advice on eating bovine liver. [6956]

Mr. Horam: The advisory committee on dangerous pathogens guidance relates to the handling of tissue which is known or suspected to be infected with any transmissible spongiform encephalopathy agent in specific experimental or laboratory situations. Any infectivity if present in these circumstances could pose a potential risk and the ACDP advice, based on studies with scrapie, is a sensible precautionary measure.

This is distinct from the issue of liver for human consumption because affected cattle do not enter the food chain. In addition, all evidence supports the view that liver does not transmit the infective agent.

Access Committee for England

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will outline the consultation process that has been carried out in the review of the access committee for England, listing details of organisations and Government Departments that have been or will be formally consulted; [3011]

(2) if he will make a statement about his Department's plans for the continued funding of the access committee for England. [2915]

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health.

A working party comprising officials from the Department of Social Security, Department of Health and Department of the Environment is reviewing the committee's future. It is working closely with the committee itself and is also seeking the views of other Government Departments and interested organisations. The working party is expected to report shortly where upon Ministers will decide how to proceed.

Care Programme Approach

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *527*, how many health authorities and trusts have adopted the care programme approach to date; and how many have not. [6916]

Mr. Bowis: The care programme approach has been adopted in all districts.

GP Prescribing

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of patient compliance on the cost-effectiveness of general practitioner prescribing. [6733]

Mr. Malone: My Department has recently begun to commission studies on prescribing. One of the priority areas is patient adherence or compliance.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a full copy of the protocols on which the Prodigy prescribing trial is based, indicating the medicines listed by Prodigy. [6735]

Mr. Malone: The guidelines used in the trials will be published with the first interim report which is due in mid-year 1996.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the results of the Prodigy evaluation, including changes in health care delivery and health outcomes before any decision is taken on whether to extend it; and if he will list those responsible for evaluating the project, indicating what expert advice will be taken. [6737]

Mr. Malone: Prodigy is a research and development project, which is being independently evaluated by the Sowerby unit for primary care informatics at Newcastle university. Findings and expert references will be published along with the evaluation report. Future decisions on the project will be taken in the light of the research findings.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the GP practices in which the Prodigy prescribing system is being piloted. [6732]

Mr. Malone: It is considered inappropriate, at this stage of the research project, to make public the names of the general practitioners who have volunteered to participate.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the cost of the Prodigy pilot; and if he will estimate the cost of installing such a system for all GPs. [6736]

Mr. Malone: The Department of Health is investing an estimated £1.5 million in the project. In addition, some development costs are being met by the participating information technology software companies. Future implementation costs will depend on the findings of the evaluation and subsequent decisions.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent health outcomes will form part of the evaluation of the Prodigy pilot prescribing system. [6734]

Mr. Malone: The initial phase of Prodigy is designed to test the concept of computer-aided prescribing decision support, the acceptability of such systems to general practitioners, and the impact on their prescribing and patient consultations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medicines *(a)* are listed in the British national formulary, *(b)* have product licences in the UK and *(c)* are listed in the choice options in the pilot prescribing system, Prodigy. [6738]

Mr. Malone: Approximately 900 medical substances and 4,000 individual preparations are listed in the British national formulary. There are currently around 17,000 granted marketing authorisations or product licences in the United Kingdom. The Prodigy system currently provides around 600 drug choices, plus an option to access all drugs within GPs' existing computerised systems.

Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department established the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy; and how much money was *(a)* allocated to and *(b)* spent on the enquiry in each year since it was established, showing separately the sums (i) for central organisation and analysis, (ii) allocated to NHS regions and districts, by region and (iii) allocated for other purposes. [5275]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* The confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy was established in 1992. The financial information requested is not available for 1992–93. Information for the following years is as follows:

Amounts allocated to the inquiry, which do not include accommodation, postage and telephones for the central secretariat are:

1993–94 = £1.886 million

1994–95 = £2.107 million

1995–96 = £2.317 million.

Initial allocations to regions for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are not available. Allocations by regions to districts for 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 are also not available centrally. Initial allocations for 1995–96 are:

	£000
	1995–96
Central Organisation, reports, special projects, and special inquiries	1,107
Northern and Yorkshire	169
Trent	121
Anglia and Oxford	137
North Thames	164
South Thames	165
South and West	135
West Midlands	150
North West	169

Amounts spent on the Inquiry:

	1993–94 £000	*1994–95 £000*
Total	1,761	2,107
Central organisation, reports, special projects and special inquiries	71	177
Northern	113	288
Yorkshire	186	
Trent	153	225
East Anglia	80	215
Oxford	88	
North-west Thames	101	244
North-east Thames	109	
South-east Thames	125	137
South-west Thames	93	
Wessex	90	379
South Western	181	
West Midlands	175	248
Mersey	87	194
North Western	109	

1. Totals may not exactly add due to rounding.

2. Total Expenditure for 1995–96 is not yet available.

Assaults on NHS staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many assaults on national health service staff have been reported to his Department in each of the last five years. [6915]

(2) what information his Department collects on assaults against staff. [6917]

Mr. Horam: Only a very small number of assaults on national health service staff are reported to the Department each year, as this is primarily a local management matter.

Government Procurement

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6663]

Mr. Horam: It is not the Department's policy to discriminate in favour of large or small companies when letting contracts. The Department's tendering process includes an invitation to all companies, no matter what their size, to bid for departmental contracts. Their bids are subjected to an objective evaluation and the firm offering the best value for money is awarded the contract. A review of these procedures is not, therefore, necessary.

Nurses and Midwives

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for September 1994 the whole-time equivalent numbers of nurses and midwives in the NHS by each of the former regional health authority areas; [2009]

(2) if he will list the whole-time equivalent numbers of nurses and midwives in the NHS by each of the former regional health authority areas for each year since 1989 to 1993 inclusive. [2008]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The information is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services qualified and unqualified nursing and midwifery staff, excluding agency staff and learners, and general medical service practice nurses, by region

Whole-time equivalents

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[1]	*1994*
Total	341,130	344,260	353,630	353,170	350,020	346,700
Northern	24,040	23,850	24,530	23,670	24,300	23,380
Yorkshire	25,530	25,710	26,450	25,310	26,060	25,770
Trent	32,640	33,650	34,780	34,220	35,000	35,150
East Anglia	14,220	14,520	14,540	14,600	14,750	14,890
North-west Thames	22,170	22,020	23,560	23,250	21,450	21,090
North-east Thames	26,410	26,910	27,650	27,220	25,720	25,710
South-east Thames	25,650	25,480	25,120	26,110	23,260	24,100
South-west Thames	19,940	19,740	20,180	21,340	20,530	19,770
Wessex	20,420	21,480	22,050	21,240	23,140	22,170
Oxford	15,120	15,400	16,030	16,120	16,960	15,990
South Western	23,960	24,750	25,280	25,410	25,980	26,350
West Midlands	35,860	36,320	36,330	37,800	36,960	36,230
Mersey	18,750	18,360	18,030	18,050	17,460	16,910

NHS hospital and community health services qualified and unqualified nursing and midwifery staff, excluding agency staff and learners, and general medical service practice nurses, by region

Whole-time equivalents

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[1]	*1994*
North Western	32,200	32,150	32,640	32,470	32,230	32,400
SHAs and others[2]	4,210	3,930	6,460	6,350	6,230	6,810
Not included in the above:						
HCHS learners[3]	62,100	58,840	47,340	34,740	21,040	11,080
Project 2000 students[3]	n/a	3,000	10,500	18,300	28,000	32,000

Notes:

[1] Comparisons between 1993 and other years at sub-national level should be treated with caution. Changes over a longer period of time are likely to provide more reliable comparisons.

[2] "SHAs and others" include staff in SHAs, FHSAs and other special authorities.

[3] Learners are nursers on traditional nurse training courses, spending the majority of their time on patient care, and are directly employed by NHS HCHS. Project 2000 training was introduced in 1989 and has gradually replaced traditional pre-registration nurse training. Project 2000 training is predominantly college based, and students are funded by bursaries. Figures for Project 2000 students are headcounts and should not be added to figures which are whole-time equivalents.

1. All HCHS figures are at 30 September of each year, and GMS figures as at 1 October of each year.

All figures are whole-time equivalents, rounded to the nearest 10.

'n/a' denotes not applicable.

Sources:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census.

Department of Health bi-annual census of General Medical Practitioners.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prevention of Terrorism Legislation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism legislation are still operative; and how many apply to *(a)* matters concerned with the Irish troubles and *(b)* other. [5040]

Mr. Howard: Thirty-five exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism Act remain in force. The power to make exclusion orders contained in that Act applies only to terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will repeal the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 following the recent European Court of Justice ruling and the ceasefires. [4808]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* No. The recent European Court of Justice ruling was confined to procedural matters and did not question the continued need for the powers in the Prevention of Terrorism Act. We will maintain powers to deal with terrorism—from whatever source—for as long as the threat remains.

Legislative Repeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2033]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* None.

Missing Children

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give an estimate of the number of children and young people under 18 years who have been reported missing this year and the estimated statistics of missing children for every year over the last 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [5333]

Mr. Maclean: Statistics are not collated centrally of the number of missing children reported to the police, the majority of whom are found within a few days. A National Missing Persons Bureau was established in New Scotland Yard in April 1994 in order to provide a central register and matching facility for vulnerable missing persons, including juveniles, missing for more than 28 days or otherwise of special concern. The following numbers have been referred to the bureau since its opening.

	1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995	*1 April 1995 to 30 November 1995*
Males under 14	50	24
Males 14 to 17	118	60
Females under 14	48	23
Females 14 to 17	227	137

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-operation and co-ordinated action his Department has undertaken with local authorities and the National Missing Persons Bureau to locate missing children; and if he will make a statement. [5334]

Mr. Maclean: The Government established and fund the National Missing Persons Bureau as a clearing house of information on vulnerable missing persons. Tracing missing persons, including children, remains an operational matter for the police service.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current method of categorising missing children; and if he will make a statement. [5335]

Mr. Maclean: Recording missing persons is an operational matter for police forces. A range of information may be kept concerning missing children, including their age, appearance, the circumstances in which they are missing and any particular cause for concern.

Dangerous Substances (Notification)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations govern *(a)* the holding by fire brigades of lists of premises where significant quantities of pesticides and related chemicals such as sheep dips are stored and *(b)* procedures for not using large volumes of water in the event of fires at such premises; and if he will make a statement. [5430]

Mr. Sackville: Fire authorities have arrangements, under section 1(1)(d) of the Fire Services Act 1947, for obtaining, by inspection or otherwise, information required for firefighting purposes with respect to the character of premises in their areas. Where premises contain significant quantities of any dangerous substance, the occupier has to inform the local authority under the Notification of Dangerous Substances (Notification and Marking of Sites) Regulations 1990.

The Home Office has issued detailed guidance to the fire service on procedures for using water in the event of fires at such premises.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5620]

Mr. Howard: My Department employs no staff exclusively to answer letters from hon. Members. Answers are prepared by a large number of officials as part of their normal duties. No estimate is readily available of the current overall cost of replies. However, in 1994, Home Office Ministers received more than 21,000 letters from hon. Members.

National Lottery

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the national lottery's effect on leading United Kingdom charities; and if he will make a statement. [4777]

Mr. Sackville: The Government made a commitment during the passage of the National Lottery Act 1993 that they would monitor the income of charitable organisations before and after the introduction of the national lottery. This will have two main elements.

First, the Home Office will be obtaining information from the family expenditure survey to look at trends in individual giving to charity. Early results should be available in spring 1996.

Secondly, the Home Office has announced a research programme which has been developed in consultation with the voluntary sector. It will look in detail at all the main sources of charitable income, and will monitor changes over the three years before the introduction of the national lottery, the year of its introduction and the following two years. Detailed analysis of earlier years and the first full, post-lottery year will be available in spring 1997.

It is still too early to make a definitive assessment of the effect of the national lottery on charitable income, but two things can be said with confidence. First, the national lottery could make available to the National Lottery Charities Board up to £300 million every year to support the charitable, benevolent and philanthropic sector throughout the United Kingdom—in addition to the hundreds of millions of pounds of awards to charitable organisations in the arts, sport and heritage sectors made by the other lottery distributors. Secondly, if people wish to give to charity, the most effective way is to give directly to their favoured cause.

Mr. Abiodum Igbindu

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who in his Department or the immigration service authorised the disclosure of information concerning the refusal to grant asylum in the United Kingdom to Mr. Abiodum Igbindu; [4851]

(2) what is the policy of his Department in respect of disclosure of information about individual cases, concerning immigration and asylum, to third parties, and what action he is taking in respect of the disclosure of information concerning Mr. Abiodum Igbindu; [4852]

(3) what assessment he has made of the source of the disclosure to third parties of personal details relating to Mr. Abiodum Igbindu. [4856]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 8 December 1995]:* Details of individual cases are not disclosed unless applicants—or someone acting on their behalf—have chosen to make public details of their cases and allegations about their consideration. In those circumstances, it is the well-established practice of the Home Office to give information in response to inquiries.

In the case of Mr. Igbindu, the applicant chose to release information to the press. In accordance with normal practice, the Home Office press office responded to media inquiries.

Crime Prevention

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the contacts his Department has with the Prince's Trust in respect of assistance to young people to avoid crime; and if he will make a statement. [5684]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* Officials from the Home Office meet representatives from the Prince's Trust from time to time to discuss issues of common interest, including means of preventing young people from involvement in crime.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what practical and financial arrangements he intends to make to facilitate the return to the United Kingdom of asylum seekers whose appeals against removal to a third country are allowed. [6169]

Miss Widdecombe: It is not our practice to provide financial assistance to enable successful appellants from abroad to travel to this country. Other practical issues such as documentation are under consideration.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for *(a)* arranging for legal advice and *(b)* allowing instructions to be given to legal representatives in respect of asylum seekers removed to a third country who are appealing against the decision. [6173]

Miss Widdecombe: Asylum seekers will be advised of their appeal rights before they are removed and how to seek assistance. Arrangements for instructing legal representatives after removal will be a matter for appellants, as is already the case in relation to appeals from abroad under the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the German Government's procedures in respect of a white list of countries in relation to asylum and immigration. [6177]

Miss Widdecombe: Our understanding is that under asylum legislation in Germany selected countries have been designated as "safe states of origin". Designation leads to a presumption that there is in general no risk of persecution and claims by nationals of designated countries may be treated as manifestly unfounded unless the facts presented in individual cases outweigh the presumption. Claims are examined under a shortened procedure with restricted appeal opportunities. Countries which are currently designated as "safe states of origin" are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Ghana, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Senegal and the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those third countries which his Department regards as safe for the purposes of clause 2 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; and to what extent the decision on the safety of third countries will be left to immigration officials. [6191]

Miss Widdecombe: We treat each case on its merits in the light of our information about the asylum procedures of the third country concerned. Over 80 per cent. of removals are to France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Decisions are taken by a unit within the asylum division specialising in safe third country cases.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has proposed to comply with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recommendations of August 1994 on readmission agreements covering refugees sent to third countries. [6193]

Miss Widdecombe: There is no obligation to consult the authorities of a third country before removing someone there on safe third country grounds. The Government support the early implementation of the Dublin convention, which they ratified in 1992, which sets out criteria for determining which European Union member state has responsibility for considering a particular asylum application.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what special procedures will apply in respect of applicants for asylum who have immediate family resident in the United Kingdom. [6170]

Miss Widdecombe: An asylum applicant is not normally returned to a safe third country if his spouse or minor dependent children are already lawfully present here. In such a case, the asylum claim is considered substantively. We have no plans to change this arrangement.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for ensuring that asylum seekers removed to a third country under his certificate will have access to legal advice prior to their removal. [6175]

Miss Widdecombe: Asylum seekers refused leave to enter at a port are advised how to contact the refugee legal centre.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends to take in cases where asylum seekers sent to a third country are *(a)* refused admission by that country and *(b)* returned by the third country to Britain. [6171]

Miss Widdecombe: In such cases the asylum claim will, as now, normally be considered substantively by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a person appealing from a third country against a decision by him to send him to that country will be eligible for legal aid for legal advice and for assistance in the preparation and conduct of the appeal. [6174]

Miss Widdecombe: He will be eligible for assistance and representation from the refugee legal centre, which is grant aided by the Home Office, and, subject to a means test, for advice and assistance under the legal aid green form scheme.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to ensure the safety of those asylum seekers who are removed to third countries. [6192]

Miss Widdecombe: We will return asylum seekers to a safe third country only in cases where the proposed requirements in clause 2(1) of the Asylum and Immigration Bill are met. Our practice already complies with those requirements.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what means he expects an asylum seeker removed to a third country to lodge an appeal against the certificate issued by the Home Secretary under clause 2 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [6194]

Miss Widdecombe: The same arrangements will apply as apply now for appeals from abroad under the Immigration Act 1971. The asylum applicant will be provided with an appeal form prior to removal. It will be open to him to send the form by post from abroad or to have notice of appeal lodged on his behalf after removal by a person in this country.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which categories of appellants bringing appeals under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 will be affected by changes in respect of giving and calling oral evidence at their appeals; and how. [6168]

Miss Widdecombe: No such proposals have been made, but my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor intends to bring forward shortly proposals for amending the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1993 in a number of respects.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has in respect of the appeals procedure for asylum seekers removed to third countries in relation to certificates issued by him under the terms of clause 3 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [6172]

Miss Widdecombe: We will indicate during the passage of the Bill what adjustments to appeal procedures will be proposed for appeals under clause 3.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account was taken of the provisions of article 3 of the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees in drawing up measures contained in the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [6176]

Miss Widdecombe: We are satisfied that our proposals are compatible with article 3.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what views were sought from representatives of local government bodies on the implications for them of the Immigration and Asylum Bill. [6478]

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 December, *Official Report* column *733*.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the consultancy report into asylum appeals commissioned by the Home Office last year to which he referred in his oral statement of 20 November, *Official Report*, column 337. [6332]

Mr. Kirkhope: A copy of the report by KPMG Peat Marwick on the operation of the asylum appeals procedures was placed in the Library on 8 February this year.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants seeking political asylum arrived *(a)* on direct flights from their home countries and *(b)* on flights that landed beforehand in safe third countries in each of the last three years. [5897]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5745]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The direct cost of staffing and professional advice for administration of the private finance initiative policy generally is estimated at £230,000 per annum.

Administration costs are also incurred on development of every capital project, whether financed directly or through PFI. These costs are not recorded separately.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5746]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 7 December, column *356.*

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5739]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is not available in the form requested. It is a fundamental principle when considering schemes under the private finance initiative that what is assessed is the best value for money in providing a specified service, taking into account all aspects of design, building, finance and operation as a unified whole.

Missing Persons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment the Missing Persons Bureau has made of the benefits of holding data in respect of missing persons before they have been missing for 28 days. [5995]

Mr. Maclean: Details may be notified to the bureau before 28 days where the circumstances in which a person is missing are of particular concern to the notifying police force. It would not be practicable for the bureau to be notified of all such cases, as the majority of missing persons are found within a few days.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for providing the national missing persons helpline with funding for the work it carries out at the request of the police service. [6041]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Government received an application for funding the helpline when it formed part of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, and has received a number of other representations suggesting public funding should be provided. There are no plans to provide public funding for the organisation. The helpline may apply to the National Lottery Charities Board and to other sources of funding available to voluntary organisations.

Police Service Strength

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the number of police officers per 1,000 of the population per authority area and the average number of police officers per 1,000 of the population per authority area for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [6244]

(2) what was the number of police officers per 1,000 of the population for each year since 1979 for each police authority area. [6274]

Mr. Maclean: Information on police to population ratios can be found in the appendix to the annual reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary. Copies of these are in the Library.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the manpower of each police force in respect of *(a)* numbers of police officers and *(b)* numbers of civilian support staff on 1 November for each of the last five years for which figures are available. [6273]

Mr. Maclean: Information on police strength was collected at the end of each month until April this year. Data on police service strength are now provided twice a year. Information for the last five years is contained in the tables:

Police force strength in England and Wales 1991 to 1995

As at 31 October

Force	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*'1995*
Avon and Somerset	3,069	3,068	3,048	3,025	2,986
Bedfordshire	1,097	1,129	1,157	1,123	1,116
Cambridgeshire	1,241	1,262	1,278	1,270	1,254
Cheshire	1,880	1,888	1,858	1,913	1,951
City of London	814	801	878	889	869
Cleveland	1,477	1,490	1,430	1,442	1,430
Cumbria	1,180	1,192	1,205	1,179	1,144
Derbyshire	1,711	1,803	1,786	1,803	1,762
Devon and Cornwall	2,871	2,918	2,917	2,885	2,872
Dorset	1,291	1,317	1,302	1,287	1,272
Durham	1,371	1,390	1,379	1,357	1,377
Essex	2,886	2,923	2,964	2,909	2,897
Gloucestershire	1,174	1,154	1,144	1,171	1,142
Greater Manchester	6,985	7,084	7,075	6,980	7,026
Hampshire	3,182	3,269	3,272	3,259	3,307
Hertfordshire	1,662	1,690	1,693	1,691	1,704
Humberside	2,023	2,027	2,029	2,038	2,025
Kent	3,028	3,099	3,183	3,137	3,100
Lancashire	3,211	3,203	3,149	3,196	3,195
Leicestershire	1,823	1,846	1,829	1,835	1,860
Lincolnshire	1,202	1,188	1,212	1,214	1,164
Merseyside	4,616	4,687	4,690	4,688	4,536
Metropolitan police	28,202	27,804	27,695	27,627	27,395
Norfolk	1,416	1,419	1,437	1,419	1,392
Northamptonshire	1,156	1,197	1,190	1,171	1,161
Northumbria	3,467	3,578	3,595	3,593	3,611
North Yorkshire	1,389	1,411	1,349	1,323	1,311
Nottinghamshire	2,334	2,343	2,360	2,345	2,314

Police force strength in England and Wales 1991 to 1995

As at 31 October

Force	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	[1]*1995*
South Yorkshire	2,996	3,013	3,022	3,030	3,041
Staffordshire	2,198	2,196	2,194	2,207	2,190
Suffolk	1,209	1,240	1,224	1,209	1,158
Surrey	1,672	1,684	1,663	1,673	1,656
Sussex	2,973	3,007	2,977	2,949	3,020
Thames Valley	3,731	3,843	3,886	3,887	3,760
Warwickshire	1,009	1,007	1,031	1,038	983
West Mercia	2,031	2,061	2,057	2,042	2,008
West Midlands	6,867	6,935	6,961	6,991	7,078
West Yorkshire	5,171	5,095	5,005	5,036	5,122
Wiltshire	1,203	1,257	1,272	1,260	1,236
Dyfed Powys	949	966	968	980	977
Gwent	1,004	1,008	996	1,004	1,006
North Wales	1,349	1,369	1,359	1,369	1,352
South Wales	3,152	3,182	3,159	3,048	2,954
Total all forces	125,272	126,043	125,878	125,492	124,710

[1] As at 30 September 1995, the latest data available.

Civilian and traffic warden strength in England and Wales for 1991 to 1995

As at 31 October

Force	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	[1]*1995*
Avon and Somerset	1,058	1,254	1,338	1,325	1,294
Bedfordshire	419	420	439	477	519
Cambridgeshire	496	491	488	488	546
Cheshire	533	581	615	641	730
City of London	367	378	384	332	338
Cleveland	464	491	521	525	575
Cumbria	427	446	459	484	462
Derbyshire	553	635	657	670	751
Devon and Cornwall	1,162	1,182	1,213	1,224	1,237
Dorset	610	630	625	665	671
Durham	554	563	560	508	526
Essex	1,173	1,200	1,279	1,329	1,270
Gloucestershire	402	411	420	425	464
Greater Manchester	2,460	2,693	2,815	2,880	2,904
Hampshire	1,125	1,169	1,212	1,317	1,409
Hertfordshire	645	665	669	699	921
Humberside	740	760	733	708	670
Kent	1,112	1,230	1,228	1,181	1,290
Lancashire	1,224	1,190	1,164	1,243	1,419
Leicestershire	776	758	724	755	747
Lincolnshire	481	509	516	528	452
Merseyside	1,705	1,757	1,781	1,773	1,797
Metropolitan police	15,723	16,205	16,324	15,767	16,762
Norfolk	480	499	531	548	553
Northamptonshire	450	467	518	500	492
Northumbria	1,356	1,381	1,330	1,397	1,402
North Yorkshire	469	483	464	522	537
Nottinghamshire	869	802	871	934	1,022
South Yorkshire	945	986	1,211	1,283	1,292
Staffordshire	779	781	773	763	800
Suffolk	537	556	543	544	520
Surrey	600	650	709	721	796
Sussex	1,073	1,131	1,153	1,182	1,219
Thames Valley	1,562	1,603	1,647	1,767	1,913
Warwickshire	348	356	364	363	412
West Mercia	914	967	969	995	1,038
West Midlands	2,534	2,717	2,729	2,859	2,957
West Yorkshire	2,023	2,034	2,032	2,092	2,149
Wiltshire	504	523	516	501	521
Dyfed Powys	268	287	304	311	335
Gwent	334	346	350	350	380
North Wales	469	491	507	484	472
South Wales	1,173	1,180	1,279	1,215	1,240
Total all forces	51,916	53,858	54,953	55,275	57,790

[1] As at 30 September 1995, the latest data available.

Police Force (Civilianisation)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his targets for civilianisation of the police force. [6279]

Mr. Maclean: The allocation of staff within a police force is a matter for the chief constable. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary encourages forces to civilianise posts in appropriate cases, and monitors progress as part of its inspection process.

Fire Safety Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to introduce new fire safety regulations to comply with the European framework directive and the workplace directive. [6575]

Mr. Sackville: We intend to publish new draft regulations as early as possible next year.

Illegal Immigrants (Employment)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost to employers of implementing the proposed sanctions against the employment of illegal immigrants. [6287]

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Asylum and Immigration Bill, published on 29 November.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he plans to introduce to ensure European Community nationals seeking employment in the United Kingdom are not illegally discriminated against as a result of the proposed sanctions in respect of the employment of illegal immigrants. [6289]

Miss Widdecombe: Under the proposals set out in the consultation document which we issued on 20 November, a European economic area passport or identity document would be one of the documents regarded as demonstrating entitlement to live and work in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of illegal immigrants working currently in the United Kingdom. [6288]

Miss Widdecombe: As my right hon. and learned Friend made clear in the House on 11 December, the precise scale of illegal working is unknown. However, the immigration service detected more than 10,000 people working here illegally in 1994.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he plans to give to employers concerning the proposed sanctions against the employment of illegal immigrants; and what the cost of providing that information will be. [6290]

Miss Widdecombe: As explained in the consultation document issued on 20 November, the Home Office will provide full advice to employers about the new offence and its implications for employers, including leaflets and a helpline number to contact if they have any doubts about documentation presented to them. It is not possible at this stage to provide estimates of the cost involved, but it is unlikely to be substantial.

National DNA Database

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects a national DNA database to be established; which police forces throughout the United Kingdom he would expect to have access to this facility; and when this will include Scottish forces. [5785]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The DNA database currently operated by the Forensic Science Service became operational in April 1995, after enabling amendments to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 had come into force. All police forces in England and Wales have access to it.

Separate legislation has been enacted to allow the establishment of databases in Scotland and Northern Ireland and will come into force in the first half of next year. We intend that police forces throughout the United Kingdom will in due course have access to all the data.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5984]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys into aspects of public attitudes and opinions are in the list, together with the relevant policy area. Most research conducted for the Home Office is published and widely disseminated, and therefore, all interested individuals and organisations have access to the results. The exception to this is research commissioned for internal management purposes. The fee paid to successful contractors is not shown as this is regarded by the Central Statistical Office as a matter of commercial confidentiality.

1993

Specials creative and development research

Date commissioned/notified: April 1993

Agency: Cragg, Ross and Dawson

Sample size: 48

Location: Great Britain

Timetable: April–May 1993

Policy area: Special Constables

Purpose: Reactions to the new advertising campaign for the Specials.

Eleven discussion groups plus an interview survey of c1200 women and ethnic minorities in England, Scotland and Wales

Date commissioned/notified: April 1993

Agency: Harris Research Centre

Sample size: 110

Location: Great Britain

Timetable: June–July 1993

Policy area: Fire service

Purpose: To explore reasons why potentially eligible women and members of ethnic minority groups might wish or not wish to apply for work as fire fighters.

Telephone survey of drug usage

Date commissioned/notified May 1993

Agency: RSL and Sheffield University

Sample size: 1,500

Location: Greater Manchester

Timetable: May 1993–January 1994

Policy area: Drugs prevention

Purpose: To explore urban—rural variations in drug use, attitudes to drugs and drugs prevention.

Car crime advertising

Date commissioned/notified: August 1993

Agency: Sample Surveys

Sample size: 500

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: September–October 1993

Policy area: Car crime prevention

Purpose: To examine the recall of a car crime campaign and changing attitudes to car crime.

Smoke alarms home audit

Date commissioned/notified: June 1993

Agency: GFK Marketing Services

Sample size: 20,000

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: September 1993–February 1994

Policy area: Fire prevention

Purpose: To measure smoke alarm ownership and maintenance procedures.

Omnibus Survey questions on public experiences of and attitudes towards the police. 2,000 adults in England and Wales

Date commissioned/notified: September 1993

Agency: OPCS

Sample size: 2,000

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: October 1993

Policy area: Attitudes to the Police

Purpose: To assess public response to the police service Quality of Service Programme.

Special Constables recruitment advertising research

Date commissioned/notified: November 1993

Agency: BMRB

Sample size: 600

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: November–December 1993

Policy area: Special Constables

Purpose: To examine awareness of and attitudes towards the Special Constabulary, including the recent recruitment advertising.

1994

1994 British crime survey

Date Commissioned/notified: April 1993

Agency: OPCS

Sample size: 14,500

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: January–March 1994 (fieldwork)

Policy area: General attitudes to crime and crime related issues

Purpose: A random sample of the general public were interviewed in relation to their experiences of crime. The interview also collected information on a wide range of public attitudes and opinions on such issues as attitudes to the police, awareness of neighbourhood watch, worries and fear of crime, crime prevention measures, and perceptions of crime.

Smoke alarms post advertising research

Date commissioned/notified: January 1994

Agency: BMRB

Sample size: 2,000

Location: England

Timetable: February–March 1994

Policy area: Fire prevention

Purpose: A post advertisement survey of adults in England and Wales regarding smoke alarm ownership, maintenance, fire precautions and knowledge of the effects of fire.

Specials creative development

Date commissioned/notified: February 1994

Agency: Reflexions Market Research Ltd.

Sample size: 64

Location: England

Timetable: February 1994

Policy area: Special Constables

Purpose: A survey of a number of adults in England asking their opinions of new advertising executions for the specials; including perceived target audience, communication, motivation potential (to joining the specials) style and tone of voice of advertising.

Specials advertising evaluation

Date commissioned/notified: March 1994

Agency: BMRB

Sample size: 1320

Location: Granada TV Region

Timetable: March-June 1994

Policy area: Special Constables

Purpose: Research measuring awareness of advertising, knowledge and awareness of specials.

International commercial crime survey

Date commissioned/notified: January 1994

Agency: BMRB

Sample size: 4000

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: January 1994-December 1995

Policy area: Retail Crime

Purpose: Information gathered will help development of national and local government strategies for crime prevention.

Fifteen discussion groups amongst residents of five areas currently served by 'Parish Special Constables'

Date commissioned/notified: April 1994

Agency: Tim Grosvenor Associates

Sample Size: 150

Location: Five Villages in Kent, Dorset, Derbys, and North Yorks having "Parish Special Constables".

Timetable: May-June 1994

Policy area: Parish Special Constables

Purpose: To assess public reactions to the Parish Special Constables initiative.

Immigration and nationality user survey

Date commissioned/notified: September 1994

Agency: Public Attitude Surveys Ltd.

Sample size: 60

Location: Glasgow, West Midlands, London and the South East Timetable: October-December 1994

Policy area: Immigration

Purpose: A qualitative survey of Immigration Department applicants and representatives to establish the most important quality of service aspects from a users prospective. Concentrates on issues such as provision of information, speed of response, clarity of correspondence, etc. if not concerned with users'.

Survey of 500 persons living in the London area and currently eligible to apply for UK citizenship

Date commissioned/notified: August 1994

Agency: SCPR

Sample size: 500

Location: Greater London

Timetable: February 1995-April 1995

Policy area: UK Citizenship

Purpose: Applicants and non-applicants were questioned about their reasons for applying/not applying. To assist workload planning by B4 Division of Immigration and Nationality Department.

Smoke alarms post advertising research

Date commissioned: December 1994

Agency: BMRB

Sample size: 600

Location: England and Wales

Timetable: January 1995-February 1995

Policy area: Fire prevention

Purpose: Survey of adults in England and Wales regarding smoke alarm ownership, maintenance, and awareness and recall of the advertising.

Knives

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ban the free sale of *(a)* hunting knives, *(b)* bayonets, *(c)* commando knives and *(d)* other war memorabilia that may be used for illegal purposes; and if he will make a statement. [6010]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend will consider adding to the list of knives and other weapons, the sale of which is already prohibited, any knife which has no legitimate use and which can be defined in law in a way which satisfactorily distinguishes it from knives which do have a legitimate purpose. So far as war memorabilia are concerned, firearms and ammunition are subject to the normal licensing requirements of the firearms legislation.

Self-confessed Murderers

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many self-confessed murderers remain at large whose precise location are known to his office, the Crown Prosecution Service and the police. [6891]

Mr. Kirkhope: The statistics the hon. Member seeks are not available.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the family of Anthony Robin Fletcher, murdered in London in 1967, about the consequences of their knowing the identity and whereabouts of the murderer. [6886]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Home Office has been in contact a number of times with Mr. Fletcher's son. Officials have discussed the case at length with him and are aware of, and sympathetic to, the family's situation.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met his United States counterpart to discuss the extradition of a self-confessed murderer from the United States of America to stand trial in the United Kingdom. [6892]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases have been brought or supported by the Commission for Racial Equality in the last year for which figures are available in cases where bias in favour of *(a)* white applicants by white employers, *(b)* black applicants by black employers and *(c)* Asian applicants by Asian employers was alleged; and if he will make a statement. [6942]

Mr. Kirkhope: This information is not recorded centrally by the Commission for Racial Equality and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name the members of the Commission for Racial Equality; if he will indicate in each case the date and duration of appointment and the ethnic background; and if he will make a statement on the qualities, experience or other position which made the individual suitable for such appointment. [6940]

Mr. Kirkhope: The posts of commissioner at the Commission for Racial Equality are the personal appointment of my right hon. and learned Friend. They are initially appointed for a two-year period with the possibility of further extensions up to a total of five years.

The current commissioners are:

Name	*Appointed*	*Until*
Mr. Herman Ouseley	19 April 1993	18 April 1998
Dr. Raj Chandran	1 January 1993	31 December 1996
Mr. Michael Hastings	1 May 1993	30 April 1997
Mr. Bob Purkiss	1 May 1993	30 April 1997
Dr. Dwain Neil	1 May 1993	30 April 1997
Mrs. Marie Cunnigham	1 May 1993	30 April 1997
Dr. Zaka Khan	1 May 1993	30 April 1997
Mrs. Zahida Manzoor	22 November 1993	31 March 1997
Mr. Moussa Jogee	1 September 1994	31 August 1997
Mrs. Julie Mellor	31 October 1995	30 October 1997
Mr. Hugh Harris	1 January 1995	31 December 1996
Mrs. Jaslien Singh	1 January 1995	31 December 1996

Details of commissioners' backgrounds are set out in the Commission for Racial Equality's annual report, the most recent copy of which was published on 6 June 1995; a copy has been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *215*, about the ethnic profile of employees of the Commission for Racial Equality, what assessment he has made of the consistency of that profile with a policy of appointment by merit in the context of statistical likelihood. [6943]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have no reason to think that the current profile is inconsistent with the commission's equal opportunities policy towards the job applications it receives.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases have been brought or supported by the Commission for Racial Equality in the last year for which figures are available against employers on the basis that the ethnic profile of their employees was such as to be inconsistent with the appointments made purely on merit; in how many other cases such a profile was a significant factor in the commission's case; and if he will make a statement. [6941]

Mr. Kirkhope: None of the cases brought or supported by the commission against employers in the last year was on the basis that the ethnic profile of their employees was such as to be inconsistent with appointments made purely on merit.

Information on whether such a profile has been a significant factor in other cases could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 9 November, ref 2120/95. [6691]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. David Winnick, dated 18 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about when you will receive a reply to your letter of 9 November.

Your letter was passed to the Director General for reply as he has operational responsibility for the Prison Service. Richard Tilt sent a reply on 11 December.

Choi Chang Hun

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for refusing the application for entry into the United Kingdom of Choi Chang Hun from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. [6816]

Mr. Kirkhope: Mr. Choi's visa application was refused on the ground that his exclusion from the United Kingdom was conducive to the public good for reasons of national security.

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the main responsibilities and duties of inspectors working under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [6063]

Mr. Sackville: The duties are set out in section 18 of the Act.

Mrs. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many project licences were granted in each severity banding in 1994 under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and how the bandings are defined. [6067]

Mr. Sackville: Severity limits are allocated to individual procedures within project licences. Each severity limit is an agreed assessment of the maximum level of pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm likely to be associated with the procedure, taking into account any action planned to mitigate these adverse effects. Limits are selected from a three-band scale of mild, moderate and substantial severity. Procedures in which the animal is unconscious throughout are regarded as unclassified.

The assessment of the overall severity of a project uses the same three-band scale but takes into account the cumulative effect of each procedure; the number of animals to be used in each procedure; the proportion of animals expected to be exposed to the upper limits of severity in each procedure and the length of time that the animals might be exposed to the upper limits of severity.

The overall severity of project licences granted in 1994 was:

substantial: 9
moderate: 513
mild: 395
unclassified: 38

Mrs. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of Stae for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the current number of inspectors working under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [6065]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mrs. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits by inspectors working under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 were *(a)* announced and *(b)* unannounced in each year since 1990. [6064]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is as follows:

	Total visits to establishments	*Visits of inspection to establishments*	*Visits to departments within establishments (a) announced (b) unannounced*	
			(a)	*(b)*
1990	2,829	2,533	1,744	4,703
1991	2,933	2,533	1,809	4,920
1992	3,299	2,784	2,302	4,638
1993	2,984	2,507	2,082	4,157
1994	2,726	2,319	1,535	4,348
1995 (January–October)	2,390	2,063	1,122	3,877

1. The difference between Columns A and B reflects the fact that some visits may be unconnected with inspection *per se*—for example for the maintenance of scientific or professional skills.

2. The term "departments" at C includes the various units within each establishment visited.

Mrs. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how consistency is ensured throughout the inspectorate when assessing the costs and benefits of animal research procedures. [6066]

Mr. Sackville: The report of the Animal Procedures Committee for 1993 sets out in the appendix II a note by the chief inspector, animals (scientific procedures) inspectorate, indicating how the assessment of benefit and severity is made. A small group chaired by the chief inspector also reviews licences for consistency.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5572]

Mr. Howard: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since 1979 he has imposed a freeze on police recruitment; and what was the duration in each case. [5423]

Mr. Maclean: Recruitment of police officers is a local matter for each police authority and the chief officer of police. Police force establishment levels, set by my right hon. and learned Friend, were not increased in the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95. From 1 April 1995, my right hon. and learned Friend has not set establishment levels, and it is now for each police authority to set the strength of its force.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5590]

Mr. Howard: In 1994–95, the cost of hospitality in my Department, including its executive agencies, was £27,468. This differs from the provisional figure given in my answer of 1 May, *Official Report*, column *94*. That figure—£48,293—has been revised on the basis of subsequent further analysis which revealed that some expenditure originally, and provisionally, classified as hospitality should have been classified as other administrative costs. Expenditure on hospitality for the financial year to date is £27,558.

The projected budget for 1995–96 is £60,570.

Hong Kong (Key Persons Scheme)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used to determine the granting of right of abode status to Hong Kong citizens under the 50,000 key persons scheme; who determines such applications; and what right of appeal exists against refusal. [5846]

Mr. Kirkhope: Applications under the scheme are assessed in accordance with the criteria set out in the British Nationality (Hong Kong) (Selection Scheme) Order 1990—statutory instrument No. 2292—and Hong Kong (British Nationality) (Amendment) Order 1993—statutory instrument No. 1789. Points are scored for age, experience, education and training, proficiency in the English language, connections with the United Kingdom, public and community service, and special circumstances. Applications are considered by the governor, who makes recommendations to my right hon. and learned Friend. The Secretary of State is obliged to register as British citizens those recommended by the governor unless he has reason to believe that the person concerned is not of good character. There is no right of appeal but the Governor is always willing to consider any representations made about his decisions.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *213*, how many of the applicants for right of abode status in the United Kingdom under the key persons scheme have been approved. [5867]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 9 December, 48,119 principal applicants had been registered as British citizens under the scheme.

Operation Charm

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give details of animal products seized by the Metropolitan police in Operation Charm; and how many people were arrested; [5446]

(2) if he will give details of those premises raided by the Metropolitan police in Operation Charm and the names and nationalities of people arrested. [5452]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that, in the most recent phase of Operation Charm, a property in west London was searched on 30 November and over 1,000 items believed to contain derivatives of species protected under the convention on international trade in endangered species were seized. The species protected under CITES include tiger, bear, rhinoceros, saiga antelope, tortoise, cobra and pangolin. It is not normal practice to identify any individuals concerned at this stage in proceedings.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the cloning of mobile telephones. [5472]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations from hon. Members, the telecommunications industry and members of the public about both the cloning of mobile telephones and mobile telephone fraud in general.

In order to help combat the problem of cloning, the industry and government study group on mobile phone fraud, which was set up by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology in June and reported in October, recommended that the range of offences under section 42 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 should be extended. This recommendation is currently receiving careful consideration.

Identity Cards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses he received in relation to his Green Paper concerning identity cards; if he will provide a statistical breakdown of respondents and views in a similar form to that published by the Data Protection Registrar; when he expects to introduce proposals on the introduction of an identity card; and if he will make a statement. [5344]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) on 13 December at columns *659–60*.

Criminal Records

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the White Paper on improving the system of disclosing police criminal records. [5135]

Mr. Maclean: We expect to publish the White Paper within the next few months.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses he received in relation to his Green Paper, Cm. 2319; when he expects to introduce proposals to allow the wider disclosure of criminal records; and if he will make a statement. [5343]

Mr. Maclean: Some 180 responses were received to the Green Paper "Disclosure of Criminal Records for Employment Vetting Purposes", Cm. 2319. We expect to publish a White Paper within the next few months, which will set out proposals for new arrangements.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what data are held by his Department in respect of the number of enforced subject access requests to criminal records; what plans he has to introduce legislation to cover the practice of enforced subject access to criminal records; if he will list the risks his Department has assessed in respect of reliance on enforced subject access; what plans he has to notify foreign embassies based in the United Kingdom in respect of these risks; and if he will make a statement. [5347]

Mr. Maclean: Applicants exercising their right under the Data Protection Act 1984 to access to criminal records are not required to give reasons. It is not therefore possible to estimate the number of requests which are "enforced", whether by employers, foreign embassies or others. The Government will be publishing a White Paper within the next few months which will propose new arrangements for access to criminal records.

Fingerprint Computer System

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fingerprint records will eventually be stored in the Lockheed Martin fingerprint computer system based in Florida; what steps he has taken to ensure that the United States authorities cannot use their powers to access the fingerprints of Untied Kingdom citizens stored on the system; by what means he would be informed if such actions took place; and if he will make a statement. [5345]

Mr. Maclean: The computer system in question is controlled by the AFR Consortium of 33 police forces, and it is for the member forces to administer it in accordance with the relevant legal provisions, including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Data Protection Acts. I understand from the AFR Consortium that there are now about 2.7 million sets of fingerprint images on the system, and that it is expected that about 3 million sets will eventfully be stored on the system, which is located in Tacoma, Washington State, not Florida. It is believed that there are no powers under which the fingerprints stored on the system could be accessed by the United States authorities. If the United States authorities require access to images of fingerprints held by the police service in the United Kingdom, reciprocal arrangements exist under which they may apply to the national identification service for copies.

Knife-related Assaults

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many knife-related assaults were recorded in nightclubs in the last year; and how many of those assaults caused fatal injury. [4779]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Operation Whitewash

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive a report by the Hampshire police inquiry Operation Whitewash; and if he will make a statement. [5358]

Mr. Maclean: We have not requested any such report.

Criminal Offences

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of recorded criminal offences in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available. [5136]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is published in table 2.2 of "Criminal statistics, England and Wales 1994", Cm 3010. The latest information for the 12 months to June 1995 is published in Home Office statistical bulletin 19/95. Copies of both these publications are available in the Library.

Data Protection

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *362*, what discussions he plans with the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Social Security before the publication of his Department's review of the Office of Data Protection Registrar. [5892]

Mr. Sackville: We have no problems at present for discussions on the review with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for Social Security. Should such discussions be needed, I shall have them. All Departments will be involved in discussions on the implementation of the European Union data protection directive.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer on 7 December, *Official Report*, column *396*, if she will provide a breakdown of how the provisional assumptions as to net savings arising from the introduction of subsidised private sector loans have been calculated, indicating *(a)* the annual number of eligible students taking out subsidised private sector loans and *(b)* the level of public sector subsidy per annual loan. [5776]

Mr. Forth: As I made clear in my answer of 7 December, the figures for the net savings that would arise from the introduction of subsidised private sector loans to students were provisional. However, they were based on the assumption that by 1998–99 some 25 per cent. of eligible students would be taking out private sector loans.

Colleges (VAT)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much VAT has been paid by *(a)* sixth form colleges and *(b)* further education colleges in each year since 1991. [4536]

Mr. Paice: Information on the payment of VAT by colleges in the further education sector is not held centrally.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by her Department was in each of the past five years. [5851]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested in respect of the former Department for Education and the former Employment Department is contained in the following table:

Year	*Employment Department* £	*Department for Education* £
1990–91	201,910	134,191
1991–92	222,886	241,215
1992–93	261,151	217,197
1993–94	287,476	288,121
1994–95	282,851	274,377

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total expenditure on *(a)* buildings, *(b)* furniture and *(c)* uniforms by the former Department of Employment since 1979 for each region. [5356]

Mr. Robin Squire: No information is available before the 1991–92 financial year. The following table gives total expenditure on *(a)* buildings, *(b)* furniture and *(c)* uniforms for the former Department of Employment group from 1991–92.

Total expenditure for the financial years from 1991–92 to 1995–96

(£000)

	Buildings	*Furniture*	*Uniforms*
Employment Service Regions			
Northern	33,257,821	4,108,025	n/a
Yorkshire and Humberside (including HO)	87,234,044	7,858,553	n/a
East Midlands	49,565,846	5,237,058	n/a
London and South East	256,432,427	25,083,915	n/a
South West	52,445,990	5,650,311	n/a
Wales	36,073,758	3,198,818	n/a
West Midlands	61,346,176	3,250,969	n/a
North West	66,733,432	6,677,156	n/a
Scotland	68,526,970	4,111,674	n/a
(Total for all regions)	711,616,464	65,176,479	n/a
Remainder of the De Group			
ACAS[1]	15,627,938	884,350	n/a
Employment Department (including TEEd)[2]	202,114,723	8,115,771	118,051
Health and Safety Executive	113,865	6,191	931
De Group Total	929,492,990	74,182,791	118,982

Notes:

[1] ACAS—Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

[2] TEED—Training Enterprise and Education Directorate.

n/a = Not available.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press or public relations officers are employed by her Department; and what is the total annual salary bill for *(a)* and *(b)* above. [5291]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department employs two special advisers and 18 press officers. The salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually, in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points ranging from £19,503–£67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable and the salary spine reflects this. The annual salary bill for the press officers is some £532,000.

Teachers Redundancies

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has had regarding teacher redundancies for the year 1995. [7010]

Mr. Robin Squire: Several letters on this subject have been received in the Department.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI; [5712]

(2) if she will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current costs of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5713]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Decisions on spending in education are for the institutions of local authorities concerned. That information, therefore, is not held centrally. For PFI in the Employment Service, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 6 December, *Official Report,* column *311.* It is a fundamental principle when considering schemes under the private finance initiative that what is assessed is the overall best value for money over the whole life of the project. It is not possible, therefore to provide information about the financing costs of any scheme in the form requested.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5711]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Department has a dedicated private finance division employing six staff full-time. Costs to date for the division, which was established as a separate unit in June, have amounted to some £106,000 and are budgeted to amount to £223,000 for 1995–96 in total. The budget, both for 1995–96 and for future years, will be kept under review in line with the work load. In addition, staff in the further and higher education and youth training and schools directorates and the Employment Service work on a part-time basis to encourage private finance in their specialist areas. The information directorate also includes the private finance initiative within its portfolio. Costs for such part-time work are not accounted for separately.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for the academic year 1994–95 for each school covered by the assisted places scheme in descending order what sums the school received from the scheme, how many pupils were covered by the scheme at each school, the total numbers of pupils on the school's roll and the proportion of the school's roll made up of pupils covered by the scheme; what level of fees was charged for pupils covered by the scheme at each school; and what sums were received by each school under the scheme. [5871]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is contained in a number of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Universities (Staff:Student Ratio)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average staff:student ratio in the United Kingdom university system *(a)* in the current year, and *(b)* in each of the past 15 years. [6551]

Mr. Forth: Information on the student:staff ratio in higher education institutions in England for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 are as follows:

1990–91: 13:4

1991–92: 14:6

1992–93: 15:6

1993–94: 16:5

Information on the same basis for earlier years is not available.

Postgraduate Students

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many postgraduate students in United Kingdom universities are *(a)* from the United Kingdom, *(b)* from other European Union countries, and *(c)* from other countries. [6549]

Mr. Forth: Figures for the academic year 1994–95 show that as at 31 December 1994 there were 290,000 full-time and part-time postgraduate students in UK higher education institutions—including the Open University—of whom 80 per cent. were domiciled in the United Kingdom, 6 per cent. were from other European Union countries and 14 per cent. were from other countries.

Nursery Schools

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many staff work in maintained nursery schools; and how many have qualified teacher status; [6526]

(2) what is the current ratio of staff to children in state nursery schools. [6525]

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1995, the latest date for which information is available, the pupil: teacher ratio in maintained nursery schools in England was 19.41:1; the pupil:staff ratio was 8.8:1. There were 1,596 full-time equivalent teaching staff, of whom 1,577 were qualified and, in addition, there were 1,901 full-time equivalent nursery assistants.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances local education authorities may institute a system of charging for nursery provision in *(a)* nursery classes in schools *(b)* and nursery schools; which local education authorities currently do this; and what are the scales of charges. [6432]

Mr. Squire: Education, including nursery provision, offered by any grant-maintained or local education authority maintained school must by law be free of charge if it takes place wholly or mainly during school hours. Independent and privately run nursery schools may set whatever level of charges they consider to be appropriate.

Undergraduate Students

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many United Kingdom undergraduate students there are in United Kingdom universities in the current academic year; and how many she forecasts will be studying at United Kingdom universities in each of the next three years. [6550]

Mr. Forth: We do not yet have comprehensive figures on the number of undergraduate students in the United Kingdom in the current academic year. Our best estimate is based on the November 1995 Budget projection, which took account of latest data available from the universities and colleges admissions services—UCAS—and from local education authorities. This projects 1.119 million full-time equivalent United Kingdom domiciled undergraduate students, both full-time and part-time, in United Kingdom institutions in the current academic year.

The projected numbers for the three subsequent academic years are 1.112 million, 1.116 million and 1.138 million.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many undergraduate students in United Kingdom universities are *(a)* from the United Kingdom, *(b)* from other European Union countries, and *(c)* from other countries. [6548]

Mr. Forth: Figures for the academic year 1994–95 show that as at 31 December 1994 there were 1,213,000 full-time and part-time undergraduate students in UK higher education institutions, including the Open University, of whom 92 per cent. were domiciled in the UK, 4 per cent. were from other European Union countries and 4 per cent. were from other countries.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her policy in respect of the role for Capita Managed Services Ltd. in the inspection of the nursery voucher scheme. [6044]

Mr. Robin Squire: Capita Managed Services Ltd. has a contract to administer the issue and redemption of vouchers in phase one of the nursery education voucher scheme. The company will not exercise any judgment about the quality of provision in institutions which apply to redeem vouchers.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if nursery vouchers will be issued on a termly basis. [6280]

Mr. Squire: Nursery vouchers will be issued termly.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of how children with special needs will be affected by the nursery voucher scheme. [6281]

Mr. Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on 13 December, *Official Report,* columns *978–79.*

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the cost has been of promoting and explaining the nursery voucher scheme. [6282]

Mr. Squire: The cost to date for publicising and explaining the nursery voucher scheme to parents and providers is some £150,000.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many extra nursery places she expects the nursery voucher scheme to create. [6283]

Mr. Squire: The number of additional places created through the nursery voucher scheme will depend on the response of providers to parental demand. I am confident that providers of all types, either alone or in partnership with each other, will satisfy parental demand over time, given the extra funding which the voucher scheme provides.

Academic Standards

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the academic standard of *(a)* five GCSE passes at grades a–c and *(b)* the French Baccalaureat. [6045]

Mr. Paice: Even if such comparisons could reliably be made, there would be little to be gained by trying to compare standards in an examination taken by 16-year-olds in England with an examination taken by 18-year-olds in France.

School Budgets

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to raise the level of the potential schools' budget from 85 per cent. to 100 per cent. for *(a)* all schools and *(b)* by category of school. [6124]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government have no plans at present to raise the proportion of the potential schools budget which must be delegated to schools by local education authorities. This was, however, one of the several options in respect of voluntary aided schools identified in the consultation paper issues on 27 October, the responses to which are still being considered.

Captial Spending

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what amounts have been requested by way of capital spending in 1996–97 *(a)* by each local education authority and *(b)* in England as a whole. [6476]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the size of 1996–97 bids for annual capital guidelines by each local education authority in England.

I shall be making an announcement on 1996–97 education ACG totals for each LEA in England shortly.

ACG Bids 1996–97

	£000
Barking	3,435
Barnet	8,003
Bexley	4,680
Brent	8,573
Bromley	4,841
Croydon	9,562
Ealing	9,338
Enfield	17,666
Haringey	18,516
Harrow	16,375
Havering	10,297
Hillingdon	8,471
Hounslow	8,448
Kingston	4,178
Merton	6,673
Newham	17,083
Redbridge	7,371
Richmond	7,403
Sutton	8,673
Waltham	14,150
City	0
Camden	6,510
Westminster	4,238
Greenwich	7,095
Hackney	7,940
Hammersmith	6,400
Islington	10,600
Kensington	2,287
Lambeth	15,642
Lewisham	28,266
Southwark	4,504
Wandsworth	7,052
Tower Hamlets	14,442
Birmingham	59,837
Coventry	6,701
Dudley	6,138
Sandwell	10,422
Solihull	4,642
Walsall	8,123
Wolverhampton	13,005
Knowsley	4,917
Liverpool	24,311
St. Helens	7,012
Sefton	4,197
Wirral	9,464
Bolton	5,965
Bury	1,997
Manchester	50,963
Oldham	6,434
Rochdale	10,858
Salford	35,655
Stockport	5,217
Tameside	5,259
Trafford	7,003
Wigan	11,009
Barnsley	5,767
Doncaster	7,524

ACG Bids 1996–97

	£000
Rotherham	6,354
Sheffield	49,913
Bradford	48,734
Calderdale	6,483
Kirklees	9,102
Leeds	39,002
Wakefield	34,035
Gateshead	10,454
Newcastle	26,029
North Tyneside	8,966
South Tyneside	7,019
Sunderland	9,586
Isle of Scilly	47
Bath, North East Somerset	4,382
Bedfordshire	6,619
Berkshire	10,567
Bristol	7,986
Bucks	19,114
Cambridge	27,991
Cheshire	35,182
Cornwall	16,045
Cumbria	21,470
Derbyshire	39,148
Devon	36,346
Dorset	28,328
Durham	55,904
East Riding	11,625
East Sussex	33,943
Essex	79,677
Gloucester	37,110
Hampshire	38,013
Hartlepool	1,586
Hereford, Worcester	13,935
Hertford	29,391
Hull	9,401
Isle of Wight	10,791
Kent	57,365
Lancashire	37,227
Leicester	7,963
Lincoln	15,630
Middlesbrough	5,000
North Lincolnshire	7,278
North-east Lincolnshire	6,546
North Somerset	6,501
Norfolk	20,678
North Yorkshire	25,471
Northampton	22,027
Northumberland	2,908
Nottinghamshire	21,057
Oxfordshire	20,430
Redcar, Cleveland	2,985
Shropshire	8,355
South Gloucestershire	7,376
Somerset	10,970
Staffordshire	26,213
Stockton	3,772
Suffolk	21,635
Surrey	22,359
Warwick	20,266
West Sussex	10,925
Wiltshire	9,507
York	3,440
Total	1,855,297

Nursery Education

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of three and four year-olds currently receive state nursery education; and what are the equivalent figures for France and Germany. [6284]

Mr. Robin Squire: International comparisons of participation in education by young children are difficult to make because of the need to ensure consistent definition across countries. The latest available information on three and four-year-olds participating in public and private education is shown in the following table. Separate participation rates for state nursery education only are not available.

Participation rates of 3 and 4 year-olds[1] in education, 1992

	3 and 4 year-olds Per cent.
France	100
Former West Germany	49
United Kingdom	[2]53

Source:

Education Statistics for the United Kingdom, 1995 edition, HMSO.

Education at a Glance, OECD, 1995.

Notes:

[1] Pupils aged 3 and 4 as a percentage of the population aged 3 and 4.

[2] Fifty seven in 1995.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the educational benefit a child receives from nursery education. [6285]

Mr. Squire: There is a widespread acknowledgement, based on evidence from research studies in the United States and this country, that children benefit from good quality nursery education in primary education and beyond.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the cost to the Employment Service of implementing the proposed sanctions against employing illegal immigrants. [6286]

Mr. Forth: The provisions of the Asylum and Immigration Bill and the related Home Office consultation document on the prevention of illegal working do not propose additional functions or duties for the Employment Service.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the outcome of her Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6660]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade today.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy to abolish the Equal Opportunities Commission. [6807]

Mrs. Gillan: No.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many members currently serve on the Equal Opportunities Commission; and how many of these are *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [6803]

Mrs. Gillan: At present, there are 11 commissioners. Eight are women and three are men.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of the employees of the Equal Opportunities Commission are *(a)* male and *(b)* female. [6801]

Mrs. Gillan: A total of 30—17.6 per cent.—of the commission's employees are men and 140—82.4 per cent.—are women.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total level of public funding for the Equal Opportunities Commission in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the next financial year. [6805]

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission's grant in aid for 1995–96 is £6,156,000. In 1996–97 grant in aid is £5,820,650.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the individuals who currently serve on the Equal Opportunities Commission, indicating in each case the date and duration of their appointment, together with any other relevant positions which they hold, and the basis of the experience or qualification on which that appointment was made. [6804]

Mrs. Gillan: The information is set out in the following table:

Name	*Other relevant positions*	*Date appointed*	*Appointment expires*
Kamlesh Bahl	Consultant; Lawyer	14 June 1993	13 June 1996
Diane Brittan	Chair, Community Industry; Deputy Chair, Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	1 January 1988	31 December 1996
Joan Stringer	Assistant Principal, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, member of the Higher Education Quality Council	18 April 1995	17 April 1998
Robert Fleeman	Director, Fleeman Cooper and Smaller Businesses Advisory Services Ltd; Industrial Tribunal member	1 December 1994	30 November 1997
Richard Grayson	Retired BP Company Secretary; member CBI Companies Committee	1 December 1994	30 November 1997
Noreen Bray	Director, Good Relations Ltd	1 September 1990	31 August 1996
Cecilia Wells	Consultant in Human Resource Management	1 January 1991	31 December 1996
Anne Gibson	National Officer, Union for Manufacturing, Science and Finance	1 May 1991	30 April 1997
Mary Berg	Industrial Economist	13 June 1994	12 June 1997
Peter Smith	General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers	13 June 1994	12 June 1997
Elizabeth Symons	General Secretary, Association of First Division Civil Servants; member of the Employment Appeal Tribunal	1 November 1995	31 October 1998

Appointments are made by the Secretary of State on the basis of a candidate's overall fitness to serve a Commissioner.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to what extent the Equal Opportunities Commission operates an equal opportunities policy; and to what extent the employee gender profile is taken into account in this matter. [6802]

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission operates an equal opportunities policy and keeps it under review. An equal opportunity statement is placed in all advertisements for posts. The commission's recruitment practices are designed to ensure that no groups are unfairly excluded from applying for posts and that appointments are made solely on merit.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many cases in the last year for which figures are available were brought or supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission in which discrimination was alleged against *(a)* women and *(b)* men. [6806]

Mrs. Gillan: In 1995 the Equal Opportunities Commission brought or supported 94 cases, of which 82 alleged discrimination against women and 12 alleged discrimination against men.

DEFENCE

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Service Children's Education Authority to complete its review of whether the Quantock school, Taunton, is suitable to remain on the MOD admissible schools list. [6178]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *478–79*). It is expected that the review of the pastoral care at Quantock school by the Service Children's Education Authority will be completed by 31 March 1996.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 11 December, what plans he has to bring to the attention of parents of children who benefit from the boarding school allowance the observation of the Service Children's Education Authority regarding the pastoral arrangements of Quantock school, Taunton. [6199]

Mr. Soames: SCEA provides on request an advisory service to all service parents on boarding school provision in the United Kingdom. In the case of Quantock school, Taunton, SCEA will continue to provide a similar service. The final choice of school, however, is a matter of parental choice.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much each school on the MOD admissible schools list received from the service boarding school allowance. [6179]

Mr. Soames: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Batus, Canada

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* serious injuries which have occurred at Batus, Suffield, Canada, for each year since 1972; and if he will state the cause in each case. [4932]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Fatalities

Year	*Numbers*	*Cause of death*
1972	1	1 RTA
1973	Nil	—
1974	3	3 RTAs
1975	1	Drowned on Exercise
1976	2	1 stepped in front of a vehicle, 1 scout car overturned
1977	2	1 inhalation of vomit, 1 RTA
1978	2	1 RTA; 1 accident on adventure training
1979	1	Crushed in Tank
1980	3	1 Collision Tank/scout car; 1 struck by lightning; 1 drowned on adventure training
1981	Nil	—
1982	2	1 GSW on exercise; 1 helicopter crash
1983	1	Training explosion
1984	1	Helicopter crash
1985	Nil	—
1986	Nil	—
1987	3	2 RTAs; 1 killed by debris from helicopter crash
1988	1	RTA
1989	Nil	—
1990	Nil	—
1991	Nil	—
1992	1	Crushed between two vehicles
1993	1	Accident with warrior armoured fighting vehicle
1994	5	1 Collision with warrior/landrover; 2 [illegible] buried in trench; 1 run over by warrior; 1 GSW on exercise
1995	Nil	—

Serious injuries

Year	*Total injured*	*Numbers and details*
1972	15	1 eye injury; 14 shrapnel wounds
1973	1	RTA soldier hit by car
1974	6	1 trapped by vehicles; 2 ammo explosions 1 rocket launcher explosion 2 fire in Tank
1975	Nil	
1976	1	ammo explosion
1977	2	1 smoke grenade explosion; 1 RTA
1978	Nil	
1979	1	ammo explosion
1980	1	breach explosion
1981	2	2 ammo explosion
1982	Nil	
1983	1	ammo explosion
1984	2	explosion in landrover
1985	7	4 ammo explosions; 2 RTAs; 1 GSW
1986	4	2 RTAs; 1 ammo explosion; 1 back blast
1987	4	3 RTAs; 1 ammo explosion
1988	2	ammo explosions
1989	8	3 GSWs; 1 vehicle fire; 3 ammo explosions 1 laser beam injury
1990	Nil	
1991	1	ammo explosion
1992	5	4 ammo explosions; 1 mortar incident
1993	4	3 ammo explosions; 1 tank barrel in face
1994	2	2 GSW
1995	Nil	

RTA = Road Traffic accident.
GSW = Gun shot wound.

Service Housing

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be responsible for maintenance, improvements and refurbishments of dwellings privatised by his Department. [5880]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's answer of 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *810–11*. The specialist housing division within the MOD, the defence housing executive, will retain responsibility for maintenance, improvement, and refurbishment of properties leased back from the purchaser of the married quarters estate in the event that a sale goes ahead. A sale of the married quarters estate to the private sector will, of course, depend on reaching agreement on terms which satisfy the interests of the services and on a price which properly reflects the public interest.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many copies of the corporate plan for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency were *(a)* printed, *(b)* distributed to DERA establishments and *(c)* distributed for the use of staff at the Defence Evaluation and Test Organisation at Boscombe Down; [6811]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the corporate plan for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [6809]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Robert Key, dated 18 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of the Corporate Plan for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) have been printed and distributed to DERA establishments and how many, specifically, have been distributed for the use of the staff at the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation (DTEO) site at Boscombe Down. You also asked if a copy the DERA Corporate

Plan would be placed in the Library. Your questions have been passed to me, as Chief Executive of DERA, to reply and I am dealing with both in this letter.

We printed 650 copies of the DERA Corporate Plan of which 420 have been distributed to DERA establishments including 72 which were sent to the DTEO site at Boscombe Down. Copies were also sent to MOD customers. DERA management and staff have been briefed on the content of the Corporate Plan and my management team and I have also given a presentation to the Trade Unions

I am afraid that I am unable to place a copy of the Corporate Plan in the Library as it contains information which is commercial-in-confidence. This year, additionally, the document contains classified information. If, however, you would like me to brief you on the main issues contained in the Plan then I should be happy to do so.

Museum of Army Transport

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had over the possibility of relocating the Museum of Army Transport from Beverley to Ministry of Defence land on Driffield airfield. [6009]

Mr. Soames: The Museum of Army Transport and officials within my Department have corresponded on this matter. Driffield airfield is used by the Army as a training area. Although 7.42 hectares of land are to be sold, that property is tenanted and cannot be made available to the museum; no other suitable land has been declared surplus.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6562]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Records of newspaper advertising are not held centrally nor is the cost separately identified. The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Trident

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Trident D5 missiles that have been purchased from the United States *(a)* have been test fired and *(b)* remain to be collected from the United States; [6211]

(2) what plans his Department has to purchase further Trident D5 missiles from the United States; [6212]

(3) when he plans to make an announcement on the purchase of further Trident missiles.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Of the Trident II (D5) missiles that have been purchased from the United States, four have been test fired and 12 have yet to be collected. Remaining missile orders are likely to be placed over the next three years as part of a joint US-UK procurement programme and initial funding to that end is being committed. I have no immediate plans to make a further statement regarding future missile orders.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the changes made to the guidance to aircrew on ship identification and attack manoeuvres following the review of such guidance conducted following the incident off Oban on 29 April 1991.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 12 December 1995]:* The guidance issued to aircrew on low-level flight in the vicinity of shipping was reviewed taking into account the findings of the RAF police investigation into the incident on 29 April 1991. No changes were judged to be necessary.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a qualification in night-time low flying lapses for Tornado GR.1 aircrew; and how many sorties are required to *(a)* maintain currency and *(b)* regain a lapsed qualification. [5177]

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's policy to release information relating to combat ready status of aircrew.

Queen's Flight

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *1*, regarding the use of the Queen's Flight, if he will list in each case the point of departure of the aircraft and the destination, the sum which was reimbursed and the member of the royal family involved. [5249]

Mr. Soames: In accordance with the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen, arrangements agreed by my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for Defence were introduced on 1 April 1995 under which the costs of private flights in aircraft of No 32 (The Royal) Squadron by members of the royal family would be reimbursed to the MOD. The requested details of the six flights since that date are as follows:

Departure point	*Destination*	*Charge £*	*Member of Royal Family*
Sandringham Kensington	Kensington Sandringham	2,540	HRH The Duke of Edinburgh
Aberdeen Heathrow	Northolt Aberdeen	1,470	HRH The Prince of Wales
Aberdeen Teeside	Teeside Aberdeen	3,116	Her Majesty The Queen

Home Base (Absence)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of pilots, navigators and other aircrew and of ground staff employed at squadron level have spent more than a total of four months absence from their home base in each of the last three years. [5041]

Mr. Soames: The percentage of pilots, navigators, other aircrew and ground crew absent from their home station for more than four months during 1995 is 12.6 per cent., 11.5 per cent., 10 per cent. and 12.9 per cent. respectively. Information for previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5612]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No member of staff is employed in my Department exclusively to answer letters sent to my right hon. Friend from hon. Members. Staff throughout the Department are involved in answering letters from hon. Members and others to my right hon. Friend. The overall cost of replying to such correspondence is not held centrally and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs.

Departmental Dwellings

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings his Department currently possesses; and how many are currently occupied. [5947]

Mr. Soames: As at 30 September 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, my Department owned 74,064 dwellings, of which 59,966 were occupied.

Property Refurbishment

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of refurbishing the flats at 49–144 Stillington street, London SW1, owned by his Department; and what plans he has to make these homes available to service families. [5879]

Mr. Soames: Nos 49-144 Stillington street are blocks of flats providing one of the primary housing sites for the families of service personnel based in central London. A total refurbishment of these blocks is currently being undertaken as part of an on-going upgrade programme.

The Stillington street project is in two phases. Phase 1, involving 48 units, was completed in May 1994 at a cost of £3.5 million. Phase 2, involving 96 units, is due for completion in May-June 1996 at an estimated cost of £6.6 million.

The flats, which were completed in May 1994, accommodate families of service personnel posted to Army units in central London. The remainder of the flats, when completed, will house the balance of the families of the Infantry Battalion who are housed at Hounslow.

Our on-going refurbishment and development plans will enable us to surrender property at Caterham, Uckfield and north London with consequential improvements in operational responsiveness and savings both in travelling time and residence to duty costs.

RAF Finningley (Houses)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the price paid by the Hodge group to acquire the houses sold at RAF Finningley; and what tendering process was involved. [5882]

Mr. Soames: The surplus houses at RAF Finningley were sold by sealed tender and the price achieved is a matter of commercial confidentiality between the Department and the successful purchaser, Hodge and Co.

Gulf Veterans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many veterans are planned to be examined under the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme in the next six months; and, of these, how many are planned to receive examination for the first time. [5319]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* The numbers to be seen over the next six months cannot be forecast as this will depend on factors outside my Department's control, such as the rate of new referrals and the need for second and subsequent examinations. However, appointments will be available for the 28 individuals currently waiting for initial assessment to be seen by the end of January.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many veterans have been examined under the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme in the last six months; and, of these, how many received examination for the first time. [5320]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* A total of 152 Gulf veterans have been examined under the medical assessment programme in the last six months. Of those, 81 were examined for the first time.

Married Quarters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the average level of rent charged for a married quarters housing stock unit in each of the last five years. [6544]

Mr. Soames: The average weekly charges for service families accommodation owned by the Ministry of Defence are as follows, and are based on furnished accommodation in England, Scotland and Wales and of the most commonly occupied type of accommodation.

	1991–92 £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Officers	37.17	40.67	41.30	43.12	47.04
Other ranks	23.87	26.04	26.46	27.74	29.68

Additionally, all service personnel pay a contribution in lieu of council tax. Some of the quarters are occupied by civilians and these charges are based on market rents which are assessed by local defence lands service offices.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what methods are currently used to collect rent on the married quarters housing stock owned by his Department; and what plans he has to review these methods. [6542]

Mr. Soames: Accommodation charges for service personnel and entitled MOD personnel are deducted directly from pay accounts, and there are no plans to review this method of payment. With regard to other personnel, various payment methods are employed. The defence housing executive is currently reviewing these methods of payment, with a view to recommending that all should be made by standing order or direct debit.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the marketable value of the married quarters housing stock owned by his Department. [6546]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Our assessment of the value of the married quarters estate under the terms of the proposed sale is commercially confidential.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people employed by his Department lived in the married quarters housing stock owned by his Department in each of the last five years; and how many do so currently. [6541]

Mr. Soames: Total occupancy of the married quarters stock owned by my Department on 31 March in each of the last five years and on 30 September, which is the most recent information available, was as follows:

31 March 1991: 63,351

31 March 1992: 62,929

31 March 1993: 62,687

31 March 1994: 61,230

31 March 1995: 59,776

31 September 1995: 59,549

Information on the number of these quarters which were occupied by service and civilian personnel employed by my Department is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The figures include a significant number of people not employed by my Department, for example, irregular occupants, foreign service personnel, and contractors' staff.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total rent collected by his Department on the married quarters housing stock in each of the last five years. [6545]

Mr. Soames: Information is readily available only for the last four financial years. The total rent collected for married quarters was as follows:

1991–92: £129.33 million

1992–93: £132.54 million

1993–94: £147.08 million

1994–95: £145.64 million

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the criteria used to set rent levels for the married quarters housing stock owned by his Department. [6543]

Mr. Soames: Accommodation charges for service personnel are recommended annually by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. It traditionally bases its recommendations on local authority rents, with an abatement to reflect the disadvantages of living in service accommodation when compared with local authority housing. The subject of service accommodation charges is currently under review by the AFPRB as part of the 1996 programme of work. In addition, some of the quarters are occupied by civilians employed by MOD, and their charges are based on market rents which are assessed by local Defence lands service offices.

Service Officers (Business Appointments)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *475*, what were the restrictions imposed on nine of the applications made under the business appointments procedure; and what period of time elapsed in each case between applications and acceptance. [6596]

Mr. Soames: Seven applications were approved subject to waiting periods. The other two applications were approved subject to bans on the involvement of the applicant in particular projects or areas of work. There is no requirement under the business appointment rules for staff to report to the department whether or not appointments are taken up. It is not possible to say, therefore, what time elapsed between application and acceptance.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *475*, how many of the former serving officers listed by rank as making applications under the business appointments procedure were approved *(a)* immediately and *(b)* within two years of making such an application. [6595]

Mr. Soames: The business appointment rules apply for two years after an individual leaves Crown service. All the officers concerned made their applications within that period of time, and they were informed of the Department's decision as soon as it had been reached. In the shortest case this was within one week of the date of application and in the longest 15 weeks.

Surplus Explosives

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records his Department holds regarding surplus stocks of conventional explosives brought from RAF Great Orton to Royal Ordnance establishments in Wales for disposal between 1946 and 1948; what current environmental monitoring is conducted by his Department on these disposal sites; and if he will list locations of all land and off-shore sites in and around Wales used for such disposal. [6436]

Mr. Soames: Any surviving records on the operation of RAF Great Orton will be held in the Public Records Office. Surplus munition stocks from this unit would have been allocated for sea disposal at Beaufort's dyke or transferred to the Royal Ordnance factory, Pembrey, south Wales for breakdown and reduction to scrap. Land burial was not an authorised final disposal route for surplus munitions or explosives. The only disused sea disposal sites adjacent to the Welsh coast are off Milford Haven. My Department has no plans to monitor disused munition sea dumping grounds.

Kit Suppliers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which companies provide *(a)* uniforms and *(b)* general kit for the armed forces. [5321]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 11 December 1995]*: This is a matter for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency—DCTA—under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DCTA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Brigadier M. J. Roycroft to Dr. David Clark, dated 18 December 1995:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the companies which provide uniforms and general kit for the armed forces, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

I enclose a list of those companies which supply uniforms and associated general clothing and textile items to the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA) on behalf of the services.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

WALES

Community Action Programmes

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of community action programmes and their current costs in operation in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Mid Glamorgan and *(c)* the Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney constituency. [5424]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information in the form requested is not available centrally.

Cardiff International Airport

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in approving a bid by South Glamorgan county council for funding for the proposed link road between Culverhouse Cross and Cardiff international airport. [5516]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The 1996–97 transport grant settlement was announced on 13 December. My right hon. Friend approved the bid for preparation costs for the airport access road in full.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5571]

Mr. Hague: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the Welsh Office departmental report 1995, Cm 2815.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5850]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

1990–91: £155,933

1991–92: £169,514

1992–93: £180,281

1993–94: £189,281

1994–95: £204,579

Theatr Clwyd, Mold

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the likely future of *(a)* ownership, *(b)* operation and *(c)* funding of Theatr Clwyd, Mold following local government reorganisation. [6076]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend will receive advice from the residuary body by 31 December 1995 on the future ownership of land and property including Theatr Clwyd. We expect to publish a draft property transfer order by mid-January. This will set out the transfer arrangements for all property owned by the existing councils. If the unitary authorities falling within the Clwyd county council area decide to set up collaborative arrangements to run Theatr Clwyd, that is a matter for them.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to discuss with Clwyd county council and Flintshire county council the future of Theatr Clwyd, Mold. [6075]

Mr. Richards: On 30 November the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), met the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and representatives of Flintshire county council, when the subject of Theatr Clwyd was discussed.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the future of Theatr Clwyd, Mold following local government reorganisation. [6083]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of representations concerning the future of Theatr Clwyd.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to use his reserve powers in respect of the future organisation and funding of Theatr Clwyd, Mold. [6080]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend will receive advice from the residuary body by 31 December 1995 on the future ownership of land and property, including Theatr Clwyd; we expect to publish a draft property transfer order by mid-January. There are currently no proposals to use reserve powers.

Residential Care

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to apply the provisions of the Registered Homes Act 1984 to old people's homes owned by local councils; and if he will make a statement. [5957]

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friends the Under-Secretaries of State for Wales and for Health launched on 22 September a review of the regulation and inspection of social services in England and Wales. Views are invited by the end of February 1996 on the range of issues raised in the consultation document, "Moving Forward".

Planning Application (Gwernymynydd)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations have been made to the local planning authority by the highway section of his Department with regard to the proposed development at Swan lane, Gwernymynydd with particular reference to its impact on the A494. [6079]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A planning application in respect of a development at Minffordd fields, Gwernymynydd near Swan lane was referred to the highways directorate of the Welsh Office in Janaury 1995. Its response in February 1995 directed that the proposed access from the development on the trunk road should be completed in accordance with the details submitted with the application.

Health Survey

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in establishing a health survey in Wales as undertaken in the departmental report 1995. [5900]

Mr. Richards: The Welsh health survey was carried out during May and June 1995. Questionnaires were sent to 50,000 people living in Wales and over 28,000 were completed and returned, in line with the expected response rate. The results will be published early in 1996.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets his Department has set in respect of breast cancer in Wales analogous to those in "The Health of the Nation". [5680]

Mr. Richards: A target to reduce death rates from breast cancer among women aged 50 to 64 by at least 20 per cent. by 2002 was included in the "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain: Cancers", issued by the Welsh Office in 1991.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the specialist breast cancer treatment centres *(a)* in Welsh hospitals and *(b)* otherwise currently serving Welsh health authority populations; and what plans he has (i) to increase their number and (ii) to upgrade them. [6538]

Mr. Hague: There are no designated specialist breast cancer treatment centres in Wales. However, Breast Test Wales refers women with screen-detected breast cancer to the following hospitals for treatment:

Llandough Hospital, Cardiff
University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff
Neath General Hospital, West Glamorgan
Prince Philip Hospital, Llanelli
East Glamorgan General Hospital, Church Village
Llandudno General Hospital, Gwynedd

Additionally, general practitioners are free to refer patients screened by Breast Test Wales to other hospitals, should they wish.

An expert group on cancer services has been established to help health authorities implement the report of the chief medical officers of England and Wales, "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services". The group will consider the need to increase the number of or upgrade specialist cancer treatment centres.

House Building

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of (i) council houses and (ii) housing association homes to be built in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [6471]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Housing associations are now the main providers of subsidised rented housing. I refer the hon. Member to the statement which my right hon. Friend made to the House on Wednesday 13 December, *Official Report*, columns 1002–17, which set out our estimate of housing association activity in 1996–97.

Smoking

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ban smoking in all public buildings in his control. [6464]

Mr. Hague: My Department has operated a no-smoking rule for a number of years. Smoking is permitted in designated locations, which are kept under review. I have no plans for an absolute smoking ban.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5625]

Mr. Hague: Most Welsh Office staff handle correspondence as part of their duties; it is not possible to estimate the proportion of time, or the cost, spent in answering letters from hon. Members.

Public Bodies

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the public authorities in Wales to which he makes appointments, indicating which were established *(a)* by primary legislation, *(b)* by secondary legislation, *(c)* by royal charter or warrant, *(d)* royal prerogative and *(e)* by other means. [6046]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Waste Disposal, Newport

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what inquiries he made of the United States authorities about the past activities of Browning Ferris environmental services before becoming mindful to grant it a licence for waste disposal at Newport, Gwent. [5883]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales under what powers an inspector holding a planning inquiry may refuse to let a member of the public put questions; and if he will make a statement on the inquiry held into the application by Browning Ferris to operate a waste disposal plant in Newport, Gwent. [5945]

Mr. Jones: An inspector's powers when holding a planning inquiry are contained in the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992, SI 1992 No. 2038, or the Town and Country Planning Appeals (Determination by Inspectors (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992, SI 1992 No. 2039.

Medical School Applications

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the number of people making application to enter medical schools, *(b)* the number and percentage of applicants who are successful and *(c)* the proportion of each category estimated to be Welsh speaking in (i) each Welsh county and (ii) Wales for the latest available year. [6047]

Mr. Hague: This information is not held centrally. Information on the number of applications and the results may be available from the Universities and College Admissions Service.

Vaccinations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to publish a report analogous to the recent report from the Secretary of State for Health on the measles and rubella immunisation campaign. [6276]

Mr. Richards: The chief medical officer for Wales has recently written to all doctors informing them that the report "Measles Rubella Immunisation Campaign in England 'One Year On'" is available from the Department. Attached to the report is a summary of the measles and rubella campaign undertaken in Wales. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Emergency Hospital Admissions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) on how many occasions Welsh district general hospitals have been closed to new medical emergency patients during the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [6540]

(2) what plans he has to ensure the adequacy of provision of emergency medical intake beds during winter months. [6539]

Mr. Hague: This information is not held centrally.

I am committed to ensuring that action is identified to ease the pressure on hospitals as a result of unexpected increases in emergency medical admissions.

My officials met senior NHS managers and health professionals on 7 December 1995 to measure the true extent and cause of the problem and to identify a response. The meeting resulted in agreement on a range of practical measures to minimise this risk of hospitals closing to emergency patients over the coming months.

I will be monitoring the position closely over the next few months.

Child Abuse Report

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of Monday 11 December, *Official Report,* columns *555–56,* what arrangements he made with Nicola Davies QC as regards visiting *(a)* local authority and *(b)* private homes and *(c)* other organisations in her inquiry; how many individuals she met and questioned during the course of the visit to a private organisation referred to in paragraph 11(ii) of her conclusions and recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [6594]

Mr. Hague: Miss Davies QC was asked to examine the relevant papers held by the various agencies concerned. The precise arrangements in respect of that examination were a matter for the examining team and the agencies, including the private establishment referred to in paragraph 11(ii). This was an independent investigation and the precise manner in which it was concluded was not a matter in which I or officials of my Department were involved.

Duffryn House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council concerning the taking over of the Duffryn house conference centre and garden in the Vale of Glamorgan. [6537]

Mr. Hague: None. However, my officials are being kept informed of developments which are as yet at a very early stage. Any expenditure on this project by the TEC would require prior approval by my Department.

Youth Training (Accidents)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* major and *(c)* minor accidents took place on youth training schemes in Wales in (i) July to September 1993, (ii) October to December 1993, (iii) January to March 1994, (iv) April to June 1994, (v) July to September 1994, (vi) October to December 1994, (vii) January to March 1995, (viii) April to June 1995 and (ix) July to September 1995; and what were the numbers of accidents on training for work for the same periods. [6482]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table.

Accidents in Wales from September 1993 to September 1995

	Fatal	*Major*	*Minor*
Youth training			
July–September 1993	0	5	45
October–December 1993	0	4	26
January–March 1994	0	9	29
April–June 1994	0	0	6
July–September 1994	0	2	1
October–December 1994	0	12	17
January–March 1995	0	2	11
April–June 1995	0	0	0
July–September 1995	n/a	n/a	n/a
Training for work			
July–September 1993	0	1	8
October–December 1993	0	5	10
January–March 1994	0	0	11
April–June 1994	0	1	2
July–September 1994	0	0	1
October–December 1994	0	1	2
January–March 1995	0	1	3
April–June 1995	0	0	0
July–September 1995	n/a	n/a	n/a

1. Welsh Office figures for trainees have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for employed persons. However, the Department's figures include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments and road traffic accidents which would not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individual been employed.
2. Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR).
3. The accident figures for the period July to September 1995 are not yet available.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those projects being considered for private finance initiative funding; and if he will give the names of the companies in the consortia bidding for or expressing an interest in each project. [6593]

Mr. Hague: Projects being looked at currently, which have been announced, are as follows: M4 relief road; A465 Heads of the Valleys road; eastern bay link of the Cardiff peripheral distributor road; new general hospital at Baglan; staff residential accommodation, district general hospital, Llantrisant; day surgery unit and mental health development, Nevill hall, Abergavenny; cancer treatment centre, Glan Clwyd district general hospital, Rhyl; community hospital, Chepstow; replacement of radiotherapy equipment, Velindre; OSIRIS, office automation system for Welsh Office.

A £6.5 million plan to build a multistorey car park and an eastbound slip road to the A48 at the University hospital of Wales, was approved by my Department last week. Information on schemes costing less than £1 million is not collected. The names of companies bidding for or expressing an interest in such projects are confidential.

Council House Building

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much cash he has earmarked for council house building in the next financial year in each of the unitary authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [6683]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: For some years, housing associations have been the main providers of new subsidised rented housing and local authorities are encouraged to work in partnership with them.

Capital Borrowing Limits

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total capital borrowing limit for each unitary authority in Wales for 1996–97. [6985]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amounts of unitary authorities' basic credit approvals for 1996–97, which allow borrowing for any capital purpose, are set out in the following table. In addition, authorities will receive supplementary credit approvals directed to specific programmes. Full details of these have not yet been finalised.

Basic credit approvals 1996–97

	£000s
Anglesey	3,417
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	7,863
Aberconwy and Colwyn	5,000
Denbighshire	4,580
Flintshire	6,441
Wrexham	7,062
Powys	10,018
Cardiganshire	4,581
Pembrokeshire	6,189
Carmarthenshire	9,516
Swansea	11,559
Neath and Port Talbot	7,497
Bridgend	6,109
The Vale of Glamorgan	5,019
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	11,668
Merthyr Tydfil	3,270
Caerphilly	8,984
Blaenau Gwent	4,125
Torfaen	4,930
Monmouthshire	3,776
Newport	6,373
Cardiff	14,116
All unitary authorities	152,093

Small and Medium Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in light of best practice. [6659]

Mr. Hague: My Department is revising its standard tender documentation so that small and medium businesses can identify themselves as such when responding, and has forwarded updated information about contact points for the DTI booklet "Tendering for Government contracts". Written guidance to all departmental staff engaged in procurement includes material specific to the implications of buying from small and medium enterprises. In addition, these staff refer to the DTI publication "Think big, buy small", "Tendering for Government Contracts" and "Your guide to help for small firms". The name of a contact is included in all standard tender documentation.

My Department also liaises regularly with organisations responsible for the provision of business support services. It has strategic responsibility for the business connect service, through which a variety of those organisations will deliver their services to small and medium-sized companies. Business connect is due to be launched in the new year.

European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total estimated contribution to the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund projects in the current and the next two financial years by his Department. [6986]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The total contribution from the Welsh Office to projects receiving assistance from the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund under the objective 5b programme for rural Wales will depend on the quality of those projects and the other sources of funding available to them. However, we have set aside £1,000,000 over the next two years to be used as a source of joint financing.

SCOTLAND

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to implement the expansion of the assisted places scheme in Scotland. [7152]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 13 October 1995 that the assisted places scheme is to be doubled in size over time. I am today announcing the plans for achieving that expansion in Scotland.

At present, just over 3,000 children in Scotland benefit from the assisted places scheme. The first new places under the expansion will be created in the 1996–97 school session. Thereafter, the pace of expansion will depend largely on the parental demand and the rate at which Scottish independent schools can provide additional places for assisted pupils. This expansion will provide greater choice for parents, greater opportunity for their children, and will be warmly welcomed by parents and schools alike.

In addition to the on-going consultation with the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, my Department is writing to independent schools to seek bids to increase the number of assisted pupils at their schools and the number of aided places at the St. Mary's music school; to invite schools to bid for day places for children below the age of 10 in integral junior departments of independent secondary schools; to invite more independent schools in Scotland to take part in the scheme; and to seek schools' views generally on how the scheme might best be expanded further over time.

I will be looking in particular to receive bids from schools which increase the number of places for children from families with the lowest incomes and children from deprived areas who would not otherwise have the opportunity of education offered in independent schools.

I intend to continue the present broad framework of means-tested parental contributions towards approved fees. Arrangements for means testing and fee setting are reviewed annually for the purpose of the regulations, and I shall consider any representations on these matters for the reviews in 1996 and subsequent years.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations led the Lord Advocate to conclude that jurisdiction in the Lockerbie case does not extend to all countries whose nationals were lost. [5399]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has not reached any such conclusion. Criminal jurisdiction is a matter for the domestic laws of particular countries, but Scotland and the United States are the most appropriate jurisdictions for trial of the two accused, as has been recognised by the United Nations Security Council

Highland Health Board

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *704–5*, what was the cash equivalents of the proportionate value as at 31 March on the equipment transferred to the Computing Sciences Corporation Ltd. from *(a)* the Highland health board and *(b)* all other Scottish health boards; and if he will make a statement. [5063]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: *(a)* The cash equivalent of the proportionate value as at 31 March 1995 the equipment transferred to the Computing Services Corporation from Highland health board was £120,000.

(b) The cash equivalents and proportionate values percentage for the other NHS data centres involved, showing which health boards they serve, are as follows:

	£	*Per cent.*
Northern Computer Services serving Grampian, Orkney and Shetland Health Boards	52,000	2
Maryfield Computer Services serving Tayside, Fife and Forth Valley Health Boards	144,000	6
Woodburn Informatics serving Lothian Health Board	82,000	4
West Coast Computer Consortium serving Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Dumfries and Galloway and Western Isles Health Boards	190,000	8
Greater Glasgow Health Board	31,000	1
Common Services Agency (CSA) serving CSA Divisions, Lothian, Borders and Lanarkshire Health Boards	1,360,000	59
CSA Prescription Pricing Division	339,000	15
	2,318,000	

Dyslexic Prisoners

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the prison population are dyslexic; and what steps are taken to help such persons with difficulties experienced in educational or training courses undertaken. [4835]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mrs. Maria Fyfe, dated 18 December 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question relating to dyslexia and the prison population.

I am afraid that the information you seek is not collected centrally. As a learning difficulty, dyslexia is most likely to surface amongst those prisoners taking part in education programmes, but not all prisoners participate in such programmes and even those who believe that they have learning difficulties may not come forward, thereby disguising the true numbers who are dyslexic.

In general, where a prisoner is identified (during induction, sentence planning or through educational or other activities) as having special educational needs, attempts will be made to meet those needs, for example, by providing tuition on a one-to-one basis or by calling in specialist support, if the prisoner is willing to cooperate, and subject to resources being available.

Patient Charges

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was collected within each health board area in patient charges in each financial year since 1990–91; and if he will make a statement. [6153]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is set out in the table. Figures have been taken from the annual accounts of health boards and from 1992–93 a combination of annual accounts of health boards and NHS trusts.

£000

Health board area	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Argyll and Clyde	5,352	5,723	5,546	5,595	6,111
Ayr and Arran	4,883	5,280	4,898	5,370	5,375
Borders	1,432	1,601	1,697	1,767	1,963
Dumfries and Galloway	1,921	2,095	2,054	2,088	2,239
Fife	4,206	5,454	4,646	4,817	5,535
Forth Valley	3,507	3,828	3,938	4,075	4,581
Grampian	6,743	7,514	8,756	9,180	9,941
Greater Glasgow	10,028	10,779	10,502	11,591	12,312
Highland	2,594	3,515	3,011	3,345	3,061
Lanarkshire	6,136	6,568	6,446	6,786	7,281
Lothian	10,356	11,652	11,684	12,696	14,103
Orkney	221	237	272	304	326
Shetland	257	228	296	334	343
Tayside	5,607	6,008	6,163	6,840	7,160
Western Isles	225	243	252	257	335
Scotland total	63,468	70,725	70,161	75,045	80,666

Procurators Fiscal

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of business undertaken by the procurators fiscal service in each of the past five years, by location. [6040]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* As the information requested is lengthy, I shall arrange for the details to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on the operation of the procurators fiscal service in Scotland in each financial year since 1979–90. [6038]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* This information is not available.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many procurators fiscal there are in Scotland, by location. [6037]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* There are 49 procurator fiscal districts in Scotland. In some cases a procurator fiscal has responsibility for more than one district and where this is the case the districts have been grouped together.

Aberdeen
Airdrie
Alloa
Arbroath
Ayr
Banff
Campbeltown
Cupar
Dingwall

Dornoch and Tain

Dumbarton
Dumfries
Dundee
Dunfermline
Dunoon

Duns and Jedburgh

Edinburgh and Peebles

Elgin
Falkirk
Forfar
Fort William
Glasgow

Greenock and Rothesay

Haddington
Hamilton
Inverness
Kilmarnock
Kirkcaldy

Kirkwall and Lerwick

Lanark
Linlithgow

Lochmaddy and Portree

Oban
Paisley
Perth
Peterhead
Selkirk
Stirling
Stonehaven
Stornoway

Stranaer and Kirkcudbright

Wick

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further changes he intends to make to the number and location of procurators fiscal in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [6039]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* A Crown Office steering group has been carrying out a senior management review of the Crown Office and procurator fiscal service. Depending on the outcome of the review any necessary consultations will be undertaken.

Advertising

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost of advertising by NHS trusts and health boards in each region in each financial year since 1990. [6157]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Trusts (Income)

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level and percentage of NHS trust income in each region received from non-national health service sources in each year since 1991–92. [6159]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Complete information on NHS trust income from non-national health service sources is not held centrally. The table details the level and percentage of total NHS trust income, by health board area, derived from non-national health service sources in respect of their main health care functions. This information has been taken from NHS trust accounts for financial years 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95.

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
Health Board	*Level of income £000*	*Percentage of total income*	*Level of income £000*	*Percentage of total income*	*Level of income £000*	*Percentage of total income*
Argyll and Clyde	n/a	n/a	2	0.00	29	0.02
Ayrshire and Arran	105	0.24	516	0.30	250	0.14
Borders	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dumfries and Galloway	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	39	0.10
Fife	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	277	0.17
Forth Valley	n/a	n/a	–113	0.00	89	0.07
Grampian	642	0.57	773	0.29	862	0.30
Greater Glasgow	n/a	n/a	854	0.46	1,092	0.17
Highland	n/a	n/a	473	0.78	193	0.16
Lanarkshire	n/a	n/a	0	0.00	0	0.00
Lothian	n/a	n/a	29	0.05	1,837	0.40
Orkney	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Shetland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tayside	n/a	n/a	181	0.17	336	0.12
Western Isles	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Totals	747	0.48	2,715	0.27	5,004	0.10

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS trusts in Scotland have borrowed money from commercial sources and if he will list the sums involved. [6158]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Currently there are no NHS trusts borrowing on a long-term basis from commercial sources within the private sector. However some NHS trusts may require the use of overdrafts to cover very short-term working capital requirements.

Dental Services

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the net expenditure on general dental services in each health board area in Scotland in each financial year since 1989–90; and if he will make a statement. [6154]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is set out in the table. Figures have been taken from the annual accounts of the 15 Scottish health boards.

£000

Health board area	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Argyll and Clyde	6,290	7,807	9,415	9,276	8,918	9,384
Ayr and Arran	5,311	7,082	8,005	7,663	7,453	7,659
Borders	1,130	1,362	1,611	1,724	1,718	1,853
Dumfries and Galloway	1,675	2,046	2,447	2,301	2,070	2,180
Fife	3,996	4,803	5,845	5,907	3,483	6,329
Forth Valley	3,406	4,208	5,180	5,354	5,066	5,352
Grampian	5,668	6,415	7,952	8,104	7,745	8,172
Greater Glasgow	14,731	18,731	22,116	23,483	22,051	23,414
Highland	2,435	3,006	3,783	3,675	3,483	3,647
Lanarkshire	7,062	8,653	10,207	9,795	9,341	10,128
Lothian	10,010	11,503	14,600	15,759	14,907	15,723
Orkney	107	87	115	161	153	244

£000

Health board area	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Shetland	134	205	201	188	246	275
Tayside	5,413	6,636	7,933	8,061	7,850	8,085
Western Isles	241	272	344	376	394	424
Scotland total	67,609	82,456	99,754	101,827	94,878	103,319

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was his Department's net expenditure on administration in each financial year since 1979–80 *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* adjusted for inflation. [6160]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Scottish Office accounts for its running costs on a gross rather than net basis. The figures for the Scottish Office, excluding Scottish Prison Service, are as follows:

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*1995–96 prices*
1995–96	188.3	188.3
1994–95	185.9	191.0
1993–94	188.3	197.1
1992–93	190.4	205.1
1991–92	175.1	196.3
1990–91	153.1	182.4
1989–90	142.0	182.7
1988–89	115.9	159.5
1987–88	109.3	160.5
1986–87	105.2	162.7
1985–86	100.8	160.6
1984–85	95.0	159.7
1983–84	92.0	162.4
1982–83	77.0	142.2
1981–82	74.0	146.4
1980–81	71.0	154.1
1979–80	58.0	148.9

Figures for early years are not comparable to recent figures owing to the introduction of superannuation charges of approximately 13 per cent., which have been taken into account from 1989–90 onwards, the introduction of charges for the occupation of Government offices in 1983–84—which now amount to some £25 million—and various shifts of responsibility from UK Departments to the Scottish Office. The total effect of these changes in accounting practice have increased the figures over the period by an amount estimated in 1995–96 to be approximately £40 million per annum.

Criminal Justice Services Fund

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was paid by way of the criminal justice services fund to organisations in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland in each of the past three years; what is the amount budgeted for this fund in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [4631]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The funding made available by the Scottish Office under the 100 per cent. funding arrangements for the provision of criminal justice social work services in the financial years 1993–94 to 1995–96 in Strathclyde region and Scotland is set out in the table. Allocations by the Scottish Office are not broken down below regional level, and it is therefore not possible to provide figures for Inverclyde. Allocations to new councils for the 1996–97 financial year have not yet been made.

	Allocation	
Year	*Strathclyde* £	*Scotland* £
1993–94	10,040,122	25,122,495
1994–95	12,209,262	27,606,816
1995–96	12,031,200	28,969,400

Dry Stone Walls

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals his Department or its agencies have to institute a national survey of the state of repair of dry stone walls in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [3793]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* I have no proposals to institute such a survey. I am aware from other correspondence on this subject that the Dry Stone Walling Association has indicated to its members that it has asked Scottish Natural Heritage to undertake a national survey. However, Scottish Natural Heritage has no record of any approach from the association.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the funds paid through *(a)* farming capital grant schemes and *(b)* agri-environment schemes for the purpose of restoration and repair of dry stone walls in Scotland in each of the last three financial years. [3797]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The information is as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
Capital grant schemes	353,557	356,762	187,485
Agri-environment scheme (environmentally sensitive areas scheme)	389,293	348,387	264,278

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 19 December 1995

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements for 1994–95. [6512]

The Attorney-General: The departments for which I am responsible make every effort to settle invoices promptly. The information requested is not recorded and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* orders and *(b)* firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6490]

The Attorney-General: Information is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many illegal immigrants have been expelled in each year since 1979 from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each separate region within the United Kingdom; [5160]

(2) which country has received most illegal immigrants expelled from the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. [5161]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the total number of illegal entrants and persons subject to deportation action who have been removed from the United Kingdom is given in table 1. The data for 1984 onwards show the nationalities grouped by main geographical region. The largest 10 individual nationalities, comprising two thirds of the total, in 1994 are shown in table 2; corresponding data for other years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Data on nationalities have been given in the absence of statistics on the countries to which persons were removed. Data are also not available on the region of residence prior to removal.

Table 1: Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom as illegal entrants or under the deportation process, 1979–1995

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
All nationalities	1,416	1,938	1,601	1,315	1,196

Nationality by geographical region	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Europe	276	257	210	284	449	527
Americas	101	137	115	159	249	404
Africa	634	690	804	952	1,467	1,918
Indian sub-continent	187	177	223	389	582	590
Other Asia	95	100	98	116	215	283
Oceania	8	7	10	13	11	16
Other nationalities[2]	56	57	62	80	74	101
All nationalities	1,357	1,425	1,522	1,993	3,047	3,839

Nationality by geographical region	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995 January to June*
Europe	362	615	609	988	911	n/a
Americas	522	803	820	732	539	n/a
Africa	1,963	2,457	2,740	2,207	1,354	n/a
Indian sub-continent	454	616	797	896	1,002	n/a
Other Asia	302	543	545	448	437	n/a
Oceania	28	35	26	42	40	n/a
Other nationalities[2]	131	233	293	171	25	n/a
All nationalities	3,762	5,302	5,830	5,484	4,308	1,963

n/a Not yet available.

[1] Excluding 'voluntary' departures after enforcement action had been initiated.

[2] British Overseas citizens, stateless and nationality doubtful. Data prior to 1994 also include the small nationalities of the geographical regions specified.

Table 2: Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom as illegal entrants or under the deportation process: the top ten nationalities in 1994

Nationality	*Number of persons*
India	574
Nigeria	570
Poland	451
Pakistan	287
Ghana	216
Jamaica	194
Bangladesh	150
Turkey	145
Algeria	132
Malaysia	104
Total	2,823

[1] Excluding 'voluntary' departures after enforcement action had been initiated.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6503]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office central accounting computer system shows that approximately £290 million was paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. This figure includes payments made by the Home Office and the Prison Service agency, the United Kingdom Passport Agency and the Forensic Science Service.

Prisons (Probation Officers)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those prisons at which probation officers are currently based; and how many of these are scheduled to lose their prison-based probation officers as a result of changes being implemented by his Department. [7027]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 19 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about prison-based probation officers.

All prison establishments currently have probation officers working in them on secondment from their home service. Governors are looking critically at how the functions of their establishments are being delivered with a view to improving operating efficiency next year. Until the process is complete and their 1996–97 budgets have been finalised it is not possible to predict how many prisons might reduce or restructure their complement of seconded probation staff.

Learmont Report

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the report of General Sir John Learmont's review of the implementation of the recommendations contained in Sir John Woodcock's report on the escape from Whitemoor prison; and if he will make a statement. [7661]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend has today placed a copy of General Sir John Learmont's report in the Library. We are extremely grateful to Sir John, and to Sir John Woodcock with whom the review was undertaken, for their work. The report concludes that in both security and control terms, a

"sea change for the better had taken place at Whitemoor"—

paragraph 2.2—and that

"in a period of less than a year the Prison Service has made infinitely more headway in implementing the Woodcock recommendations than it seemed reasonable to expect, and in line with the published timetable. It has made this progress with an optimism and enthusiasm that demonstrates the calibre of the staff at all levels of the Service. All concerned deserve praise for what has been achieved in getting the fundamentals of custody, care and control into better balance"—

paragraph 4.6.

General Sir John Learmont has already recommended the appointment of a director of dispersal prisons at prisons board level, and in this latest report he says that this issue needs addressing without delay. The acting director general has today appointed Mr. Philip Wheatley, at present area manager (London north), to be director of dispersal prisons—Frankland, Full Sutton, Long Lartin, Wakefield and Whitemoor—and of HMP Belmarsh, which also holds a significant number of category A prisoners.

Hagdi Elfons Tawafig

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his decision concerning the deportation of Hagdi Elfons Tawafig to Sudan; and if he will make a statement about the refoulement of Sudanese coptic Christians to Sudan. [7157]

Mr. Kirkhope: Mr. Tawafig has been refused leave to enter the United Kingdom and, his appeal having been dismissed, is liable to removal action. The United Kingdom fully complies with its international obligations in relation to non-refoulement.

Police (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussion he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to his policy of combating racial attacks in the Greater London area. [6460]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues relating to the policing of London.

Flights (Criminal Incidents)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many arrests have been made by the police for criminal incidents on in-bound flights to the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [6224]

(2) on how many occasions the police have taken action as a result of incidents on in-bound flights into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; what has been the nature of the occurrences; and if he will make a statement. [6225]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not collected centrally.

Research Projects (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all Home Office funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1989 in *(a)* the city of Sunderland, *(b)* Wearside district and *(c)* Sunderland travel-to-work area identifying (i) the title, summary and duration of the pilot/trial, (ii) the target population and total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot, trial or research finding was published indicating the date of publication; and if he will give details of all other non-Home Office research bodies or organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [6305]

Mr. Howard: There have been no major studies confined to the areas highlighted. However, each year, a number of research projects and surveys are conducted on the basis of nationally representative samples. Householders or other persons in the areas mentioned might have been included in these. The data are often confidential to the survey company, so it is not always possible to identify which areas have been surveyed.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5862]

Mr. Howard: The information in respect of ministerial cars was given in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 7 November, *Official Report*, column *826*.

Information relating to use by officials is not collected centrally and I will write to the hon. Member when it has been obtained.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6570]

Mr. Howard: Information in the form requested would be available only at disproportionate cost. The table gives the aggregated expenditure of the Home Office, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on the space bought in the national press for the period requested. For the reason stated, the figures do not include local press, or the cost of creative and production work.

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Daily Express	93,993	96,730	28,990	—	27,000	—
Daily Mail	154,940	175,580	16,050	—	49,270	8,816
Daily Mirror	171,430	117,885	41,054	—	46,000	—
Daily Star	39,822	34,870	12,040	—	7,000	—
Daily Telegraph	90,350	73,671	25,771	5,500	72,200	22,800
Evening Standard	69,609	27,406	9,990	—	25,430	2,455
Financial Times	14,364	31,252	—	—	—	32,532
Guardian	43,427	49,729	34,756	27,190	50,321	34,296
Independent	51,735	48,458	23,487	17,523	18,225	19,734
Independent on Sunday	1,200	9,875	2,235	—	15,137	—
Mail on Sunday	124,130	95,083	11,500	11,500	5,600	2,660
News of the World	135,000	203,870	32,085	25,000	24,500	—
Observer	35,454	32,432	7,953	—	11,693	10,788
The People	142,300	61,038	22,138	—	16,300	—
The Sun	239,464	155,200	45,600	29,500	91,300	—
Sunday Correspondent	2,400	—	—	—	—	—
Sunday Express	118,580	76,010	16,648	10,500	40,000	—
Sunday Mirror	129,490	65,840	16,000	14,500	23,000	—
Sunday Telegraph	7,561	11,475	2,754	—	19,238	12,750
Sunday Times	85,068	104,246	71,214	36,371	69,054	33,998
The Times	38,626	17,868	1,200	528	29,940	1,965
Today	27,269	21,255	6,200	—	3,250	—
Daily Record	—	5,000	—	—	—	—
Morning Star	—	1,600	—	—	—	—
Sunday Mail	—	6,830	—	—	—	—

Knives

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances police officers are permitted to search people for concealed knives; and if he will make a statement on the measures relating to *(a)* detection and *(b)* punishment he is taking to deter knife-carrying in public. [6129]

Mr. Maclean: Under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 an officer may search a person for a knife where he has reasonable grounds for suspecting that he will find one. In addition, under section 60, of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, an officer of superintendent rank or above may, where he reasonably believes that serious violence may occur and that it is expedient to prevent it, authorise officers to stop any pedestrian and search him for offensive weapons or dangerous instruments. Acting under the authorisation, an officer may stop and search any person he thinks fit, whether or not he has any grounds for suspecting the person is carrying weapons or articles of that kind. The authorisation applies to a specified area for a period not exceeding 24 hours. My right hon. and learned Friend supports proposals in a private Member's Bill which will increase the maximum penalty for carrying a knife in public without good reason or lawful authority under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, from a £1,000 fine to six months' imprisonment.

Police Safe Scheme (Warwickshire)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Warwickshire constabulary's police safe scheme; and if he will make a statement on the practice of making charges for police services of this nature. [6130]

Mr. Maclean: The Warwickshire constabulary's police safe scheme is a new computerised keyholder service which is designed to maintain accurate, up-to-date information about non-domestic commercial and community premises and so enable Warwickshire constabulary to identify and contact current keyholders whenever necessary, promptly and effectively.

Warwickshire constabulary intends to charge initial registration and annual renewal fees in respect of premises registered with police safe.

Under section 15 of the Police Act 1964, the chief officer of police of any police force may provide, at the request of any person, special police services at any premises or in any locality in the police area for which the force is maintained, subject to the payment to the police authority of charges on such scales as may be determined by that authority.

Warwickshire constabulary has made it clear that it will continue to deal with incidents at any premises, whether registered with police safe or not, according to the circumstances and priorities at the time and will perform its duty to ensure that a basic level of action is taken to secure premises if necessary.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *216*, if he will take steps to ascertain the proportion of persons attending for interviews at the asylum screening unit who have to wait more than *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* three and *(d)* four hours. [5960]

Mr. Kirkhope: There are no plans to carry out a survey of this kind. Waiting times vary according to a number of factors, including the purpose of the visit, the type of interview required and, most importantly, the number of people visiting the asylum screening unit on any given day. In response to a substantial increase in the number of callers during the last two months, separate accommodation has been equipped to enable the unit to deal quickly with straightforward inquiries and requests.

Missing Persons Helpline

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received on the need for an independent missing persons helpline separate from the police; [5996]

(2) what is his Department's policy in respect of the formation of an independent missing persons helpline, separate from the police. [5997]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 December]:* Dealing with missing persons reports is an operational matter for the police service. We have no plans to introduce a Government helpline independent of the police, and have received no representations indicating that a separate helpline should be set up.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the national missing persons helpline in respect of the investigations of events at 25 Cromwell street, Gloucester. [5998]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 December]:* I understand that the helpline assisted police with the identification of victims based on the information it holds on missing persons.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for help the police make to the national missing persons helpline every week; and if he will make a statement on the use of the helpline by the police. [6000]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 December]:* I understand that there are regular contacts between police forces and the helpline, but that no comprehensive figures are available.

Police (Complaints)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will produce a breakdown of the reasons given for complaints made against the police, in each of the years 1990 to 1994. [6278]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 December]:* Information on the reasons for complaints recorded by the police is shown in the table. Figures for the Metropolitan police are available only for 1992 onwards.

Complaints completed by reason for complaint

England and Wales (excluding the Metropolitan Police) *Number of complaints*

Reason for complaint	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*		*1993*		*1994*	
Oppressive behaviour	11,719	12,302	12,316	(4,243)	12,391	(4,083)	12,438	(4,228)
Racially discriminatory behaviour	215	244	256	(205)	252	(198)	310	(298)
Malpractice	1,440	1,576	1,446	(726)	1,798	(687)	1,416	(623)
Failures in duty	5,662	6,018	6,039	(1,581)	6,173	(1,540)	6,125	(2,072)
Incivility	5,260	5,248	4,897	(1,348)	4,585	(1,548)	4,922	(2,297)
Traffic irregularity	386	324	340	(42)	301	(54)	270	(89)
Other	1,755	1,376	1,215	(268)	1,072	(212)	1,076	(357)
Total	26,437	27,088	26,509	(8,413)	26,572	(8,322)	26,557	(9,964)

Figures in brackets are for the Metropolitan Police only.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Pensions Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking in relation to the recruitment of additional staff in the pensions appeal tribunals service in Wales. [5765]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The pensions appeal tribunals do not maintain a permanent staff in Wales. In common with most other pensions appeal tribunal locations, hearings there are attended by staff based in London, the number of which has recently been increased.

Mr. Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of service that the pensions appeal tribunals (England and Wales) service provides to appellants from Wales. [5766]

Mr. Evans: The level of service provided to those wishing to have their appeal heard in Cardiff has been adversely affected since May 1995, when the independent tribunal service indicated that it was no longer in a position to allow the pensions appeal tribunals to use its premises in Cardiff. Hearings will, however, resume in south Wales in February 1996, at Cardiff county court. The Court Service is actively looking for additional locations in south Wales to reduce backlogs. Cases from south Wales, where the appellant has indicated that he or she does not wish to attend the hearing, are dealt with at hearing centres outside Wales to enable them to be dealt with more quickly.

Hearings for appellants from north Wales have always been held at Chester. From January 1996, the number of hearings at Chester will be doubled.

My Department keeps the service provided to appellants in Wales, as elsewhere, under review.

Mr. Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the sites in Wales at which the Court Service's pensions appeal tribunals (England and Wales) were held prior to May 1995. [5764]

Mr. Evans: Prior to May 1995, the pensions appeal tribunals conducted hearings at the premises of the independent tribunal service at Oxford house, Hill street, the Hayes, Cardiff.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6604]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In June 1995 the Department issued its procurement manual to all departmental purchasing officers. This contains advice on identifying suppliers and directs purchasing staff to seek assistance from trade journals and magazines, business and trade directories, trade associations and professional organisations, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, local enterprise agencies and small firms organisations such as the Alliance of Small Firms and Self Employed People, the National Federation of the Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd., the Small Firms Council and the CBI.

In addition, the manual contains comprehensive information about the special contracts arrangement, a Government scheme aimed at helping workshops for disabled persons compete for government contracts.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6710]

Mr. Evans: The Department's procurement unit is the contact point for all such matters. The publication "Government Opportunities" is one way in which contact details are publicised to potential suppliers, including small and medium enterprises.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6605]

Mr. Evans: None.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6606]

Mr. Evans: The following guidance has been issued.

> "Size may be relevant to the selection of tenderers, but only insofar as it is necessary to assess whether or not the job is within their capability. Once that assessment has been made, relative size is likely to be less significant than skills, efficiency, experience and reliability—characteristics relevant to value for money but just as likely to be found in small firms as in large and particularly relevant in the procurement of services".

Benzodiazepine

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many representations he has received since 1990 from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* health groups, *(c)* individuals and *(d)* legal representatives regarding benzodiazepine litigation and the withdrawal of legal aid certificates. [6329]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My predecessor and I have received many representations about this case from a number of different sources, including those mentioned.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he or his departmental officials last discussed the benzodiazepine litigation with *(a)* the legal aid board, *(b)* the Benzodiazepine Solicitors Group and *(c)* the Lord Chief Justice. [6328]

Mr. Evans: My predecessor and I, and our officials, have been frequently in touch with the legal aid board and interested solicitors about the policy implications of these actions. There have been no discussions on this matter with the Lord Chief Justice.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid certificates are presently in force in respect of benzodiazepine litigation; and if he will make a statement. [6327]

Mr. Evans: None.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements for 1994–95. [6510]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* orders and *(b)* firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6491]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what response there has been to the consultation on the proposals for commercial borrowing by grant-maintained schools. [7662]

Mrs. Gillan: One hundred and fourteen responses to the consultation on commercial borrowing for GM schools were received. Of the responses which gave a view on the principle of commercial borrowing, 75 per cent. were in favour, including 80 per cent. of grant-maintained schools which responded. I have today deposited a policy briefing sheet summarising the responses in the Library.

School Inspections

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on future school inspection arrangements once the current four-year cycle has been completed. [7663]

Mr. Robin Squire: The inspection system is achieving its intended purpose: to make schools focus on areas that require improvement and to provide information to parents on the performance of their children's schools. Over 5,000 schools have already been inspected by the Office for Standards in Education under the current four-year inspection cycle. But we are more than halfway through the first cycle for secondary schools and well into the primary cycle and now need to consider the future.

The first cycle of inspection will establish a clear baseline for all schools. That was essential, and the Government will continue to ensure that all schools are inspected regularly. But having completed this necessary universal audit, it may be less necessary to inspect every school in the same depth and frequency in the next cycle.

Having consulted Her Majesty's chief inspector, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is minded to favour a more targeted approach in the second cycle of inspections. The practical issues associated with this will need to be carefully considered. She has invited Her Majesty's chief inspector to advise her, by 31 January 1996, on a range of possible options for adjusting the timing and intensity of inspections to the needs of particular schools. In the light of his advice she will make a further announcement before Easter.

Suffolk Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress Suffolk TEC is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [7664]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce the award of a three-year licence to Suffolk TEC which has now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the Student Loans Company appointed a new chief executive. [7665]

Mr. Forth: Mr. Colin Ward, currently assistant managing director of the Student Loans Company, has accepted the post of chief executive with effect from 1 January 1996.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the Student Loans Company appointed a new assessor; and if she will publish his terms of reference. [7667]

Mr. Forth: Mr. Graham Chandler, retired registrar of the university of Nottingham, has agreed to become the independent assessor for the Student Loans Company from 1 January 1996. I am placing details of his terms of reference in the Library.

Schools (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on capital allocations for local education authority maintained schools for 1996–97. [7668]

Mrs. Gillan: Local education authorities have today been informed of their annual capital guidelines for schools which, together with supplementary credit approvals, will total £458 million in 1996–97. They have also been informed of the allocations for spending by the governors of voluntary-aided and special agreement schools in their areas—the overall grant to be made available in 1996–97 will be £100 million.

ACGs do not represent the full total of funds available to LEAs for capital expenditure. Authorities are also able to spend additional sums from capital receipts and from their revenue budgets if they so choose.

Local authorities have received considerable resources in the last few years for building work at schools. The substantial sum available in 1996–97 is a 7.5 per cent. increase on the £426 million available in the current year and should enable local authorities to continue to make significant progress in improving the building stock.

The reserve held back for subsequent issue as supplementary credit approvals includes a substantial sum, £30 million to £40 million, for a new challenge fund which will be allocated towards innovative capital projects involving contributions from other bodies, including the private sector. The Department will be consulting shortly on the criteria against which bids to the challenge fund will be assessed.

In distributing ACGs, I have again given priority to the second and third year expenditure on work covered by ACGs in previous years; projects to provide new school places in areas of population growth—"Basic Need"—and projects to remove surplus places. For 1996–97, we are allocating a historically high level of cover for commitments—£282 million. We are also providing £90 million for basic need—a level of cover equal to 1995–96.

Of the total of £100 million grant for voluntary-aided schools, £62 million has been allocated for capital work and £38 million has been set aside for repairs. The figure of £62 million represents a very healthy 7 per cent. increase in funds available for capital work. More funds have had to be set aside for committed projects this year than in 1995–96 and allocations for basic need are also much higher than in previous years. I am pleased to announced 35 new major projects for the starts list and 27 projects for the design list.

Some £42 million of the ACG total will be allocated in the form of SCAs to LEAs during the course of the year. This figure includes provision for the challenge fund.

Details of individual LEA's ACGs and grant allocations have been placed in the Library.

Data (National Security Certificates)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what occasions certificates under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 were signed by members of her Department; for how long each certificate was valid; and in what circumstances employment records can be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security. [5341]

Mr. Robin Squire: I am aware of one such certificate so far as the Department for Education and Employment is concerned. Disclosing details of such certificates would itself not be in the interest of national security.

Classroom Certificates

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many classroom assistants were employed in *(a)* England and *(b)* each of the seven counties of the south-west in (i) 1992 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [5350]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table:

Full-time equivalent numbers of education support staff[1] in maintained schools[2] for England and in each local education authority area of the South West: 1992 and 1995

	1992	*[3]1995*
Position in January each year		
Avon	1,326	1,544
Cornwall	748	1,065
Devon	1,312	1,730
Dorset	608	800
Gloucestershire	609	736
Isles of Scilly	3	2
Somerset	748	1,043
Wiltshire	701	959
England	63,711	81,910

[1] Nursery assistants, special needs support staff and other support staff including librarians, technicians, medical staff and child care assistants.

[2] Maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.

[3] Provisional.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5560]

Mr. Robin Squire: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in both the former Employment Department and the former Department for Education in each of the last three years is included in running cost expenditure, as published in the respective annual reports. It is not always possible to disaggregate the specific costs for a small number of rooms from the overall cost of refurbishing a whole floor of a building.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and in the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5577]

Mr. Robin Squire: In 1994–95 the cost of official hospitality, which was included in the running cost budget for the Department, was £99,004. Of this, £73,643 was attributable to the former Department for Education and £25,361 to the former Department of Employment.

For the combined Department for Education and Employment the figure for the financial year to date is £61,000 with expenditure for the year as a whole projected to be £90,000.

Telephone Hotlines

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what telephone hotlines are run by her Department; when each was set up; how much each costs annually to run; how many calls each has received to date; and what is the average cost of each call received. [5771]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment does not operate any hotlines. However, the Department does run a small number of lines providing publicity and information to members of the public. To provide this information would incur disproportionate cost.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many colleges of further education there are currently in the United Kingdom. [6071]

Mr. Paice: I am responsible for further education in England only. However, I understand that there are currently a total of 545 colleges of further education in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many colleges of further education in the United Kingdom have been transferred from local education authority control to management by incorporated bodies. [6073]

Mr. Paice: I am responsible for further education in England only. However, I understood that, of the 545 colleges of further education in the United Kingdom, 488 have been transferred from local education authority control to management by incorporated bodies.

Staff-student Ratios

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the current average staff to student ratio in primary, junior, further and higher education in (i) 1985, (ii) 1992, and (iii) the latest available date. [6552]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table:

Pupil: Teacher/student: Staff ratios in primary and junior schools and further and higher education in England in 1984–85, 1991–92 and at the latest available date

Academic year	Primary schools	(of which) Junior schools	Further education	Higher education
1984–85	22.2	22.4	n/a	n/a
1991–92	22.2	22.7	n/a	14.6
1993–94	—	—	15.4	16.5
1994–95	22.9	23.1	—	—

n/a = not available.

Advertising

Mr Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate she has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6563]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested by the hon. Member could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Research Projects (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all former Department for Employment/Employment Department Group, and former Department for Education and Department for Education and Employment funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1989 in *(a)* the city of Sunderland, *(b)* Wearside district, *(c)* the Sunderland travel-to-work district and *(d)* Sunderland local education authority identifying (i) the title, summary and duration of the pilot/trial, (ii) the target population and the total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot, trial or research finding was published and if she will indicate the date of publication; and if she will make a statement on other non-Department of Employment/Employment Department Group, Department of Education and Department for Education and Employment research bodies, or organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [6304]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following information is available about research projects which fall within the hon. Member's definition:

TITLE: "COUNTY DURHAM TEC INVESTORS IN PEOPLE TRAINING EVALUATION TOOLKIT" (NAME SUBSEQUENTLY CHANGED TO DURHAM EVALUATION SYSTEM)

Summary

This development project developed and piloted an effective, practical generic training evaluation toolkit, so that companies can easily and accurately assess and understand the effectiveness of their training investment in terms of their business objectives, development of people, and the development of their organisations. The specific outputs of the projects were a concept paper, a specification, a prototype paper-based evaluation system and a pilot using three companies within County Durham.

Target population

The target population was employers interested in Investors in People Standard, principally within County Durham, but the project outcomes were made available to TECs/employers outside the area including Wearside.

Total number of participants

Three companies took part in the pilot scheme (Liz Dargue Staffing; Tornado; and Seaward)

Date of publication

Report published June 1993

Other organisations involved

This project was a joint development by the [then Training Enterprise and Education Directorate of the] former Employment Department, County Durham TEC and Rubicon Associates.

TITLE: "OPEN LEARNING" CREDITS

Summary

The "Open Learning" Credits pilots were a White Paper initiative to trial the use of open learning for adult unemployed people. There were 14 pilots in all of which 11 were in England, two in Scotland and one in Wales. One of the English pilots was based at Wearside TEC (later renamed Sunderland City TEC).

Duration

The pilots were carried out in 1993–94.

Target population and number of participants

The target population was unemployed adults. About 100 learners participated in the pilot at Wearside TEC.

Publication of Findings

A national evaluation report for the Open Learning Credits was published and copies are placed in the Library.

Other organisations involved in the pilots

The British Association for Open Learning managed the pilots.

The Policy Studies Institute carried out the evaluation of the pilots.

TITLE: "TAKING TRAINING TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES" (SUNDERLAND)

Summary

This was one of the four pilot projects (the others were in Bradford Lewisham and Wandsworth) operating in housing estates which set out to investigate and demonstrate new ways to encourage and help develop their skills. The Sunderland project was a mobile service operating from a van displaying a range of open learning materials, with a project officer who helped steer people towards Open Learning or other provision, and helped set up training courses for groups with similar needs.

Duration

The project was funded for 15 months.

Target population

People living on housing estates with high unemployment. Women returning to the labour market were specifically targeted.

Total number of participants

Approximately 250 clients registered with the project, but the informal nature of the service meant that this take-up figure is an estimate. It is not known how many of those who came into contact with the project, and who did not take up Open Learning, went on to do other training.

Date of publication

The project was summarised in the Employment Department's report "Taking Training to Local Communities", published in 1993.

Other organisations involved

The contractor for the project was the library service of the Council, which provided the main open learning resource. Sunderland Open Learning (SOL) arranged open learning support. The day to day management of the project was shared between SOL and the library service. Wearside TEC (now Sunderland City TEC) paid the project officer's salary, including a six month extension beyond the Department's support.

TITLE: "YOUTH DROP-OUT RESEARCH PROJECT"

Summary

This project examines the experience of young people in the Ford and Pennywell area of Sunderland as they make the transition from school to the world of work and training. The project was funded from the Employment Service Programme Development Fund with additional support from the Ford and Pennywell Advice Centre (Sunderland).

Duration

The project lasted one year during 1994–95

Target population and number of participants

The target population was young people between 16 and 24. Two hundred and fifty young people in Sunderland were interviewed by the researcher.

Date of publication

The report was published in October 1995 by the Youth Work Press. Copyright resides with the publishers (Youth Workshop Press).

Other organisations involved

Dr. Clive Wilkinson, currently Rural Development Officer for the Community Council of Northumberland, carried out the research. Ford and Pennywell Advice Centre (Sunderland) provided part funding

TITLE: "LOCAL SUPPORT FOR TRAINING DEVELOPMENT—NORTH EAST ENGLAND"

Summary

The project piloted ways of helping trainers, managers and TEC advisors to use computer based information exchange as a way of providing mutual help in dealing with training problems and opportunities. Sunderland TEC was one of five TECs involved in this project.

Duration

10 months, from September 1994 to July 1995.

Target population

Trainers, managers and TEC advisors.

Date of publication

Report published as "Local Computer Support for Training Development" by Sandra Corlett, August 1995. The report is obtainable from Newcastle University or the Department (Trainer Development Team).

Other organisations involved

The work was contracted with the Northern Regional Management Centre in Washington. The co-ordination work has been moved to Newcastle University.

Note: Sunderland City TEC (formerly Wearside TEC) will have been involved in other pilots, trials and research studies, however information on these is not available centrally.

Training Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people, after leaving (i) the adult employment subsidy scheme, (ii) the employment action scheme, (iii) the job creation programme, (iv) the job interview guarantee scheme, (v) the job review workshops scheme, (vi) the job splitting scheme, (vii) the job search seminars scheme, (viii) the job training programme, (ix) the job training scheme, (x) the jobplan workshops programme, (xi) the learning for work scheme, (xii) the new workers scheme, (xiii) the old training scheme, (xiv) the recruitment subsidy for school leavers scheme, (xv) the voluntary projects programme, (xvi) the work experience programme, (xvii) the workstart pilots scheme, (xviii) the wider opportunities training programme, (xix) the youth employment subsidy scheme between 1976 and 1978 and (xx) the young workers scheme *(a)* went into work, *(b)* went into further employment schemes and *(c)* became unemployed; [6423]

(2) how many people took part in (i) the adult employment subsidy scheme, (ii) the employment action scheme, (iii) the job creation programme, (iv) the job interview guarantee scheme, (v) the job review workshops scheme, (vi) the job splitting scheme, (vii) the job search seminars scheme, (viii) the job training programme, (ix) the job training scheme, (x) the jobplan workshops programme, (xi) the learning for work scheme, (xii) the new workers scheme, (xiii) the old job training scheme, (xiv) the recruitment subsidy for school leavers scheme, (xv) the voluntary projects programme, (xvi) the work experience programme, (xvii) the workstart pilots scheme, (xviii) the wider opportunities training programme, (xix) the youth employment subsidy scheme between 1976 and 1978 and (xx) the young workers scheme in each year of each scheme's operation including those who left before completion of the scheme; [6427]

(3) how many persons left (i) the adult employment subsidy scheme, (ii) the employment action scheme, (iii) the job creation programme, (iv) the job interview guarantee scheme, (v) the job review workshops scheme, (vi) the job splitting scheme, (vii) the job training programme, (ix) the job training scheme, (x) the jobplan workshops programme, (xi) the learning for work scheme, (xii) the new workers scheme, (xiii) the old job training scheme, (xiv) the recruitment subsidy for school leavers scheme, (xv) the voluntary projects programme, (xvi) the work experience programme, (xvii) the workstart pilots scheme, (xviii) the wider opportunities training programme, (xix) the youth employment subsidy scheme between 1976 and 1978 and (xx) the young workers scheme *(a)* in each year of each scheme's operation and *(b)* for each year as a percentage of the total numbers leaving all schemes; [6425]

(4) what type and level of qualification each leaver obtained from (i) the adult employment subsidy scheme, (ii) the employment action scheme, (iii) the job creation programme, (iv) the job interview guarantee scheme, (v) the job review workshops scheme, (vi) the job splitting scheme, (vii) the job search seminars scheme, (viii) the job training programme, (ix) the job training scheme, (x) the jobplan workshops programme, (xi) the learning for work scheme, (xii) the new workers scheme, (xiii) the old job training scheme, (xiv) the recruitment subsidy for school leavers scheme, (xv) the voluntary projects programme, (xvi) the work experience programme, (xvii) the workstart pilots scheme, (xviii) the wider opportunities training programme, (xix) the youth employment subsidy scheme between 1976 and 1978 and (xx) the young workers scheme; and in each case how many failed to obtain any qualification. [6424]

Mr. Paice: As the reply will consist of a large amount of data, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure on (i) the adult employment subsidy scheme, (ii) the employment action scheme, (iii) the job creation programme, (iv) the job interview guarantee scheme, (v) the job review workshops scheme, (vi) the job splitting scheme, (vii) the job search seminars scheme, (viii) the job training programme, (ix) the job training scheme, (x) the jobplan workshops programme, (xi) the learning for work scheme, (xii) the new workers scheme, (xiii) the old job training scheme, (xiv) the recruitment subsidy for school leavers scheme, (xv) the voluntary projects programme, (xvi) the work experience programme, (xvii) the workstart pilots scheme, (xviii) the wider opportunities training programme, (xix) the youth employment subsidy scheme between 1976 and 1978 and (xx) the young workers scheme in each year of each scheme's operation. [6422]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the following table:

£ million

	1975–76	*1976–77*	*1977–78*	*1978–79*	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*
Adult Employment Subsidy				0.2	0.4		
Employment Action[2]							
Job Creation Programme	1.2	34.7	72.6	76.9	4.9	0.5	0.1
Job Interview Guarantee[3]+							
Job Review+							
Job Splitting Scheme+							
Jobsearch Seminars+							
Job Training Programme[4]							
New Job Training Scheme							
Jobplan Work-shops+							
Learning for Work							
New Workers Scheme+							
Old Job Training Scheme[4]							
Recruitment for School Leavers Subsidy	0.8	2.1					
Voluntary Projects Programme							
Work Experience Programme			12.8				
Workstart+							
Wider Opportunities for Training							
Youth Employment Subsidy+		0.6	5.0	3.7			
Young Workers Scheme+							

£ million

	1982–83	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*
Adult Employment Subsidy							
Employment Action[2]							
Job Creation Programme	4.1						
Job Interview Guarantee[3]+							
Job Review+							
Job Splitting Scheme+	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	
Jobsearch Seminars+							
Job Training Programme[4]	311.1	240.7	232.9	219.4	286.2	272.3	
New Job Training Scheme					0.9	66.9	
Jobplan Work-shops+							
Learning for Work							
New Workers Scheme+					9.1	15.0	4.4
Old Job Training Scheme[4]							
Recruitment for School Leavers Subsidy							
Voluntary Projects Programme	0.2	5.5	9.9	11.5	14.5	13.4	12.4
Work Experience Programme							
Workstart+							
Wider Opportunities for Training	11.9	16.1	22.2	26.0			
Youth Employment Subsidy+							
Young Workers Scheme+	40.7	58.3	41.3	32.4	17.8	0.5	

£ million

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]
Adult Employment Subsidy							
Employment Action[2]			16.3	137.3			
Job Creation Programme							
Job Interview Guarantee[3]+			0.9	1.1	3.3	1.0	1.3
Job Review+			1.3	3.8	3.4	2.6	3.2
Job Splitting Scheme+							
Jobsearch Seminars+			2.4	5.0	4.7	4.3	4.9
Job Training Programme[4]							
New Job Training Scheme							
Jobplan Work-shops+					35.3	28.5	16.8
Learning for Work					12.0	8.2	

£ million

	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96[1]
New Workers Scheme+							
Old Job Training Scheme[4]							
Recruitment for School Leavers Subsidy							
Voluntary Projects Programme							
Work Experience Programme							
Workstart+					0.2	1.4	5.5
Wider Opportunities for Training							
Youth Employment Subsidy+							
Young Workers Scheme+							

[1] Figures for 1995-96 are planned provision. Figures for previous years are actual outturn.

[2] Figures for Employment Action are for England and Scotland.

[3] Part of the expenditure on the Job Interview Guarantee scheme is funded through the Employment Services's overall running costs budget, which includes expenditure on a number of other functions.

[4] The Job Training Programme was a generic name which covered a range of separate programmes including the Old Job Training Scheme.

1. Figures up to and including 1991 are for GB. 1991-92 in expenditure for England and Wales. For 1992-93 onwards in England only. Figures for programmes marked + are GB.

Nursery Education

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many children under the age of five years have *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* part-time place in (i) reception classes in school, (ii) nursery classes in schools and (iii) nursery schools by local education authority area; [6524]

(2) what percentage of children under the age of five years has *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time place in (i) reception classes in schools, (ii) nursery classes in schools and (iii) nursery schools by local education authority area. [6523]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Pupils aged under five years of age[1] [2] in nursery and primary schools

Position as at January 1995 (provisional)

	Nursery schools			
	Full-time		Part-time	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Camden	40	1	21	1
Greenwich	330	5	317	5
Hackney	62	1	87	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	310	8	244	7
Islington	147	3	172	3
Kensington and Chelsea	174	6	75	2
Lambeth	190	2	260	3
Lewisham	100	1	131	2
Southwark	216	3	319	4
Tower Hamlets	451	8	270	5
Wandsworth	112	2	104	2
Westminster	52	1	138	4
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0	0
Barnet	26	—	549	7
Bexley	0	0	0	0
Brent	222	3	1	—
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Croydon	0	0	499	5
Ealing	20	—	434	5
Enfield	0	0	0	0
Haringey	163	3	60	1
Harrow	0	0	0	0
Havering	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	0	0	120	2
Hounslow	0	0	0	0
Kingston upon Thames	58	2	184	5
Merton	0	0	0	0
Newham	80	1	879	10
Redbridge	0	0	0	0
Richmond upon Thames	8	—	60	1
Sutton	0	0	240	5
Waltham Forest	33	—	275	4
Birmingham	788	2	1,623	5
Coventry	17	—	124	1
Dudley	9	—	61	1
Sandwell	73	1	55	1
Solihull	0	0	0	0
Walsall	73	1	766	10
Wolverhampton	0	0	848	12
Knowsley	0	0	0	0
Liverpool	193	1	371	3
St. Helens	0	0	80	2
Sefton	1	—	317	4
Wirral	13	—	306	3
Bolton	31	—	460	6
Bury	51	1	108	2
Manchester	404	3	138	1
Oldham	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	47	1	865	13
Salford	532	8	543	8
Stockport	80	1	856	11
Tameside	0	0	281	4
Trafford	0	0	0	0
Wigan	3	—	187	2
Barnsley	0	0	181	3
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	0	0	403	6
Sheffield	140	1	711	5
Bradford	179	1	342	2
Calderdale	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	0	0	548	5
Leeds	0	0	77	—
Wakefield	0	0	481	5
Gateshead	3	—	70	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	588	8	34	—
North Tyneside	46	1	180	4
South Tyneside	10	—	444	11
Sunderland	38	—	1,004	12
Avon	698	3	1,101	4
Bedfordshire	316	2	1,160	7
Berkshire	129	1	2,074	10
Buckinghamshire	0	0	571	3
Cambridge	18	—	716	4

Pupils aged under five years of age[1] [2] in nursery and primary schools

Position as at January 1995 (provisional)

	Nursery schools			
	Full-time		Part-time	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Cheshire	40	—	829	3
Cleveland	0	0	154	1
Cornwall[3]	24	—	87	1
Cumbria	1	—	816	7
Derbyshire	138	1	1,435	6
Devon	46	—	269	1
Dorset	0	0	0	0
Durham	2	—	2,616	17
East Sussex	0	0	258	2
Essex	0	0	300	1
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	1	—	338	1
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	41	—	1,702	6
Humberside	219	1	944	4
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	0	83	—
Lancashire	24	—	3,640	9

Pupils aged under five years of age[1] [2] in nursery and primary schools

Position as at January 1995 (provisional)

	Nursery schools			
	Full-time		Part-time	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Leicestershire	0	0	51	—
Lincolnshire	61	—	470	3
Norfolk	3	—	401	2
North Yorkshire	1	—	372	2
Northamptonshire	0	0	616	4
Northumberland	36	—	92	1
Nottinghamshire	6	—	589	2
Oxfordshire	70	—	1,009	6
Shropshire	0	0	176	2
Somerset	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	610	2	1,467	5
Suffolk	0	0	101	1
Surrey	90	—	338	1
Warwickshire	0	0	759	6
West Sussex	15	—	419	2
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0
England[1] [4]	8,702	1	43,856	3

Position as at January 1995 (provisional)

	Primary schools							
	Nursery classes				Infant classes			
	Full-time		Part-time		Full-time		Part-time	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Camden	446	11	509	12	1,014	25	1	—
Greenwich	284	4	2,351	35	1,012	15	12	—
Hackney	784	12	1,388	21	1,587	24	0	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	558	15	609	16	568	15	0	0
Islington	949	19	626	12	1,459	29	7	—
Kensington and Chelsea	412	13	196	6	380	12	5	—
Lambeth	560	7	1,451	19	975	12	43	1
Lewisham	404	6	2,027	28	1,069	15	62	1
Southwark	697	9	1,865	25	2,113	29	7	—
Tower Hamlets	1,594	28	1,041	18	1,695	29	10	—
Wandsworth	859	13	1,317	19	1,624	24	0	0
Westminster	439	11	554	14	568	15	6	—
Barking and Dagenham	2	—	2,052	46	1,623	36	0	0
Barnet	4	—	2,091	25	2,156	26	49	1
Bexley	0	0	1,442	23	2,052	33	22	—
Brent	702	10	1,675	24	1,974	28	0	0
Bromley	0	0	172	2	2,385	34	0	0
Croydon	0	0	1,512	16	2,877	30	6	—
Ealing	1	—	3,264	41	2,424	30	2	—
Enfield	0	0	1,663	22	2,366	31	23	—
Haringey	511	8	2,008	32	1,846	30	2	—
Harrow	0	0	1,009	18	1,626	29	0	0
Havering	17	—	478	9	1,983	36	1	—
Hillingdon	0	0	3,234	47	31	—	56	1
Hounslow	1	—	2,362	40	1,724	29	1	—
Kingston upon Thames	0	0	967	28	500	14	538	15
Merton	19	—	2,694	55	777	16	206	4
Newham	62	1	3,434	40	1,280	15	0	0
Redbridge	34	1	1,292	20	1,216	19	181	3
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	670	16	57	1	1,057	26
Sutton	1	—	1,726	36	61	1	3	—
Waltham Forest	91	1	2,314	33	1,033	15	11	—
Birmingham	1,869	6	6,669	21	9,933	31	86	—
Coventry	31	—	1,953	22	2,786	32	2	—
Dudley	74	1	2,918	35	2,707	33	0	0
Sandwell	131	2	4,406	51	2,840	33	0	0
Solihull	1	—	1,879	36	1,949	38	0	0

Position as at January 1995 (provisional)

	Primary schools							
	Nursery classes				*Infant classes*			
	Full-time		*Part-time*		*Full-time*		*Part-time*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Walsall	61	1	3,496	47	2,464	33	1	—
Wolverhampton	1	—	3,049	42	2,262	31	0	0
Knowsley	0	0	3,003	62	1,673	34	6	—
Liverpool	708	5	4,990	36	4,483	33	0	0
St. Helens	0	0	1,605	33	1,574	33	0	0
Sefton	0	0	2,440	32	2,506	33	1	—
Wirral	0	0	1,954	22	2,932	33	1	—
Bolton	369	5	2,325	30	2,617	33	1	—
Bury	176	3	1,203	24	1,595	31	0	0
Manchester	4,283	31	2,756	20	2,423	17	6	—
Oldham	957	14	1,501	22	2,235	33	1	—
Rochdale	94	1	1,139	17	2,112	32	0	0
Salford	1,662	25	794	12	2,264	34	0	0
Stockport	1	—	1,145	15	2,482	32	1	—
Tameside	7	—	2,280	35	2,133	33	2	—
Trafford	2	—	2,524	43	1,919	32	0	0
Wigan	0	0	1,986	23	2,700	31	32	—
Barnsley	0	0	2,812	45	1,090	18	11	—
Doncaster	55	1	3,612	44	2,817	34	0	0
Rotherham	121	2	2,803	39	1,160	16	0	0
Sheffield	236	2	4,613	34	2,096	15	342	2
Bradford	176	1	5,789	39	3,933	26	202	1
Calderdale	264	5	1,682	31	1,866	34	0	0
Kirklees	1	—	3,889	35	3,509	32	0	0
Leeds	109	1	9,061	46	5,695	29	35	—
Wakefield	14	—	4,349	49	1,678	19	92	1
Gateshead	10	—	1,791	35	1,623	32	30	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	768	10	1,527	20	2,263	30	26	—
North Tyneside	45	1	2,423	50	1,681	35	1	—
South Tyneside	4	—	1,777	42	1,336	32	52	1
Sunderland	4	—	2,401	29	2,611	31	0	0
Avon	252	1	3,182	13	7,924	32	6	—
Bedfordshire	436	3	3,308	20	2,331	14	587	4
Berkshire	198	1	4,459	21	695	3	82	—
Buckinghamshire	0	0	2,469	13	1,064	6	2,036	11
Cambridge	11	—	1,486	8	5,812	31	30	—
Cheshire	10	—	4,604	18	8,320	32	3	—
Cleveland	4	—	9,364	59	5,236	33	5	—
Cornwall[1]	4	—	1,551	14	1,990	18	1,627	14
Cumbria	0	0	2,224	18	4,058	33	8	—
Derbyshire	274	1	7,858	31	4,381	17	1,387	5
Devon	112	—	2,585	10	4,125	16	115	—
Dorset	0	0	841	5	1,170	8	3,830	25
Durham	1	—	4,644	29	5,110	32	2	—
East Sussex	1	—	1,366	8	2,480	15	2,706	16
Essex	108	—	2,278	6	7,424	18	1,270	3
Gloucestershire	0	0	27	—	4,592	32	24	—
Hampshire	0	0	1,638	4	10,653	25	2,992	7
Hereford and Worcester	130	1	1,552	9	2,908	16	45	—
Hertfordshire	11	—	7,769	28	4,761	17	613	2
Humberside	696	3	7,384	30	5,380	22	20	—
Isle of Wight	1	—	174	6	922	34	0	0
Kent	0	0	2,125	5	10,429	25	3,080	8
Lancashire	0	0	4,466	11	12,865	33	2	—
Leicestershire	1,607	6	3,612	14	4,241	17	521	2
Lincolnshire	40	—	1,496	10	4,905	33	7	—
Norfolk	0	0	857	5	3,812	21	1,834	10
North Yorkshire	112	1	3,400	19	5,103	29	259	1
Northamptonshire	27	—	2,402	14	5,473	32	5	—
Northumberland	7	—	2,916	40	2,492	34	6	—
Nottinghamshire	263	1	12,906	47	1,946	7	153	1
Oxfordshire	64	—	2,084	12	906	5	411	2
Shropshire	0	0	1,844	17	1,803	16	324	3

Position as at January 1995 (provisional)

	Primary schools							
	Nursery classes				*Infant classes*			
	Full-time		*Part-time*		*Full-time*		*Part-time*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Somerset	3	—	584	5	3.895	33	6	—
Staffordshire	1,444	5	3,532	13	9,021	32	47	—
Suffolk	1	—	2,976	17	2.503	14	88	—
Surrey	9	—	2,626	10	4,574	17	2.504	9
Warwickshire	2	—	1,423	11	4,225	33	3	—
West Sussex	0	0	811	5	2,960	17	51	—
Wiltshire	3	—	574	4	3,276	20	112	1
England[3][4]	27,514	2	275,948	21	313,781	24	30.043	2

[1] Excludes pupils who became five years of age by 1 January.

[2] The number of pupils under five years is expressed as a percentage of the estimated population aged three and four at 31 December.

[3] Includes Isles of Scilly.

[4] Includes Corporation of London.

— Less than 0.05.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the levels of public expenditure on education for children under school age in *(a)* Denmark, *(b)* France and *(c)* the United Kingdom, (i) in total, (ii) per child under school age, (iii) as a percentage of the national gross domestic product and (iv) as a percentage of total public spending in each country. [6522]

Mr. Squire: International comparisons of expenditure on early childhood education are difficult to make because of the need to ensure consistent definitions across countries. Compulsory schooling begins in the UK one year earlier than in France and two years earlier than in Denmark. Total spending on the education of children under school age in these countries is therefore likely to be higher than in the UK. In addition, UK figures exclude expenditure on primary provision in infant and reception classes which account for approximately half of all pupils below compulsory school age in this country.

There are particular differences making comparisons over time because of changes in countries' programmes and policies and in some international definitions.

The latest available estimates based on information provided by individual countries to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are shown in the table:

Public expenditure[1] on early childhood education, 1992

	Total public expenditure on early childhood education in publicly funded schools (£ million)	*Public expenditure per FTE[2] pupil in early childhood education in publicly funded schools (£ per pupil)[3]*	*Public expenditure on early childhood education as a percentage of GDP*	*Public expenditure on early childhood education as a percentage of total public expenditure*
Denmark[4]	399	2,790	0.7	1.2
France	3,900	1,530	0.6	1.1
United Kingdom[5]	484	2,040	0.1	0.2

Source:

DfEE estimates based on data supplied to OECD by individual countries for the publication *"Education at a Glance"*, OECD April 1995.

Notes:

[1] Recurrent and capital expenditure, but excluding loan charges.

[2] Each part-time pupil is counted as 0.5 full-time equivalents.

[3] Rounded to the nearest £10.

[4] From 1992, includes expenditure on all pupils aged three to five. Prior to 1992, such pupils were excluded.

[5] From 1992, for international comparison purposes only, the UK has regarded early childhood education as covering only pupils in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools. Prior to 1992, all pupils below compulsory school age were included in this category.

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to end Government funding for the access to work scheme. [6429]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to an announcement made on 14 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), *Official Report*, column 738. This makes it clear that the funding planned for next year will be maintained.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to introduce an employers' contribution to the access to work scheme. [6428]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to an announcement made on 14 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Tatton, *Official Report*, column 738. This explains that discussions will be held about the future operation of the programme.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled people are currently in employment following involvement in the access to work scheme. [6430]

Mr. Paice: Over 9,000 disabled people have been helped by the access to work programme since April 1995. Help is provided only to disabled people who need help to get or retain work. Of those helped, over 80 per cent. were already in employment when they applied for assistance.

Discretionary Grants

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will fund further research into the discretionary grants policy of local education authorities. [6934]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to do so.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many orders are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by her Department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6488]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information required could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Department. The Department does not maintain this statistical information.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6501]

Mr. Robin Squire: Detailed information is not held in the form requested. However, the Department paid over £1.5 billion to private sector suppliers in 1994–95, principally for the delivery of employment and training programmes.

GCSE Scores

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for all English secondary schools, including special schools, in 1995 *(a)* the average GCSE point scores, *(b)* the average percentages achieving at least five Cs, *(c)* the average percentages achieving at least five Gs and *(d)* the average percentages achieving at least one pass, in 5 percentile groups ranked by their 15-year-old pupils' achievements according to each of these indices, respectively, on the same basis as the annual schools performance tables. [7028]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following list for 1995, shows *(a)* the average GCSE point scores, *(b)* the average percentages achieving at least five Cs, *(c)* the average percentages achieving at least give Gs, *(d)* the average percentages achieving at least one pass, in 5 per centile groups ranked by their 15-year pupils' achievements according to each of these indices. These figures are based on the school performance tables published in November and they exclude data from the published schools that had less than 10 pupils aged 15. The averages quoted are simple averages, based on the sums of the percentage divided by the numbers of schools involved. This is consistent with the data for earlier years provided in the reply to the hon. Member's question of 8 November. *Official Report*, columns *960-61*.

School performance tables 1995

Percentage of 15 year olds achieving GCSE

Five percentile group	*Average point score*	*5A–C*	*5A–G*	*1A–G*	*Number schools*
1	60.6	98.9	100.0	100.0	218
2	53.8	93.2	99.2	100.0	218
3	48.7	82.6	97.7	99.3	219
4	44.8	68.9	96.6	99.0	218
5	42.5	60.9	95.5	98.0	218
6	40.8	55.9	94.3	97.7	219
7	39.2	51.8	93.4	97.0	218
8	37.7	48.3	92.4	96.4	218
9	36.3	44.7	91.2	95.9	218
10	34.9	41.6	89.7	95.0	218
11	33.3	38.2	88.2	94.2	219
12	31.7	34.3	86.4	93.3	218
13	30.1	30.9	84.2	92.0	218
14	28.3	27.4	81.9	90.5	219
15	26.3	23.8	79.1	88.8	218
16	24.1	19.6	74.8	86.3	218
17	21.1	14.5	68.4	82.6	218
18	13.4	5.6	44.3	72.5	219
19	0.9	0.0	0.0	20.4	218
20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	218

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many times mobile telephones used by Ministers in her Department have been cloned during *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the last 12 months and *(c)* the last 18 months; and which Ministers within her Department have had their mobile telephones cloned. [4256]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 7 December 1995]:* There have been two such instances, one in May 1995 and another in September 1995. In both cases, it was the mobile telephone allocated to me that was cloned. To try to prevent any recurrence, following the first instance the number of my telephone was changed and following the second a new digital replacement was provided.

TRANSPORT

Local Roads (Capital Resources)

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce the allocation of capital resources for expenditure on local roads and transport in England for 1996–97. [7543]

Sir George Young: This year a total of about £830 million is to be allocated to local highway authorities and passenger transport authorities in England for capital expenditure on their local transport infrastructure in 1996–97. This consists of £236 million in transport supplementary grant and around £594 million in annual capital guideline, supplementary credit approval, grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968, and grant under section 13 of the Industrial Development Act 1982.

In this year's settlement, I am funding 53 packages of measures proposed by authorities outside London to encourage public transport, cycling and walking and to offer attractive alternatives to car use. We were pleased to announce last week the successful bids in our cycle challenge competition at a value of £1.89 million. I am providing funding for a number of measures in London, including further support for the London bus priority network and the London cycle network.

I am increasing funding for local safety schemes from £50 million in 1995–96 to £55 million in 1996–97. I am also accepting five new bypasses for funding. These are designed to remove congestion and bring environmental relief to rural communities.

I am setting aside resources for two new major public transport schemes—a new transport interchange to serve Luton airport, and concourse improvements at Stratford station in east London—which are expected to begin construction during 1996–97. I am continuing to fund the Midland Metro light rail project and, subject to satisfactory bids being received, Croydon Tramlink. Some £187 million is being allocated for the assessment, strengthening and maintenance of bridges and the structural maintenance of principal road carriageways. As for previous years, local authorities will be free to vire resources between bridges and carriageways according to local priorities.

Table 1 sets out the national totals for different types of expenditure. Table 2 shows the total amounts of grant, credit approvals and gross approved expenditure for each of the 118 local highway authorities, and the six passenger transport authorities. The Department's government offices for the regions are notifying them today of their allocations. Table 3 details the package allocations, and table 4 lists the new major road and public transport schemes accepted this year.

Table 1

	£ million
Existing commitments	420.379
New major schemes	5.620
Maintenance of principal roads	85.894
Assessment and strengthening of bridges	100.900
IDA grant	4.000
Local safety schemes	55.000
Packages minor works	78.700
Block SCA for minor works	39.583
ERDF SCA	37.600
Cycle challenge	1.890
Total	829.566

Key:

IDA—Industrial Development Act.

SCA—Supplementary Credit Approval.

ERDF—European Regional Development Fund.

Table 2: Local authority capital expenditure 1996–97 (£ million)

	Government grant (TSG)	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
London Boroughs			
City of London	0.311	0.377	0.688
Barking and Dagenham	0.162	0.599	0.761
Barnet	0.159	0.852	1.011
Bexley	4.414	5.214	9.628
Brent	0.000	1.783	2.151
Bromley	0.074	9.983	10.206
Camden	0.557	1.478	2.035
Croydon	0.000	1.705	2.215
Ealing	0.000	0.608	0.740
Enfield	0.000	1.960	3.092
Greenwich	2.973	3.964	7.029
Hackney	0.016	1.010	1.275
Hammersmith and Fulham	0.218	2.892	3.382
Haringey	0.372	1.518	1.890
Harrow	0.558	3.102	5.646
Havering	0.000	0.685	0.875
Hillingdon	0.000	2.294	3.922
Hounslow	1.163	2.102	3.265
Islington	0.725	1.440	2.165
Kensington and Chelsea	0.382	1.021	1.504
Kingston upon Thames	1.551	6.745	8.805
Lambeth	0.150	1.099	1.567
Lewisham	1.975	2.695	4.705
Merton	0.000	0.870	1.018
Newham	1.211	3.508	5.105
Redbridge	0.253	0.887	1.140
Richmond upon Thames	0.198	1.443	1.641
Southwark	0.000	1.435	2.250
Sutton	0.067	1.135	1.438
Tower Hamlets	0.000	1.215	1.744
Waltham Forest	0.215	1.049	1.467
Wandsworth	0.596	1.638	2.234
Westminster	1.697	2.614	4.405

Note:

Gross approved expenditure exceeds the sum of grant and borrowing approval if an authority holds unused grant from previous years.

Local authority capital expenditure 1996–97 (£ million)

Metropolitan Districts	*Government grant (TSG)*	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
Bolton	0.061	1.570	2.338
Bury	0.504	1.169	1.673
Manchester	2.713	4.811	7.615
Oldham	1.656	2.694	4.608
Rochdale	1.433	2.250	3.683
Salford	3.271	4.310	7.581
Stockport	1.107	1.726	2.898
Taineside	0.575	1.214	1.789
Trafford	5.569	6.835	13.226
Wigan	0.333	1.080	1.556
Knowsley	1.379	3.951	6.708
Liverpool	0.000	3.165	3.996
St. Helens	0.898	1.548	2.446
Sefton	1.331	2.531	3.862
Wirral	0.442	1.856	2.442
Barnsley	0.579	3.799	6.637
Doncaster	2.257	3.455	5.712
Rotherham	0.705	1.891	2.596
Sheffield	3.762	10.206	14.033
Gateshead	0.297	1.482	1.779
Newcastle upon Tyne	1.608	3.337	5.784
North Tyneside	0.427	1.188	1.741
South Tyneside	0.340	1.105	1.445
Sunderland	0.988	2.210	3.365
Birmingham	13.457	17.692	31.149
Coventry	3.674	6.641	12.669
Dudley	0.573	3.937	4.510
Sandwell	1.679	2.864	4.543
Solihull	0.630	1.874	2.559
Walsall	1.725	3.854	6.260

Local authority capital expenditure 1996–97 (£ million)

Metropolitan Districts	*Government grant (TSG)*	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
Wolverhampton	2.170	4.592	7.859
Bradford	1.045	3.638	4.826
Calderdale	0.900	2.576	3.476
Kirklees	1.053	2.543	3.596
Leeds	4.374	11.470	16.743
Wakefield	1.990	3.037	5.027

Local authority capital expenditure 1996–97 (£ million)

	Government grant (TSG)	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
Counties			
Bedfordshire	1.684	4.220	5.904
Berkshire	0.333	3.353	4.770
Buckinghamshire	3.442	5.353	8.795
Cambridgeshire	3.577	6.942	10.519
Cheshire	11.367	12.910	24.535
Cornwall	2.836	4.775	7.611
Cumbria	2.441	3.704	6.145
Derbyshire	2.763	4.230	7.023
Devon	2.806	6.354	9.160
Dorset	1.099	2.879	3.978
Durham	2.932	4.486	7.418
East Sussex	3.695	7.590	11.834
Essex	0.793	5.868	7.629
Gloucestershire	2.209	3.918	6.714
Hampshire	7.037	12.646	19.683
Hereford and Worcester	5.349	6.133	11.482
Hertfordshire	3.370	6.723	10.291
Kent	36.313	43.384	81.609
Lancashire	2.452	9.920	15.291
Leicestershire[1]	0.934	5.316	6.694
Lincolnshire	4.545	6.660	11.205
Norfolk	3.136	7.036	10.172
Northamptonshire	2.172	3.866	6.387
Northumberland	3.371	4.230	7.601
Nottinghamshire	2.685	6.168	9.003
Oxfordshire	0.000	3.680	5.061
Shropshire	1.001	3.296	4.328
Somerset	3.880	6.187	11.039
Staffordshire	8.557	11.015	19.572
Suffolk	1.487	5.811	7.355
Surrey	6.897	10.038	16.935
Warwickshire	1.113	2.792	3.905
West Sussex	1.718	3.518	5.467
Wiltshire	1.095	2.418	3.513

Note:

Gross approved expenditure exceeds the sum of grant and borrowing approval if an authority holds unused grant from previous years.

[1] Includes £125,000 Public Transport Grant (s56).

Local authority capital expenditure 1996–97 (£ million)

	Government grant (TSG)	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
Unitary Authorities			
Isle of Wight	0.329	2.545	2.874
Bath and North East Somerset	0.506	1.156	1.662
Bristol	0.652	2.427	3.079
North Somerset	0.000	0.950	1.480
South Gloucestershire	1.399	4.838	7.143
Hartlepool	0.150	1.820	1.970
Middlesbrough	0.423	1.053	1.476
Redcar and Cleveland	1.006	1.675	2.815
Stockton-on-Tees	0.000	1.232	1.949
East Riding of Yorkshire	0.689	1.761	2.735
Kingston upon Hull	2.413	4.463	7.055
North East Lincolnshire	0.224	1.194	2.040

Local authority capital expenditure 1996–97 (£ million)

	Government grant (TSG)	*Total borrowing approval*	*Gross approved spending*
North Lincolnshire	0.362	0.640	1.002
North Yorkshire	2.031	4.448	7.399
York	1.284	2.056	3.340

Note:

Gross approved expenditure exceeds the sum of grant and borrowing approval if an authority holds unused grant from previous years.

Passenger Transport Executives

	Government grant (s56)	*Total borrowing approval*
Greater Manchester PTE	0.000	4.500
Merseyside PTE	0.000	5.779
South Yorkshire PTE	1.876	1.375
Tyne and Wear PTE	0.000	2.693
West Midlands PTE	12.500	15.461
West Yorkshire PTE	0.000	0.000

Note:

Gross approved expenditure exceeds the sum of grant and borrowing approval if an authority holds unused grant from previous years.

Table 3: Package minor works allocations

	(£million)
Current packages:	
Greater Manchester	9.000
Merseyside	10.000
West Midlands	11.000
Bradford	1.450
Calderdale	1.350
Kirklees	0.950
Leeds	3.800
Wakefield	0.700
Ashford	0.200
Avon	2.600
Bedford/Kempston	0.800
Bournemouth/Poole	0.500
Brighton/Hove	0.850
Cambridge	1.500
Canterbury	0.200
Dartmoor	0.150
Exeter	0.700
Hull	1.200
Ipswich	1.300
Central Leicester	2.600
Macclesfield	0.200
New Forest	0.200
North Staffordshire	0.800
Norwich	1.300
Greater Nottingham	1.300
Oxford	1.100
Plymouth	0.850
Preston/South Ribble	0.600
Reading	0.700
Shrewsbury	0.750
Southampton	0.500
Staines	0.350
Swindon	0.300
Teeside	1.100
Warwick/Leamington/Kenilworth	0.350
Winchester	0.800
Winchester	0.800
York	0.600
Total	62.650

Table 3: Package minor works allocations

	(£million)
New Packages	
South Yorkshire	5.500
Tyne and Wear	4.500
Cheltenham	0.300
Colchester	0.600
Falmouth	0.300
Gloucester	0.350
Hartlepool	0.150
Hope/Derwent	0.100
Maidstone	0.250
Northampton	0.450
Northwich	0.250
South-east Essex	0.700
South-west Hertfordshire	1.000
Worcester	0.350
Worthing	0.350
Wycombe	0.450
Total	15.600
Other package-related allocations	
Lancaster	0.300
Surrey Rural (star)	0.150
Grand Total	78.700

Table 4: New major schemes

Authority	*Scheme*
Bedfordshire	Luton Airport Interchange
Buckinghamshire	A421 Tingewick Bypass
Cornwall	A39 Trispen Bypass
Hereford and Worcester	A44 Broadway Bypass
Kent	A228 Hale Street Bypass
Lincolnshire	A15/A16 Deepings Bypass
London Borough of Newham	Stratford Station Concourse Improvements

Noise Insulation Regulations

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Noise Insulation (Railways and other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations 1996 will be made. [7624]

Mr. Watts: The draft regulations have been amended to correct some defective drafting identified by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments; the substance of the draft regulations remains the same. The amended draft regulations, which supersede the draft regulations laid on 13 July 1995, have been laid before Parliament today. The draft regulations are subject to the negative resolution procedure and will be made at the end of a 40-day praying period. It is intended that the draft regulations will enter into force on 1 March 1996.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6498]

Mr. Norris: The Department's records do not distinguish between private and public sector suppliers.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of bills owed by his Department in 1994–95 were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements. [6511]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 18 July, *Official Report*, columns *1211-12*.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many *(a)* orders and *(b)* firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95; [6493]

(2) what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements for 1994–95. [6515]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available.

Drivers (Alcohol)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the maximum legal blood alcohol levels for drivers in each European country. [7219]

Mr. Norris: The information is not readily available for all European countries. However, we do have details of legal blood alcohol limits for drivers in countries in the European Union and these are as follows:

	mg of alcohol/100 ml of blood
Austria	80
Denmark	80
Germany	80
Ireland	80
Italy	80
Luxembourg	80
Spain	80
United Kingdom	80
Belgium	50
Finland	50
France	50
Greece	50
Holland	50
Portugal	40
Sweden	20

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he issues on the maximum average intake of alcohol for drivers. [7320]

Mr. Norris: Our advice to motorists is not to drink at all before or during driving. It was reiterated in the recent report of the interdepartmental group on sensible drinking.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has held on the issue of a trans-European agreement on low-volume type-approval for motor cars with his European counterparts. [6602]

Mr. Watts: Officials have held discussions with the type-approval authorities of Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg with a view to obtaining their agreement to accept vehicles type-approved to the UK low-volume scheme. So far, one vehicle type has been accepted in full by Germany and Italy and partially by France, Spain, Belgium and Luxembourg, the latter group of countries requiring some additional tests. We have also pursued the issue of a trans-European agreement at several meetings chaired by the European Commission.

British Rail (Members' Parking Passes)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the saving made to Railtrack in 1996–97 from the cancellation of free parking passes to hon. Members; and what is his estimate of the costs in 1995–96 of providing such passes. [6599]

Mr. Watts: The present free car parking passes are provided by the British Railways Board, which does not attribute a cost to the provision of the passes. The small administrative cost of issuing individual passes is not separately identified by the British Railways Board.

When the present passes issued by British Rail expire on 1 June 1996 it will be for the train operating companies, or Railtrack in the case of those stations owned and managed by it, to decide whether to provide free car parking passes for hon. Members.

Salford Quays-Eccles Metrolink Extension

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the amount of section 56 funding required in 1996–97 for construction of the Salford quays and Eccles extension to be started 1996; [7161]

(2) when he plans to announce his Department's contribution to the funding for the Salford quays and Eccles Metrolink extension. [7159]

Mr. Norris: Greater Manchester passenger transport authority has yet to obtain powers under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for the Metrolink extension between Salford quays and Eccles. GMPTA has bid for funding for the extension as far as Salford quays in the 1996–97 local transport settlement. We are announcing details of the settlement today. I am afraid that we have been unable to find resources for the scheme in 1996–97.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he plans between his Department and the Greater Manchester transport authority in respect of starting construction of the Salford quays and Eccles Metrolink extension during 1996. [7160]

Mr. Norris: My Department will be happy to have further discussions with Greater Manchester passenger transport authority about its proposed Metrolink extension to Salford quays and Eccles.

Toll Bridges

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the single crossing charge for cars on toll bridges in England and Wales. [7238]

Mr. Watts: Current details of the tolls charged by toll bridges that were not promoted by statute is not available to me. For those bridges in England and Wales that were promoted by statute the car toll for a single crossing is:

Toll bridge	*Toll for car*
Aldwark bridge	8p
Cleddau bridge	75p
Clifton bridge	20p
Dartford bridge	90
Dunham bridge	20p
Humber bridge	£1.60
Itchen bridge	40p (50p peak)
Rixton Warburton bridge	10p
Severn bridge	£3.70 (Westbound only)
Shrewsbury (Kingsland) bridge	10p
Swinford bridge	5p
Tamar bridge	£1.00 (25p concession rate)
Whitchurch bridge	8p
Whitney on Wye bridge	50p

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6386]

Sir George Young: The costs in the current and previous two financial years are set out. Information before that could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

1995–96 (April to end November)

(a) £57,516

(b) £159,177

(c) [1]£12,212

(d) £14,169

1994–95

(a) £84,013

(b) £288,000

(c) This information is not collected in the format requested. It could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

(d) £44,616

1993–94

(a) £54,080

(b) £286,000

(c) As for item (c) in 1995–95 above.

(d) £65,303

[1] Costs of Ministerial security attributable to the move to Great Minister house.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6385]

Sir George Young: This information was not collected in the format requested before the current financial year, 1995–96, but was included in the running costs expenditure of my Department which is published in the appropriate year's annual report.

The cost of running my departmental office, so far in the current financial year, April to November, 1995–96, is

(a) £2,799.55 (mobile telephones and pagers only—excludes costs of desk telephones which are not available in the format requested).

(b) £212,033.60

(c) This information is not collected in the format requested. It could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

(d), (e) and (f) £686.23 The budget does not differentiate between entertainment, alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks.

(g) £835.31

(h) None.

(i) None.

InterCity West Coast Franchise

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the timetable for the franchising of the InterCity West Coast rail track from London to Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [6380]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director will invite applications to pre-qualify and tenders for the InterCity West Coast franchise as soon as practicable in 1996. The franchise will be closely linked to the project to modernise the line. The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising will bring the franchise forward as the infrastructure project is developed. This will be timed to enable the franchisee to participate fully in the modernisation.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the expenditure by his Department on the trunk road network in each of the last six years; and what is the planned expenditure for the current year. [6223]

Mr. Watts: The following table sets out the actual expenditure on trunk roads over the period 1989–90 to 1994–95 and the estimated expenditure in 1995–96.

Outturn	*Total expenditure £ million*
1989–90	1,416
1990–91	1,882
1991–92	1,975
1992–93	2,068
1993–94	2,182
1994–95	2,196
1995–96[1]	1,923

[1] Estimated.

Road Improvements (Norfolk and Suffolk)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each of the proposed road improvement schemes which were due to be started in Norfolk and Suffolk and which have now been either *(a)* abandoned or *(b)* suspended; and if he will make a statement. [6459]

Mr. Watts: Following the recent review of the trunk road programme, the list of schemes placed in each category is set out:

Longer term programme schemes

A12 Wrentham Bypass, Suffolk

A12 Wroxham Bypass, Suffolk

A12 Wickham Market—Saxmundham Improvement, Suffolk

A12 Martlesham-Wickham Market Improvement, Suffolk

A47 Acle Straight Improvement, Norfolk

A47 Blofield-Acle Improvement, Norfolk

A47 North Tuddenham-Easton Improvement, Norfolk

A47 Little Fransham Bypass, Norfolk

A47 Middleton and East Winch Bypass, Norfolk

A47 Wisbech Bypass A1101 Junction Improvement, Norfolk

A47 Tilney-Kings Lynn Improvement and A47/A17 GSJ, Norfolk.

The longer-term programme comprises those schemes, which although required, are not of the highest priority nationally. They will be taken forward only as the main programme is completed.

Withdrawn schemes

A10 Setchey and West Winch Bypass, Norfolk

A12 Kessingland-Pleasureland Improvement, Suffolk

A12 Sutton Bridge-Kings Lynn Improvement, Norfolk

A140 Dickleburgh-Norwich Improvement, Norfolk

A140 Long Stratton Bypass, Norfolk

A140 Beacon Hill-Scole Improvement, Suffolk

A140 Stonham Bypass, Suffolk.

Railtrack Assets

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the net book value of Railtrack's assets a published in its annual report for 1994–95. [5763]

Mr. Watts: The report of Railtrack's auditors to its shareholders included in the annual report for 1994–95 confirms that the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company at 31 March 1995.

Rail Competition

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what safeguards he intends to apply to avoid *(a)* passenger and *(b)* freight train operating companies from establishing a monopoly in a sector of the privatised rail market by acquiring two or more franchises by direct application or as a result of a takeover. [6181]

Mr. Watts: The requirements of competition law apply to franchising and the disposal of other BR businesses including freight companies. Qualifying mergers are investigated by the Office of Fair Trading under the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry decides whether to make a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The Rail Regulator is also required to approve any change of control of a licence holder and in exercising this function will bear in mind the availability of powers under the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the Competition Act 1980 which have been transferred to him.

Emergency Response Trains

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many times emergency response trains have been deployed on the rail network in response to rail incidents in each of the last five years and on how many occasions they have been deployed within the ScotRail network; [4440]

(2) what consultations his Department held with Railtrack over its recent decision in relation to the deployment of emergency response trains and what representations it made; [4438]

(3) if he will make a statement on the deployment of emergency response trains by Railtrack. [4437]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The deployment of such trains is an operational matter for Railtrack, consulting the independent Health and Safety Executive as necessary. I understand from Railtrack that the information requested is available for the period 1992 to 1995 as follows:

Emergency response train/crane call-outs

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
Great Britain	415	334	182	131
Scotland	7	8	1	4

[1] To 30 November 1995 only.

TREASURY

Corporation Tax

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the taxation effects on pension funds of the corporation tax changes outlined in the Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement. [6018]

Mr. Jack: Pension funds are not liable to corporation tax on their income or gains and are therefore not directly affected by the corporation tax changes proposed in the Budget.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6608]

Mrs. Angela Knight: A meeting with the following organisations representing small firms was held on 27 September 1995 to review tendering procedures:

CBI Small Firms Panel;

Association of British Chambers of Commerce; and

Forum of Private Business.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implication of purchasing from small and medium enterprises; [6609]

(2) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6607]

Mrs. Knight: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave to her on 6 December at column *258.*

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6519]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury placed orders for £12.5 million with private sector suppliers for goods and services in 1994–95.

Sequestrated Iraqi Assets

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the original value of Iraqi assets sequestrated in United Kingdom banks as a result of the Gulf conflict; what is the current value of those assets; and if he will make a statement. [6600]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Sequestrated Iraqi assets are not deposited in the United Kingdom. However, the Bank of England advises that the value of Iraqi funds sequestrated in accordance with Security Council resolution 778 was $736,938.12 made up of $672,553.43 plus accrued interest of $64,384.69.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which United Kingdom banks Iraqi assets sequestrated as a result of the Gulf conflict are deposited; and if he will make a statement. [6601]

Mrs. Knight: Banks in the United Kingdom do not hold any sequestrated Iraqi assets. As required by the provisions of Security Council resolution 778—adopted on 2 October 1992—concerning the temporary sequestration of certain Iraqi assets, all funds representing the proceeds of the sale of Iraqi petroleum or petroleum products, paid for on or after 6 August 1990, have been transferred to the United Nations' escrow account provided for in Security Council resolutions 706 and 712, which were adopted on 15 August and 19 September 1991 respectively. Funds in the escrow account are available for meeting the costs of compensation arising out of the Gulf war and costs of UN activities and humanitarian relief.

VAT (Subscriptions)

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pension associations are affected by the decision to levy VAT on their subscription income; and how much revenue he expects to raise as a result. [6752]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Following the decision of the independent value added tax and duties tribunal that membership subscription income of the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance does not qualify for exemption from VAT, two other pensioner associations were found not to be taxing such income. Customs and Excise is currently amending its public and internal guidance with a view to identifying any other associations affected by this decision. Not all of the subscription is taxable—for example, if it covers such items as a newsletter, which is zero-rated. The decision, which is not being made retrospective, will not affect the amount of revenue collected to any significant extent.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the VAT status of subscriptions to occupational pensioner groups; and if he will grant them VAT exempt status. [6135]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The independent value added tax and duties tribunal recently ruled that, under the EC sixth VAT directive there was no scope to exempt from VAT the membership subscription income of the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance. I have no plans to review the VAT liability of subscriptions to occupational pensioner groups. However, not all of the subscription is taxable if it covers items such as a newsletter, which is zero-rated.

Long-term Care

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the unallocated sum for long-term care in the Red Book is deemed to cover England only; and if he will make a statement. [6819]

Mr. Waldegrave: The sum covers the whole of the United Kingdom.

VAT Thresholds

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has as to how many firms in each parliamentary constituency will be brought into paying VAT as a result of the decision not to raise the threshold in line with indexation. [6516]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are no estimates available on a constituency basis on the number of businesses affected.

Publicity Costs (EU)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what expenditure is incurred by the EC Commission's London, Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh offices in publicising the work and activities of the EC and the EU in the United Kingdom; and what element of this is met from British public funds; [162]

(2) what expenditure is incurred by the European Parliament's London office in publicising the work and activities of the EC and the EU in the United Kingdom; and what element of this is met from British public funds. [161]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These are matters for the European Commission and the European Parliament respectively. There is no direct contribution from UK public funds, although all the activities of the European Community institutions are financed from the general budget of the European Communities to which the UK contributes.

Income Tax

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of the 20p tax band; and if he will list the number in each successive £1,000 income band above the tax threshold, indicating the average annual tax reduction for a person in each £1,000 income band. [4002]

Mr. Jack: The estimated full-year tax cost at 1996–97 income levels of the proposed £3,900 20p band tax is £3.5 billion. The numbers of taxpayers and the average annual tax reduction by income band are given in the table:

Income band above the tax threshold £	*Number of taxpayers millions*	*[1]Average tax reduction £*
0–1,000	1.6	20
1,000–2,000	1.6	60
2,000–3,000	1.6	100
3,000–3,900	1.5	140
>3,900	19.5	156
Total	25.8	140

[1] A 20p rate compared with a 24p rate for the same income band.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5565]

Mrs Angela Knight: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of the Treasury, which is published in the annual report.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5863]

Mrs Angela Knight: The cost of chauffeur-driven cars over the last five years is as follows:

Year	*£*
1991–92	459,974
1992–93	453,781
1993–94	465,070
1994–95	431,777
1995–96 (to November)	245,220

Rural Business Unit

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the establishment of the rural business unit for tax purposes, as set out in the rural White Paper. [6126]

Mr. Jack: As explained in the rural White Paper, the case for a rural business unit is being considered.

Government Shareholdings

Mr. Legg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which privatised companies the Government retain a shareholding; and what number of shares the Government own in each such company. [6918]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is included in the table:

Government shareholdings

Company	*Total Her Majesty's Government Holding Millions*
BAA	29.47
British Gas	0.08
BT	30.80
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company	12.41
Anglian Water	2.58
Northumbrian Water	0.27
North West Water	2.70
Severn Trent	3.57
Southern Water	1.21
South West Water	0.11
Thames Water	3.53
Welsh Water (ORD)	0.85
Welsh Water (PREF)	0.92
Wessex Water (ORD)	1.01
Wessex Water (PREF)	1.21
Yorkshire Water	1.50
East Midlands Electricity	0.95
London Electricity	1.12
Midlands Electricity	1.28
Northern Electricity (ORD)	0.79
Seeboard	2.30
Southern Electric	0.92
South Wales Electricity	0.62
Yorkshire Electricity	1.09
National Power	34.49
PowerGen	22.00
Scottish Hydro-Electric	7.69
Scottish Power	18.80
Northern Ireland Electricity	5.40

Ministerial Transport, London

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has used *(a)* the London Underground and *(b)* London Buses in the last year while on official business. [7263]

Mr. Waldegrave: I have not used London Buses or London Underground while on official business in the last year, unless going to watch the Lord Mayor's show with my children counts as official business.

Personal Pensions (Tax Relief)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total revenue forgone from tax relief on appropriate personal pensions for individuals whose gross earnings are (i) £5,000 to £15,000, (ii) £15,000 to £25,000, (iii) £25,000 to £35,000, (iv) £35,000 to £45,000, (v) £45,000 to £55,000, (vi) £55,000 to £65,000, (vii) £65,000 to £75,000 and (viii) £75,000 to £82,000 per annum, *(a)* in aggregate and *(b)* per capita. [4491]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* Total income tax relief for contribution to appropriate personal pensions, including tax relief for the national insurance rebate, is provisionally estimated at £500 million for 1994–95. The average benefit per participant is about £85. I regret that a distribution of the relief by earnings of participants is not available.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of bills to his Department were paid in accordance with agreed contractual conditions or, where no such contractual conditions existed, within 30 days of receiving goods and services or the presentation of a valid invoice in the last year for which figures are available. [5694]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* For invoices received between November 1994 and October 1995, 72 per cent. were paid within 30 days of receipt. Most of those paid later than 30 days were delayed due to problems associated with particular suppliers, such as an error in the invoice or problems with the goods or service including a failure to deliver. Some of these invoices would still be within contractual conditions but it would incur disproportionate cost to establish what percentage they represent.

This figure compares with a previous estimate of 82 per cent. of invoices paid within 30 days in 1994–95. This was given to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) in a question answered on 22 November 1995 at column *108*. I regret that the calculations underlying this higher number were flawed. However, we are taking additional steps to improve performance, and between 1 September and 30 November 1995 the Treasury has achieved the figure of 82 per cent.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5977]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* No such research projects or surveys have been carried out by the Treasury during the period in question.

Tax Receipts (Oil Production)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the tax receipts from oil production in each year since 1979. [6245]

Mr. Jack: *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Revenues raised from North sea oil and gas production since 1979–80 have been as follows:

£ million

Year	*Petroleum revenue tax*	*Supplementary petroleum duty*	*Corporation tax*		*Royalty*	*Total*
			ACT[1] set-off	*Main-stream CT*		
1979–80	1,435	—	78	172	628	2,313
1980–81	2,410	—	97	244	992	3,743
1981–82	2,390	2,025	270	411	1,396	6,492
1982–83	3,274	2,395	202	319	1,632	7,822
1983–84	6,017	—	430	447	1,904	8,798
1984–85	7,177	—	1,244	1,188	2,426	12,035
1985–86	6,375	—	1,085	1,831	2,057	11,348
1986–87	1,188	—	1,130	1,546	919	4,783
1987–88	2,296	—	681	617	1,024	4,618
1988–89	1,371	—	685	510	602	3,168
1989–90	1,050	—	495	248	575	2,368
1990–91	860	—	363	484	605	2,312
1991–92	–216	—	370	268	557	979
1992–93	69	—	480	202	554	1,305
1993–94	359	—	219	39	606	1,223
1994–95	712	—	299	81	550	1,642
1995–96[2]	860	—	790	130	560	2,340

[1] ACT set-off against corporation tax payments due in each financial year is used as an approximate substitute for ACT receipts.

[2] Forecast consistent with the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 19 December 1995. [5411]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5864]

The Prime Minister: No No. 10 staff, other than the Prime Minister, have a car and driver allocated for their use. The total costs of this allocated car, including security costs, Government car service cars allocated to No. 10 and GCS cars on short-term hire were as follows:

1992–93: £470,000

1993–94: £450,000

1994–95: £380,000.

These costs exclude VAT.

The figures for earlier years are available only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers; [6412]

(2) what is his estimate of the running cost of his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bill, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6411]

The Prime Minister: Expenditure by my Office during 1993–94 and 1994–95 is as follows:

£000[1]

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Overseas travel and accommodation	1,000	790
Cars, Domestic travel and accommodation	490	440
Telephone and stationery costs	130	90
Total staff costs[2]	3,270	3,200
Entertainment	40	40
Office refurbishment	140	70
Other costs[3]	4,150	3,020
Total costs	9,220	7,670

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest £10,000.

[2] Includes the cost of the Press Office.

[3] Includes security costs; for 1993–94 includes telecommunications costs.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6647]

The Prime Minister: Since May 1995, the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency has had meetings with the Federation of Electrical Industries and the Computing Services and Software Association.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6508]

The Prime Minister: The information is not held in the form requested.

Council of Europe

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the 1996 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [7384]

The Prime Minister: The 1996 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 22 January 1996. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the Session will consist of 19 members of the Conservative party, 15 members of the Labour party and two members from the minority parties.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the parties concerned in accordance with the resolution of the House on 22 May 1992, *Official Report*, column 682, and of the House of Lords on 18 June 1992, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 290–92.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the Assembly of the Western European Union, which next meets in London in February 1996.

Representatives from the Government benches will be:

My noble Friend the Lord Finsberg—who will continue to act as leader of both delegations.

My hon. Friends the Members for:

Warwick and Leamington (Sir Dudley Smith)
Calder Valley (Sir Donald Thompson)
Ashford (Sir Keith Speed)
Medway (Dame Peggy Fenner)
Lewes (Mr. Tim Rathbone)
Bournemouth East (Mr. David Atkinson)
Ravensbourne (Sir John Hunt)
Reading West (Sir Anthony Durant)
The Lord Newall

Representatives from the Labour Party will be:

The hon. Members for:

Wentworth (Mr. Peter Hardy)
Tooting (Mr. Tom Cox)
Wansbeck (Mr. Jack Thompson)
Newham North West (Mr. Tony Banks)
Don Valley (Mr. Martin Redmond)
Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Terry Davis)
The Lord Kirkhill

The representative from the minority parties will be:

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber
(Sir Russell Johnston)

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates.

From the Government benches:

The hon. Members for:

Sheffield, Hallam (Sir Irvine Patnick)
Norfolk North (Sir Ralph Howell)
Brighton Kemptown (Sir Andrew Bowden)
Northavon (Sir John Cope)
Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Terry Dicks)
Bridlington (Mr. John Townend)
Newark (Mr. Richard Alexander)
The Baroness Hooper
The Earl of Dundee

From the Labour Party:

The hon. Members for:

Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. James Dunnachie)
Glasgow, Provan (Mr. James Wray)
Newport East (Mr. Roy Hughes)
Easington (Mr. John Cummings)
Leigh (Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe)
Leicester South (Mr. James Marshall)
Manchester Central (Mr. Robert Litherland)
The Baroness Gould of Potternewton

From the minority parties:

The Lord Mackie of Benshie.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Peru

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the Government of Peru concerning *(a)* the operation of their emergency legislation and *(b)* human rights in respect of the emergency legislation; and if he will make a statement. [6019]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Since the answer I gave the hon. Member for Islington, North on 6 November, *Official Report*, columns *554-55*, I personally discussed human rights with the Peruvian President of Congress and the Peruvian Foreign Minister in Lima on 29 November. Our ambassador in Lima held a further meeting with the Director General for Human Rights in the Peruvian Foreign Ministry on 14 December.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice has been given to procurement staff in *(a)* the diplomatic wing and *(b)* the ODA on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6645]

Mr. Hanley: The diplomatic wing of the FCO provides detailed advice about business with small and medium enterprises through its purchasing manual, which as been distributed to all officers in the Department with purchasing responsibilities, and to those in its executive agency, the Wilton Park conference centre.

In addition, the DTI video "Think Big, Buy Small" is shown to all participants in the Department's introductory training course "Working on Purchasing and Supply".

The ODA's "Guide to Aid Procedures" is being revised to include advice on procurement from small and medium enterprises and reflect present policy.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work *(a)* the diplomatic wing of his Department and *(b)* the ODA have done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6643]

Mr. Hanley: The diplomatic wing of the FCO promotes best practice relating to small and medium enterprises through its purchasing manual, which has been distributed to all officers in the Department with purchasing responsibilities and to those in its executive agency, the Wilton Park conference centre.

The manual reiterates current Government policy which is to encourage the development of small and medium enterprises by giving them a full opportunity to bid for public sector business. SMEs are included, wherever possible, in inquiries for quotations and invitations to tender.

The ODA is revising its own "Guide to Aid Procedures" to reflect similarly present policy.

General guidance for SME's on purchasing by the FCO and ODA is included in the DTI booklet "Tendering for Government Contracts".

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress *(a)* the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration have made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6723]

Mr. Hanley: FCO diplomatic wing contact points have been established in central London, Croydon and Milton Keynes and communicated to the Department of Trade and Industry for inclusion in the DTI booklet "Tendering for Government Contracts". The ODA has similarly forwarded to the DTI a contact point and a list of procurement agents employed by the ODA.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings *(a)* the diplomatic wing of his Department and *(b)* the ODA have had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6644]

Mr. Hanley: The diplomatic wing of the FCO and the ODA have themselves had no meetings since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. But on behalf of all departments, the Treasury's central unit on procurement met, on 27 September 1995, the CBI small firms panel, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of Private Business to review tendering procedures.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much *(a)* the diplomatic wing of his Department and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6507]

Mr. Hanley: Excluding amounts spent on major works and on local purchases overseas, it is estimated that the diplomatic wing spent £102.4 million on goods and services supplied by the private sector in 1994–95.

ODA figures on payments made for goods and services to the private sector are not separately held, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6487]

Mr. Hanley: The Foreign and Commonwealth diplomatic wing and its executive agency, Wilton Park, use a sampling method of measure payment performance. During 1994–95, 8 per cent. of invoices or 55 payments sampled by the DW were not paid on time. During the same period, WP did not pay 5 per cent. of invoices on time, representing three firms.

The Overseas Development Administration and its executive agency, the Natural Resources Institute, monitor payment performance by analysing all payments. During 1994–95, 13 per cent. of ODA invoices and 4 per cent. of NRI invoices were not paid on time. It is not possible to break this down further by supplier without incurring disproportionate cost.

Antarctic Treaty

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with interested parties on the future of the Antarctic treaty and the siting of the secretariat; and if he will make a statement. [6927]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Questions on the Antarctic treaty and the location of the secretariat are raised periodically as part of our regular meetings with other Antarctic treaty parties.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with signatories to the Antarctic treaty on *(a)* the progress of ratification and *(b)* the siting and operation of the secretariat. [6829]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No recent discussions have taken place on ratification of the Antarctic treaty. The treaty was ratified on 23 June 1961. The United Kingdom ratified the environmental protocol to the Antarctic treaty on 25 April 1995.

The question of the location and operation of the Antarctic treaty secretariat is raised periodically as part of our regular meetings with other Antarctic treaty parties.

European Commission Legislation

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the new initiatives proposed by the Commission for 1996 in its document Com(95) 512 final will require legislation; and how many of these legislative proposals will be subject to majority vote. [6820]

Mr. David Davis: The Commission's work programme for 1996—document Com(95) 512 final—indicates that the Commission intends to bring forward 19 new pieces of primary legislation as part of its new initiatives programme in 1996. How many of these proposals will be subject to majority voting will become clear only when the Commission makes known on what treaty base it intends to bring each of them forward.

Nigeria

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's representations to the Shell oil company concerning the activities of Shell Nigeria in the Ogoni lands; and if he will make it his policy to advise Shell to review its activities in this matter. [5958]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) on 29 November, *Official Report,* column 1190. It is for Shell to make its own commercial decisions and to explain them to those who express concern about them.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the discussions his Department held with Shell in respect of discussions between Shell Nigeria and the Nigerian Government prior to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa. [6002]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave the hon. Member for South Dorset on 29 November, *Official Report,* column, 1190. It is for Shell to comment on any discussions it may have held with the Nigerian Government.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ministerial visits have been undertaken by each Minister in his Department between 6 July and 1 December; and how many and what percentage of these have been involved with the Minister travelling abroad. [4229]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* Ministers carry out many visits in the course of their official duties. During the period in question the numbers of official visits by Foreign Office Ministers were as follows:

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made 14 overseas visits visiting 17 countries;

the Minister for Overseas Development made five overseas visits visiting 14 countries;

the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), made four overseas visits visiting 11 countries and one dependent territory;

the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), made 16 overseas visits visiting six countries and one dependent territory;

and I made eight overseas visits visiting 13 countries.

SCOTLAND

Public Expenditure

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the provision that he has made in his public expenditure plans for Government-supported expenditure and aggregate external finance in 1997–98 and 1998–99. [7692]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My plans for Government-supported expenditure and aggregate external finance for 1997–98 and 1998–99 and the actual figures for 1996–97 which I announced on Budget day are shown in the table. The plans for 1997–98 and 1998–99 will, in the normal way, be subject to review in future public expenditure surveys.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
GSE	6,200.7	6,231	6,245
AEF	5,400.9	5,337	5,303

COMMUNITY CARE

The above amounts of GSE and AEF are inclusive of the following sums which are being transferred to local authorities in respect of their care in the community and the independent living fund responsibilities.

	£ million
1996–97	211.6
1997–98	245.0
1998–99	269.5

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

My plans for GSE and AEF for the two forward years assume that the new councils will incur local government reorganisation related costs of £20 million in 1997–98, including £3 million for redundancy costs, and no such costs in 1998–99.

My right hon. Friend announced 12 months ago that, in his 1994 public expenditure plans, he had assumed that savings of £40 million per annum would be achieved from the new local government structure from 1997–98. I think that annual savings of at least that order are possible provided the new councils streamline their management and committee structures and seek the most effective means of delivering services.

Overall, therefore, my plans assume reorganisation-related savings of £20 million (net) in 1997–98 and £40 million in 1998–99.

Trunk Road Network

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his programme of improvements to the trunk road schemes network in 1996–97 and in the subsequent two years. [7693]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scotland's trunk road network is vital to the continuing health of Scotland's economy. We are committed to ensuring that it continues to give the highest service to all its users. Our strategy is to give priority to the key routes of major importance to the economy and my new plans will ensure further rapid progress in that strategy. Our priorities are the A74, central Scotland motorway network, A1 and A96, but the plans will also allow significant improvements on other important parts of the trunk road network. In all, I plan for 17 major schemes to start in the next three years.

I have already announced our decision to complete the final A74 upgrade project as a design, build, finance and operate scheme. Final tendering on that scheme will be under way soon with construction starting in 1997—fulfilling our commitment to complete the A74 upgrade by 2000. Our additional plans for the financial year 1996–97 are:

M8 Newbridge underpass

M90 Halbeath interchange

A96 Kintore bypass

A96 Blackburn bypass

A9 Logie Easter

A68 Dalkeith bypass

A830 Lock Nan Uamh to Polnish bridge.

The following schemes are planned to start between April 1997 and March 1999:

M8 Baillieston to Newhouse (DBFO)

including Newhouse to Shotts (Junctions 5-6) (DBFO)

M80 Stepps to Cumbernauld (DBFO)

M77 Fenwick to Floak

A1 Haddington to Dunbar

A830 Arisaig to Kinsadel

A828 Creagan Bridge

A75 The Glen

A92 Balmedie to Tipperty.

This is an ambitious programme involving substantial levels of investment. Private finance will have an increasing role to play in ensuring that we fulfil these commitments. I have already referred to the completion of the A74 upgrade by private finance. I also intend that private finance will be used for the M8 Baillieston scheme completing the motorway link between Glasgow and Edinburgh. A tender for that scheme will be issued next year to allow work to commence in the following year. It is also my intention to use private finance to take forward the M80 Stepps-Cumbernauld scheme. Subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures, I am planning for construction to start towards the end of this three-year programme. These are important links in the motorway system and will take us near to fulfilment of the objective of completing that network and they are major opportunities for the private sector and will ensure that we remain in the forefront of developments in the private finance initiative.

But public finance has an important role to play; the increased use of private finance complements those resources and ensures that we can make rapid progress on a variety of other long-awaited schemes. In particular, I am delighted to confirm our continuing commitment to the A96, where work on both the Blackburn bypass and the Kintore bypass will commence next year. These schemes will provide major improvements in service and road safety as well as improving the environment of these communities on this important route.

Our other high priority route is the A1. Our plans clearly demonstrate our continuing commitment to its improvements. In addition to the Haddington-Dunbar dualling scheme, an intensive package of measures on the A1 will be brought forward next year under the route action plan.

A75 The Glen and A92 Balmedie-Tipperty are schemes which have come into the construction programme for the first time and are significant improvements on routes of continuing economic importance. The A75 is the main route to the port of Stranraer and the important sea passage to Northern Ireland; the scheme will therefore benefit all those who have trade links with Ireland as well as holiday makers and local traffic. The A92 Balmedie-Tipperty is heavily used by fishing, oil and agriculture interests in the north-east. I am sure these commitments and the others which confirm our previous plans will be warmly welcomed by local communities throughout Scotland.

Work will continue throughout the rest of the network also, with smaller scale but still valuable improvements being made in pursuit of the other route action plans that we have for the A7, A9, A76, A77, A90 and A96. These improvements will include village gateways, traffic-calming measures and other road safety work, tackling accident black spots through minor road curvature changes and improved lighting, signing and skid-resistance measures. The provision made will enable many other pressing but localised needs throughout the network to be addressed within the three-year period. Planning for other important schemes will also continue and these will be added to the construction programme in future years. We shall continue to keep the performance of the network under careful review in order to assess future requirements in the light of developing transport policies and emerging conditions on the network.

In conclusion, at a time of very necessary restraint on Government spending, this increased roads programme is a major boost for Scotland and emphasises the importance and value of the Government's private finance initiative. It will ensure excellent progress with the Government's key objectives for improving the trunk road network and is excellent news for business and commerce as a whole, and for the people of Scotland.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5570]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report.

Plant Eradication

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Scottish Natural Heritage has paid out in grants for the eradication of Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed for *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and how much was paid to Argyll and Bute district council. [5768]

Mr. Kynoch: Scottish Natural Heritage made a grant of £340.16 to Jura community council for the control of Japanese knotweed in 1994 and has offered £200 in 1995. SNH also made a grant of £2,500 in 1995 to the Tweed Forum for a hogweed study. SNH has not paid out any grant towards the eradication of Himalayan balsam. No grant in connection with any of the species has been paid to Argyll and Bute district council.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the islands in Argyll and Bute where Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed have been recorded in the wild. [5769]

Mr. Kynoch: Although no specific records of the distribution of these three plants throughout Scotland are kept, it is known that they are commonly found in the wild—especially along riverbanks, roadsides and wasteground.

There have been reports of the presence of Japanese knotweed on Coll, Islay, Jura, Mull, Lismore, Seil and Shuna, and it is suspected to be present on Colonsay and Bute. Himalayan balsam has been reported on Seil and Eilean Righ and is suspected to occur on Bute. Giant hogweed has been reported on one site on Mull.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the plant species for which grants are available for eradication from Scottish Natural Heritage. [5770]

Mr. Kynoch: Scottish Natural Heritage will consider offering grant for the eradication or management of any plant posing a threat to the natural heritage of Scotland or to the enjoyment of the natural heritage by the public.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5855]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The cost to the Scottish Office of chauffeur-driven cars in each of the last five years is as follows:

1991–92: £234,803

1992–93: £224,163

1993–94: £256,270

1994–95: £292,143

1995–96: £150,723 (six months).

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the breakdown of the £311 million of capital investment under the private finance initiative for the national health service which he announced in his oral statement to the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday 11 December 1995 at column 4. [6794]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figure announced in the Scottish Grand Committee was an estimate based on the current capital programme of the NHS in Scotland. It covers schemes which are likely to proceed or are already proceeding using the private finance solutions. The £311 million is derived from estimated expenditure over the following years:

1996–97: £75 million

1997–98: £113 million

1998–99: £123 million.

Some schemes currently planned will continue beyond these three years. The values include capital expenditure only and are made up of expenditure projected for the new royal infirmary of Edinburgh, Western general hospital, Law and Hairmyres hospitals and a number of other schemes.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6639]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office purchasing, contracting and supply manual contains advice on purchasing from small and medium enterprises. Copies of the DTI video and accompanying booklet "Think Big, Buy Small" are available to all purchasing divisions.

It is Scottish Office policy to encourage small and medium enterprises to compete for business on an equal footing with larger firms when they have the expertise, capacity and financial strength appropriate to the contract being awarded.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to the needs of small and medium enterprises' needs. [6637]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has produced a booklet "Selling to The Scottish Office" which is a guide to all suppliers interested in doing business with us. This booklet is available on request and has been widely distributed through chambers of commerce. The Scottish Office also has an entry in the DTI publication "Tendering for Government Contracts" giving a named contact point for suppliers.

Representatives from the Scottish Office have taken part in a number of publicity events organised in conjunction with local enterprise bodies aimed at stimulating the interest of small and medium enterprises in becoming suppliers to the Scottish Office.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6712]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has a business inquiry point within its purchasing and supply division, which deals with inquiries from all firms interested in doing business with us.

The business inquiry point is continually involved in attending supplier events featuring small and medium enterprises with the next event scheduled for February 1996.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6638]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A representative from the Scottish Office was unable to attend the meeting held by Treasury's central unit on procurement in September 1995 but we have received full details of the discussions.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6658]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Prior to the review the Scottish Office already had in place a number of measures dealing with small firms and these have been enhanced over the last year. Information has been made available to small firms through our "Selling to The Scottish Office" booklet, establishment of the business inquiry point, updating our entry in the DTI publication "Tendering for Government Contracts" and through attendance at local supplier events.

Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the sources of funding of the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board. [6291]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board receives funding from the Secretary of State for Scotland and when operational will also receive registration fees from qualified conveyancers and executry practitioners.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* orders and *(b)* firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6494]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Based on a sample but extrapolating to a full year, we estimate that some 2,500 invoices were not paid in accordance with the appropriate contract. The statistical process we used does not provide a basis for allowing us to estimate the number of firms these represent.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6499]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Scottish Office spent £124 million in 1994–95 on goods and services in 1994–95 from external suppliers, including a number of public sector bodies such as HMSO.

Capital Projects

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the capital projects embarked on by Scottish local authorities in 1994–95 and 1995–96, the responsibility for which will be transferred to Scottish water authorities in 1996; [7223]

(2) if he will set out the liabilities that will be transferred from Scottish local authorities to Scottish water authorities in 1996. [7222]

Mr. Kynoch: Relevant property, rights and liabilities of regional and islands councils will transfer to the water authorities by virtue of transfer schemes prepared under section 91 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. My right hon. Friend is currently considering the schemes which have been submitted to him.

Water Authorities

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that the new Scottish water authorities will have adequate funding to meet the capital expenditure requirements together with the operational expenses required of them and to prevent a negative cash flow arising from capped income. [7225]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has announced external financing limits for 1996–97 which should be sufficient to enable the water authorities to meet capital expenditure requirements and operating expenses with overall average charge increases of not more than 6 per cent. It is for each authority to prepare and submit a charges scheme to the customers council. External financing limits for future years will be considered in the context of successive public expenditure rounds.

Development Corporations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for each of the development corporations in Scotland if the bids submitted for the housing stock of each corporation by alternative landlords have met all the criteria down by his Department. [5798]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* My right hon. Friend was satisfied that the bids from the landlords which appeared on the ballots in East Kilbride and Glenrothes conformed with the criteria set out in the guidance issued. The bids received in Cumbernauld, Livingston and Irvine are currently being evaluated by the respective development corporations which are expected to make their ballot recommendations to my right hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what approaches Irvine housing association has made to Irvine development corporation requesting additional funding from the corporation since the association's establishment; how much Irvine housing association has received in financial support from Irvine development corporation up until this point; how this was broken down; and what outstanding requests for support from Irvine housing association are being considered by Irvine development corporation. [5800]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Prior to Irvine housing association becoming operational on 28 August 1995 it received support of £299,138 from

Irvine development corporation. The breakdown is shown in the table. Since 28 August the corporation's only contribution has been £950 per month towards the costs of the senior official on secondment to the association from the corporation. There are no outstanding requests for additional funding.

	£
Professional fees	133,833
Staffing costs	131,464
Fitting out office	39,754
Sundry	18,824
	323,875
Less contribution from Scottish Homes	24,737
	299,138

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements the board of Irvine development corporation has put in place to avoid a conflict of interests arising from the role of the vice chair of Irvine development corporation as the chair of the Irvine housing association. [5802]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The corporation's standing orders require the members of the board to declare any conflicts of interest.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be in a position to announce the bidding organisations which will be included on the ballots for the housing stock of those development corporations which have still to ballot their tenants on the disposal of their housing stock. [5804]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* My right hon. Friend expects to announce his decisions during the first quarter of 1996.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department has held with Irvine development corporation over the secondment of the former chief housing manager of Irvine development corporation to the Irvine housing association since the association's establishment; how much this secondment is costing the Irvine development corporation; when it is due to end; and if he will instruct the Irvine development corporation to end this arrangement. [5806]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The secondment is discussed as part of the on-going dialogue between officials in the Department and the corporation. The current cost of the secondment to the corporation is £950 per month. The Department is content for the secondment to be reviewed by the corporation after the outcome of the ballot of tenants is known.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tenants of Scotland's development corporations have lost part or all of their right to buy as a result of accepting tenancies with housing associations that have been transferred to these bodies as a result of trickle transfer by those development corporations. [5786]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* None. All trickle transfer sales are of vacant untenanted homes.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what involvement his Department had in establishing the ballot areas which will be used by Irvine development corporation in balloting its tenants on an alternative landlord in advance of the corporation's wind-up; what criteria were considered in drafting these ballot areas; and what priority was accorded to an assessment of the housing stock transferred and still to be transferred to the Irvine housing association, indicating the form of discussions on this subject. [5787]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Scottish Office approved the corporation's detailed plans for the disposals of its housing stock. A copy was sent to the hon. Member on 20 April 1995. The criteria taken into account in deciding the ballot areas were, as set out on page 7, to identify areas that would be attractive to a wide range of prospective landlords, the requirements of the existing communities and the geography of the area. The transfer of housing stock to Irvine housing association is a key part of the corporation's broader housing strategy intended to achieve maximum diversification of ownership of rented housing in the period prior to the ballot tenants and to provide meaningful choice for tenants at the ballot. The transfer to Irvine housing association is among the matters discussed at regular meetings between the Department and the corporation.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department had with Irvine development corporation in advance of trickle transfer of stock to Irvine housing association relating to guarantees to be sought from the housing association about the right-to-buy entitlement of Irvine development corporation tenants transferring to Irvine housing association in advance of the ballots of tenants. [5788]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* None. All trickle transfer sales to Irvine housing association are of vacant untenanted homes.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between his Department and Irvine development corporation in respect of the vice chair of Irvine development corporation continuing as the chair of the board of the Irvine housing association; if the Irvine development corporation intends this arrangement to end; and what assessment he has made of possible conflicts of interest arising between Irvine development corporation and the Irvine housing association in the disposal of Irvine development corporation's housing stock. [5799]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The appointment of the chairman of Irvine housing association is a matter for the association.

The guidance issued by the Scottish Office provides the criteria against which all bids are examined and the final decision on which organisations should appear on the ballot rests with my right hon. Friend.

Social Work Budgets

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the disaggregation of social work budgets by *(a)* Strathclyde regional council and *(b)* other regional and islands councils; and if he will make a statement. [4630]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* As part of the process of preparing notional 1995–96 budgets for their successor councils, Strathclyde, Central, Grampian, Lothian and Tayside regional councils have disaggregated their 1995–96 revenue budgets, including those for social work, to the new council areas. This exercise has been carried out having regard to principles prepared in consultation with the councils concerned and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Disaggregation is not necessary in the case of the other four regional councils and the three islands councils.

Asbestos

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the use of asbestos in the construction of public sector houses; and if he will make a statement. [4122]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 December 1995]:* No information is collected centrally on the general use of asbestos in the construction of public sector dwellings. However, it is estimated from the first Scottish house condition survey that in 1991 between 3,000 and 5,000 public sector dwellings had sheets or tiles of cement reinforced by asbestos as their principal roof cover.

Local authorities were reminded in 1983 of their duties in connection with asbestos materials in buildings and urged to check whether asbestos products were used in any part of their housing stock. Further guidance was issued in 1986. It is for local authorities, Scottish Homes and new town development corporations to deal with any problems arising from asbestos from within the resources made available to them by the Secretary of State.

Water Rates

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out, by local authority, the amounts paid from reserves in Scotland to reduce the water rates in 1994–95 and 1995–96. [7224]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is contained in the following table:

Authority	*Balances applied to water account 1994–95*	*Balances applied to sewerage account 1994–95*	*Total balances applied 1995–96*	*Balances applied to water account 1995–96*	*Balances applied to sewerage account 1995–96*	*Total balances applied 1995–96*
Borders	0	0	0	153	187	340
Central	1,629	1,140	2,769	3,711	1,814	5,525
Dumfries and Galloway	617	561	1,178	897	227	1,124
Fife	1,893	570	2,463	3,956	3,080	7,036
Grampian	3,958	2,849	6,807	4,155	3,931	8,086
Highland	(495)	595	100	(775)	(431)	(1,206)
Lothian	419	(213)	206	(4,693)	(274)	(4,967)
Strathclyde	5,015	174	5,189	7,211	(3,485)	3,726
Tayside	(30)	719	689	(807)	1,856	1,049
Orkney	150	0	150	342	0	342
Shetland	0	0	0	179.4	314.8	494
W. Isles	320	65	385	311.7	22.3	334
Scotland	13,476	6,460	19,936	14,641	7,242	21,883

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Bilateral Aid

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries which receive priority for bilateral aid under the Government's policy of providing aid to the poorest. [6186]

Mr. Hanley: In 1994–95, 55 per cent. of ODA bilateral aid, including emergency aid, went to the top 20 recipients. Of these, 17 were among the poorest countries in the world—with a GNP per capita under $676 in 1992. The other three were lower middle income countries—with a GNP per capita between $676 and $2,695 in 1992. The countries concerned are in the table.

ODA programme: top twenty bilateral recipients 1994–95

£ million

Low income countries	*ODA programme bilateral aid (including emergency aid)*
India	83
Bangladesh	46
Rwanda	45
Zambia	39
Malawi	39
Uganda	36
China	28
Kenya	28
Pakistan	28
Zimbabwe	27
Ethiopia	23
Indonesia	21
Mozambique	21

ODA programme: top twenty bilateral recipients 1994–95
£ million:

Low income countries	*ODA programme bilateral aid (including emergency aid)*
Tanzania	18
Nepal	15
Ghana	14
Sudan	12
Total	523
Percentage of total bilateral aid	46.7

Lower middle income countries	*ODA Programme bilateral aid (including emergency aid)*
States of ex-Yugoslavia	46
Russia	33
South Africa	16
Total	95
Percentage of total bilateral aid	8.5

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the developing countries which are the direct recipients of aid from the United Kingdom indicating for the last available year the moneys paid in aid to each country, and the debt repayments made to the United Kingdom Government and United Kingdom banks. [6654]

Mr. Hanley: A list of developing countries showing the amount of aid granted to each country by the United Kingdom Government in financial year 1994–95 may be found in table 7 "Bilateral Aid by Country" in "Overseas Development Administration: British Aid Statistics 1990/91–1994/95", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Details of debt repayments made by developing countries to UK banks are commercially sensitive.

Debt service—principal and interest—paid to the United Kingdom Government by aid recipient countries during financial year 1994–95 on outstanding ODA and Export Credit Guarantees Department loans are given in the table.

Country	*ODA* £	*ECGD* £	*Total* £
Africa: North of Sahara			
Algeria	—	1,920,042	1,920,042
Egypt	—	14,145,740	14,145,740
Morocco	—	19,975,752	19,975,752
Tunisia	44,022	—	44,022
Africa: South of Sahara			
Benin	—	234,682	234,682
Burkina Faso	—	196,244	196,244
Cameroon	—	45,455	45,455
Congo	—	468,501	468,501
Cote d'Ivoire	525,389	66,888	592,277
Ethiopa	—	122,831	122,831
Gabon	—	3,437,359	3,437,359
Gambia	—	2,348,825	2,348,825
Ghana	—	1,608,185	1,608,185
Guinea	—	206,078	206,078
Kenya	—	6,003,267	6,003,267
Malawi	—	44,938	44,938
Mali	—	2,354,162	2,354,162
Mauritania	—	80,604	80,604
Mauritius	844,097	—	844,097
Mozambique	—	353,773	353,773
Nigeria	—	7,812,783	7,812,783
Senegal	—	17,240	17,240
Seychelles	502,844	—	502,844
Sierra Leone	—	95,254	95,254
Swaziland	948,465	—	948,465
Tanzania	—	2,020,041	2,020,041
Togo	—	17,876	17,876
Uganda	—	214,336	214,336
Zambia	—	2,469,803	2,469,803
Zimbabwe	1,690,763	—	1,690,763
America: Central			
Mexico	—	12,080,897	12,080,897
Nicaragua	—	81,581	81,581
America: Caribbean			
Antigua	180	—	180
Barbados	57,894	—	57,894
Belize	1,501,449	—	1,501,449
Cayman Islands	64,560	—	64,560
Dominica	957,700	—	957,700
Grenada	375,200	—	375,200
Guyana	—	366,587	366,587
Jamaica	5,322,391	215,483	5,537,874
St. Kitts	451,540	—	451,540
St. Lucia	333,400	—	333,400
St. Vincent	263,200	—	263,200
Trinidad and Tobago	—	1,459,383	1,459,383
America: South			
Argentina	—	5,146,074	5,146,074
Bolivia	—	1,002,038	1,002,038
Brazil	—	92,733,382	92,733,382
Chile	—	113,949	113,949
Colombia	295,647	—	295,647
Ecuador	1,025,447	2,579,667	3,605,114
Falkland Islands	22,300	—	22,300
Paraguay	234,607	—	234,607
Peru	—	812,660	812,660
Asia: Middle East			
Jordan	—	99,046	99,046
Asia: South			
India	18,375,000	—	18,375,000
Asia: Far East			
Indonesia	—	510,692	510,692
Malaysia	1,591,945	—	1,591,945
Philippines	826,010	9,782,354	10,608,364
Singapore	1,041,668	—	1,041,668
Thailand	74,533	—	74,533
Vietnam	—	650,907	650,907

Country	*ODA* £	*ECGD* £	*Total* £
Europe: CEE/FSU Countries in Transition			
Bulgaria	—	995,008	995,008
Poland	—	51,616,829	51,616,829
Russia	—	6,172,045	6,172,045
Europe: CEE/FSU Developing Countries			
Croatia	—	1,649,628	1,649,628
Europe: Other Developing Countries			
Cyprus	20,400	—	20,400
Gibraltar	86,526	—	86,526
Turkey	6,093,752	—	6,093,752
Oceania			
Fiji	268,425	—	268,425
Kiribati	13,000	—	13,000
Solomon Islands	281,150	—	281,150
Tonga	77,240	—	77,240
Vanuatu	17,199	—	17,199

West Bank and Gaza

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of support for British Council projects in the west bank and Gaza in the last five years. [6686]

Mr. Hanley: British Council expenditure in the west bank and Gaza using grant in aid funding from the Overseas Development Administration and the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was as follows:

1990–91: £471,000

1991–92: £499,000

1992–93: £973,000

1993–94: £997,000

1994–95: £1,050,000

In addition to work funded by the Government grant in aid, the council is contracted by ODA to manage its technical co-operation training programme, and some individual projects. It also manages the Chevening scholarship programme which is funded by ODA and the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Nigeria (Police Training)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the costs of United Kingdom police training consultancy visits to Nigeria in each year since 1990; how many consultants visited Nigeria in each of those years; what was the total number of visits by consultants in each of those years; and to which United Kingdom police forces those consultants belonged. [6264]

Mr. Hanley: Apart from two short training advisory visits in September and October 1995, the project was staffed not by consultants but by long-term contract officers—technical co-operation officers. Overall staffing costs, including travel, accommodation, etcetera, in each year since 1990–91 are as follows:

1990–91: £16,869

1991–92: £188,612

1992–93: £253,978

1993–94: £232,199

1994–95: £133,946

1995–96: £60,000 (estimate).

The numbers of TCOs or consultants on the ground during all or part of each year since 1990–91 is as follows:

1990–91: 1

1991–92: 4

1992–93: 4

1993–94: 6

1994–95: 3

1995–96: 3.

The TCOs/consultants came from the Metropolitan, Cleveland, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester police forces. There was also a retired British Transport police officer.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the nature of the training provided to Nigerian police officers in the United Kingdom and Nigeria since 1990. [6265]

Mr. Hanley: Training of Nigerian police officers in the United Kingdom has covered:

UK police training methodology.

Tackling serious crime including fraud.

Maintenance of public order (1990 and 1991 only).

Operating a Central Planning Services Unit.

Police Force administration and the direction of operations.

Command and management functions.

Training in Nigeria has covered:

Developing training methodologies and conducting classes.

Using audio-visual aids.

Preparing course work, examinations and training manuals.

Advising on detective training needs, including restructuring courses and reviewing teaching methodology.

Child Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the International Monetary Fund and World bank concerning the use of child labour in countries that have been subject to structural adjustment programmes; and if he will make a statement. [6020]

Mr. Hanley: The World bank and the IMF participated in the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March. Both organisations support programmes which strengthen the social dimensions of economic development, promote equitable economic growth and reduce poverty: they recognise child labour as one of the most serious manifestations of poverty.

Bosnia

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the amount of humanitarian aid provided to Bosnia in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement on its purpose in each year. [6017]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The ODA has contributed over £283 million since 1991 to the former Yugoslavia: £148 bilaterally and £135 million through the European Community. A further breakdown of bilateral expenditure, by financial year, is as follows:

1993–94: £51.8 million

1994–95: £43.508 million

1995–96: £14.15 million (latest figure).

We are unable to provide a separate breakdown for Bosnia.

The aim of the aid programme to the former Yugoslavia has been constant: to alleviate the suffering of people affected by war by getting food and medical relief into the country and assisting with infrastructure and utilities works.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

British Rail (Members' Parking Passes)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Lord President of the Council what discussions he has had with British Rail about the continued issue of free parking passes to hon. Members.

Mr. Newton: None. This will be a matter for Railtrack and the train operating companies to consider.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Disabled People

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many disabled persons in Northern Ireland are presently awaiting adaptations to their homes. [5664]

Mr. Moss: Most of those disabled persons awaiting adaptations to their homes are either in public sector housing or in the private sector awaiting decisions on grant aid. These are matters for the Housing Executive. I understand from the chief executive that the information requested is not readily available. I will, however, write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many disabled persons in Northern Ireland are presently awaiting new build disabled accommodation. [5665]

Mr. Moss: I understand from the chief executive of the Housing Executive that the information relating to public sector housing is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

International Investments Ltd. (Gibraltar)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place with the Government of the Irish Republic in respect of International Investments Ltd. (Gibraltar). [6248]

Sir John Wheeler: The Irish Government are aware that there are continuing inquiries into this company's activities.

Housing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the population of Northern Ireland live in *(a)* public and *(b)* private housing. [6529]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1991 census of population shows that 70 per cent. of the Northern Ireland population live in private housing and 28 per cent. in public housing. The remaining 2 per cent. of the population mostly live in communal establishments.

George Finbar Ross

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action has been taken to secure the extradition of George Finbar Ross with regard to contacts with the United States Government since May 1995. [6247]

Sir John Wheeler: There have been no contacts with the US Government in the period since May 1995.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects Crown counsel to respond to queries arising from the direction to prosecute George Finbar Ross. [6215]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 October, *Official Report*, column *652*.

Pensioners (Transport Concessions)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the reciprocal arrangements for Northern Ireland pensioners to be entitled to free transport in Eire and for Eire pensioners to be entitled to transport concessions in Northern Ireland; and how the scheme is funded. [6452]

Mr. Moss: There are no reciprocal arrangements. The cross-border free travel scheme is promoted and funded by the Republic of Ireland's Department of Social Welfare.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills *(b)* total staff costs *(c)* press and communications *(d)* entertainment *(e)* alcoholic drinks *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks *(g)* stationery *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6389]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many legally held firearms there are in Northern Ireland *(a)* in total and *(b)* of each type. [6729]

Sir John Wheeler: At 31 October 1995 there were 133,769 firearms held legally in accordance with article 3 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

These are broken down as follows:

Type	*Number*
Shotguns	85,186
Pistols	9,580
Revolvers	3,448
Rifles .22	12,456
Rifles centrefire	1,279
Air weapons	20,982
Humane killers	122
Signal Pistols	118
Starting pistols	87
Collectors items	501
Spear guns	10
Total	133,769

Belfast Corporation Act 1930

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to repeal section 42 of the Belfast Corporation Act 1930. [7166]

Mr. Moss: None.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises; [6630]

(2) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs; [6628]

(3) what work his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95; [6502]

(4) what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures; [6629]

(5) what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6715]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 18 December, *Official Report*, column *909*.

EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for health and personal social services programme; [6437]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the education, arts and libraries programme; [6438]

(3) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the environmental and miscellaneous services programme; [6439]

(4) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the housing programme; [6440]

(5) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the roads and transport programme; [6441]

(6) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the agriculture, fisheries and forestry services and support programmes; [6445]

(7) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the energy programme; [6446]

(8) if he will provide a breakdown of the provisional allocations from the European Union peace and reconciliation programme included in the 1995 public expenditure survey for the industry, trade and employment programme. [6447]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

European union peace and reconciliation programme—provisional allocations

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	3	11	8	—
Industry, Trade and Employment	4	28	31	17
Energy	—	—	—	—
Roads and Transport	—	1	1	—
Housing	—	—	—	—
Environmental and Miscellaneous Services[1]	1	25	40	7
Education, Arts and Libraries	3	12	15	1
Health and Personal Social Services	5	11	13	6

Note:

[1] The allocation set aside for the Partnership Measure is included in the Environmental and Miscellaneous Services Programme.

Public Expenditure

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of the reduction in planned expenditure for 1996–97 in "Other Public Services" in the 1995 public expenditure survey. [6442]

Sir John Wheeler: The decrease in provision falls mainly in the superannuation vote, where 1995–96 includes provision for early departure costs under a Government-wide scheme. Provision in 1996–97 will be agreed when the position on redundancies is clearer.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of the estimated reduction in expenditure in the industry, trade and employment programme for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99, as shown in the 1995 public expenditure survey. [6443]

Mr. Ancram: The breakdown of the estimated reduction in expenditure in the industry, trade and employment programme is as follows.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Industrial Development Board	3	—
EC Pool	1	—
Training and Employment Agency	2	2
EU Peace Package	—	14
Total	6	16

Action for Community Employment

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will define the extent of proposed reductions in expenditure on the ACE training scheme in each of the three years covered in the 1995 public expenditure survey. [6444]

Mr. Ancram: The proposed reductions in expenditure on the ACE training scheme in each of the three years covered in the 1995 public expenditure survey are as follows:

1996–97: £12.5 million (23 per cent.)

1997–98: £14.3 million (27 per cent.)

1998–99: £11.4 million (21 per cent.).

Acute Hospitals Reorganisation Project

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what studies or reports have been provided to those people who have been consulted, or who have a right to be consulted, about the work of the acute hospitals reorganisation project currently being undertaken by the steering group headed by Dr. James McKenna; [7338]

(2) what provision is made for access to the relevant studies for those people who are entitled to be consulted about the work of the acute hospitals reorganisation project currently being undertaken by the steering group headed by Dr. James McKenna; [7339]

(3) if he will ensure that all relevant parties have full and complete access to all studies relevant to the work of the steering group chaired by Dr. James McKenna. [7340]

Mr. Moss: The steering group which is taking forward the acute hospitals reorganisation project has published two reports for consultation. These are "In Shape for the future" and "A Singular Service". Both documents were issued to a wide range of interested parties for comment. The steering group hopes to publish a third report for consultation in the near future and, as before, this will be made available to all interested organisations and individuals.

Child Support

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to prevent the Child Support Agency from declaring the parent with custody the absent parent in equal shared care arrangements. [7358]

Mr. Moss: In establishing who is the parent with care and who is the absent parent for child support purposes account is taken of the amount of overnight care provided by each parent. Where overnight is divided equally the parent receiving child benefit is treated as the parent with care. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend the child benefit regulations to give a parent with custody the sole right to payment of child benefit in equal shared care cases. [7359]

Mr. Moss: No. Where both parents satisfy the conditions for entitlement to child benefit and the parents are unwilling to make a joint election as to which of them shall be entitled, the Department may at its discretion determine which of them is to be entitled. In reaching such a decision, the Department must consider the actual costs each customer incurs in looking after the child, and the impact of its decision on the welfare of the child. Court orders for the care of children cannot be accepted in isolation as a decision on child benefit.

Housing Benefit (Tenants)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Housing Executive provides the Inland Revenue with details of housing benefit paid to tenants of private landlords. [7362]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive does not provide the Inland Revenue with details of housing benefit paid to tenants of private landlords.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about the evasion of tax in respect of housing benefits paid to tenants of private landlords. [7364]

Mr. Moss: None.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was paid in housing benefits to tenants of private landlords in each of the last three years. [7363]

Mr. Moss: The amount of housing benefit paid to tenants of private landlords in each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Total payment made to tenants of private landlords*
1992–93	42,986,889.41
1993–94	51,605,437.17
1994–95	60,670,126.62

Motor Vehicles (Damage Claims)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) policy in respect of acceptance of liability in respect of claims submitted for damage to motor vehicles when failure to maintain the carriageway is alleged. [7373]

Mr. Moss: Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 allows vehicles damage compensation claims to be made against the Department for failure to maintain the road. The same article, however, provides the Department with defences to such claims. If, for example, the Department can show that it operated a reasonable system of inspection and repair of the road in question, there is no entitlement to compensation and a claim in such circumstances must be refused. It is the policy of the Department to investigate fully all damage claims made against it and after a thorough investigation a decision is taken either to settle it, reject it or refer it to another party, for example, a contractor.

Housing Policy Review

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to publish the housing policy review and if he will make a statement. [7546]

Mr. Moss: I have today placed in the Library of the House the Government's proposals for future housing policy in Northern Ireland entitled "Building on Success". This review has taken place following extensive local consultations in Northern Ireland. Those who responded, almost without exception, praised the work of the Housing Executive in providing and managing public sector housing. The Government are determined to build on that success. The proposals published today seek to strengthen the executive's role in a number of important strategic ways including the determination of the locations for all new social housing, their subsequent allocation, the monitoring and oversight of housing associations and the private rented sector, and urban and rural regeneration. I want to maximise the private housebuilding sector's contribution, and also that of housing associations which have access to private finance. The document outlines proposals through which this could take place, together with a number of other policy proposals which the Government believe will help achieve their housing objectives for Northern Ireland. I have now initiated consultations on these proposals, with comments sought by 31 March 1996, following which decisions will be taken.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Military Aircraft Exports (Indonesia)

Sir Alan Haselhurst: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about exports of military aircraft to Indonesia. [7545]

Mr. Nelson: I have authorised the issue of licences to British Aerospace in respect of the contract signed in 1993 to export Hawk aircraft and support equipment to Indonesia. This decision has been made, following consultation with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in the light of the established and internationally agreed criteria for military exports. In accordance with Government policy, a thorough assessment of the likelihood of these aircraft being used for internal repression in Indonesia or East Timor has been undertaken. This assessment has concluded that it is not likely that these aircraft will be so used. In addition, the Indonesian Government have given assurances that the aircraft will not be used for internal security or against civilians in any part of Indonesia or East Timor.

It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose details of individual export licence cases, but, as I consider that the public interest in this matter outweighs the need for confidentiality, I have decided to make an exception.

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to maintaining outstanding commitments to projects or partnerships not completed by British Coal Enterprise at the time of its sale. [5887]

Mr. Page: The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal. Where projects or agreements have been entered into prior to the completion of the sale these will pass, subject to the consent of the third parties involved in certain cases, to the purchasers of the relevant activities of BCE.

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if any European regional development fund grants paid to British Coal Enterprise will have to be repaid after privatisation. [5888]

Mr. Page: Where projects supported by ERDF grant and grant payments are complete, the Government do not believe that the sale of British Coal Enterprise or of its workspace activities, will affect the status of the projects or of the grants, provided that the assets continue to be used for eligible purposes and in accordance with the terms of the relevant offers of grant.

Where projects supported by ERDF grant or the associated grant payments are not complete, or where offers of grant are still to be made in response to applications from BCE, the Government will seek assurances from any prospective purchaser of BCE, or of its workspace activities, that they will complete the projects in accordance with the terms of the offer of ERDF grant, continue to use the assets for eligible purposes and comply with the other requirements, both of the Government and of European Community law, as they relate to the offer of those grants.

Electricity Prices

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in real terms, and expressed as a percentage of the 1994 figure, what is the annual average for the electricity component of the retail prices index in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* at the time of privatisation and *(c)* at the present time. [7031]

Mr. Lang: In real terms, domestic electricity prices, excluding VAT, have fallen by 7 per cent. between privatisation—taken to be the second quarter of 1990—and the third quarter of 1995. The detailed information requested is given in the table.

	Index number in current terms[1]	*Real terms index number*[2]	*Percentage of 1994 figure*
1979	44.2	96.4	100.2
1990	100.0	100.0	104.0
1994	112.5	96.2	100.0
1995	[3]111.9	93.6	97.3

[1] The average of the monthly electricity components of the Retail Prices Index over the year (rebased to 1990=100).

[2] Using the Gross Domestic Product (market prices) deflator with 1990=100.

[3] The average of the monthly electricity components of the Retail Prices Index over the period January to November (rebased to 1990=100). Data exclude VAT at 8 per cent. which became payable from 1 April 1994.

Business Investment

Mr. Booth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate his Department has made of the level of investment by United Kingdom industry since 1979. [5895]

Mr. Oppenheim: Business investment is over a third higher, in volume terms, than in 1979.

Mr. Booth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate his Department has made of the proportion of investment in United Kingdom industry by foreign sources for each year since 1979. [5894]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information required is given in the table.

Percentage of UK manufacturing investment by foreign-owned companies

Year	*Number*
1979	23.2
1981	25.5
1983	23.1
1984	21.1
1985	21.9
1986	20.4
1987	21.3
1988	21.4
1989	27.6
1990	27.0
1991	33.5
1992	31.7

Notes:

1. 1992 figures are the latest available.
2. Prior to 1983 figures were only collected biannually.
3. Information is only available for manufacturing industries.

Source:

Annual Census of Production: CSO Business Monitor PA1002.

Mr. Booth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the figures for investment in the United Kingdom in industry in relation to *(a)* investment in Germany and *(b)* investment in France in industry for each year since 1979. [5896]

Mr. Oppenheim: OECD estimates for business investment in the UK, France and Germany, expressed in relation to levels of GDP, are shown in the table. Since 1979, business investment in the UK has averaged 12.5 per cent. of GDP compared with 12 per cent. in Germany and 11 per cent. in France.

Business investment as a proportion of GDP

At 1990 Prices *Per cent*

	UK	*Germany*	*France*
1979	12.0	11.8	11.4
1980	11.8	12.0	11.7
1981	11.1	11.6	11.3
1982	11.7	11.1	11.0
1983	11.4	11.4	10.5
1984	12.1	11.1	10.1
1985	12.4	11.4	10.3
1986	11.9	11.6	10.8
1987	12.8	11.9	11.1
1988	14.1	12.1	11.7
1989	14.7	12.5	12.2
1992	14.1	13.0	12.4
1991	12.9	13.3	12.2
1992	12.5	12.7	11.5
1993	12.3	11.1	10.6
1994	11.9	10.6	10.4

Source:

OECD Business Sector database.

Oil and Gas Exploration

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has concerning the exploration of oil and gas fields in the firth of Clyde, the sound of Jura and the sound of Mull; and if he will make a statement. [5163]

Mr. Page: There are no extant oil and gas exploration licences for the firth of Clyde, sound of Jura and sound of Mull. No applications were received for these areas in the recent seventh round of onshore oil and gas licensing.

As in previous onshore rounds, all unlicensed areas including estuarine and near shore waters, referred to as "watery areas", were offered for licensing.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5861]

Mr. Lang: The total cost, excluding VAT, of chauffeur-driven cars is as follows:

Year	*£*
1990–91	197,496
1991–92	213,295
1992–93	321,664
1993–94	399,180
1994–95	411,827

These figures also reflect structural and ministerial changes within the Department resulting from machinery of government changes.

Docks Dispute (Merseyside)

Mr. Parry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will establish an inquiry into the dispute between Merseyside dockers and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, and if he will make a statement. [7323]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. The dispute is solely a matter for the parties concerned.

Mr. Parry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the talks between ACAS and the Transport and General Workers Union concerning the dispute between the dock workers and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. [7156]

Mr. Taylor: No. ACAS does not divulge details of its contacts with the parties to a dispute without their permission.

Company Name Changes

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies have changed their name following direction by the Secretary of State under section 32 of the Companies Act 1985, in each of the last 10 years; and if he will name the companies involved and the nature of their business. [5773]

Mr. Oppenheim: Our records show that, in the last 10 years, one company has changed its name following a direction under section 32 of the Companies Act. It is not our practice to disclose details of a company so directed.

Marked Goods

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action is available by his Department or trading standards officers if goods purporting to be made in Sheffield and so stamped are not; and if he will make a statement. [6681]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, it is a criminal offence to mark goods with a false indication of their place of manufacture or production. The Act empowers trading standards officers to prosecute cases of false origin marking in the courts.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6722]

Mr. Page: The small firms and business link division of my Department is the contact point for general small business issues relating to public procurement. However, departmental procurement contacts for specific goods and services have also been established in DTI headquarters. Contacts for general departmental procurement queries exist in headquarters and the Department's executive agencies. Details are published in "Tendering for Government Contracts".

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many and what percentage of small and medium enterprises *(a)* have been informed of and *(b)* have used the regional supply network; and what has been its cost to public funds. [6518]

Mr. Page: Information about how many small and medium enterprises have been informed of, or have used, the regional supply network could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. DTI expenditure was £1.3 million in 1994–95 and expenditure to end of November in 1995–96 is £1.4 million. The budget for each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 is £2.8 million.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises; [6612]

(2) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises, needs. [6610]

Mr. Page: A copy of the chapter from the Department's procurement manual providing guidance on purchasing from small and medium enterprises has been placed in the Library of the House.

My Department has published a guide for small firms on "Tendering for Government Contracts", which contains advice on and details of the procurement requirements for each Government Department and its agencies, and a guide for Government procurement officers on purchasing from small firms called "Think Big, Buy Small". These publications are currently being updated and will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6611]

Mr. Page: My Department was represented at a meeting held by Her Majesty's Treasury officials between departmental purchasing officers and representatives of the CBI small firms council, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of Private Business on 27 September 1995 to review tendering procedures.

Exporting Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many United Kingdom firms were exporting *(a)* in April 1995, and *(b)* on the latest available date. [6553]

Mr. Oppenheim: According to the most recent information from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, there were approximately 112,000 firms exporting from the UK in 1994. This figure includes shipping agents but excludes those firms below the United Kingdom VAT registration threshold.

Design Advisers (Business Links)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many design advisers are currently in place in business links; in which business links they are situated; and who they are. [6517]

Mr. Page: There are currently 18 design counsellors in business links. A list of the counsellors and the business links in which they are based has been placed in the Library of the House.

Arms Exports

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account is taken of human rights records in determining whether to permit the export of United Kingdom arms to overseas Governments. [7067]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department seeks the advice of the FCO in making decisions on individual export licence applications for military, security and para-military equipment, which are taken in the light of extensive information on the human rights situation. Export licences would not be granted for equipment likely to be used for internal repression.

Export Licences

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Wickman Harrison applied for export licences for the sale of machine tools to the Nasr, Badr, Shuala, Aquabin Nafi and Al-Am facilities in Iraq; [5597]

(2) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Philips Scientific applied for export licences for the sale of an atomic absorption spectrometer to the Tuwaitha and Hutteen facilities in Iraq; [5598]

(3) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Avesta Steels Ltd. applied for an export licence for the sale of non-corrosive steel to the State Organisation for Technical Industries in Iraq; [5604]

(4) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Atlas Equipment Ltd. applied for an export licence to sell nuclear triggers to the Al-Qaqaa General Establishment in Iraq; [5606]

(5) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Astra Holdings applied for an export licence for the sale of munitions to the Huteen and Nasr facilities in Iraq; [5605]

(6) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Cincinati Milacron Ltd. applied for export licences for the sale of machine tools to the Nasr, Badr, Shuala, Aquabin-Nafi and Al-Am facilities in Iraq; [5603]

(7) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Norman Rushworth Ltd. applied for export licences for the sale of machine tools to the Nasr, Badr, Shuala, Aquabin Nafi and Al-Am facilities in Iraq; [5599]

(8) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Gatewood Engineering Ltd. applied for an export licence for the sale of earth moving equipment to the Hutteen and Nasr facilities in Iraq; [5600]

(9) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Marconi applied for an export licence for the sale of artillery metereological systems to the Hutteen and Nasr facilities in Iraq; [5601]

(10) if he will list the dates since 1985 when Millitorr Engineering Ltd. applied for export licences for the sale of resin mixers to Iraq. [5602]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Successive Administrations have not routinely disclosed such information, which is covered by commercial confidentiality, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is the investigating authority for breaches of export controls, and if the hon. Member has any evidence of such breaches he should inform customs.

Regional Grants

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance through Government schemes will be available from 1 January 1996, for which the Lowestoft area will be eligible for support, development and diversification of its economic base; and if he will make a statement. [6201]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The following are the main measures of Government and European assistance for which funding could be sought for projects to promote regeneration, economic development and direct support for businesses in the Lowestoft area:

(i) Objective 5b funding for the designated area within Lowestoft, in accordance with East Anglia Single Programming Document;

(ii) Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Funding in accordance with the bidding guidance to be issued early in 1996;

(iii) Two National DTI grant schemes for businesses. The Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology (SMART) is an annual competition offering financial support towards the development of commercially viable innovative projects. Support for Projects under Research (SPUR) offers flat rate grants to develop innovative products and processes;

(iv) Financial assistance to undertake market research or to visit overseas markets is also available through the DTI/Foreign and Commonwealth Overseas Trade Services programme.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department is having with businesses, local authorities and other partners in Waveney to produce funding bids for support, development and diversification of the economic base of Lowestoft, in 1996 and beyond; and if he will make a statement. [6204]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The government office for eastern region has indicated to the various interests in the Lowestoft area that it stands ready to discuss such bids. Preliminary discussions based on objective 5b funding and the third round of the single regeneration budget challenge fund will be taking place before the end of the month.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the eligibility criteria for gas and oil-related projects in the next round of regional challenge, mainstream objective 5b and single regeneration budget funding grants; how they are administered on a regional basis; and if he will make a statement. [6190]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* There are no specific criteria under these funding and challenge competitions in relation to oil and gas-related projects, but depending on the nature of any future projects account might need to be taken of any wider impact that they might have on the sector in terms of its existing capacity and employment. The same considerations would apply to projects in other industrial sectors. It is expected that the regional administrative arrangements for these measures will remain unchanged.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the eligibility criteria by which a scheme in Swaffham, Norfolk, won the regional challenge funding for East Anglia; and if he will make a statement. [6203]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* All bids, including the winning regional challenge project for the East Anglia objective 5(b) area, were assessed against the criteria for the regional challenge competition and those provided for in the East Anglia single programming document.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what (i) consultation, (ii) visits and (iii) submissions the government office for the eastern region was involved in and when they took place, to date in 1995, in connection with regional challenge and objective 5b funding in Suffolk and Norfolk; and if he will make a statement. [6196]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Prior to the formal submission of the regional challenge bids, visits were made to Breckland district council on 10 July and Waveney district council on 26 July at the request of those councils. A sub-group of the objective 5b monitoring committee, accompanied by GOER officials, visited Breckland district council on 4 September and Waveney district council on 13 September for presentations on the regional challenge bids, in preparation for the consideration of those bids by the monitoring committee on 18 September. Senior officials from GOER visited Waveney district council on 10 November to discuss developments in market conditions affecting the regional challenge proposals for the marine base.

Other contacts, mainly by telephone and in writing, have taken place throughout the period, largely for clarification of the bids.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the considerations above the strict eligibility criteria he employed in determining the regional challenge and objective 5b funding applications for Suffolk and Norfolk. [6198]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* No special considerations above those applying to regional challenge and objective 5b funding were employed in determining the eligibility of the applications for the regional challenge competition. Projects considered to be eligible were assessed against the criteria in the regional challenge bidding guidance and the selection criteria provided for in the East Anglia single programming document. Those project selection criteria included value for money, taking into account the likelihood of achievement of the projected outputs from the proposals.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade at what stage during 1995 *(a)* his officials, *(b)* the government office for the eastern region and *(c)* he personally, determined that gas and oil-related projects were ineligible for regional challenge and objective 5b funding; and if he will make a statement. [6202]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* No such decisions have been taken.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under what circumstances his Department reconsiders reworked bids from the Lowestoft area for funding assistance for projects relating to *(a)* gas and oil, *(b)* a port and *(c)* technological development, during 1996; and if he will make a statement. [6197]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The government office for the eastern region stands ready to consider both new and revised bids from the Lowestoft area against the criteria for the range of measures listed in my previous answers. Any revised bids for oil and gas projects would also be expected to take account of the recent, local market developments in the offshore supply sector which have affected the feasibility of the regional challenge bid for an integrated offshore marine base.

Radio Communications Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times the Radio Communications Agency has had cause to reject an application from Scope Marketing (Communications UK) Ltd. Totnes, for an EC type examination certificate under the Electromagnetic Compatibility Regulations 1992 due to presentational errors from the type approvals laboratories. [7006]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Radiocommunications Agency has not rejected any applications from Scope Marketing (Communications UK) Ltd. Totnes for an EC type examination certificate under the Electromagnetic Compatibility Regulations 1992 No. 2372, solely on the grounds of presentational errors.

Contractorisation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what systems are in place in *(a)* the Patent Office, *(b)* Companies House and *(c)* the Insolvency Service to compare costs of outside bidders with in-house services prior to any contractorisation; and if he will make a statement on the timetable and stages of contractorisation at each agency. [5836]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The basis for assessing bids in each agency will be overall value for money, including both the cost and quality of service. On costs, any bids will be assessed against a benchmark of the cost of continuing in-house provision, taking into account any planned efficiencies.

On the timetables for each exercise: *(a)* Patent Office.

Contracting out is being considered for four areas of the Patent Office—the operation of London front office; accommodation and office services; marketing and information services and information technology services. The first two are in the early stages of competitive tender. If it is decided to award a contract, it is envisaged that contractors would begin work in the early summer of 1996. The other two areas are the subject of feasibility studies.

(b) The Insolvency Service: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) on 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *599*.

(c) Companies House: Tenders are currently being evaluated for the London and satellite offices in England, the Edinburgh office, and the central inquiry unit and postal search services and the cheque processing functions in Cardiff. If it is decided to award any contract, it is currently envisaged that contractors would be in place by April.

Tender invitations are due to be issued in January 1996 in relation to office services in Cardiff which covers typing, reception, and so on.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations have taken place with staff and unions and *(a)* the Patent Office and *(b)* the Insolvency Service with particular reference to benchmarking. [5839]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Regular meetings have been held with the agency trade unions and staff have also been briefed regularly regarding the progress of the contracting-out process in both agencies. The issue of benchmarks has been covered in discussions or in correspondence with trade unions. Suggestions for efficiency improvements from staff put forward to management and agreed in the normal way are incorporated in the benchmarks.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5979]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Surveys carried out by my Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions in the three years to December 1995 are given in the table. In the time available, it has not been possible to assimilate information on the date the research was commissioned, the time scale, and on which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings, nor to distinguish between general and specific policy proposals. The date in the table shows the survey was conducted. Information on the fee paid cannot be disclosed due to commercial confidentially considerations.

Table: Public opinion surveys commissioned by the DTI from December 1992 to December 1995

Survey	*Date*	*Location*	*Organisation*	*Number of questionnaires*
Mountain bike study	March 1994	United Kingdom	Nottingham University Institute for Occupational Ergonomics	1,490
Metrication survey	April 1994	Great Britain	RSGB Ltd.	2,000
Child usage of gas and electrical consumer products	November 1993	GB	Children's Research Unit	310
Renewable energy awareness	September 1993	UK	RSGB Ltd.	2,200
Citizen's band radio licence	August 1995	UK	Radiocommunications Agency	53,000
Wind turbine design research	November 1995	GB	Martin Hamblin Research	472
Potential for green electricity supply to UK domestic consumers	January 1995	UK	Ratcliffe Hall International	90
Insolvency Service user survey	November 1994	England and Wales	Price Waterhouse	545
Patent Office customer survey	November 1994	UK	DTI	465
Overseas trade services publicity study	April 1994	UK	Metra Martech	900
Attitudes towards the publications of the small firms division	October 1993	UK	BLM Research	130
Farmers and growers attitude to renewable energy opportunities	August 1993	UK	ADAS	8,180
1993 renewable energy awareness study—industrial and commercial sectors	September 1993	GB	BMRB	500

Departmental Grants

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about inquiries taking place into grants made by his Department in the south-west region. [5465]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The Department's internal inquiries referred to in my answer on 7 November 1995 about the information given by my hon. Friends on 2 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *719*, and 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1561–62*, have now been completed. The situation is that, although some checks may have been made into the background to the directors of ROM-Data Corporation Ltd. before an offer of grant was made to the company in 1991, the subsequent investigation has revealed no documentary evidence that these checks were made.

It would therefore appear that those involved in appraising the case were not aware that Mr. John Dawson, who was involved with the ROM-Data Coroporation Ltd., was a discharged bankrupt even through that information was held by the Insolvency Service.

In addition to the meeting held on 29 October 1993 between a DTI official and Mr. Brad Shepard, a subsequent meeting was held between DTI officials and the company on 2 June 1994 in connection with an application under the small firms loan guarantee scheme, a point which was omitted from the earlier reply on 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1561–62*.

I regret these errors. Ministers are considering what steps need to be taken to ensure that they do not recur. In general, the record for RSA grants has been good. In 1994–95 offers worth £159 million were made and only £2.4 million of grants paid in earlier years were written off in that year. I would also draw attention to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *334*, about the Department's policy in respect of making grants available to companies whose directors have had previous bankruptcies.

The Department's own inquiries into other aspects of its handling of the case are continuing and I will report the outcome to the House further as appropriate.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall costs of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5623]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *880*.

Departmental Committees

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will list the cost of each committee of inquiry listed in his answer of 25 May, *Official Report*, columns *717–20*, and the amount of remuneration paid to the chairman; and if he will make a statement; [6336]

(2) if he will list the cost of each of the inquiries cited in his answer to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) of 25 May, *Official Report*, columns *717–20*; and if he will make a statement. [7132]

Mr. Freeman: The information is not held centrally.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6709]

Mr. Willetts: The contact points for my Department and its agencies will be published in the revised edition of the booklet "Tendering for Government Contracts", which will be available next month.

HMSO (Privatisation)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has yet had the opportunity to respond to the Speaker's letter of 28 November to the Lord President about HMSO. [7062]

Mr. Freeman: I wrote to the Speaker on 12 December 1995 and placed a copy of my response in the House Libraries on 14 December 1995. My reply reads as follows:

Dear Madam Speaker,

Thank you for the copy of your letter of 28 November to the Lord President about our plans to privatise HMSO.

I recognise, and am sympathetic to, the concerns which you raise about the service which HMSO provides to the House and how to safeguard it for the future. There are two strands to the protection which I believe can be made strong enough to satisfy the House. At present, the quality of the service is dictated both by the requirement, which is set down in writing, and by long history and tradition creating a culture within HMSO which ensures that Parliament is seen and treated as the key customer. I believe these can be carried forward into the relationship with a private sector Stationery Office and can be even stronger than they are now.

Under the type of sale which we have proposed, HMSO staff, and with them tradition, knowledge and experience, would transfer to the new employer, who would have every interest in maintaining the best possible relationship with the House. House business would be financially important and would also carry significant prestige. No supplier would want to be associated with a failure to deliver the services required by such a noteworthy customer. Done well, the Parliamentary business would be the best possible advertisement for the company. Done badly, other potential customers would take flight.

The agreement between the House and the privatised Stationery Office would be an enforceable, legally binding contract. Ultimately, the content of that contract is for the House to decide, although the Government would be happy to offer advice.

The contract terms could make it clear that local overnight production facilities together with space and facilities for the staff of the House are required. The transfer would be subject to TUPE and therefore staff and management of the existing HMSO would transfer to the new employer. In addition, the contract could specify that it is dependent on the provision of properly trained staff. It would be quite normal to include a requirement for prior consultation in the event that significant changes to management or organisation are planned. It would also be quite usual, I think, for there to be a named senior individual responsible for the contract and for the relationship with the House. The Supply and Service Agreement would be the foundation of the contract, with the advantage that the minimum standards it establishes would be enforceable at law.

I would expect the examination of prospective purchasers to include an evaluation of their intentions and understanding with regard to the services which they will be supplying to the House. The rights of the House in respect of the production and reproduction of its documents will be made explicit in the contract. I see no difficultly whatsoever in building on the financial arrangements of the new Supply and Service Agreement in order to ensure that the House continues to benefit from the negotiations which have been so recently completed.

You raised the question of the possible future fragmentation of the organisation or sale to an unacceptable buyer. The Government intends to seek a buyer for the whole business and that buyer will have to be acceptable to key customers and in particular to the House. If, after the sale, the buyer sought to sell on to another party or sought to break-up the business the House could be protected both commercially and contractually. The contract could include the right to terminate on a change of supplier status; and commercially, of course, a considerable part of the value of the business would lie in the contract with the House. An owner who put this at risk would soon find that he had devalued what he wished to sell.

I hope that this outline of responses to the views of the Commission indicates the seriousness I attach to these issues but also perhaps the degree to which I have already begun to address them. I have invited House officials to join mine in carrying forward the privatisation process including advising me on the selection of a buyer.

I did, as you know undertake to make an oral statement to the House at the earliest opportunity and I hope to make this on Wednesday 14 December. I should also be pleased to seek an opportunity for the House to discuss its interest in the matter, in a debate as soon as possible after my statement.

I should like to thank you for your helpful and constructive approach to these issues and for the considerable amount of work which has been undertaken by the House of Commons Commission and the Finance and Services Committee and by the House officials concerned. I am confident that from this excellent starting point we shall be able to take this work forward together to achieve the sale, and end the uncertainty, by summer next year.

I understand that the House of Lords has similar concerns to yours though some details may be different, reflecting present business arrangements. But whatever the concerns, I am clear that they must be satisfied as a pre-requisite to the sale of HMSO.

I am copying this letter to the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal and the Lord Chairman of Committees.

Please be assured of my close attention to this matter.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the office locations which will form part of the proposed sale of HMSO, indicating the number of staff employed in each. [6731]

Mr. Willetts: HMSO employs 2,898 staff in various locations around the United Kingdom. The geographical breakdown of those employees is as follows:

1,105 in Norwich: 399 in Chadderton, Manchester; 210 in Edinburgh and South Gyle; 198 in Bristol, 67 in Belfast and Newtonards; 49 in Cardiff; 17 in Birmingham; 10 in Leeds; in London there are 220 in Elephant and Castle, 253 in Southwark, 303 in Vauxhall, 18 in Whitehall, 28 in Holborn, 16 in Docklands; and five in Monchengladbach serving the MOD in Germany.

Under the proposed sale, all the staff assigned to the undertaking would transfer to the new employer. The number of staff involved in the residual body and who therefore would not transfer is not expected to amount to more than about 30.

Expense Reimbursement

Mr. Stern: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those organisations holding national charters in which there are targets set for collecting statistics on claims for reimbursement of expenses submitted which are delayed for more than 50 per cent. of the average number of days for the year claimed. [4693]

Mr. Freeman: I am not aware that any of the organisations holding national charters have set targets for expense reimbursement. Whether such targets should be included in charter revising will be kept under review.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5857]

Mr. Willetts: Expenditure on the use of chauffeur-driven cars by the Cabinet Office including the Office of Public Service and its executive agencies, which includes expenditure for the Government and Opposition Whips, for the Leader of the Opposition and for ex-Prime Ministers, is as follows:

1993–94: £544,900

1994–95: £745,600

1995–96: £455,800.

Notes:

Actual expenditure to end of November. The figure for the Cabinet Office excludes expenditure by the Office of the Prime Minister, which was the subject of a separate Answer by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Figures for earlier years are available only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT

City Challenge

16. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment from which city challenge partnerships he has received annual reports for 1994–95. [4890]

Mr. Curry: Annual reports for 1994–95 have been received from all 31 city challenge partnerships. The reports are very encouraging and they indicate that city challenge is having a major impact on the regeneration of our cities.

House Insulation

17. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the standard of insulation of housing in the United Kingdom with particular reference to the record of the last 20 years. [4892]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The standard of insulation of housing has improved dramatically over the last 20 years.

Information for the whole of the United Kingdom is not available. However, the proportion of homes in Great Britain with lofts that are insulated has more than doubled from 42 per cent. to 89 per cent.; the percentage with cavity walls that are insulated has increased nearly tenfold from 2.5 per cent. to 23 per cent.; and the proportion of homes with windows double glazed has risen over sevenfold from 8 per cent. to 59 per cent.

Local Government Finance

18. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion he has had with local authority leaders on the Government contribution to overall local authority revenue. [4893]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the leaders of the local authority associations on 11 December to discuss a range of issues affecting local government, including the financing of local authority revenue expenditure. He will be meeting them again on 15 January at the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance.

North East Lincolnshire Authority

19. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much will be lost to the new North East Lincolnshire authority as a result of the impact of the 1996 area cost adjustment on its financial allocations. [4894]

Mr. Curry: Nothing. The effect of using data from the 1994 new earnings survey is to reduce the area cost adjustment factors for authorities in London and the south-east and distribute more to other authorities, including North East Lincolnshire.

South Pennines

20. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what special protection is provided by statute for the environment of the south Pennines. [4895]

Mr. Clappison: Large areas of the south Pennines have been notified as sites of special scientific interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Parts of the area fall within the Peak District national park, or are designated as green belt or areas of special landscape quality. The area also contains buildings listed as being of special architectural or historic interest.

Urban Design

21. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage high standards of urban design so that new developments in towns and villages enhance the urban landscape. [4897]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As part of my Department's initiative, "Quality in Town and Country", we have launched a national urban design campaign to promote greater consideration of urban design at a local level. About 20 of the more promising proposals submitted under the campaign will receive modest financial support from my Department and will feature in a major exhibition next year. We hope to announce our selection of proposals early in the new year.

Rough Sleepers Initiative

22. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to continue the rough sleepers initiative beyond March 1996. [4898]

Mr. Curry: The housing White Paper, "Our Future Homes", issued on 27 June 1995, undertook to continue the Government's rough sleepers initiative in central London beyond March 1996, and to assist the development of the successful RSI model in other areas where rough sleeping could be demonstrated to be a major problem. Over the next three years, 1996–97 to 1998–99, my Department plans to make available £73 million to meet these commitments. Following analysis of the responses to a consultation paper issued on 3 October 1995, we will be issuing a strategy paper in the new year inviting bids for these resources.

Rented Homes

23. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes for renting were started by local authorities and housing associations in total in 1978–79; and what is his estimate for 1996–97. [4899]

24. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To asks the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes for renting were started by local authorities and housing associations in total in 1978–79; and what is his estimate for 1996–97. [4900]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration earlier today to the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice).

Planning Applications

25. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to revise the criteria for the calling in of planning applications. [4901]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to revise his policy for calling in planning applications.

Local Authority Housing

26. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much in total will be available for investment in the renovation of local authority housing from *(a)* credit approvals, *(b)* estate action and the single regeneration budget and *(c)* capital receipts in 1996–97; and what the equivalent figures were for 1989–90 and 1993–94. [4902]

Mr. Curry: We are making £699 million available in 1996–97 for general housing credit approvals, £30 million for the housing partnership fund and £256 million for estate action. Seventy schemes in round 1 of the single regeneration budget challenge fund have a significant housing content and are expected to receive about £125 million of SRB resources in 1996–97. Similar details for round 2 are not yet available; £40 million will also be available from the deprived estates challenge fund, out of a three-year total of over £314 million. The amount available from capital receipts will depend on authorities' success in selling assets. I will arrange for figures for the earlier years to be put in the Library.

The proportion of these resources invested in the renovation of council housing will depend on authorities' own decisions about priorities.

London Docklands Development Corporation

27. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals or plans he has for the transfer of the current responsibilities of the London Docklands development corporation subsequent to its dissolution in 1998. [4903]

Mr. Curry: The corporation's planning and development control responsibilities are transferring to the relevant local authority.

Successor arrangements for other responsibilities are the subject of detailed discussions between the corporation, the local authorities, the Department and other bodies, including English Partnerships.

Energy Efficiency

28. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many pensioners and people over the age of 60 years have received help under the home energy efficiency scheme. [4904]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Age became a ground for grant in April 1994. Since then, some 530,000 grants have been paid to householders who claimed on the basis that they or their spouse was aged 60 or over. Grant eligibility for over-60s currently depends solely on age, not income, and no information is available on how many grant recipients are pensioners.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to lay before Parliament the order altering the structure of local government in Rutland and Leicestershire; [6207]

(2) what he expects to be the date of the first local government elections in Rutland within the proposed unitary county. [6208]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend intends to lay the order giving effect to structural change in Leicestershire before Parliament early in the new year. This will allow for elections to the future unitary authorities in May 1996 and reorganisation on 1 April 1997.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest advice he has received on cryptosporidium in drinking water. [4896]

Mr. Clappison: The expert group, chaired by Sir John Badenoch, published its second report on 2 November this year.

This confirmed that control over the catchment areas from which source waters are drawn and meticulous control and management of water treatment processes are the main safeguards against further outbreaks of waterborne cryptosporidiosis.

Outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis, which are thought to be linked to drinking water, are investigated by the drinking water inspectorate and the case for prosecuting a water company for supplying water unfit for human consumption is considered.

Landfill Sites (Essex)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the landfill sites in Essex; and what type of waste can be deposited in each of these sites. [6049]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment does not keep records of individual landfill sites. This information can be obtained from the register maintained by Essex waste regulation authority.

Glow Worms

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the numbers of glow worms in England over the past 30 years. [6180]

Mr. Clappison: The Government's statutory scientific advisers, English Nature, advise that quantitative data on the abundance of the glow worm—Lampyris noctiluca—in England is scarce. Accurate recording of the population trends is difficult, in particular because the species is nocturnal and is easily detected only for around two weeks of the year.

Available information suggests that the British population of Lampyris noctiluca may have declined over the past 50 years but is still present over most of its natural range.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* orders and *(b)* firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6492]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Waste Collection and Disposal

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the number of tonnes of *(a)* inactive waste and *(b)* other waste, collected by local authorities in England and Wales and disposed of to landfill, in each year since 1990; [6821]

(2) what is the forecast number of tonnes of *(a)* inactive waste and *(b)* other waste, which local authorities in England and Wales will collect and dispose of to landfill, in each year from 1995 to 2000; [6822]

(3) what is the expected total amount of money that local authorities in England and Wales will pay in landfill levy in each year from 1996 to 2000; [6823]

(4) what is the current range of landfill costs per tonne in England and Wales; [6825]

(5) what assessment has been carried out by his Department into the price elasticity of demand for landfill. [6890]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities are responsible for the collection and disposal of household and commercial waste. The Government's strategy for sustainable waste management, published last week, records that the estimated annual arisings for household and commercial waste in the United Kingdom are 35 million tonnes. Around 90 per cent. of household waste and 85 per cent. of commercial waste currently go to landfill. Very little of this is likely to fall within the definition of inactive waste. Figures are not available centrally on an annual basis.

Local authorities are responsible for meeting the cost of disposing of the 20 million tonnes of household waste produced each year. They are able to recover the cost of disposing of the 15 million tonnes of commercial waste from the producers of the waste. Assuming that the full amount of landfill tax is passed on to local authorities by landfill operators, the cost of disposing of the proportion of the 20 million tonnes of household waste that goes to landfill would increase by about £126 million. As the landfill tax and other policies in the Department's strategy for sustainable waste management will act as incentives to move away from landfill, we would expect this figure to fall over a period of time. Local authorities will also benefit from a reduction of 0.2 per cent. in the main rate of employer national insurance contributions in 1997–98, as part of the Government's policy of moving business taxation away from employment towards activities which damage the environment.

A study published by the Department shows that in April 1993 the cost of landfilling domestic and commercial waste ranged from £5 to £30 per tonne. Prices varied according to the type of waste and the location of the landfill site. Prices have risen since then, partly as a result of the implementation of the more stringent licensing regime under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The price elasticity of demand for landfill depends on the suitability and availability of alternative waste management practices. This will vary to some extent across the country and between different types of waste. It will also vary over time as the practices of waste producers and handlers change to reflect policies contained in the waste strategy.

Landfill Levy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total increase in council tax bills in England and Wales forecast as a result of the introduction of the landfill levy, for each year from 1996 to 2000. [6824]

Sir Paul Beresford: Levels of council tax will depend upon budget decisions taken by local authorities. The net amount attributable to the landfill tax will depend on authorities' waste disposal policies and on the effect of offsetting savings in employers' national insurance contributions.

Pollution

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of how the best practice programme will save 2 million tonnes of carbon emissions. [7324]

Mr. Clappison: The energy efficiency best practice programme produces authoritative guidance on energy efficiency measures, promoted to industry, commerce and buildings professionals. It has a target of stimulating energy savings that, by the year 2000, will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 5 million tonnes of carbon per year. Market research shows that the programme has already generated annual reductions of some 2 million tonnes of carbon, and that it is well on course to meet its target for 2000.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the energy efficiency programmes whose continuing effects are expected to contribute to reducing carbon emissions as stated in the progress report on carbon dioxide emissions, and the date that each programme *(a)* commenced and *(b)* finished or is expected to finish. [7331]

Mr. Clappison: Of the many energy efficiency initiatives which predate the United Kingdom climate change programme, the principal ones—the energy efficiency best practice programme and the Government's work in promoting combined heat and power—began in 1989 and 1990 respectively. Both programmes are on-going.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what factors underlay the reduction in forecast carbon dioxide savings from energy efficiency measures in the progress report on carbon dioxide emissions published on 14 December; [7325]

(2) what conditions led to the increase in the forecast contained in the progress report on carbon dioxide emissions for savings in carbon dioxide emissions as a result of road fuel duty. [7355]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to pages 23 and 24 of the report.

English Nature

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the budget for English Nature in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97 and *(d)* 1997–98. [7207]

Mr. Clappison: English Nature's grant in aid for the financial years in question are:

Year	*Grant in aid £ million*
(a) 1994–95	40.405
(b) 1995–96	40.419
(c) 1996–97	39.166
(d) 1997–98	[1]38.904

[1] Baseline planning figure.

Countryside Commission

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the budget for the Countryside Commission for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97 and *(d)* 1997–98. [7206]

Mr. Clappison: The grant in aid budget for the Countryside Commission was £46.137 million for 1994–95 and is £42.124 million for 1995–96. The allocation for 1996–97 is £25.787 million and the planning figure for 1997–98 is £24.727 million.

The reduction in 1995–96 included £2 million for the national forest, work on which was commenced by the commission but which is being taken forward by the National Forest Company. The reductions in 1996–97 and 1997–98 take account of agreed transfers to MAFF—£13.293 million in each year—to support the transfer of responsibility for countryside stewardship, and to the groundwork foundation, £1.200 million in each year, for work in groundwork trust areas formerly funded by the Commission, as well as the 5 per cent. reduction in running costs being applied generally to the Department's sponsored bodies.

Pesticides (Drinking Water)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has made to improve the standard of drinking water in response to the publication of the National Rivers Authority report into the levels of pesticides being found in water supplies; and if he will make a statement. [7335]

Mr. Clappison: The report makes it clear that serious incidents of pesticide pollution are rare, and that the data presented did not reflect drinking water quality. The quality of drinking water is very high; in 1994, of 3.5 million tests carried out, 99.3 per cent. met the relevant standards. Where standards were not met, water companies have provided legally binding undertakings to carry out the necessary improvements.

Advisory Committee on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the final report of the advisory committee on Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; and if he will make a statement. [7435]

Mr. Clappison: I am today placing a copy of the committee's final report in the Library of the House, together with responses by the inspectorate and the Environment Agency.

I am grateful to the committee for producing a final report, which will assist in preparing for the inspectorate's entry into the agency. The report provides a valuable independent assessment of the inspectorate's strengths, and it provides a set of recommendations to guide the further development of the effectiveness and efficiency of pollution regulation in the future.

I am pleased that the inspectorate and the agency have responded constructively to the committee's recommendations and are taking the necessary action to implement them.

National Park Authorities

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements have been made for appointing the members to the new national park authorities provided for by the Environment Act 1995. [7437]

Mr. Clappison: The new independent national park authorities, whose creation was provided for by the Environment Act, are intended to be established in England on 1 October 1996, and to take over their full powers and responsibilities on 1 April 1997.

During the passage of the Environment Act, the importance of the role for the Secretary of State's appointed members in bringing the wider national viewpoint to the deliberations of the national parks was emphasised.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside has today written to all Members who have a constituency interest in national parks, inviting nominations for Secretary of State members of the new authorities. Officials will also seek nominations from a wide range of organisations.

Candidates are sought from a wide range of backgrounds and interests. All those with an interest in the parks are encouraged to put forward names for consideration. Local publicity will be arranged in the individual national parks.

Nominations are required by 29 February 1996.

In making these appointments to the new authorities, we will wish to bear in mind the desirability of maintaining some continuity of membership as well as of introducing some new members. We will select individuals for their personal qualities and experience, and not as representatives for specific groups or organisations. We expect them to have regard to the interests of all those who are concerned with a specific park, but our primary concern is that those members should bring the wider national viewpoint to the authorities' discussions.

The Secretary of State will continue to be advised on his appointment by the Countryside Commission, which provides an independent input in to the selection process, and whose advice has always been valuable.

UK Round Table on Sustainable Development

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the UK round table on sustainable development has held another meeting; and if he will make a statement. [7694]

Mr. Gummer: The UK round table on sustainable development held its fifth meeting on 11 December, with Professor Sir Richard Southwood and me in the chair. The meeting discussed the liberalisation of the supply of gas and electricity to domestic consumers, freight transport and environmental audit. Reports by the round table on each of these topics will be published shortly. The round table also considered a framework for a sustainable transport policy, on which discussion will continue at the next meeting in February, and agreed to undertake further work on the structure and powers of economic and environmental regulators in the UK, and how these can best reflect the needs of sustainable development.

Packaging Industry

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the outcome of his meeting with the packaging industry on producer responsibility on 15 December. [7695]

Mr. Gummer: On 15 December, I met 30 representatives of leading businesses involved in packaging to hear their views on the best form of legal obligation to implement producer responsibility for packaging. This was a final opportunity to hear industry views before Government make their decision.

The first part of the meeting was chaired by Sir Peter Parker, president of the Industry Council on Packaging and the Environment, whom I had asked to help resolve remaining differences of view in industry on alternative methods of achieving a shared approach to producer responsibility for packaging. As a result of his discussions a proposal combining elements of both approaches and agreed by the meeting has now been submitted to me.

The main elements of this industry proposal are as follows:

Information. The Environment Agency should develop and acquire data on major package material flows, waste streams and recovery processes and make this available to the industry.

The legal obligation to valorise packaging to specific targets. A staged approach should be applied as follows, with the introduction of regulations in summer 1996:

> By the end of *Year 1* (mid-1997) individual businesses or schemes should be under an obligation to provide packaging flow data to the Environment Agency;
>
> By *Year 3* (1998–99) individual businesses or schemes should be assessed on completion of the first (3 year) tranche of recycling/recovery obligations. Compliance with *Interim targets* should not be enforced before 1998.

A *review* of the legal obligation involving all sectors of the packaging industry should be carried out on behalf of the Secretary of state by the end of 1997.

An *Advisory Committee*, giving balanced representation to the industry sectors involved, should be established early in 1996 to advise the Secretary of State on the drafting and implementation of the regulations and on arrangements for carrying out a review of the legal obligation, including consideration of actual burden on individual companies.

The *principles* on which the legal obligation should be based are:

1. the use of packaging;
2. the need to ensure effective co-operation throughout the packaging chain to achieve recycling and recovery, taking account of equity and the different roles of each sector.

c. that each sector must play an equitable part in relation to the domestic waste stream.

For the first two years, the *legal obligation* for sectors having taken into account exports and imports at all levels should be initially as follows (these would be the basis for figures applied to businesses *outside* a collective scheme):

Raw materials and imports: 5½ per cent.

Converters and imports: 14½ per cent.

Packer fillers and imports: 35 per cent.

Retailers, importers and distributers: 45 per cent.

In the operation and monitoring of the obligation, the maximum practicable use should be made of sampling; "ready reckoners" and counting at the interface between 2 sectors.

Companies supporting this approach are clearly committed to the principle that costs will be passed down the chain and through to the ultimate consumer.

Companies supporting this approach and wishing to join a collective scheme would be expected to commit themselves for the first 2 years (or such longer period as may be agreed) to raise funds through a turnover-related annual membership fee, subject to a maximum of £50,000 for the largest UK turnover and with proportionately smaller fees for smaller companies.

I welcome the very real efforts made by businesses in all sectors to achieve a consensus on the best means of implementing a shared responsibility approach in which they can have confidence.

Government will now need to consider and decide on the best form of the legal obligation, taking account of all relevant considerations.

I am placing copies of the full text of the industry proposal and a list of those who attended the 15 December meeting in the Library.

Land Disposal (Local Authorities)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to alter the arrangements whereby local authorities obtain consent to dispose of land at less than best price. [7696]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department and the Welsh Office have today issued the Local Government Act 1972 general disposal consent 1995, a copy of which has been placed in the Library, with the covering letter and explanatory commentary. This gives effect to proposals on which local authority associations and other interested organisations, including the Audit Commission, were consulted in March and which were generally welcomed.

This general consent defines certain circumstances in which local authorities may, in future, dispose of land for less than best price without making specific application to the Secretary of State. For example, local authorities will now have greater freedom to grant long leases to other local authorities, health authorities or charities, or for purposes for which they have powers to provide grants or loans.

The consent is designed to strike a balance between protecting the public purse and giving greater autonomy to local authorities to manage their own affairs.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response was received to the consultation paper on the appointment and jurisdiction of valuation tribunals in respect of local government reorganisation in parts of England. [7697]

Sir Paul Beresford: The list of responses received has been placed in the Library of the House; copies of individual response may be obtained through the Library. Regulations will be introduced shortly to give effect to the following measures.

(i) The Avon Valuation Tribunal is to be renamed the "Severnside Valuation Tribunal", and its members appointed by the four successor authorities in that area. Its complement will be increased to 40 members, with these shadow authorities entitled to appoint one member each immediately. As vacancies arise, they are to be replaced by appointments by the authorities in the following order in rotation: North West Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset.

(ii) The Cleveland Valuation Tribunal is to be renamed the "Teeside Valuation Tribunal", and its members appointed by the four successor authorities in that area. Its complement will be increased by one, which may be appointed by the shadow Hartlepool UA immediately. As vacancies arise, they are to be replaced by appointments by the authorities in the following order in rotation: Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees and Hartlepool.

(iii) The areas of the Selby District Council and the City of York Unitary Authority will be transferred from the area of jurisdiction of the North Yorkshire Valuation Tribunal into that of East Yorkshire Valuation Tribunal. The complement of the North Yorkshire tribunal will remain the same.

(iv) The Humberside Valuation Tribunal is to be renamed the "East Yorkshire Valuation Tribunal", and its area of jurisdiction will cover the unitary authorities of East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston-upon-Hull and York, and the district of Selby. Its members are to be appointed by the unitary authorities and the North Yorkshire County Council (in the ratio of 3:2:1:1). Its complement will be increased to 49, with York and North Yorkshire councils entitled to appoint one member each immediately. As vacancies arise, they are to be replaced by appointments by the authorities in the following order: twelve by York and North Yorkshire councils alternately, and the remainder by East Riding and Hull councils in the ratio 3:2.

(v) The area of jurisdiction of the Lincolnshire Valuation Tribunal is to be extended to include the area south of the Humber which previously formed part of the area of the Humberside tribunal. Its complement will be increased to 90, with North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire entitled to appoint 14 members each immediately. The first vacancy to arise will be replaced by these authorities, and the remainder by Lincolnshire County Council.

DEFENCE

Gazelle Helicopter (Alleged Misuse)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the outcome of the investigation by the special investigation branch of the Royal Military police in Edinburgh into the alleged misuse of a Gazelle helicopter by an Army officer with regard to a golf course in Scotland earlier in 1995 and other similar incidents. [5312]

Mr. Soames: Investigations into this incident have been completed and the findings have been considered by the Army chain of command. A Gazelle helicopter deviated from its task to take two Army officers to a golf tournament. There was no dishonest intent on the part of the officer responsible. He did, however, make an error of judgment and he has been subject to the appropriate disciplinary action. In addition, the procedures for authorising requests for helicopter flights have been amended to ensure that similar incidents cannot happen in future. There is no connection between this incident and other allegations of the misuse of Army assets, which have not been substantiated.

Absence without Leave

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines apply to the payment of members of the armed forces who are on unauthorised absence from service; how many such absences there have been in each year since 1990–91; how much pay has been received by individuals while on unauthorised absence; and if he will make a statement. [7165]

Mr. Soames: When a member of the armed forces absents him or herself without authority, action is taken to stop pay, including increments and additional pay, from day one of the absence. On recovery from absence, disciplinary action is usually taken and, if the case against the individual is proven, pay for the entire period of absence is forfeited; it follows that no pay is received by individuals while on unauthorised absence. Details of the numbers of such absences there have been in each year since 1990 are currently being collated and I will write to the hon. Member with this information.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the steps to be taken following receipt of expressions of interest in the buildings of the Royal Naval college, Greenwich. [7199]

Mr. Portillo: In my capacity as sole trustee of the Crown charity, Greenwich hospital, and with the agreement of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for National Heritage and for the Environment, I have invited Lord Faringdon, Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Lord Sainsbury and Jocelyn Stevens to form an advisory group to advise me on the expressions of interest and on the future use and management of the Royal Naval college, Greenwich. Hayden Phillips and Sir Moray Stewart—from the Department of National Heritage and the Ministry of Defence—would also participate in the work of the group.

It will be asked to give particular attention to the extent to which the proposals are sympathetic to the status of the building and their wide enjoyment by the public. A short list may be produced early in the new year; a final decision is not expected until summer 1996.

Directorate of Operational Capability

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role and responsibility of the directorate of operational capability; to whom it reports; and what organisation it has replaced in his Department. [7139]

Mr. Soames: The directorate of operational capability was formed earlier this year. Its primary function is to provide a strengthened ability to assess defence-wide operational capability through a process of operational audit. This task was previously the responsibility of Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Operations).

The directorate also provides the military element of the secretariat for the Defence Council. The director of operational capability reports directly to the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments).

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6640]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department produces a publication, "Selling to the Ministry of Defence", which, in addition to setting out our basic procurement procedures, also provides a range of useful contact points within the Department. This publication, has been well received by small and medium enterprises. I will place a copy in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6641]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Department maintains regular contact with a variety of trade associations representing companies involved in the defence sector that count among their membership small firms. Those discussions will from time to time include consideration of the Department's tendering procedures.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6657]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Ministry of Defence has always encouraged small firms to bid for work appropriate to their skills and capabilities. No specific review of this area of the Department's procurement activity is currently being undertaken.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6497]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department publishes each year in "UK Defence Statistics" an analysis of its expenditure on goods and services in the UK, broken down by industry group. The analysis for 1994–95 is not yet available; that for 1993–94 appears in the 1995 edition of "Defence Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. These figures do, however, include some expenditure on goods and services purchased from the public sector, such as rail transport and postal services. They exclude expenditure by the then Defence Research Agency.

RB44 Army Light Vehicle

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department withdrew from service the RB44 Army light vehicle; and on what date his Department was first alerted to the problems with braking mechanisms of the RB44. [6987]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The issue of braking first arose during trials in 1989, but the shortcomings were addressed before the production contract was placed in 1990.

The vehicles were temporarily withdrawn from service in June 1992 following problems with braking performance reported by the Royal School of Artillery in May 1992; after modifications, they were restored to service in November 1992. Following the results of further testing under stringent conditions in August 1993, the vehicles were withdrawn from service in December 1993, but were accepted again for service in August 1995.

Biological and Toxic Weapons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made at the ad hoc group meeting of states parties to the biological and toxic weapons convention in Geneva; what work has been carried out on compliance measures; and when the ad hoc group will complete its owrk. [6992]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The second substantive meeting of the biological and toxic weapons convention ad hoc group, which was held in Geneva from 27 November to 8 December 1995, made useful progress, building upon the work of the previous meeting in July. On compliance measures, a number of issues were explored on mandatory declarations; on-site visits/inspections, in particular regarding the role of non-challenge visits; and investigation of alleged biological weapon use. Much work remains to be done, however, and it is not possible at this stage to predict when the process will be concluded. The ad hoc group is mandated to complete its work as soon as possible and to submit its report to be considered at the fourth review conference, scheduled for November-December 1996, or later at a special conference.

Honourable Discharges

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army service men have been given an honourable discharge in each of the last 36 months; and if he will indicate their units. [6887]

Mr. Soames: Honourable discharge is not an officially recognised term. However, excluding those who have been discharged as a result of sentencing by court martial or for misconduct, 48,377 soldiers have left the Army "honourably" since the beginning of 1993. This figure could be further broken down only at disproportionate cost.

Merchant Vessels

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *344*, relating to the charter of merchant vessels by his Department, what was the total cost of chartering these vessels. [6990]

Mr. Soames: The total cost of chartering these vessels is £25,807,174.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the name of every merchant vessel and its country of registration chartered by his Department for *(a)* exercises and *(b)* military support and re-supply operations in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994. [6988]

Mr. Soames: The names of merchant vessels and their country of registration chartered for *(a)* exercises and *(b)* military support and re-supply in 1992, 1993 and 1994 are as follows:

Vessel name	*Flag*
1992: Vessels chartered for exercises	
Rosa Dan (Twice)	Danish
Tor Caledonia (Twice)	Danish
King of Scandinavia (Twice)	Danish
Mercandian Arrow (Four times)	Danish
Mercandian Duke	Danish
Mercandian Senator	Danish
Mercandian Prince II	Danish
Mercandian Queen II	Danish
Norona	Danish
Winston Churchill	Danish
Thomas Wehr	Danish
Stena Traveller (Twice)	Swedish
Stig Gorthon	Swedish
Este Submerger II	German
Condock III	German
Skene	German
Alster Rapid	German
Baltic Sun	Dutch
Danica Red	Danish
Danica Green	Danish
Miranda	Danish
Dina	Grenadines
Vessels Chartered for support	
Northella	British
Indomitable	British
Oil Mariner	British
RTK Raiding Craft	British
Polar Circle	British
ROV Achilles Eyeball	British
ROV Scorpio 34	British
Flying Spindrift	British
Marine Explorer	British
Proud Seahorse	British
Artic Nanook	Bahamian
6.5 Beach Rider	British
Steadfast	British
Seagull	British
Maersk Ascension	British (IOM)
Maersk Gannet	British (IOM)
ONL Producer	Norwegian
British Wye	British
ESSO Mersey	British
Solaro	Italian
Rita Maersk	Danish

Vessel name	*Flag*
Golconda	Panamian
Valentino	Italian
ESSO Fawley	British
Granada	Norwegian
Lisbet (Twice)	Norwegian
Rathmoy	Irish
Sonja	Norwegian
Four Skies	Maltese
Confidence	Singaporean
Maersk Harrier	British
Milford Haven	British
Rathkyle	Irish
Shell Trans	Dutch
Longobarda	Italian
Conny	Liberian
Stella Procyon	German
Ankergracht	Dutch
Jens Munk	Danish
Castor	Singaporean
Malene	Danish
St. Brandon	British
Jetta Dainia	Danish
Dansus	Danish
Kleven	Danish
Stig Gorthin	Swedish
Ben Ellan	British
Beursgracht	Dutch
Conti Blue	St. Vincent
Puma	Danish
Atlantic Conveyor	British
Atlantic Cartier	French
Baltic Breeze	Singaporean
Jaguar	Danish
Bassro Star	Norwegian
Belvaux	Luxemburg
Maersk Kent	Bahamian
Maria J	German
Via Tirreno	Italian
Nornews Service	Norwegian
Rheiderland	German
Rosa Dan	Danish
Santa Maria	German
Sea Bird	Danish
1993: Vessels Chartered for exercise	
Mercanian Duke	Danish
Tor Britannia (Twice)	Swedish
Submerger I	German
Tor Dania (Five times)	Swedish
Salar (Twice)	Swedish
Princess of Scandinavia	Danish
Sophie	Danish
Nornews Service	Norwegian
Submerger II	German
Bassro Star	Norwegian
Arktis Bay	Danish
Atlanic Cartier	French
Merida	Danish
Rosa Dan	Danish
Arktis Sky	Danish
Maria (Twice)	Danish
Cecilia	Danish
Vessels charterd for support	
Northella	British
Indomitable	British
Oil Mariner	British
Marine Explorer	British
Proud Seahorse	British
Paragon VSV 10	British
Bramley Moore	British
Waterloo	British
CS Monarch	British
Rockwater I	British
MFV Brighter Morn	British
Maersk Ascension	British (IOM)
Maersk Gannet	British (IOM)
Navigo	Swedish
Antonio D'Alesio	Italian
ESSO Fawley (Three times)	British
United Star	Swedish
Oderstern	British (IOM)
ESSO Mersey (Twice)	British
Echoman	British
Star Penbroke	Bahamian
British Tamar	British
Helen Knutsen	Norwegian
Panther	Danish
Sophie (Twice)	Danish
Parkgracht	Dutch
Maria	Danish
St. Brandon	British
Maria D	German
Ben Ellan	British
Barde Team	Norwegian
Celebrity	British
St. Angus	British
Glencloy	British
Condock III	German
MV Anomis	Danish
MV Amulet	Danish
MV Brandaris	German
Mercandian Queen II	Danish
Puma	Danish
Glenfyne	British
Mercandian Duke	Danish
Belvaux	Luxembourg
Nornews Service	Norwegian
Arroyofrio Dos	Spanish
1994: Vessels charted for exercise	
Mercandian Queen II	Danish
Tor Dania	Swedish
Nesborg	Danish
Arcade Eagle	Norwegian
Arktis River	Danish
Jaguar	Danish
Puma	Danish
Danica Red	Danish
Danica Green	Danish
Vessels chartered for support	
Indomitable	British
Oil Mariner	British
Marine Explorer	British
Proud Seahorse	British
VSV 50 (Three times)	British
Aquamarine (Twice)	Liberian
Seaway Harrier (Twice)	British
CS Sovereign	British
Northella	British
Fennica	Norwegian
Maersk Gannet	British (IOM)
Pride of Portsmouth	Bahamian
Ben Viking	Norwegian
The Performa	Bahamian
Flying Enterprise	Cypriot
Seaway Pelican	Norwegian
ESSO Fawley	British
Lisbet	Norwegian
Harpoen	Dutch
Minibex	British
Seashake	Sardinian
Nordfast	Bahamian
Lowland Cavalier	British
Torm Ragnilo	Bahamian
Rasmine Maersk	Norwegian
Dubalti	Latvian

Vessel name	*Flag*
Arion	German
Creon	Cypriot
Petro Milford Haven	British
ESSO Mersey	British
Sidsel Knutsen	Norwegian
Maersk Ascension	British (IOM)
Atlanta Forest	Maltese
Arktis Spring	Danish
St. Brandon	British
Carman	Swedish
Arktis Fighter	Danish
Happy Bucaneer	Dutch
Tiger	Danish
Spes	Italian
Klippergracht	Danish
Rosen	Danish
Glenrosa	British
Glenfyne	British
Arkstis Star	Danish
Germania	German
Elbemond	Dutch
Alster Rapid	German
Bassro Star	Spanis
Mercandian Prince	Danish

Ministry of Defence Police (Colchester)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the MOD police are based in Colchester. [6827]

Mr. Soames: There are currently 43 MOD police officers, of whom six are CID, and two civilian members of staff based in Colchester.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *241*, if he will list the US navy ships which have been chartered by his Department to move United Kingdom equipment to Bosnia; what consideration he gave to the chartering of British merchant vessels; and if he will provide details of the financial arrangements concerning this charter. [6989]

Mr. Soames: The names of the two US navy ships chartered to move United Kingdom equipment to Bosnia are USNS Cape Rise and USNS Cape Race. The Ministry of Defence charters shipping that best meets its sealift requirements in the most cost-effective manner possible. As they are non-trading vessels and therefore not committed to existing commercial charters, the US naval ships provide guaranteed availability with the ability to meet the initial rapid deployment time scales required of us by NATO. The US navy ships have been chartered under the auspices of a UK-US bilateral arrangement on a reimbursement basis. It is intended to charter civilian shipping on the international market for the balance of the sea deployment requirement for which British ship owners will have an opportunity to offer their vessels. The defence freight market representative at the Baltic exchange, acting on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, has now approached the market.

RAF Bases (Planned Closures)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *485*, if he will list the closure dates of *(a)* RAF Carlisle, *(b)* RAF Quedgeley and *(c)* RAF North Luffenham. [6993]

Mr. Soames: The planned closure dates for RAF Carlisle and RAF Quedgeley are 31 March 1997 and 31 March 1996 respectively. RAF North Luffenham is expected to close towards the end of 1997.

Ministry of Defence Police (Redundancies)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many redundancies there have been in the MOD police in each of the last five years. [6826]

Mr. Soames: There have been no redundancies in the MOD police during the past five years.

Special Investigations Branch (Colchester)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of his Department's special investigations branch are based in Colchester. [6828]

Mr. Soames: Five members of the special investigations branch of the Royal Military police are based in Colchester.

Departmental Targets

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department performed against performance measurements in the period 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995; and if he will make a statement. [7542]

Mr. Soames: My Department has today published a performance report covering the period 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995, and I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

Army Attack Helicopter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the manufacture of the Army's attack helicopter will be made in Britain. [6991]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1091–92, we have received guarantees that at least 50 per cent. of the Army's attack helicopter procurement by cash value will be manufactured in the United Kingdom. The details of how this will be achieved are being negotiated currently, and will be reflected in the contract, which we expect to place with Westland helicopters in the new year.

Service Housing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date of consultancy payments made to firms in relation to work carried out to develop his Department's plans for the proposed sell-off of its housing stock. [6888]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The total cost to date of consultancy payments made to firms in relation to new arrangements for the married quarters estate, including work carried out on the previous proposal for a housing trust and on the establishment of the Defence Housing Executive, amounts to some £5.9 million, exclusive of VAT; on the basis of invoices received by early December. Such firms include financial legal and property advisers. Of this total, approximately £1.6 million has been incurred, subsequent to the abandonment of the housing trust proposal, on the development of the proposal to transfer the married quarters estate to the private sector announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 30 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns *810–11.*

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the approximate value of *(a)* land that has planning consent and *(b)* land that does not have planning consent that is planned to be sold in addition to the 73,000 dwellings already announced in the plans to privatise his Department's service dwellings. [5944]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* As set out in the preliminary information memorandum for the sale of the married quarters estate, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, the current expectation is that the number of dwellings to be sold will be approximately 60,000. The extent of the land to be included in the sale varies from, in a few cases, little more than that on which the quarters stand to, at the other extreme, spacious grounds with low density housing. Our assessment of the value of the married quarters estate under the terms of the proposed sale is commercially confidential.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* orders and *(b)* firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95. [6489]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Most of my Department's bills are paid by the Defence Accounts Agency. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency pays its own. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 19 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of orders and firms whose invoices are not paid by his Department within 30 days and what amount is owed to businesses by his Department whose invoices are not paid within 30 days. I am replying to both questions on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, formerly the Defence Research Agency.

I explained in my letter to you of 1 November that virtually all our validated invoices are paid within 9 days of reaching our bill paying section. As the number of bills not paid within this period is so small I am afraid that we do not keep statistics on them.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 19 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many (a) orders and (b) firms are represented by the percentage of invoices not paid by his Department within 30 days in 1994–95. As Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency I have been asked to reply.

The payment performance statistics which are readily available are held in volume of invoices only so the information requested could only be provided as disproportionate cost.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements for 1994–95. [6513]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Most of my Department's bills are paid by the Defence Accounts Agency. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency pays its own. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 19 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of orders and firms whose invoices are not paid by his Department within 30 days and what amount is owed to businesses by his Department whose invoices are not paid within 30 days. I am replying to both questions on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, formerly the Defence Research Agency.

I explained in my letter to you of 1 November that virtually all our validated invoices are paid within 9 days of reaching our bill paying section. As the number of bills not paid within this period is so small I am afraid that we do not keep statistics on them.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Letter from P. J. Trevelyan to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 19 December 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements for 1994/95. As Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency I have been asked to reply.

We monitor our prompt payment performance closely. Of the almost 3 million bills received by the Liverpool payment office in 1994/95, 329 were not paid within 30 days. The payment performance statistics which are readily available are held in volume of bills only, therefore the amount of money owed in respect of this very small percentage of invoices could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Gulf Medical Assessment Programme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many veterans have had a medical examination under the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme to date; and how many of these have *(a)* had a second medical examination or *(b)* been referred to specialists. [5316]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* To date, a total of 339 veterans have received an initial medical examination under my Department's Gulf medical assessment programme. Twenty-four of these veterans are still in the process of having their tests completed and evaluated. Of the remaining 315 individuals, 80 have received a second examination on the assessment programme and 158 have been referred to specialists.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what inquiries were made of Mr. Joseph Spinelli, former New York State Inspector General, about the due diligence meeting with the independent non-executive directors of Camelot before the award of the contract to Camelot, with particular reference to participants at the meeting; and if she will make a statement. [6685]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have no knowledge of any such meeting.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when *(a)* officials and *(b)* Ministers were first informed of the use of GTec's private jet by the Director General of the National Lottery; what guidance was given to the director general, and when, on acceptable levels of hospitality; and if she will make a statement. [6334]

Mrs. Bottomley *[pursuant to her reply, 18 December 1995 c.849-50]:* I have today written to the Director General of the National Lottery and am placing copies of the letter in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Computer Services

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will *(a)* place in the Library a copy of the full study report referred to in paragraph 12, *(b)* list the computer services referred to in paragraph 13 and *(c)* list the computer system faults referred to in paragraph 18 of the memorandum submitted by the Information Technology Services Agency to the Social Security Committee and published with the Committee's fifth report of Session 1994–95, the work of the Department of Social Security and its agencies (HC382). [4333]

Mr. Burt: It would not be appropriate to place a copy of the full study report in the library. The report contains information which is commercial in confidence, and also contains technical, security, and audit details, which would have potential security implications if in the public domain.

The operational accounting system functionality is a customised version of the accounting portion of the FLORIDA—Florida recipient integrated data access—application. It is composed of the following modules:

Financial Management and Control Module
Collection Module
Distribution Module
Disbursement Module
Enforcement Module
Reporting Module
Data Exchange Module.

Maintenance and Assessment, another adaptation from modules within FLORIDA, provides the following facilities:

Client Registration
Interactive Interview
Aging and Tracking
Case Load Management
Client Notices
Reporting
Enquiry
History Maintenance
Security Maintenance.

Three faults, relating to the incorrect issue of notifications by the child support computer system were recorded, analysed and corrected.

Fault 1: Relates to notifications which invited payment even though funds are already held through payment of a lump sum which has been allocated and de-allocated through a clerical process.

Fault 2: Relates to incorrect amounts contained within notifications because of a fault in a weekly to monthly conversion routine. Variations were always small in value

Fault 3: Relates to requests for incorrect direct debit payments in certain circumstances following the restart of a computer program after failure in a specific area of processing.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *510*, in respect of the legal dispute between EDS and Computer Associates, on which occasions his Department was able to obtain the Computer Associates products *(a)* Telon and *(b)* Eastrieve for use with the CSA computer system; what impact access to these products had on the completion of the project; and how much his Department had to pay for these products. [4692]

Mr. Burt: The Department obtained licences to run the Computer Associates products TELON and Easytrieve on the new child support computer system from 24 November 1992. The system as provided by EDS could not have been run without these products. They were obtained in sufficient time to ensure that successful delivery of the system was unaffected.

The cost of the products is commercial in confidence.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the average amount of maintenance received by parents with dependent children claiming income support in each year since 1985 in constant prices. [4688]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the Child Support Agency measures travelling distance between *(a)* Clydebank and Greenock and *(b)* other places where water crossings or journeys around peninsulas are involved. [6062]

Mr. Mitchell: From April 1995, the formula used to assess liability for child support maintenance has included an allowance in recognition of the costs of travelling to work where these costs are high. The allowance is broad-brush in nature and is based upon the straight-line distance between the parents' home and their normal place of employment. The allowance is designed to be straightforward to administer and, in the vast majority of cases, will be a reasonable reflection of the additional costs involved.

It is recognised, however, that basing the calculation on the straight-line distance may cause some inequities, especially where there are geographical obstructions between the two locations. It is with these cases specifically in mind that high travel-to-work costs may be cited as grounds for varying the formula calculation under the new departure direction scheme which is to be piloted from April next year.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of the number of items of unlinked mail at the Child Support Agency at each month end since April 1994. [4173]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 18 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State about the number of items of unlinked post at the Child Support Agency.

I am sorry that it is not possible to provide an answer to your Question in exactly the form you have asked, but I will try to address what I think is your main concern.

All items of mail received at the Agency's six Centres are promptly sorted. A letter responding to a request for information is passed immediately to the relevant section which requested the information and staff will then take the necessary action. Other items of mail will have details of the correspondence entered immediately on the appropriate file held on the computer system.

If an item of post is received which we are unable to associate with the case (ether clerical or computer based) because, for example, there is insufficient information, the Agency writes to the correspondent asking for more details. The number of such items of unactioned and unlinked mail held by the Agency's Centres at 1 December 1995 amounted to 57.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) of 18 May, *Official Report*, column *331*, concerning maintenance assessments by the Child Support Agency with reference to cases cleared since April. [4717]

Mr. Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency on 12 December, *Official Report*, columns *625–27*.

Child Support Appeals

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many appeals which have been lodged with a child support appeal tribunal are currently pending; [4686]

(2) what is the average length of time between the lodging of an appeal to a child support appeal tribunal and the hearing of the appeal by the tribunal; [4684]

(3) how many appeals have been determined by a child support appeal tribunal; and in how many appeals the tribunal held that there had been no error by the child support officer. [4683]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: At 30 November 1995, there were 4,617 appeals outstanding at the child support appeal tribunals. In the last 12 months, 4,565 appeals have been determined; in 1,169 cases the child support officer's decision was upheld. The average clearance time is 41 weeks.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total gross cost to public funds to date of the operation of *(a)* the child support appeal tribunals and *(b)* the child support commissioners. [4685]

Mr. Mitchell: The information requested on child support appeal tribunals is not available. However, we estimate that, excluding start-up expenditure, for the first two years of operation the child support appeal tribunals cost approximately £600,000. I am informed by my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor that the information requested on the child support commissioners is not collected.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what undertakings he has given the Data Protection Registrar regarding the powers of the Child Support Agency to require the disclosure of personal data; and how these undertakings have been followed up. [5303]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Child Support Agency is registered in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984. The agency's chief executive, Miss Ann Chant, has met the registrar several times and officials from this Department, the agency and the registrar's office are in regular contact to ensure effective liaison.

Motability

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how leasing or hire purchase agreements through Motability will be affected in circumstances when the disabled person is hospitalised for a period of more than four weeks; [5090]

(2) in what respects the treatment of vehicle owners under the Motability scheme differs from that applying to disabled people with vehicles obtained under independent car or wheelchair hire or leasing agreements. [5091]

Mr. Burt: Existing Motability agreements will be unaffected by the proposals. Agreements will not be renewable while a patient is in hospital. No special arrangements are proposed for people with private agreements.

Income-related Benefit Recipients

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children in families were *(a)* dependent on income support, and *(b)* in receipt of family credit, by region, in each of the last five years. [4921]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the tables. No breakdown by Government standard statistical region is available in any year for family credit or for income support in 1990. Regional data for income support in 1995 are not yet available.

Number of children in families receiving income support 1990–95

	Number of Children					
	May 1990	*May 1991*	*May 1992*	*May 1993*	*May 1994*	*February 1995*
Great Britain	2,045	2,368	2,703	2,966	2,980	2,977
South East (excluding London)	—	315	380	442	434	—
London (Inner and Outer)	—	357	445	491	508	—
North	—	165	173	182	184	—
Wales	—	131	146	163	165	—
Scotland	—	239	251	251	248	—
Yorks and Humberside	—	239	255	268	170	—
East Midlands	—	143	166	182	190	—
East Anglia	—	51	67	80	80	—
South West	—	149	174	195	191	—
West Midlands	—	244	278	312	310	—
North West	—	336	368	402	400	—

Number of children in families receiving family credit 1990–1995

Thousands

	Number of children in Great Britain
May 1990	669
May 1991	736
May 1992	828
May 1993	992
May 1994	1,123
February 1995	1,205

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Regions are GSS Standard Statistical Regions.
3. Children are defined as aged 15 or under.

Source:

Income support annual statistical inquiries 1990–1993.

Income support quarterly statistical inquiries May 1994 and February 1995.

Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated total value of employers' contributions to national insurance in 1994–95 on behalf of all non-retired households, by gross income decile group, following the latest report on the family expenditure survey. [5381]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5580]

Mr. Burt: Departmental expenditure on official hospitality in 1994–95 was £127,785. For the financial year to date—end of October—it is £58,007. The 1995–96 projected outturn is in the region of £100,000.

Housing Benefit

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit claimants are in *(a)* the rent rebate and *(b)* the rent allowance categories; and what was the total amount paid under each heading in each year since 1991–92. [5052]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Year	*Rent allowance*		*Rent rebate*	
	Recipients (000)	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Recipients (000)*	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1991–92	1,151	2,404	2,966	3,971
1992–93	1,346	3,238	3,034	4,555
1993–94	1,549	4,173	3,053	5,020
1994–95	1,686	4,908	3,006	5,345

1. Figures given for recipients relate to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
2. Figures for recipients are an average of 100 per cent. caseload counts taken at the end of May, August, November and February of each year.
3. Expenditure figures for 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 are outturn. 1994–95 is estimated outturn.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what protection will be available to the children of asylum seekers under the Children Act 1989 when the changes in benefits to asylum seekers come into operation. [5162]

Mr. Roger Evans: The proposed changes in benefits for asylum seekers would not alter the existing provisions of the Children Act.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the maximum amount of disability living allowance that may be claimed by an applicant for asylum; and what amount is then deducted from the amount paid to such an applicant in income support. [7135]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The current maximum rate of disability living allowance payable to an asylum seeker is £79.35 a week. This is fully taken into account when assessing an asylum seeker's entitlement to income support under the urgent cases provisions.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs; [6616]

(2) what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises; [6618]

(3) what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6665]

Mr. Burt: Procurement staff in the DSS follow the guidance on procurement from small and medium enterprises issued by HM Treasury's central unit on procurement. The DSS is working with CUP to review examples of best practice in this area in order to update current guidance.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6617]

Mr. Burt: The director of procurement for DSS attended a meeting on 27 September 1995 organised by HM Treasury's central unit on procurement.

The meeting, which was also attended by the CBI small firms panel, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of Private Business, reviewed tendering procedures.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6719]

Mr. Burt: The director of procurement for DSS has taken personal responsibility to act as a contact point for all issues relating to small and medium enterprises.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6506]

Mr. Burt: In 1994–95, the DSS paid £1.42 billion to third parties for goods and services. This includes payments of £360 million to Post Office Counters.

Benefits (Disabled People)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average amount in benefit currently claimed by a disabled person. [6448]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Depending on a person's circumstances, he or she may be entitled to the following benefits:

Incapacity Benefit
Attendance Allowance
Disability Living Allowance
Disability Working Allowance
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit
Other Industrial Injuries Benefit
Severe Disablement Benefit
Invalid Care Allowance
Independent Living Fund
Income Support
Housing Benefit
Council Tax Benefit.

Attendance allowance and disability living allowance are the two main benefits available to help disabled people with some of the extra costs arising from disability. Information for these benefits are in the table.

Average amounts for disabled people

	Average amount[1] *(£ per week)*
Disability Living Allowance[2]	44.11
Attendance Allowance[3] [4]	37.55

Source:
DSS (Analytical and Services Division): 5 per cent. data.

[1] Based on April 1995 rates of benefit.

[2] As at 31 August 1995.

[3] As at 31 March 1995.

[4] Provisional.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance is issued to general practioners about charges for completion of disability living allowance claim forms. [6277]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 18 December 1995:

The Secretary of Stae for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what guidance is issued to general practioners about charges for completion of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claim forms.

The Benefits Agency has produced booklet IB204: A Guide for Registered Medical Practitioners. It contains specific details of when fees are paid for the information GPs may be asked to provide. It is available to all GPs and a copy has been placed in the Library.

IB204 informs GPs that their patients may ask them to complete a statement at the back of the DLA claim form and all that is required is a brief note on their disabling condition(s). It clearly states that a fee is not paid for completing this statement.

Information is also included with the DLA claim form outlining the help available to a customer who requires assistance completing a DLA claim form. The notes and advice section which accompanies the DLA claim form stresses that all of these services are available to customers at no cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dumping at Sea

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will conduct an investigation into the environmental impact of dumping at sea. [4891]

Mr. Baldry: Deposit at sea is controlled by means of licences issued under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

In considering a licence application a full assessment is made by our marine scientists and fisheries inspectorates of the potential implications for the marine environment, of any risk to human health and of any nuisance or interference which may be caused to other users of the sea.

Licensed sites are monitored periodically to assess the extent of any environmental effects and to determine the dispersal characteristics of any material disposed of in this way.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to determine whether (i) bovine spongiform encephalopathy and (ii) Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease can be caused by organo-phosphate pesticides; and if he will make a statement. [6070]

Mrs. Browning: Scientists from this Department, the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council have met the proponent of the theory that BSE is caused by exposure of cattle to organo-phosphate pesticides to discuss his ideas in detail. They concluded that the ideas were unsubstantiated, as they failed to explain a number of key facts about the disease. In addition, the MRC has carried out an independent test, designed in full collaboration with the proponent of this theory, to test the hypothesis, that OPs bind to the BSE prion protein. The independent MRC scientists found no evidence of binding and have said that the theory does not merit further investigation.

The hypothesis has also been considered by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, which noted that any possible association between the use of agricultural pesticides, including OP insecticides, and the occurrence of BSE had been considered in the original epidemiological investigation, and none had been found; that the lesions of delayed neurotoxicity induced by OPs are clearly distinguishable from those in BSE; that many countries without BSE use OPs on cattle; and that Guernsey, where OPs are not significantly used, does have BSE. It also noted that the OP hypothesis does not explain the temporal occurrence of BSE.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money his Department has spent in each of the last 10 years; and how much it estimates it will spend in the current year and each of the next three years on research into the risk of transmission of the BSE agent from cattle to *(a)* humans and *(b)* other primates. [6183]

Mrs. Browning: This Department has a very wide-ranging research programme on BSE, many elements of which address the question of the risk of transmission of the BSE agent. It is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to separate out the elements as requested.

Since BSE was first identified in November 1986, this Department has spent, or intends to spend, the following sums on research into the disease:

Financial Year	*£ million*
1988–89	0.5
1989–90	1.0
1990–91	1.5
1991–92	5.0
1992–93	5.9
1993–94	5.7
1994–95	5.4
1995–96	5.4
1996–97	6.4

No estimates are available of expenditure beyond the next financial year.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reasons for not extending the Specified Bovine Offal Order to all calves and young cattle. [6128]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column, *830*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has *(a)* been commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the number of BSE-infected cattle being eaten in British abattoirs. [6975]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]*: None, since cattle are not eaten in abattoirs.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of asymptomatic bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected cattle *(a)* that have been consumed and *(b)* that will have been consumed by 2001; what estimate he has made of the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected dairy cattle slaughtered at the end of their milking life that will have been consumed in these periods; and if he will make a statement. [6957]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]*: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to him on 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *223*. All the controls in place to protect the public from any remote theoretical risk from BSE are based on the assumption that any cattle going for slaughter may be infected with BSE.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to ensure that animal tissue being eaten in the United Kingdom does not contain bovine spongiform encephalopathy infection. [6955]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]*: All cattle suspected as suffering from BSE are killed and the carcase incinerated. In addition, the specified bovine offals, which include the tissues known potentially to contain BSE infectivity, have to be removed from all cattle at slaughter, and cannot be used for human food or animal feed.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the murine test in respect of its sensitivity towards infectivity of the various tissues of an infected cow. [6972]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]*: The effectiveness of the murine assay for the presence of BSE infectivity is clearly demonstrated by the success of this assay in detecting infectivity by both intracerebral and by oral ingestion routes of exposure. The intracerebral route is the more sensitive. Using the appropriate strains, the murine test is the most sensitive currently available consistent with obtaining answers in experiments with reasonable speed. We are also currently carrying out a comparative bioassay experiment to assess the differences in sensitivity of cattle to cattle to mice transmission of BSE. The results will be published in the normal way when the experiment is completed.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangement his Department has made of the dangers posed by central nervous tissue in the production of manufactured meat. [7020]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) on 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *530-31*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what considerations underlay his Department's response to the conclusions of the 1984 report of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens on the handling of bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected liver. [6959]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* No infectivity has ever been demonstrated in bovine liver.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the sensitivity of the mouse inoculation test to assess the level of infectivity of bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected *(a)* brain and spinal cord, *(b)* other specified bovine offal, *(c)* bovine tissue other than SBO and *(d)* bovine milk; and if he will make a statement. [6964]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The sensitivity of the mouse bioassay test is independent of the tissues assayed. Using this test, BSE infectivity has been detected in the brain, spinal cord and retina of clinically affected cattle and in the distal ileum of calves experimentally challenged with BSE, but no other tissue.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected cattle which have been eaten in the United Kingdom each year from 1965 to 1985. [6953]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The first case of BSE is believed to have occurred in April 1985. There is no evidence that it occurred in previous years.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence his Department evaluated in respect of bovine liver in their determination in 1988 of which offals should be banned from human consumption. [6970]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The choice of offals for inclusion in the specified bovine offal ban when it was introduced in 1989 was based on an assessment of the risk that tissues would contain significant levels of the BSE infective agent if BSE behaved in the same way as scrapie. Subsequent experimental evidence has shown that BSE infectivity is detectable in a narrower range of tissues than scrapie infectivity. No BSE infectivity has ever been demonstrated in the liver of affected cattle, but, in one exceptional case, the liver of a clinically affected sheep has shown a trace level of scrapie infectivity. In eight others in the same study no infectivity was detected.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to ensure that all bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected cattle with symptoms are picked out and marked; and to what extent cattle sold in markets have been so checked at abattoirs. [6949]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* BSE is a notifiable disease and farmers and other people in control of cattle must report to MAFF any animal they suspect of having BSE. The animal is then examined by a Ministry veterinary officer and if the suspicions of BSE are confirmed it is killed and incinerated. Cattle at markets are subject to some checks by market inspectors, and any displaying potential symptoms of BSE are reported to the Ministry. We do not rely on these checks as the final level of protection, as all cattle going for slaughter, including those which have not been sold through markets, are subject to an ante mortem check and all adult cattle and any displaying unusual signs are subject to veterinary examination prior to slaughter at abattoirs. Again, any BSE suspects identified will be killed and incinerated.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of spinal columns used in the production of manufactured meat since the beginning of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy epidemic; and how many of these he estimates derive from infected bovine, including young cattle. [6966]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* It is not possible to make meaningful estimates.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what considerations underlay the conclusions of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee that unimportant amounts of infectivity would be found in *(a)* the liver, *(b)* the lung, *(c)* the kidney and *(d)* the peripheral nerves of the cows; [7018]

(2) if he will make a statement on the research findings available to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on *(a)* the infectivity of animal tissue and *(b)* the species barrier between bovines and humans when it determined which tissue were considered acceptable for human consumption. [6967]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee is an independent advisory committee. In a recent open letter to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, the chairman of the SEAC, Professor John Pattison, and the deputy chairman, Dr. Robert Will, said:

> "SEAC regularly receives a great range and amount of information. Much of it is in the public domain but SEAC also has a data monitoring function with respect to long term research. Thus we are able to regularly look at the interim results of experiments that will take some years to complete so that we may have the earliest warning of any information which may be important for human and animal health."

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what considerations underlay his conclusions that *(a)* the majority of confirmed cases of BSE born since 1988 are due to cattle feed contamination by ruminant protein set out in his answer of 31 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *646*, and *(b)* that this has arisen from failings in the handling of a specified bovine offal after removal from the carcase which could have resulted in the offal entering the food chain. [7019]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *220–21*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the cattle *(a)* in the current bovine spongiform encephalopathy study and *(b)* of the group in the study that died of bovine spongiform encephalopathy were fed feed concentrates before becoming part of the study; and what proportion of the cattle in the study were separated from their farm, indicating the specific ages in weeks. [6952]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Ministry is undertaking a number of different studies into BSE using groups of cattle and it is not clear to which in particular the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received from veterinary surgeons on failures fully to recover bovine offals prior to carcases being dispatched to produce mechanically recovered meat. [6969]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *192–93*. Since that question was answered, and up to 14 December, we have found a further four cases in which small pieces of spinal cord were left attached to carcases after dressing.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experiments his Department has funded into the transmission of bovine spongiform encephalopathy from cow to offspring. [6961]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* This Department has funded a number of pieces of research into the possibility of maternal and horizontal transmission of BSE, some of which are still in progress. The four main studies are the on-going epidemiological study of the epidemic; the bioassay of reproduction tissues from clinically affected cattle; the case control study, all the details of which were published in the progress report on BSE presented to Parliament in May of this year, copies of which are in the Library of the House; and, finally, the cohort study: this is a blind study which will end in 1997. Details of this are given in the latest edition of the progress report on BSE, which was laid in the Library of the House on 14 December. So far, there is no statistically significant evidence for maternal transmission of BSE.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's research into the links between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and scrapie. [6965]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Details of research into the links between BSE and scrapie are given in the report by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, entitled "Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies: A Summary of Present Knowledge and Research—September 1994", which was published in February 1995, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the degree of under-reporting of cases of clinical BSE. [7021]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Our analysis does not show any under-reporting of clinical cases of BSE.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of *(a)* sheep, *(b)* goats, *(c)* pigs, *(d)* mink, *(e)* mice and *(f)* chickens that have developed a spongiform encephalopathy after being fed bovine spongiform encephalopathy as part of experimental work; and if he will make a statement. [6963]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* In experiments funded out by this Ministry, sheep, goats, mink and mice have succumbed to disease when fed orally with BSE-infected brain material. Pigs and chickens have not succumbed to oral challenge with BSE-infected brain material.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tests the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee conducted on primates in respect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy transmission to humans. [6950]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee gives advice to the Government; it does not carry out research itself.

Spongiform Encephalopathy (Dogs)

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department has received of dogs displaying symptoms similar to those of spongiform encephalopathy. [6948]

Mrs. Browning: Up to 31 October 1995 material from 14 dogs had been examined in veterinary investigations centres for spongiform encephalopathy. None of these suspected cases was confirmed, and SE has never been confirmed in dogs in the UK or anywhere else.

Calves (Feed)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines his Department issues in respect of the normal calf age for feeding *(a)* the colostrum of the mother, *(b)* milk substitute and *(c)* feed concentrates. [6973]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* This Ministry, excluding agencies, issues no guidelines on the feeding of calves. The milk and colostrum of a cow under restriction as a BSE suspect can be fed only to that cow's own calf.

Pesticides

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current permitted levels of pesticide residues in British *(a)* beef and *(b)* milk. [6068]

Mrs. Browning: Pesticides maximum residue levels have been set for a number of active ingredients in a range of commodities, including meat and milk. The MRLs are set out in the Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Crops, Food and Feeding Stuffs) Regulations 1994, as amended.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the names and manufacturers of the pesticides licensed for the treatment of British cows. [6069]

Mrs. Browning: The following table lists all ectoparasiticides and endectocides currently authorised as veterinary medicines for the treatment of cattle in the United Kingdom, as shown in our records:

Ectoparasiticides

Product	*Authorisation number*	*Company*	*Active ingredient*
Ivomec SR bolus for cattle	00025/4058	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Renegade pour on	10228/4000	Sorex Ltd.	Alphacypermeth
Negasunt	00010/4070	Bayer (UK) Ltd.	Coumaphos
Paratect flex bolus	00057/4090	Pfizer Ltd.	Morantel Tartrate
Ridect	00038/4093	Beecham Group PLC T/A Beecham Research Laboratory	Permethrin
Stockguard insecticidal ear tag for cattle	00095/4041	Cyanamid (GB) Ltd.	Flucythrinate
Coopers spot-on	05869/4007	Mallinckrodt Veterinary Ltd.	Deltamethrin
Oramec drench for cattle	00025/4045	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Ivomec super injection for cattle	00025/4046	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Enzec injection for cattle	00025/4060	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Abamectin
Dectomax (Doramectin) injectable for cattle	00057/4094	Pfizer Ltd.	Doramectin
Flectron fly tags	10228/4004	Sorex Ltd.	Cypermethrin
Auriplak	05653/4028	Virbac Laboratories (France)	Permethrin
Stomoxin fly tags	05869/4009	Pitman-Moore Ltd./Coopers Animal Health	Permethrin
Grenade emulsifiable concentrate 20 per cent.	05869/4000	Mallinckrodt Veterinary Ltd.	Cyhalothrin
Deosan deosect pour-on	05645/4020	Deosan Ltd.	Cypermethrin
Debantic ear tags	08476/4001	Fermenta Animal Health (Europe) Ltd.	Tetrachlorvinphos
Tirade spray	10228/4002	Sorex Ltd.	Fenvalerate
Youngs swift	01447/4106	Robert Young and Co. Ltd.	Permethrin (Cis 80: Trans 20)
Grisovin powder	05869/4193	Pitman-Moore Ltd./Coopers Animal Health	Griseofulvin
Grenade 2 per cent. pour-on	05869/4132	Mallinkrodt Veterinary Ltd.	Cyhalothrin
Deosan flectron fly tags	01476/4034	Diversey Ltd.	Cypermethrin
Taktic	00086/4186	Hoechst (UK) Ltd.	Amitraz
Ivomec pour-on for cattle	00025/4050	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Ivomec injection for cattle	00025/4040	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Young's poron 20	01447/4077	Robert Young and Co. Ltd.	Phosmet
Barricade 5 per cent. pour-on	10228/4001	Sorex Ltd.	Cypermethrin Cis 50: Trans 50
Cydectin 1 per cent. injectable solution	00095/4059	Cyanamid (GB) Ltd.	Moxidectin
Panomec injection for cattle, sheep and pigs	00025/4071	Merck Sharpe and Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin

Endectocides

Product	*Authorisation number*	*Company*	*Active ingredients*
Oramec drench for cattle	00025/4045	Merck Sharpe & Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Ivomec super injection for cattle	00025/4046	Merck Sharpe & Dohme Ltd.	Ivermectin
Enzec injection for cattle	00025/4060	Merck Sharpe & Dohme Ltd.	Abamectin

Endectocides

Product	Authorisation number	Company	Active ingredients
Dectomax (Doramectin)	00057/4094	Pfizer Ltd.	Doramectin
Injectable for cattle grisovin powder	05869/4193	Pitman-Moore Ltd./Coopers Animal Health	Griseofulvin
Cydectin 1 per cent. injectable solution	00095/4059	Cyanamid (GB) Ltd.	Moxidectin

Dioxin Monitoring

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the sites in the United Kingdom being monitored for dioxin emissions. [7208]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry has collected cows' milk from farms around 29 industrial sites representative of processes that may release dioxins or related compounds. These sites are:

Chineham Municipal Waste Incinerator, Basingstoke, Hampshire
Otterbourne Municipal Waste Incinerator, Winchester, Hampshire
Brockhampton Municipal Waste Incinerator, Havant, Hampshire
Vine Street Incinerator Plant, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire
Avonmouth Refuse Disposal Works, Bristol, Avon
Stoke Incineration Plant, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire
Coventry Waste Reduction Unit, Coventry, West Midlands
Eastcroft Municipal Waste Incinerator, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire
Coleshill Sludge Disposal Plant, Coleshill, Warwickshire
Hillingdon Hospital Incinerator, Uxbridge, Middlesex
New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton, West Midlands
Cherry Tree Hospital, Stockport, Greater Manchester
Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport, Greater Manchester
ICI Chemicals and Polymers, Runcorn, Cheshire
Cleanaway Ltd. Incineration Plant, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
Fine Organics Ltd., Middlesbrough, Cleveland
Polymeric Treatments Ltd., Kilamarsh, Derbyshire
CBDE, Porton Down, Wiltshire
Rechem International Ltd., Hythe, Southampton, Hampshire
John Betts Refiners, West Bromwich, West Midlands
Specialist Metal Services, Tilbury, Essex
West Thurrock Power Station, Essex
Tilbury Power Station, Essex
Castle Cement Ribblesdale Works, Clitheroe, Lancashire
Tip 2/1, Lostock Gralam, Northwith, Cheshire
Sutton Walls, Herefordshire
Higher Kiln Quarry, Bampton, Devon
Villa Farm, Wolvey, Warwickshire
Commonside Tip, Alvanley, Cheshire

Results are available for seven of these sites and none exceeds the normal background range for dioxins in milk.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many statutory instruments his Department sponsored in the last Session of Parliament; how many of these *(a)* constituted a new rule or regulation, *(b)* were introduced to implement European Community directives and *(c)* amplify the minimum standards set out in an original European Community directive. [2467]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 28 November 1995]:* In the 1994–95 Session the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food sponsored 121 statutory instruments.

The cost of analysing each to provide detailed responses would be disproportionate. However, approximately half the SIs involved new rules or regulations and about a third were introduced to implement European Community directives, neither category being exclusive.

It is firmly not our policy to amplify the minimum standards set out in directives unless there are overwhelming policy reasons for doing so. We have recently introduced new internal procedures to ensure this.

HEALTH

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the gross redundancy payments made by each *(a)* health authority and *(b)* trust in each region in each year since 1990. [4187]

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library. The figures for 1994–95 are provisional.

Residential Homes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-stay geriatric beds have been closed since 1979; and how many private residential nursing home beds opened since that date. [5592]

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in the form requested.

Mental Health

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks and safeguards are in place in respect of inmates in institutions for the criminally insane ordering goods by mail order for individuals outside that institution who do not wish to receive them. [6025]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for the Special Hospital Services Authority. Decisions to withhold mail are subject to review by the Mental Health Act Commission.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take to bring up to the average the spending of those English local authorities which is below the average expenditure of personal social services budgets on mental health services. [6748]

Mr. Bowis: None. It is for the elected member of local authorities to decide how much to spend on particular services in the light of local needs and priorities.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take in response to the sixth biennial report of the Mental Health Act Commission on acute hospital beds in (i) all major conurbations, (ii) Devon, (iii) East Anglia and (iv) Cheshire. [6750]

Mr. Bowis: We shall be responding in due course.

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many detained non-UK national hospital patients have been removed to a country abroad since 1983, under the provision in the Mental Health Act 1983. [6926]

Mr. Bowis: Twenty-five.

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of detained non-UK national hospital patients requiring mental health treatment and removed to a country abroad have had their cases considered by the mental health review tribunal; and to how many of these the tribunal has refused to give its approval for removal since 1983. [6922]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what checks and safeguards are in place to regulate the use of telephones by inmates in institutions for the criminally insane. [6024]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for the Special Hospital Services Authority.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken by his Department and by the relevant professional organisations to organise training for their members in respect of the provisions of the Mental Health (Patients in the Community) Act 1995, and their duties under the Act. [6749]

Mr. Bowis: The Department will be issuing comprehensive guidance on the implementation of the Act's provisions which will assist in training.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6561]

Mr. Horam: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lindane

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of risk to human health from the use of lindane as a pesticide. [6216]

Mr. Horam: The Government are advised on the safety of pesticides by the independent expert statutory Advisory Committee on Pesticides. It has reviewed the use of lindane as a non-agricultural pesticide and concluded that used in accordance with the conditions of approval there would be no undue risk to human health. Details of this review were published in December 1992 in the document "Evaluation of Gamma HCH (Lindane 2)", copies of which are available in the Library. A review of the agricultural uses of lindane is presently being undertaken by the committee and the results of this are expected early next year.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has evaluated in respect of a possible link between lindane and breast cancer. [6220]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health's independent expert Advisory Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment reviewed the available epidemiology data on breast cancer in women and levels of lindane in serum and breast fat tissue at its meeting on the 16 March 1995. The committee concluded that there was no clear evidence of an association between serum and fat levels of lindane and breast cancer at the present time, but recommended that the matter be kept under review.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the countries which have banned the use of lindane as a pesticide and their reasons for doing so. [6221]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected by the Government. I am aware that approvals have been withdrawn for uses of lindane in Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the statutory maximum safe level for lindane in milk for human consumption in each European country; [6218]

(2) what is the maximum recommended safe level for consumption of lindane by humans in each European country. [6219]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

Statutory pesticide maximum residue levels—MRLs—for all active ingredient/commodity combinations in the EU are being established through an EC Commission priority programme. The MRL for lindane in milk was included in directive 93/57/EC and is set at 0.008 mg/kg of milk.

Safety limits are expressed in terms of the acceptable daily intake—ADI—of a particular pesticide from all sources, which is the level that can be consumed every day for an individual's entire lifetime in the practical certainty, on the basis of all known facts, that no harm will result. ADIs are agreed internationally through a World Health Organisation procedure, and for lindane the recommended level is 0.008 mg/kg/bodyweight.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the maximum safe level of lindane in milk for human consumption; and how many times in each of the last five years milk has been found to contain higher amounts than the maximum safe level. [6217]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

For lindane in milk, the current maximum residue level is 0.008 mg/kg, and at no time during the last five years has monitoring by the Government's working party on pesticide residues revealed an exceedance of this limit.

Latex Sensitivity

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress his Department has made in assessing the cost to the NHS of skin diseases caused by certain types of latex surgical gloves; and if he will make a statement; [6316]

(2) if the Medical Devices Agency has now issued a device bulletin to the health service in respect of latex sensitivity. [6318]

Mr. Horam: The Medical Devices Agency expects to publish the device bulletin on latex sensitivity in the health care setting early in the new year. Information on the cost of particular skin diseases to the national health service is not available centrally.

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are suffering from systemic lupus erythematosus in England; what is the age-sex distribution of the disease; and if he will make a statement on systemic lupus erythematosus; [6296]

(2) what was his total budget for *(a)* self-help groups and *(b)* self-help groups dealing with systemic lupus erythematosus in each of the last five years; [6298]

(3) what was the total amount of research money given for systemic lupus erythematosus by his Department in each of the last five years. [6297]

Mr. Bowis: The information available centrally is shown in the table. The information covers admissions to hospitals.

Finished consultant episodes—ordinary admissions and day cases combined—National Health Service hospitals—England—1993–94

	All ages	*0–4*	*5–14*	*15–44*	*45–64*	*65–74*	*75–84*	*85 and over*
Male	317	5	45	136	82	41	7	1
Female	2,296	9	135	1,386	604	134	26	2
Total	2,613	14	180	1,522	686	175	33	3

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics.

The Department's principal channel of support to voluntary organisations is the section 64 general scheme. Lupus UK, the main charity providing help for sufferers from systemic lupus erythematosus in the United Kingdom, is currently receiving a core grant under the scheme totalling £24,000 spread over the three years 1994–95 to 1996–97 towards its administrative costs. Information on grants awarded specifically to self-help groups is not separately identified.

The Department of Health is not currently funding research into systemic lupus erythematosus. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Waiting Lists

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on equality of access to services in the national health service with particular reference to waiting lists. [6231]

Mr. Horam: We are committed to improving the health of the population as a whole and reducing variations in health status by targeting resources where needs are greatest. As far as patients requiring admission to hospital are concerned, emergency cases are always treated immediately. Patients not requiring emergency treatment are treated on the basis of clinical priority within the terms of the contracts agreed between health authorities and general practitioner fundholders and trusts.

Family Planning Clinics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family planning clinics there were in each of the last five years. [6233]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Tuberculosis Notifications

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will list the three areas with the highest number of TB notifications in the last year. [6237]

Mr. Horam: The three local authorities with the highest number of notifications of all forms of tuberculosis, excluding chemoprophylaxis, in 1994 are shown in the table:

Birmingham: 263 notifications
Newham: 206 notifications
Brent: 162 notifications

GP Notes

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, who owns the written notes used by general practitioners and the equivalent computer data. [6238]

Mr. Malone: Ownership of records on patients maintained by national health service general practitioners in accordance with their terms of service, is vested in family health services authorities.

Health Authority Allocations

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the funding allocation by health authority for 1995–96 and 1996–97. [6214]

Mr. Horam: For details of 1995–96 district health authority initial revenue cash limits I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 11 December at column *520*. Details of 1996–97 planned initial cash limits for the new health authorities will be placed in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the district health authority budget allocations for next year have been determined: what representations he has received from medical professionals and academics on the calculation of the budget allocations; what work has been done in respect of these allocations by the York centre for health economics; and if he will make a statement. [6678]

Mr. Horam: Planned general allocations for 1996–97, as given in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) on 30 November at columns *869–71*, have been informed by the national weighted capitation formula. I am unaware of any representations concerning the calculation of these allocations.

The national formula includes adjustments for age and need which are based on work commissioned by my Department from a team from York university.

GP Fundholding

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the percentages of GP practices which are fund-holders in each family health services authority. [6226]

Mr. Malone: Information on the percentage of fund-holding general practitioners for each family health services authority will be placed in the Library.

NHS Bodies

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total amount of subscriptions to *(a)* the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts and *(b)* the Trust Federation from (i) health authorities, (ii) trusts and (iii) family health services authorities in each of the last five years. [6227]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

"The Health of the Nation"

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list "The Health of the Nation" targets that have not been met in the last five years. [6232]

Mr. Horam: "The Health of the Nation" strategy was launched in July 1992. It is essentially a medium-to-long-term strategy—target years vary in each key area and range from 1994 to 2010. Only one target was set for 1994, and this has not been met. It was:

> "To reduce the smoking prevalence among 11–15 year olds by at least 33 per cent. (from about 8 per cent. in 1988 to less than 6 per cent)".

The second progress report on "The Health of the Nation" strategy, "Fit for the Future", presents full details of progress towards targets. This document was published in July 1995, and copies are available in the Library.

Public Health Consultants

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make reductions in public health consultant posts. [6234]

Mr. Malone: None.

Consultants

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of *(a)* female and *(b)* male consultants at September 1994, indicating the Government target for female consultants at that date. [6236]

Mr. Malone: The number of female and male consultants in England at September 1994 was:

Female: 3,070

Male: 14,030.

The Department of Health's target was to increase the percentage of women consultants from 15.5 per cent. in 1991 to 20 per cent. by 1994.

Child Day Care

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of children under the age of five years who are in the care of *(a)* private child minders, *(b)* nannies and *(c)* private or voluntary playgroups. [6527]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the publication "OPCS Survey of Day Care Services for Children".

Edgware Hospital

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on future accident and emergency arrangements at Edgware general hospital, following the meeting he held on Wednesday 13 December with the official deputation from the area. [6879]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's primary concern is to ensure that the quality of service for local people is at least maintained, and wherever possible improved. There will continue to be an accident service at Edgware hospital which will have close links with the new accident and emergency centre at Barnet general hospital. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has also asked Barnet health authority to examine with general practitioners their possible role in the new arrangements at Edgware.

Fluoridation

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of public opinion towards water fluoridation with particular reference to *(a)* inner-city residents and *(b)* ethnic minority groups; [6653]

(2) what assessment he has made of the benefits of community-based water fluoridation for *(a)* inner-city residents and *(b)* ethnic minority groups. [6676]

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which areas had artificially fluoridated water supplies before privatisation; and which have fluoridated since. [7319]

Mr. Malone: The Government remain fully convinced of the safety and efficacy of fluoridation, in providing a cost-effective method of improving oral health for all members of the community. Studies have consistently shown that the prevalence of dental decay in fluoridated areas is between one third to one half lower than in comparable non-fluoridated water areas.

Professionally conducted opinion polls have consistently shown public support for fluoridation running at around 70 per cent. for fluoridation. Opinion surveys of particular groups are not routinely undertaken as water fluoridation benefits all sections of the population served, including inner-city residents and ethnic minorities.

United Kingdom water companies supplying artificially fluoridated water supplies to various localities within their catchment area before water privatisation include:

Severn Trent Water
South Staffordshire Water
East Worcestershire Waterworks Company (now part of Severn Trent)
North East Water
North West Water
Welsh Water
Yorkshire Water
Anglian Water
Colne Valley Water Company.

Severn Trent Water and Anglian Water have extended artificially fluoridated water supplies to new locations within their areas since water privatisation.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent NHS community psychiatric nurses were employed by English regions per thousand population on 30 September 1994. [6751]

Mr. Horam: The available information about nurses working in psychiatric areas in the community who are employed by the national health service is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Nursing and Midwifery staff working within the Community Psychiatric Nursing Area of Work (excluding Senior nurses and Agency staff)—England by Region as at 30 September 1994

Whole-time equivalents

	Nurses working in community psychiatric areas of work	*Per 1,000 head of population*
England	4,760	0.098
Northern and Yorkshire	670	0.101
Trent	480	0.101
Anglia and Oxford	420	0.080
North Thames	610	0.089
South Thames	560	0.083
South and West	800	0.122
West Midlands	470	0.089
North West	750	0.113
Special Health Authorities	'	n/a

Notes:

1. Community psychiatric nursing figures include qualified, unqualified and 'other' nursing staff working within community psychiatric nursing area of work.
2. Community psychiatric nursing staff in region headquarters are included.
3. 'denotes figure less than five n/a denotes not applicable.
4. Total may not equal the sum of components due to rounding.
5. All nursing data are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.

Source:

Nursing figures—Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Population figures—Public Health Common Data Set 1995.

Blackburn Royal Infirmary

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the access to brain scanning facilities afforded to Mr. Craig Yates of Darwen. [7068]

Mr. Horam: Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care national health service trust has announced a review of the clinical management of Mr. Yates's case. The hon. Member may wish to approach Mr. W. Woolley, chairman of the trust, for more information.

Alcohol

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response the Government will now be making to the World Health Organisation's European alcohol action plan. [7120]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths there have been from alcohol-related illness in each of the last five years. [7322]

Mr. Bowis: There is no accepted definition of the term "alcohol-related".

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisation he consulted before his announcement on changes to the recommended weekly amounts of consumption of alcohol. [7221]

Mr. Bowis: Interested persons and organisations were invited to submit written evidence to the inter-departmental group reviewing the sensible drinking message.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the national health service of alcohol-related disease in each of the last five years. [7321]

Mr. Bowis: There is no generally accepted method of producing such estimates.

Care in the Community

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many violent deaths have been caused by care in the community patients with particular reference to *(a)* homicides, and *(b)* suicides; and if he will make a statement. [7119]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. We have no reason to believe that the implementation of community-based mental health care has led to an increase in either homicides or suicides.

"Policy Appraisal and Health"

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish guidance on how to assess the impacts of policies on health. [7438]

Mr. Horam: I am today publishing a guide, "Policy Appraisal and Health". Copies have been placed in the Library and will be distributed to Government Departments, local authorities, health authorities and other interested organisations.

The guide is designed to give practical guidance to Government Departments and other public sector agencies on how to assess the impact of their policies on health. It describes how to incorporate health impacts into the wider assessments of costs and benefits required for policy development. The advice is intended to be helpful and to encourage consistency throughout the public sector but is not mandatory.

Appraisal in Government is concerned with the best use of the nation's resources. Health is a key aspect of the nation's well-being. Any significant effects on the health of the nation should therefore be assessed and taken into account.

The costs and benefits of alternative policies, programmes and projects need to be carefully compared in order to make best use of the nation's resources. The Treasury's guidance, "Economic Appraisal in Central Government", explains how to do this. The guide I am publishing today provides specific advice in the health field to supplement the more general Treasury guidance.

The guide was prepared with assistance from many Government Departments and other organisations. I am grateful to them for their contribution to producing this useful guide.

Frozen Embryos

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority on the statutory storage period for embryos; and will he make a statement. [7544]

Mr. Dorrell: I have today published the report from the authority.

I thank the authority for this helpful and thoughtful review of problems arising from the current five-year limit on the storage of embryos. The authority recommends that regulations should be brought forward to allow for embryo storage up to 10 years and exceptionally for longer, where this is justified on medical or social grounds.

The Government intend to lay regulations which will give effect to the authority's recommendation. These regulations will allow those whose embryos will have been in store for five years or more by July 1996 to be consulted and counselled about extending the storage period for their embryos, before the five-year period expires.

Copies of the authority's report have been placed in the Library.

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy regarding residential services for people with learning disabilities; what research he has commissioned to evaluate such facilities; and when he expects to receive the results of that research. [7623]

Mr. Bowis: Current policy on residential services for people with learning disabilities as set out in LAC(92)15 recognises that authorities should provide a range of residential services in order to meet the diverse needs of this client group. Authorities are able to purchase or provide places in a range of residential facilities—for example, in group homes or residential and village communities—provided they meet the criteria set out in the guidance. The primary concerns are the needs and preferences of each person and his or her family. Authorities should exercise their discretion in a way that maximises choice within available resources. Guidance on the National Assistance Act 1948 (Choice of Accommodation) Directions 1992 (LAC(92)27) makes it clear that where a prospective resident cannot express a preference authorities should act on the preferences of the carer unless, exceptionally, to do so would be against the best interests of the resident. Copies of LAC(92)15 and LAC(92)27 have been placed in the Library.

To help authorities in their task of making the best use of resources in meeting the needs of people with learning disabilities the Government have set up an independent evaluation of the cost and outcomes of various types of provision, including village and residential communities. The first phase of the evaluation will be completed by 31 May 1996. It will comprise a review of relevant research literature conducted by Professor Cullen of Keele university and Dr. Emerson of the Hester Adrian research centre and an analysis of any readily available information on costs conducted by the personal social services policy unit at the university of Kent.

Access to Health Records

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has concluded his review of the need for regulations to provide a complaints procedure for handling complaints by patients who are denied access to their health records under the Access to Health Records Act 1990; and if he will make a statement. [7690]

Mr. Horam: As announced by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Health on 21 March 1995 at column *130*, the Government are introducing on 1 April 1996, a new national health service-wide complaints procedure. This will include arrangements for dealing with patients' complaints about access to their health records.

Small and Medium Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6623]

Mr. Horam: Meetings are normally held with suppliers to give them information about their tendering performance, once a competitive tendering exercise has been completed. This procedure is particularly valued by companies, no matter what their size. Feedback from these meetings suggests that suppliers are generally content with the tendering procedures used by the Department.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6622]

Mr. Horam: The Department's guidance on procurement procedures is used by all staff engaged in buying goods and services. It ensures that all legal requirements are complied with and sets out good practice relating to the whole tendering process. This material guides staff to deploy an objective and fair competitive tendering process that will achieve best value for money for the Department and does not, therefore, distinguish between small and large firms.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6624]

Mr. Horam: The Department's purchasing manual and guidance on the use of management consultants includes advice on the selection of companies. This guidance has been circulated not only to procurement staff but to those involved occasionally in purchasing goods and services.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium-sized enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6717]

Mr. Horam: The head of purchasing in my Department is the single point for contact for companies of all sizes, on all procurement issues. He is actively engaged in improving the value for money we obtain by assisting all interested suppliers improve their competitiveness.

GP Funding

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family doctor practices in the area covered by Leeds family health services authority have had their funding *(a)* increased and *(b)* decreased as a result of the changed criteria for fund distribution; what is *(c)* the largest increase and *(d)* the largest reduction in funding; and in which area of the city practices *(c)* and *(d)* are located. [6598]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Primary Care

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made, for the financial year 1996–97, in the use of census data by local family health services authorities, in the formula for the distribution of funding to primary care practices. [6597]

Mr. Malone: Family health services authorities will continue to use 1991 census data as the basis for calculating deprivation payments to general practitioners in 1996–97.

Health Authorities (Management Costs)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for 1995–96 and 1996–97, using the Audit Commission's M2 definition, the management costs of all district health authorities and trusts; and what this data is as a per capita figure. [6928]

Mr. Horam: The Audit Commission's M2 definition is applicable only to trusts. Planned trust management costs, using the M2 definition, are not available centrally for either 1995–96 or 1996–97.

Insulin

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy in respect of the continued universal availability of animal insulin to NHS patients who prefer such insulin to synthetic insulin. [7026]

Mr. Horam: We recognise that some people with diabetes prefer to use animal rather than human insulin. Decisions as to the most suitable type of insulin for particular patients are matters for professional clinical judgment. The main supplier of animal insulin in this country has assured us that it has no plans to discontinue its production in the foreseeable future. Therefore, animal insulin will continue to be available for those patients who are prescribed it.

Camden and Islington District Health Authority

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total level of grant made available to Camden and Islington district health authority in each year from 1992 to the current financial year; what grant he expects to make in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [6830]

Mr. Horam: The 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 final revenue cash limits, the 1995–96 initial revenue cash limit and the 1996–97 initial planned revenue cash limit for Camden and Islington health authority are shown in the table.

Camden and Islington Health Authority cash limits

	thousand
1992–93 Final Revenue Cash Limit	[1]254.759
1993–94 Final Revenue Cash Limit	247.858
1994–95 Final Revenue Cash Limit	255.344
1995–96 Initial Revenue Cash Limit	226.343
1996–97 Planned Initial Revenue Cash Limit	268.145

[1] This is the sum of the final cash limits for Bloomsbury and Islington DHA and Hampstead DHA, which merged to form Camden and Islington DHA on 1 April 1993.

Notes:

1. Final revenue cash limits for 1992–93 to 1994–95 were made by North East Thames regional health authority. In 1995–96 the initial revenue cash limit was made by North Thames regional health authority. In 1996–97 Secretary of State was responsible for making the planned initial revenue cash limit.
2. 1996–97 cash limits are planned only as formal cash limits cannot be made until the new health authority legally comes into existence on 1 April 1996.
3. For 1995–96 and 1996–97 figures recorded are initial cash limits and will exclude any in year adjustments made during the year. For 1992–93 to 1994–95, the figures are final cash limits and hence include any adjustments made in year.

Hospitality

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent from his hospitality budget on alcohol in each of the last five years. [7720]

Mr. Horam: Expenditure on alcohol is not separately identified within the hospitality budget.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply to the third report of the Health Committee on breast cancer services, Cm 3007, what targets he has set for the number of specialist breast cancer care units. [7129]

Mr. Horam: No targets have been set for the number of specialist breast cancer units. It is for the local health authorities to determine the number of cancer units specialising in the treatment of breast cancer and where they should be situated based on the needs of their local populations.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that adequate resources are made available to establish the number of specialist breast care units recommended by the Health Committee in its third report of Session 1994–95, HC 324, on breast cancer services; and what plans he has to proceed with the target set out by the Committee. [7130]

Mr. Horam: National health service spending will grow by £1.3 billion in 1996–97. This will enable further improvements in cancer services to be made in line with the recommendations set out in the document "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services", which sets out the new strategic framework for the organisation of all cancer services.

Portman Group

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings he has had with members of the Portman group in the last year; with which members; and when the meetings took place. [7175]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met Sir Anthony Greener, the chairman of Guinness plc, on 14 November 1995 to discuss a wide range of matters of mutual interest.

NHS Capital Expenditure

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to PO513/1995/96 Friday 8 December 1995, what figures he has for total NHS capital expenditure in 1994–95 and forward years; and if he will give those figures. [7177]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 8 December at columns *429-30* for details of capital expenditure by national health service bodies in 1994–95.

The figures for NHS capital spending for the current and future years were announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 28 November 1995. These are shown in the table.

NHS Capital Spending 1995–96 to 1998–99

	Revised plan 1995–96	*Plan 1996–97*	*Provisional 1997–98*	*Plans 1998–99*
Hospital and community health services				
Government spending	1.806	1.543	1.495	1.430
Receipts from land sales[1]	250	310	300	290
PFI Investment	47	165	200	300
Other NHS Capital Spending[2]	17	20	17	17
Total	2,120	2.038	2.012	2.036

[1] Estimated.

[2] Central Health and Miscellaneous Services and Departmental Administration.

Factor 8

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if recombinant, genetically engineered, factor 8 is available on the NHS to all patients. [7176]

Mr. Horam: Like other treatments, recombinant factor 8 is available to national health service patients if their doctor decides that they should receive it having taken account of the patient's individual needs, the alternative treatments available and the availability of resources.

GP Commissioning Groups

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums health authorities are spending on GP commissioning groups. [7178]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the Committee on Safety of Medicines considered the manuscript produced by Professor Jick and what supplementary written material was made available from that study at its meeting on 13 October; [6085]

(2) pursuant to his oral statement to the House on 23 October, *Official Report*, column 701, on what date the Medicines Control Agency commissioned Professor Jick to conduct a study to examine safety questions regarding third generation oral contraceptives; and what was the cost of that study to the Medicines Control Agency. [5968]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]*: The Medicines Control Agency did not commission Professor Jick to conduct a study of the safety of oral contraceptives and did not provide him with funding. During June and July 1995 the MCA discussed with him the feasibility of his conducting a study which would help to evaluate further concerns regarding venous thromboembolism arising from a study conducted by the World Health Organisation. The findings of Professor Jick's study were considered by the Committee on Safety of Medicines at its meeting on 13 October. The committee also considered the findings of a study by Professor Jick of fatal cardiovascular events in users of oral contraceptives.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the publication date of the report produced by Professor Spitzer and colleagues and considered by the Committee on Safety of Medicines at its meeting on 13 October; [6084]

(2) on what date *(a)* the Medicines Control Agency requested expedited analysis of the trinational study on oral contraceptives, *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency first received data from the study and *(c)* the Medicines Control Agency received a written report of the study. [5970]

(3) what discussions his officials held on 9 October regarding safety concerns relating to third generation contraceptives. [5969]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Official of the Medicines Control Agency first saw preliminary data from the transnational study on 10 July 1995. It made a written request for an expedited analysis of the study on 13 July 1995. Such an analysis was presented by the investigators to officials from the MCA at a meeting held on 9 October 1995, and to a meeting of a working group which included members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and invited experts on 10 October 1995. The MCA has not received a final report of the study but it has reviewed the published protocol and received written documentation of the findings including an abstract which was understood to have been submitted to a scientific meeting.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action has been taken with respect to third generation oral contraceptives by *(a)* the licensing authority and *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency under powers conferred by the Medicines Act 1968 and subsidiary legislation; [6086]

(2) from what date he proposes to *(a)* suspend, *(b)* revoke and *(c)* vary the licences of the third generation oral contraceptives which were recently the subject of advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines; [5916]

(3) what regulatory action has been taken in respect of the third generation oral contraceptives referred to in the "Dear Doctor" letter of 18 October; and if he will make a statement. [5919]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Any consideration of possible regulatory action is treated in confidence between the licensing authority and the company or companies concerned. The licensing authority makes a public announcement only after any regulatory action has been completed.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) at whose request, and when, the issue of the third generation oral contraceptives was placed on the agenda of the meeting of the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products held on 17 and 18 October; [5914]

(2) if the United Kingdom representatives at the meeting of the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products on 18 October told that committee of the intention to issue later that day the "Dear Doctor" letter relating to third generation oral contraceptives; [5910]

(3) what assessment he has made of the licensing authority's compliance with its obligations to its European partners in relation to those matters relating to the safety of third generation oral contraceptives considered at the meetings of the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products held on 17 and 18 October and on 26 and 27 October. [5913]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Medicines Control Agency has an obligation to keep other European Community member states informed of issues on the efficacy, quality and safety of medicines and it has taken extensive action in this respect for oral contraceptives. When information from the World Health Organisation study was first provided to the MCA in confidence, it sought to ensure its release to other member states, although its request was not granted. The safety of third generation oral contraceptives was placed on the agenda of the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products—CPMP—pharmacovigilance working party in August 1995 and other member states were informed that important new evidence was about to emerge. The United Kingdom made it clear that the issue would need urgent consideration and that steps were being taken to obtain further information.

The safety of third generation oral contraceptives was placed on the agenda of the CPMP meeting of 17 and 18 October at the formal request of the UK representatives of the committee on 11 October, after further information on the issue became available. At the meeting on 17 and 18 October, UK representatives presented the new data to the committee and made it clear that the UK considered that there was an urgent need to communicate the findings with appropriate recommendations to doctors and women in the UK without delay.

The CPMP was unable to reach a position at the meeting of 17 and 18 October and a further meeting was convened for 26 and 27 October. UK representatives participated in this meeting and arranged for Professor Rawlins and Professor Langman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines to attend as additional UK experts. The CPMP assessment which was issued following the meeting of 26 and 27 October makes it clear that, on the basis of three studies, oral contraceptives containing desogestrel or gestodene are associated with an increased risk of venous thromboembolism. Its position statement recommends that preparations containing desogestrel and gestodene should not be withdrawn but does not make specific recommendations for action. This and the fact that the CPMP's position statement is not a binding opinion indicate that the matter of informing and advising doctors and users is for individual member states to deal with based on their particular prevailing circumstances.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information relating to third generation oral contraceptives was considered by the sub-committee on pharmacovigilance before the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October; [5921]

(2) which members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and what other persons were present at the special meeting of the committee held on 13 October; [5925]

(3) what arrangements were made for the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines to attend the special meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines held on 13 October; [5966]

(4) at what date and time the special meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines held on 13 October was called; [5931]

(5) if he will list the names and appointments of all persons present at the ad hoc sub-committee of the Committee on Safety of Medicines which met on 11 October, to consider issues relating to the third generation oral contraceptives; [5907]

(6) if he will publish the full text of the recommendations of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on third generation oral contraceptives; [5930]

(7) what factors led the sub-committee on pharmacovigilance not to consider safety concerns relating to third generation oral contraceptives prior to the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October; [5911]

(8) when he will publish the full documentation which was made available to the Committee on Safety of Medicines before its meeting on 13 October. [5917]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* No ad hoc meeting of a sub-committee of the Committee on Safety of Medicines was held on 11 October. A working group which included members of the CSM and invited experts was convened on 10 October to consider new information relating to the safety of third generation oral contraceptives. This issue was not considered by the sub-committee on pharmacovigilance before the meeting of the CSM on 13 October due to the urgency of the matter. It is normal practice for urgent safety issues to be considered by CSM without prior consideration by the sub-committee on pharmacovigilance when there are time constraints. In these circumstances ad-hoc working groups are convened as necessary.

Arrangements for the meeting of the CSM of 13 October were made during the morning of 11 October and by agreement with the chairman of the committee.

The papers and proceedings of meetings of the CSM, its sub-committees and ad hoc working groups which advise the CSM are confidential. The recommendations made by the CSM at the meeting on 13 October are embodied in the letter from the chairman dated 18 October.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of deaths which would be prevented annually if the prescribing advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines on third generation oral contraceptives were acted on by all United Kingdom general practitioners. [5929]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* It is estimated that about two deaths and 100 to 150 cases of venous thromboembolism would be prevented annually in the United Kingdom if the Committee on Safety of Medicines' recent advice on third generation oral contraceptives was acted upon.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information relating to the potential beneficial effects of third general oral contraceptives was made available to the Committee on Safety of Medicines before its meeting on 13 October; what steps the Medicines Control Agency took to establish that all currently available information was presented to the committee; and what steps the Medicines Control Agency took to establish when further information might be available; [5918]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the information made available to the Committee on Safety of Medicines before its meeting on 13 October. [5967]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Medicines Control Agency sought to obtain data on all information relevant to the cardiovascular risks of oral contraceptives. This included whether the third generation oral contraceptives might be associated with a lesser risk of arterial disease than other oral contraceptives that might offset the increased risk of venous thromboembolism. The data examined related to large populations of women in the United Kingdom with careful and exhaustive analyses to assess factors which could influence the findings. Two of the studies provided to the committee prior to the meeting included data on the risk of stroke and myocardial infarction and one study provided data on mortality. In October 1995, the MCA discussed with the investigators of the studies the availability of further information on the relative risks of myocardial infarction and stroke with different oral contraceptives and understood that substantive data would not be available for one to two years.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information was made available by the Medicines Control Agency to Wyeth, Schering and Organon, relating to safety concerns regarding third generation oral contraceptives before the meetings held between the Medicines Control Agency and those companies on 12 October. [5908]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* These companies were already aware of the preliminary findings of the World Health Organisation's study through their attendance at a meeting held in Geneva in July 1995 to discuss the data. After a review of the findings of the three studies on third generation oral contraceptives that were provided to the Medicines Control Agency in confidence by the investigators, the MCA arranged meetings with companies to present the findings to them. The MCA provided the companies with Professor Jick's data with his agreement and requested and received assurances from the investigators of the other studies that the companies were being provided with the data from these studies.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the despatch of the "Dear Doctor" letters relating to safety concerns about third generation oral contraceptives was begun; [5923]

(2) when the Government's Chief Medical Officer was informed of the decision to issue the "Dear Doctor" letter to general practitioners dated 18 October; [5912]

(3) when the order was placed for the printing of the "Dear Doctor" letters which were dated 18 October; [5927]

(4) on whose authority the "Dear Doctor" letters relating to safety concerns on third generation oral contraceptives dated 18 October were issued. [5909]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The decision to issue the letter to all United Kingdom doctors and pharmacists from the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines was taken by Ministers following advice from the Committee that there was an urgent need to inform doctors and users about new information relating to the safety of third generation oral contraceptives. The Chief Medical Officer was made aware of the CSM's advice on 13 October and was made aware of the CSM's advice on 13 October and was informed of the decision to issue the letter on 16 October. The order for the printing of the letters was placed on 16 October and dispatch began at 4.30 pm on the 18 October.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines have taken to establish that the information which they considered on 13 October in relation to third generation oral contraceptives was final; [6087]

(2) when the Medicines Control Agency received the final version of the reports for each of the three studies on third generation oral contraceptives which were considered by the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October. [5928]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Medicines Control Agency investigated the safety of oral contraceptives in the light of the new evidence emerging from three studies during the period July to October 1995. During this time it received several manuscripts from the World Health Organisation and Professor Jick providing the findings of their respective studies. The final reports of the studies conducted by the WHO and Professor Jick were received by MCA on 6 and 11 October respectively. Near-final drafts of both papers were provided by the end of September 1995 and, in each case, the MCA was assured by the investigators that there would be no substantive change to the analysis. In the case of the transnational study, MCA was presented with an analysis of the data on 9 and 10 October. During these meetings assurances were given by the investigators that these analyses were final.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the advice which he received during the period 9 to 18 October from the Medicines Control Agency with respect to safety concerns relating to third generation oral contraceptives; [5915]

(2) what advice the licensing authority received from the Medicines Control Agency following the special meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October. [5920]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Following the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October, Ministers received from the Medicines Control Agency a submission containing the CSM's advice. It is not normal practice to publish such internal documentation.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public sector dividend capital each trust has been required to pay in each year since its inception. [6101]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Progestogens

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has in respect of clinical trials for third generation progestogens for their metabolites. [5922]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Any company or investigator wishing to conduct a clinical trial with third generation progestogens or their metabolites would have to apply to the Medicines Control Agency in accordance with the Medicines Act 1968 and would have to provide a justification for the use of third generation progestogens taking into account the recent advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Prodigy

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what mechanisms will be used by Prodigy to allow general practitioners to make choices from alternative lists; [6312]

(2) which skin preparations and drugs used in the treatment of skin disorders will appear in the first choice list provided for general practitioners in the Prodigy trial; [6311]

(3) if his Department has determined which general practitioner's practices will be included in the Prodigy trial; and if he will make a statement. [6310]

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the general practitioners prescribing computer pilot project, Prodigy, and its cost. [6239]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *945-46*.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the drugs and preparations which appear on the first choice list offered by Prodigy will be generics. [6313]

Mr. Malone: The majority of drugs are listed by approved name. The only exception is where it is established as clinically important that the patient should always receive the same brand, in which case the brand name has been stated.

Advice contained within the British National Formulary, and that of experts in clinical pharmacology, has been followed.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how his Department will choose between a number of similarly efficacious products when deciding which will appear on the first choice list offered to general practitioners by Prodigy; [6314]

(2) what mechanisms are used to determine the preparations and drugs appearing in the first choice list of Prodigy. [6315]

Mr. Malone: Where one or more drugs are clinically efficacious, choice for inclusion in the guidelines was then based on other factors including safety, known side effects, best practice and cost. The guidelines were then referred to a clinical expert panel for peer review.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what mechanisms products excluded from the first choice list under Prodigy can later be added to it. [6319]

Mr. Malone: The content of the guidelines used in the project will be kept under review. Discussion with the medical profession and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry about how this is best done will take place in the new year.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surveys his Department has *(a)* carried out and *(b)* plans to carry out, in order to determine whether general practitioners are likely to take the first choices offered them by Prodigy or whether they will make alternative choices. [6320]

Mr. Malone: The extent to which general practitioners use, amend or override the guidelines will be carefully monitored during the project.

Advisory Committee on Pesticides

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and their qualifications. [6222]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

Members of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and their qualifications are:

(Chairman) Professor Sir Colin Berry Dsc, MD, PhD, FRCPath, FFPM, FRCP

(Deputy Chairman) Professor Geoffrey Sagar CBE, BA, MA, DPhil(Oxon)

Dr. Andree Carter Bsc, MISoilSci, MIWEM

Professor Nicola Cherry MD, PhD, FFOM

Professor Michael Claridge MA, Dphil, FIBiol, FLS, FRES

Professor Anthony Dayan Bsc, MD, FRCP, FRCPath, FFRM, FIBiol

Mr. John Leahy MA(Oxon), CChem, MRSC

Professor Donald Lee Bsc, PhD(Cantab), FIBiol, FRSA

Dr. Alexander Proudfoot MB, ChB, FRCP, FRCPE

Dr. Eve Roman Bsc, PhD

Mr. Roger Tayler BSc(Agric), Postgrad Dip Agric(Reading), NDA, Cbiol, MIBiol

Professor Paul Webster Bsc, PhD, FBIM, FRSA.

WALES

Departmental Performance

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the work of his Department since May 1993. [3485]

Mr. Hague: My Department's main achievements since May 1993 are as follows:

The NHS has treated a record number of patients and waiting times have fallen substantially;

Performance against patient's charter standards has continued to improve, and further expansion of the GP fundholder scheme has extended patient choice;

Over 340 inward investment projects have been secured, promising nearly 16,000 new jobs and safeguarding a further 13,000, with capital investment of over £2 billion;

Over 260 small or medium-sized businesses have been helped to enter market overseas;

Modern apprenticeships were successfully introduced to manufacturing in 1994–95. By March 1996, the estimated number of participants will have grown to over 4,000 covering the manufacturing, service and business sectors;

Increased levels of careers advice and guidance for young people are being delivered through the new careers service companies. Provision in 1995–96 represents an increase of over one third on previous local authority expenditure on the service;

Plans have been made to launch Business Connect Wales on 15 January 1996. This new initiative, which can be accessed through one low-cost telephone call, will greatly simplify access to publicly funded business support services throughout Wales;

At least £1 billion of private finance has been recorded in support of Welsh Office programmes;

Construction of the Cardiff bay barrage has started;

The final link of the M4 motorway and the dualling of the A55 across the mainland have been completed;

Significant progress has been made in improving standards in schools in Wales and I have set the framework for the way ahead following the publication of "A Bright Future: Getting the Best for Every Pupil at School in Wales".

Student enrolments on further and higher education courses in Wales have increased to record levels;

Public and Crown bodies are working towards the provision of a better service in Welsh for the public in Wales in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993. The Welsh Office will have its Welsh language scheme operating by 1 April 1996;

Local government is being reorganised into 22 unitary authorities under the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994;

More than £770 million has been made available for the renovation and improvement of the housing stock in Wales. By the end of March Housing for Wales will have secured over £12,000 additional units of social housing;

More people have received community care in their own homes or in their choice of accommodation in the community;

Implementation of the reformed common agricultural policy has progressed.

Further details are set out in the Welsh Office departmental reports for 1994, Cm 2515, and 1995, Cm 2815, together with the update which I gave to the Welsh Grand Committee on 29 November.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will allocate sufficient resources to establish specialist breast care units in Wales; [7123]

(2) what plans he has to establish specialist breast care units in Wales in accordance with the recommendation of the Health Committee's third report of Session 1994–95, HC324, on breast cancer services. [7131]

Mr. Richards: Recommendations for the future provision of cancer services are set out in "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services", a report by the chief medical officers of England and Wales. An expert advisory group has been established in Wales to assist health authorities to implement the recommendations of the report.

Health authorities will be expected to prioritise their resources to ensure that the health needs of their local population are met. In doing so, they will need to take into account the recommendations of the chief medical officers' report.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the mortality rate figures for women with breast cancer aged 50 to 69 years in 1992 for each health authority in Wales. [5677]

Mr. Richards: The information, provided by the Office for Population Censuses and Surveys, is given in the following table. As mortality rates for small subsets of the population can fluctuate considerably from year to year, an average based on five years' data has also been included.

Female breast cancer (ICD 174)—Deaths per 100,000 female residents aged 50 to 69

	1992	*1990–1994*[1]
Clwyd	99	93
East Dyfed	133	107
Pembrokeshire	129	95
Gwent	92	91
Gwynedd	64	87
Mid Glamorgan	85	90
Powys	88	103
South Glamorgan	78	81
West Glamorgan	100	103

[1] Data for 1993 and 1994 are provisional.

International Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (9th revision).

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the age standardised mortality rate figures for women with breast cancer aged 50 to 69 years in Wales in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993. [5676]

Mr. Richards: In Wales, age-standardised mortality rates for women aged 50 to 69 years with breast cancer—ICD9 code 174—are 99.7 in 1992 and 105.4 in 1993. Data for 1993 are provisional. Using data provided by OPCS, these standardised rates are worked out by adjusting the actual rates for Wales so that they are based on the age distribution within the relevant age group of women in England. For example, on the basis of the figure for 1993, for every 100 deaths from breast cancer in England there would be 105.4 in Wales if the proportions of women in each five-year age band were the same for the two countries.

National Disability Council

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what Welsh representation there will be on the National Disability Council; and if he will make a statement. [6463]

Mr. Richards: The appointment of members to the National Disability Council is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security; I refer the hon. Member to the answer he gave on 13 December, *Official Report*, columns 671–72.

Council Houses (Construction)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many council houses were built in 1994; [6467]

(2) how many housing association homes were built in 1994. [6468]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information provided by local authorities on the number of completions, by tenure, in 1994 has been published in table 2.3 of Welsh housing statistics, No. 15 1995, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Construction Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of jobs in the construction industry which would be created by a building programme of *(a)* 500, *(b)* 750, and *(c)* 1,000 houses in one year. [6465]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has made no such assessment.

Council Houses (Receipts)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the amount of cash in district and borough council balances from the sales of council housing; and if he will make a statement. [6466]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The usable amount of receipts from the sale of council houses available at 31 March 1995 is set out in the following table.

Receipts from the sale of council houses[1]

£ million

	Usable receipts from the sale of council houses available at 31 March 1995	*Outstanding loan debt as at 31 March 1995*
Alyn and Deeside	0.5	35.1
Colwyn	0.6	27.8
Delyn	0.0	32.3
Glyndwr	0.5	12.0
Rhuddlan	0.4	27.7
Wrexham Maelor	1.0	74.6
Carmarthen	0.8	35.8
Ceredigion	1.2	21.6
Dinefwr	0.6	28.1
Llanelli	0.0	47.7
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2.6	41.8
South Pembrokeshire	1.2	21.1
Blaenau Gwent	2.2	103.9
Islwyn	0.4	50.8
Monmouth	3.6	45.8
Newport	7.6	122.0
Torfaen	2.7	83.1
Aberconwy	0.2	20.3
Arfon	0.0	29.7
Dwyfor	0.3	15.9
Meirionnydd	0.0	10.6
Ynys Mon	0.2	53.7
Cynon Valley	0.0	52.9
Methyr Tydfil	0.3	64.2
Ogwr	0.6	74.9
Rhondda	0.0	87.3
Rhymney Valley	0.0	71.7
Taff Ely	0.5	42.0
Brecknock	1.2	31.6
Montgomeryshire	0.7	23.2
Radnorshire	0.4	13.2
Cardiff	7.1	184.0
Vale of Glamorgan	6.7	60.0
Port Talbot	0.0	40.2

Receipts from the sale of council houses[1]

£ million

	Usable receipts from the sale of council houses available at 31 March 1995	*Outstanding loan debt as at 31 March 1995*
Lliw Valley	0.0	39.7
Neath	0.0	40.0
Swansea	0.2	135.6

[1] Includes receipts from the sale of dwellings and the repayment of principal from local authority mortgages.

Departmental Priorities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the current priorities of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [6470]

Mr. Hague: Current priorities for the Welsh Office are set out in the departmental report 1995. Good progress is being made.

Wye and Lugg Rivers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that the National Rivers Authority becomes the navigation authority for the Rivers Wye and Lugg; [6667]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future control and supervision of the Rivers Wye and Lugg. [6668]

Mr. Hague: The National Rivers Authority has undertaken a consultation exercise on its proposals to become the navigation authority for the Rivers Wye and Lugg. The consultation paper issued by the authority outlined their views on the future management of the rivers. As the River Wye flows through England and Wales any application made by the NRA for navigation authority status following the consultation exercise would be considered jointly by myself and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will submit the River Wye to the European Commission as a special area of conservation in accordance with the EU habitats and species directive, 92/43/EEC; and if he will make a statement. [6669]

Mr. Hague: Consideration is being given as to which riverine sites might be submitted to the EC as special areas of conservation. Before sites are submitted there will be consultation with those who may be affected. Not all the potential riverine sites are yet wholly covered by designation as a site of special scientific interest, the building block for special area of conservation.

Welsh Language Schemes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all bodies required to submit language schemes to the Welsh Language Board, indicating which have so far submitted schemes and how many have as yet been recommended by the board to be accepted; and if he will make a statement. [6003]

Mr. Hague: This is an operational matter for the Welsh Language Board. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information he is seeking, and I will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises; [6636]

(2) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs; [6634]

(3) what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6713]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *998*.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6635]

Mr. Hague: None. The Department plans to hold meetings soon with training and enterprise councils and Welsh chambers of commerce to discuss how access to the Department by small firms can be improved through the review and revision of procurement procedures.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6500]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) on what date he decided to sell to the private sector the loan book of Tai Cymru; and to which divisions of the departmental budget he will apply the proceeds of the sale; [6930]

(2) what proposals he has to spend the receipts from the sale of the Tai Cymru/Housing for Wales loan book on additional public expenditure on housing by that corporation. [6817]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *568*, and by my statement on 13 December, *Official Report*, column 1007.

A477

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what inquiries his Department has carried out into the quality of the new road surface laid between Redberth and Sageston on the A477. [7125]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Testing of the materials used in the resurfacing together with testing of the new surface for skidding resistance and surface irregularity to check compliance with the specifications have taken place both during the contract in April 1995 and on three occasions since.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the new road surface was laid on the A477 between Redberth and Sageston, how many road traffic accidents were recorded in each of the 12 months preceding the laying of the new surface; and how many have been recorded in each month following the laying of the new surface. [7126]

Mr. Jones: In the 12 months preceding the laying of the new surface there were no accidents recorded; since the new surface was laid there have been two accidents—one in July and one in October.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many road traffic accidents resulting in personal injury have occurred in each of the last five years on the A477 between *(a)* St. Clears and Red Roses, *(b)* between and including the service station, Llanteg and Folly Cross, Llanteg and *(c)* Nash and Bangeston. [7127]

Mr. Jones: The accident details are set out in the following table:

Location	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
(a)	15	10	11	16	11
(b)	3	2	3	2	6
(c)	3	4	10	2	6

European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what programme was agreed with the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund for the current and subsequent years in Wales; and on what dates he made the announcements covering the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund. [7128]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: An announcement concerning the approval of the objective 5b programme for rural Wales 1994 to 1999, including the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund element, was made on 8 February 1995. The programme will in total provide £28 million in grant from the fund of which £17 million will be for the specific development of agriculture and forestry.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the actual and planned expenditure of the Countryside Council for Wales in each year since 1992–93; and what is the planned expenditure for the current year and for 1996–97. [7200]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Details of actual and planned expenditure for the years up to 1994–95 are in the Welsh Office's departmental report, copies of which are held in the Library of the House. The Countryside Council for Wales's planned expenditure for 1995–96 is £18.39 million. On 13 December my right hon. Friend announced the provision of £22 million for the council for 1996–97, *Official Report*, column 1007.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the budget for the Countryside Council for Wales for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97 and *(d)* 1997–98. [7204]

Mr. Jones: The final budget figures are as follows:

1994–95: £21,135,000 (outturn)

1995–96: £18,390,000 (expected outturn)

1996–97: £22,000,000 (plans).

The level of funding for 1997–98 and beyond will depend on future spending decisions.

Anti-smoking Campaign

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost of the 1995–96 campaign by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales to encourage people to stop smoking; if he will break down the figure to show expenditure on each element of the campaign; and how much was spent on television advertising. [7202]

Mr. Richards: Forecast expenditure on smoking related projects for 1995–96 is shown in the following table. Health Promotion Wales does not propose to fund any television advertising campaigns for smoking cessation in 1995–96.

1995–96	*£ thousand*[1]
Co-ordination of a national initiative for No Smoking Day 1996	12.0
Joint Initiative with community pharmacists for No Smoking Day 1996	16.0
Smokers Helpline	10.0
Research on impact of No Smoking Day	10.0
Pilot project on prevention of smoking during pregnancy	16.1
Evaluation of 1995 Quit and Win competition for 15–19 year olds	10.1
Smokebusters Cymru	92.0
Advice and information support service	2.1
Publication and launch of 1994–95 review of teenage smoking	5.9
1995–96 Total forecast outturn for smoking related projects	174.2

[1] Includes operational and manpower costs.

Health Purchasing Authority Allocations

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total allocations to each health purchasing authority in Wales for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [7201]

Mr. Richards: District health authority allocations for 1995–96 are as follows:

	£ million
Clwyd	199.8
Dyfed	175.6
Gwent	213.4
Gwynedd	124.5
Mid Glamorgan	276.7

	£ million
Powys	67.8
South Glamorgan	231.3
West Glamorgan	179.0

An announcement about the 1996–97 revenue allocations will be made in due course.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what credit approvals he proposes to issue in 1996–97 for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation. [7666]

Mr. Hague: I have allocated £39,954,000 of supplementary credit approvals for the transitional costs of reorganisation in 1996–97. These are additional resources, so that the costs do not have to be met by council tax payers or from councils' own resources.

Some £23,358,000 is earmarked for mandatory and discretionary compensation costs. SCAs will be issued to councils after they have incurred expenditure, on the basis of claims certified by chief finance officers. National park authorities will be eligible for support under these arrangements.

Some £11,764,250 of SCAs will be issued for information technology changes. I will announce the allocation for each county and county borough council shortly.

Finally, £4,831,750 is being added to the strategic development scheme in 1996–97 to support councils in acquiring, refurbishing or building office accommodation. I plan to announce my final decisions early in January. Any further funding for such projects in 1996–97, and all funding in later years, will be provided from within the strategic development scheme or, directly or indirectly, from receipts generated by the residuary body for Wales.

Under-fives

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate when the report of the Office of Her Majesty's chief inspector survey of provision in schools and in playgroups for the under-fives will be published. [7691]

Mr. Richards: I welcome the report by OHMCI which is being published today. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House, as soon as possible.

The report provides useful information on current educational standards and practice in schools and in playgroups and will help inform our deliberations on the introduction of a voucher scheme for four-year-olds. It highlights several areas where there is good provision, but I am concerned that there are too many instances of unsatisfactory standards in both schools and playgroups.

OHMCI has inspected both sectors according to its framework for inspecting early years provision in schools. In terms of education provision, it is not surprising that the playgroup sector lags behind the maintained sector since, traditionally, playgroups have had different aims and objectives.

To participate in the voucher scheme, playgroups will need to work to achieve the desirable outcomes to be drawn up for four-year-olds in all settings.

Officials of the Welsh Office will be having discussions with both the Wales Pre-Schools Playgroup Association and Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin to discuss issues arising from the report and how they might be addressed.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the total estimated expenditure of the Welsh Development Agency for the financial year 1995–96 and 1996–97; and what are the origins of the Welsh Development Agency's estimated income for those years; [6994]

(2) what was the total expenditure of the Welsh Development Agency in the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95; and if he will give a breakdown of the origin of the Welsh Development Agency's income for those years. [6995]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Expenditure on base programme	151.9	146.2	[1]119.4	[2]120.0
Financed by:				
Current receipts	28.8	23.4	19.0	10.0
Capital receipts	53.4	72.5	75.0	70.0
Central government provision	69.7	50.3	25.4	40.0
ERDF support for projects additional to the WDA's base programme	—	11.0	11.0	10.0

[1] Estimated outturn.

[2] Plans.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 20 December 1995

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Collection Centres

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the approved collection centres in England and Wales as defined by the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995; [3861]

(2) if he will list the approved collection centres in Scotland as defined by the Animals and Animal Products (Imports and Export) Regulations 1995. [3852]

Mrs. Browning: The following premises in Great Britain are approved collection centres, as defined in the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995:

England and Wales

Chelford Market, Chelford Agricultural Centre, Cheshire.

Lichfield Auction Centre, Fradley Park, Lichfield, Staffs (approved for cattle only).

New Lairage, Borderway Market, Rosehill Estate, Carlisle, Cumbria.

Penrith Auction Mart., Agriculture Hall, Penrith, Cheshire.

Scotland

Glenfield Auction Market, Paisley

John Swan and Sons Ltd., Newmarket Road, Edinburgh

John Swan and Sons Ltd., Newton St. Boswells, Roxburgh.

Livestock Auction Marts Ltd., Central Auction Mart, Kildean, Stirling.

RMR Lairage Co., Eloradanin, Lochmaben, Lockerbie, Dumfries and Galloway.

Royal Highland Agricultural Society, Ingleston, Newbridge, Midlothian.

United Auctions Ltd., Perth Agricultural Centre, East Huntingtower, Perth.

Wallet's Marts plc., New Market Street, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, with an estimate for the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers; [6388]

(2) what is his estimate of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 with an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6387]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministers' and top management programme budget provides for the salaries of Ministers, the permanent secretary, the special adviser and the costs of operating private offices, a parliamentary branch, a Ministers' correspondence unit and an appointments section. The appointments section has formed part of this programme only since October 1994. The total cost of this programme for the financial years readily available was as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	1.5
1993–94	1.7
1994–95	1.7

The estimated expenditure for the current financial year is £1.8 million. The costs of travel and subsistence for Ministers, the permanent secretary, the special adviser and their staff is estimated to be £130,000 for the current financial year. The budget does not cover other advisers, nor does it distinguish between overseas and domestic travel.

The cost of providing Government cars and drivers to Ministers in the Department in the current financial year is estimated to be £229,000 for this financial year.

There is no specific budget for ministerial security costs. Expenditure on telephones and office refurbishment in each of the years 1990–91 is included in the running cost expenditure of the Department, which is published in the annual report.

Total staff costs for the programme—which includes the offices described—is estimated to be £1 million in the current financial year. Press and communications costs relating specifically to Ministers cannot be separately identified.

Entertainment, alcoholic drinks and non-alcoholic drinks are included in the hospitality budget. The estimate for the current year for this budget item is £25,000. Stationery costs for the whole of the programme are also estimated to be £25,000.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6615]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Advice and guidance to procurement staff is contained in the departmental procurement and procedures manual, which is currently being brought up to date to take account of the information and direction given in the central unit for procurement guidance notes and the White Paper "Setting New Standards", Cm. 2840. On current plans, the manual will be re-issued no later than end of January 1996.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6613]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Department has recently made a contribution towards the DTI's booklet on "Tendering for Government Business", which is aimed at enterprises of all sizes. In addition, we are producing a booklet entitled "Selling to MAFF", which is intended to provide guidance to any enterprise who wishes to provide us with goods and services. The booklet is in final draft and on current plan will be released in January 1996.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6614]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Since May 1995, MAFF procurement staff have not met any organisations representing small firms to review the tendering procedures. However, the director of purchasing and supply is due to meet the sheltered employment procurement and consultancy service in January 1996. In addition, a suppliers' conference is being considered for 1996.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firm's access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6672]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* It is the Ministry's policy that procurement should be based on value for money. Goods and services should be acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. The form of competition should be appropriate to the value and complexity of the goods or services to be acquired.

In following such a policy, opportunities for small firms to gain access to areas of MAFF procurement are readily created. In choosing its suppliers, the Ministry makes every attempt to judge suppliers on eligibility, economic and financial standing and technical capacity.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6496]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The combined departmental non-pay running cost and the departmental capital outturns for the Ministry and its agencies for the year 1994–95 were £231,963,000.

Departmental Payments

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the amount owed to those businesses whose invoices were not paid within 30 days or within agreed contractual arrangements for 1994–95. [6514]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* All invoices, authorised and submitted for payment in respect of 1994–95 have been paid; there are no amounts owed to businesses in respect of these invoices for 1994–95.

EC Fruit and Vegetable Regime

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission to amend the EC fruit and vegetable regime intervention system in order to allow apples available through intervention to be purchased at a commercial rate by cider makers and other manufacturers with any monetary difference made up by the Intervention Board. [6885]

Mr. Boswell: None. The EC fruit and vegetable regime is currently being reformed. Our efforts have been, and will continue to be, aimed at securing a complete end to the withdrawal—intervention—system. This will allow the price of fruit to be set by the market alone.

EU Processing and Marketing Grant

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated net saving to his Department from ending the participation in the EU processing and marketing grant. [7380]

Mr. Boswell: The estimated net savings during the next three financial years are as follows:

Year	*£*
1996–97	1,270,000
1997–98	4,006,000
1998–99	8,061,000

Spending Reductions

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from which budget heading will come the savings necessary in order for his Department to meet the spending reductions indicated for the next three years in the public expenditure survey 1995 outcome public expenditure plan for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. [7381]

Mr. Boswell: The necessary savings have been found across a wide range of the Department's activities, involving most of the 80 programmes which cover all of the Department's work.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stormont Estate

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what portions of the Stormont estate have been built over or taken out of their natural state since 1 January 1985; what was the size and purpose of each action and the total proportion of the estate so lost; and what further areas are proposed for either new-build or return to nature. [5457]

Mr. Moss: Since 1 January 1985, the following portions of the Stormont estate have been built over or taken out of their natural state:

	Size (hectares)	*Purpose of Action*
1.	0.08	Construction of car park.
2.	1.11	Intended for construction of building. Now in use as a site for temporary decant buildings.
3.	0.65	Originally designated as a site for a building but has been returned to grass and tree saplings.
4.	0.36	Construction of car park.
5.	0.05	Access road.
6.	0.19	Construction of car park.
7.	0.07	Extension of existing car park.
8.	0.14	Hard standing and small car park.
9.	0.55	Provision of plastic playing pitch.
	3.20	

This represents 2.5 per cent. of the whole estate.

It is not envisaged that any further areas will be used for new-build or will be converted into wooded or grassed areas. At present, some areas normally grassed over are in use, on a temporary basis, either by contractors engaged in the refurbishment work to Parliament Buildings or for temporary accommodation for staff displaced by refurbishment work to Parliament Buildings, Castle Buildings and Stormont house. Those areas will be reinstated at the end of the contracts.

Education and Library Boards (Property)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what requirements are placed on the education and library boards by his Department in respect of the undertaking of property condition surveys; [6056]

(2) if the Department of Education in Northern Ireland will undertake a review of existing property management organisational arrangements across the education and library boards; [6027]

(3) how the Department of Education in Northern Ireland monitors whether the education and library boards have internal systems in place which ensure adequately that maintenance funding is applied properly and used to good effect; [6052]

(4) if DENI will be reviewing its existing arrangements in respect of the number of its branches dealing with estate management; [6054]

(5) what was the recurrent expenditure on the repair and maintenance of the education and library boards' estates during 1994–95 *(a)* in total; and *(b)* by board; and on what was spent; [6028]

(6) what mechanisms exists to facilitate the centralisation of estate management functions by the education and library boards; [6053]

(7) what proposals *(a)* DENI; and *(b)* education and library boards have to review the level of funding allocated to repair and maintenance of board property; [6051]

(8) how much of the maintenance expenditure has been spent on day-to-day maintenance; and how much on planned work in each of the education and library boards in the last five years. [6055]

Mr. Ancram: These questions all relate to issues covered by the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, "Education and Library Boards: Maintenance of Board Property", which was published on 7 December 1995. In these circumstances it is appropriate for me to amplify only material contained in the report itself.

Expenditure by the education and library boards on maintenance over the last five years is set out in the table. This relates to a wide range of maintenance work on controlled and maintained schools, further education colleges and other board property—this included electrical re-wiring, boiler and mechanical replacements, re-roofing, window replacement, painting, ground maintenance, energy efficiency measures, re-pointing of brickwork and concrete repairs. The division of expenditure between plan end and response maintenance is not readily available other than for 1994–95.

£ million

Education and Library Board	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95 Planned*	*1994–95 Response*	*1994–95 Total*
Belfast	4.9	5.7	6.1	5.4	2.7	2.7	5.4
North-eastern	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.8	2.7	2.5	5.2
South-eastern	4.4	4.3	4.8	5.1	3.3	2.4	5.7
Southern	4.5	5.1	4.6	5.0	3.2	2.3	5.5
Western	5.0	3.5	3.7	3.8	2.4	2.0	4.4
Total	24.5	24.3	25.1	25.1			26.2

Councillors Road, Carrickfergus

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the defect to the road surface at Councillors road, Carrickfergus which was repaired on 14 April, was first notified to the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) road service, as requiring repair, prior to notification of the accident which occurred on 13 April. [7365]

Mr. Moss: The defect in question was first reported to the Department's roads service on 14 April 1995.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money was spent in Northern Ireland *(a)* on set-aside payments under the arable area scheme; and *(b)* total arable area payments; in 1994–95. [7190]

Mr. Ancram: In Northern Ireland in 1994–95, £509,736.33 was spent on set-aside under the arable area payments scheme; and £5,604,643.53 was spent in total under the arable area payments scheme.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money is forecast to be spent in Northern Ireland in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area scheme; and *(b)* total arable area payments in 1995–96. [7191]

Mr. Ancram: In Northern Ireland in 1995–96, £556,110 is forecast to be spent on set-aside under the arable area payments scheme; and £8,222,180 is forecast to be spent in total under the arable area payments scheme.

Housing (Negative Equity)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the percentage of house buyers in each of the past five years experiencing negative equity in Northern Ireland. [7250]

Mr. Moss: There is no reported negative equity in Northern Ireland at present, nor has there been in the past five years.

Inward Investments

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many visits were made by industrialists in connection with potential inward investment projects to each district council area in Northern Ireland from 1 April to 30 November; and how many of these were repeat visits. [7343]

Mr. Ancram: During the period between 1 April 1995 and 30 November 1995, the Industrial Development Board arranged 200 visits to Northern Ireland by industrialists in connection with potential inward investment projects. Some 156 were first-time visits and 44 were repeat visits.

A breakdown of the visits by district council area is as follows:

District Council	*Total visits*	*Repeat visits*
Antrim	9	2
Ards	1	—
Armagh	—	—
Ballymena	1	1
Ballymoney	—	—
Banbridge	2	—
Belfast	94	14
Carrick	4	1
Castlerragh	2	—
Coleraine	—	—
Cookstown	7	3
Craigavon	6	1
Derry	6	1
Down	1	—
Dungannon	3	2
Fermanagh	4	2
Larne	2	—
Limavady	1	1
Lisburn	15	3
Magherafelt	2	2
Moyle	—	—
Newry and Mourne	14	4
Newtownabbey	14	3
North Down	9	2
Omagh	1	1
Strabane	2	1
Total	200	44

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many scientific papers have been published between April 1991 and the present day under the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment technical papers series; and how many of these papers were produced as unclassified papers; [7302]

(2) when the Porton technical papers series was first produced by the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down. [7303]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 December 1995:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the Porton Technical Paper series was first produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down and how many papers have been produced between April 1991 and the present day under the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) Technical paper series and how many of these were produced as unclassified papers have been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which includes CBDE as one of its divisions. I am replying to both questions in this letter.

The first Porton Technical Paper has a publication date of 1947.

Since the change of name to the CBDE Technical Paper series in 1991 a total of 179 papers have been published, 90 of which were produced as unclassified documents.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which countries outside Britain the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down has carried out tests and studies involving service personnel. [7296]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DERA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 December 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking in which countries outside Britain the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) at Porton Down has carried out tests and studies involving service personnel has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

Trials of equipment developed at Porton Down involving service personnel have taken place in many countries and on many occasions over the 80 year history of CBDE. These include an assessment of the difficulties of using respirators in the Khyber Pass in the 1920s, assessment of protective equipment in India in 1930s and assessment of protective clothing in Australia during the Second World War. It would involve disproportionate costs to try to identify all the studies which have been undertaken in various parts of the world as part of the development of equipment by CBDE to ensure the safe and effective protection of the United Kingdom's Armed Forces.

I hope this information is helpful.

Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the members of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee; for what reasons these individuals have been chosen to serve; if the committee will be able *(a)* to review experiments before they are carried out and *(b)* to veto or modify such experiments; which establishments this committee will review; what access to information and data this committee will have and if members of the committee have to sign the Official Secrets Act; how many members of the committee have either previously (i) served on a committee connected to the work of the chemical and biological defence establishment, (ii) worked at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment or (iii) been in receipt of an extramural contract from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and if (1) the whole or (2) parts of the committee's annual report to his Department's chief scientific officer will be available to the public or hon. Members. [7304]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The terms of reference of this committee were placed in the Library of the House, as reported on 17 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *971*. There is some further work to be done concerning membership and detailed committee procedures. I expect to make an announcement soon.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5860]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This information is not held centrally and could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

For that information which is readily available, however, I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 11 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *534*, the letter which my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State sent to the hon. Member for Darlington on 20 July 1995 and my letter of 28 November 1995 [illegible] the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones).

A copy of both letters have been placed in the Library of the House.

Land Mines

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding a ban on the production of land mines in the United Kingdom. [7330]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A number of representations have been received regarding the production of anti-personnel mines.

Chemical Weapons (Papers)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what papers concerning Britain's decision to abandon production of chemical weapons have been opened to the public at the Public Record Office under the open government initiative. [7300]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since records released to the Public Record Office under the open government initiative are not organised by subject matter, we can not identify which relate to Her Majesty's Government's decision to abandon production of chemical weapons without disproportionate cost.

Buy American Act

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the United States Government on the implications for the United Kingdom defence industry of "Buy American" clauses inserted in the most recent Department of Defence budget. [7140]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The provisions of the Buy American Act are waived for UK defence equipment in accordance with the US-UK defence co-operation memorandum of understanding signed in January 1995. Frequent representations are made at all levels to the US Administration and Congress to convey Her Majesty's Government's concern that such provisions damage the prospects for defence co-operation between the US and its allies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence expects to raise the matter when he visits Washington in January.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what fees or liabilities have been incurred to date in the course of the marketing of the Royal Naval college site in Greenwich. [7144]

Mr. Soames: The costs to date of exploring interest in the future use for the Royal Naval college, Greenwich amount to £55,590 plus VAT, exclusive of in-house staff resources. An additional sum will be payable to the Government Property Lawyers on receipt of the invoice.

British Nuclear Tests

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities used for the incineration of clothing, furniture and other combustible material radioactivity contaminated as a result of British nuclear tests in the Pacific and Australia have been monitored since 1965; and what arrangements are in place to assess the levels of radioactivity at the site. [7145]

Mr. Soames: Christmas island sites were monitored in 1981 by the New Zealand Department of Health and do not require further monitoring as it was found that no site on the island presented a health risk. In Australia the nuclear test sites are subject to frequent monitoring by Australian organisations. No contaminated equipment or material was returned to the United Kingdom for incineration, therefore, no monitoring for this type of contamination is required.

Naval Stores, Portsmouth

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of naval spares stored in his Department's Portsmouth naval depot; what are the main categories of spares held at the depot; what condition these spares are currently in; how many lorries per week are bringing spares to the depot; from what bases these spares are being brought; and if he will make a statement. [7189]

Mr. Soames: The current value of naval stores held at the RN stores depot in Portsmouth naval base is £758 million.

The main categories of stores held are marine engineering equipment, electrical and electronic material and general stores which are not applicable to specific ships or equipment.

Stock is categorised as either serviceable, current value £638 million, or repairable, current value £120 million. The repairable stocks are subject to regular critical review by commodity managers and are either retained to meet anticipated service needs or disposed of through existing sales agreements.

An average of 18 lorries per week are bringing stores to the Portsmouth depot from RN stores depots at Devonport, Eaglescliffe, Exeter and Rosyth.

Nuclear Weapons

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated time necessary to make *(a)* fresh nuclear fuel and *(b)* irradiated fuel into a bomb. [7282]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not our practice to release information about the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6711]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Ministry of Defence has had an organisation of this kind, now known as the Defence Suppliers Service, in place since 1986.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6642]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The advice given to procurement staff is that they should ensure that they achieve value for money for the Department. That objective is best served through broadly based competition. The Ministry of Defence promotes competition by regularly publishing details of its contract opportunities and by explaining to companies of all sizes, but particularly small and medium enterprises, how they should set about exploiting those opportunities.

Joint Advanced Strike Technology Programme

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he had made in negotiating a memorandum of understanding with the United States for co-operation in the joint advanced strike technology programme; and if he will make a statement. [7806]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Negotiations with the United States Department of Defence have been successfully concluded with the signature today of a memorandum of understanding on arrangements for United Kingdom participation in the JAST programme. A copy of the MOU will be placed in the Library of the House. The proposed JAST advanced short take-off and vertical landing aircraft offers a potential future carrier-borne aircraft to replace the Royal Navy's Sea Harrier in the second decade of the next century. Arrangements set out in the MOU provide significant opportunities for British industry in the JAST programme.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's projects which currently involve the private finance initiative. [5380]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* In addition to the one approved PFI project mentioned in an earlier reply on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 666, MOD has a portfolio of "Pathfinder" projects which will be tested for the suitability of PFI. Of these, a number are already in the procurement process and may, subject to value-for-money considerations, result in the delivery of a privately financed solution.

The pathfinders include the provision of training and support services for the Naval Recruitment and Training Agency; telecommunications services for the defence fixed telecommunications system; the revitalisation of water and sewerage works at Tidworth garrison; the refurbishment of MOD's main building in Whitehall; provision of vehicles for the defence support vehicle fleet; and the provision of a visitors' centre for the Royal Navy at Devonport.

MOD is committed to the use of PFI and will consider a PFI solution, alongside other options, wherever it needs to consider using its own capital resources. It also remains MOD policy to obtain best value for money in its procurement activity and a PFI solution will be adopted if it demonstrates best value for money against other options.

PRIME MINISTER

Organised Crime

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Intelligence and Security Committee has to produce a report on the proposed involvement of the Security Service in the work against organised crime. [7768]

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that I have recently received an ad-hoc report on "Security Service Work Against Organised Crime" from the Intelligence and Security Committee. After consultation I have concluded that the report does not contain any matter whose publication would be prejudicial to the continued discharge of the functions of the Secret Intelligence Service, the Security Service or Government Communications Headquarters, and I have presented the report to Parliament today. Copies are also being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ukraine

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his talks with President Kuchma of Ukraine on *(a)* co-operation on nuclear power matters, *(b)* co-operation on space matters and *(c)* future joint use of Baikenor expertise. [7061]

The Prime Minister: During my meeting with president Kuchma of Ukraine, I informed him that the United Kingdom looked forward to the signing in the near future of a G7-Ukraine memorandum of understanding regarding the closure, by the year 2000, of the remaining reactors at Chernobyl. The memorandum sets out a comprehensive programme of co-operation to support Ukraine's decision on closure within the framework of wider energy sector reform and investment. I stressed the Government's firm support for this programme. I did not discuss with President Kuchma co-operation on space matters or the joint use of the Baikenor launching site in Kazakhstan.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises; [6648]

(2) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' need. [6646]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Guidance is included in the Cabinet Office's draft procurement manual, which is due to be issued shortly to supplement existing Treasury guidelines. The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency has provided guidance to its staff on the treatment of small and medium enterprises by means of legal and commercial practice notices.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Burma

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out his Department's policy in relation to aid to Burma; and if he will give the amount of British Government aid given in each of the last three years and the purpose to which it is being put. [7057]

Mr. Hanley: Apart from some residual commitments, United Kingdom bilateral aid to Burma is available only for humanitarian support. This policy has been agreed with our EU partners and is kept under review. Total UK bilateral aid in each of the last three years was:

1992–93:	£79,000
1993–94:	£195,000
1994–95:	£350,000.

The support given consisted of relief for displaced people, including education programmes; emergency aid following floods, fires and an outbreak of dengue fever; payment of pensions for former colonial servants; assistance through the United Nations drugs control programme; and minor payments arising from projects now completed.

The United Kingdom also provided approximately £400,000 as our contribution to the European Community aid programme of £2.4 million in the five-year period from 1989 to 1993.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give figures in constant prices for grant in aid for St. Helena for the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what factors underlie the trends in these figures. [7072]

Mr. Hanley: The figures are:

£ thousand

	Cash prices	*1995–96 prices*
1987–88[1]	2.300	3.378
1988–89	3,542	4.876
1989–90	3.904	5.023
1990–91	3.477	4.142
1991–92	3.424	3.839
1992–93	3.479	3.748
1993–94	3,495	3.659
1994–95	3.225	3.314
1995–96	3.560	3.560

[1] Earlier figures are not available on a consistent basis.

UK grant in aid to St. Helena finances the difference between government budgetary recurrent expenditure and locally generated revenue. This varies between years due to a wide range of factors which can affect either the expenditure or the revenue side of the budget. It is a long-term aim to maximise the proportion of budgetary expenditure which is locally financed.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent nationality was a factor in appointing a chief education officer in St. Helena. [7073]

Mr. Hanley: In July 1995 the St. Helena Government requested recruitment of a technical co-operation officer to fill the vacant post of chief education officer, in the absence of any sufficiently qualified St. Helenians who were available to take up the post. The recruitment process is under way. As for all other ODA-recruited posts, applicants are required to be either nationals of the European Economic Area or Commonwealth citizens who have an established right of abode and right to work in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total cost of the budgetary aid mission to St. Helena to negotiate grant in aid support. [7074]

Mr. Hanley: The cost is expected to be approximately £17,000.

International Committee of the Red Cross

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Overseas Development Administration has provided to the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist with its projected end of year deficit. [8017]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has recently agreed a new contribution of £2 million to help alleviate this problem, due in part to the increased costs of the ICRC's work in the former Yugoslavia and the Africa great lakes region. As a result of this and other donors' responses the ICRC end of year financial situation is much better than projected earlier.

China

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have been held at *(a)* the International Monetary Fund and *(b)* the World bank concerning child and prison labour in China; and if he will make a statement. [6021]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* We understand that an investigation by the World bank of alleged linkages between World bank-financed projects and child and prison labour in China is nearing completion. Management will report its findings to the board of directors. The matter has not been discussed in the IMF, which has no financial programme in China.

TRANSPORT

Passenger Rail Franchises

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the award of the franchises for the first passenger rail services will be announced. [5950]

Sir George Young: The franchising director has announced the award of the first three passenger rail franchises. The South West Trains franchise has been won by Stagecoach Holdings plc. The Great Western franchise has been won by Great Western Holdings Ltd., a management and employee team backed by First Bus, 3i Intermediate Capital Group and the Royal Bank of Scotland. The London, Tilbury and Southend franchise has been won by Enterprise Rail Ltd., a management and employee team backed by 3i and Gresham Trust.

All three franchises are committing themselves to significant improvements in services and have imaginative plans for developing their businesses. I look forward to the first franchised services operating in the new year and to passengers experiencing for themselves the benefits which privatisation will bring to the railway.

A41

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of average daily traffic flows and average peak hour traffic flows along the A41 at Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [7134]

Mr. Watts: The estimated average daily flow along the A41 at Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire for 1995 was 24,700 vehicles and the average peak hour flow was 2,300 vehicles.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the percentage increase in average daily traffic flows and average peak hour traffic flows on the A41 at Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire, since the opening of the Berkhamstead–King's Langley bypass: how these figures compare with his Department's original estimates; and if he will make a statement. [7133]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Mr. David Lidington, dated 20 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what is the percentage increase in average daily traffic flows and average peak hour traffic flows on the A41 at Aston Clinton, Buckinghamshire, since the opening of the Berkhamstead-King's Langley Bypass: how these figures compare with his Department's original estimates: and if he will make a statement.

There have ben increases of approximately 19% and 20% in the annual average daily traffic flows and peak hour traffic flows respectively on the A41 at Aston Clinton since the opening of the Berkhamstead-King's Langley Bypass. This is broadly in line with our original estimates.

Roads (Withdrawn and Deferred Schemes)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each road scheme which has been withdrawn from the road programme *(a)* the sums expended by interested parties in developing the proposals, *(b)* the stage which the scheme had reached, *(c)* the reasons for the withdrawal, *(d)* the latest annual accident figures for the roads affected by the scheme and *(e)* the current volumes of traffic recorded on roads affected by the scheme. [6457]

Mr. Watts: I have set out the schemes which are shown in the November 1995 review as being withdrawn together with the stage that each scheme had reached.

During the review, careful consideration was given to allocating the limited road construction resources to where the need is greatest. Clearly, some schemes have a greater call on the available resources than others and it is now clear that resources were no longer available to allow all the 1994 roads review schemes to proceed in the foreseeable future.

Information relating to sums expended and to the accident and traffic figures above is currently being collated and I will write to the hon. Member separately as soon as it is available.

Route	*Scheme title*	*Stage reached*
M1	J31–32 Widening D4', Rotherham MB	Programme entry
M5	J17–21 Widening (Stage 2), Avon	Programme entry
M23	J9–9A Imp, West Sussex	Programme entry
M25	J10–12 Widening D4', Surrey	Programme entry
M25	J16–17 Widening D4', Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire	Programme entry
M25	J17–19 Widening D4', Hertfordshire	Programme entry
M25	J19–21A Widening D4', Hertfordshire	Programme entry
M62	J12–18 Relief Road, Salford MB, Bury MB	Preferred route announcement
A2	Kidbrooke Park Road, Interchange Imp, LB Greenwich	Programme entry
A3	Hook Interchange Imp, LB Kingston	Programme entry
A3	A245–A3100 Imp, Surrey	Programme entry
A3	Stoke Road—Hogs Back Imp, Surrey	Programme entry

Route	Scheme title	Stage reached
A5	Wofshead—Weirbrook Imp, Shropshire	Programme entry
A5	Milton Keynes Bypass South Roundabout GSJ, Buckinghamshire	Programme entry
A5	Hockcliffe Bypass, Bedfordshire	Programme entry
A10	Setchey and West Winch Bypass, Norfolk	Programme entry
A10	Stretham Bypass, Cambridgeshire	Programme entry
A10	Landbeach Imp, Cambridgeshire	Programme entry
A10	Hay Lane—Buntingford Imp, Hertfordshire	Programme entry
A10	M25—Hoddesdon Imp, Hertfordshire	Preferred route announcement
A12	Kessingland—Pleasurewood Imp, Suffolk	Programme entry
A12	Blythburgh Bypass, Suffolk	Programme entry
A12	Chelmsford Bypass Widening, Essex	Programme entry
A12	Gallows Corner Imp, LB Havering	Programme entry
A17	Sutton Bridge—Kings Lynn Imp, Norfolk	Programme entry
A17	Sutterton—Long Sutton Imp, Lincolnshire	Programme entry
A17	Leadenham—Sleasford Imp, Lincolnshire	Preferred route announcement
A19	Thornanby Bypass, North Yorkshire	Preferred route announcement
A19	Shipton By Beningborough Bypass, North Yorkshire	Preferred route announcement
A21	Lamberhurst Bypass—Chingley Wood Imp, Kent	Public inquiry
A21	Flimwell—Robertsbridge Imp, Kent, East Sussex	Programme entry
A26	Beddingham—Itford Farm Diversion, East Sussex	Public consultation
A30	Carland Cross—Zelah Imp, Cornwall	Programme entry
A31	Ringwood—Ashley Heath Imp, Hampshire, Dorset	Programme entry
A31	Sturt Lane—Red Post Imp, Dorset	Programme entry
A35	Stinsford—Cuckoo Lane Imp, Dorset	Programme entry
A35	Winterbourne Abbas Bypass, Dorset	Programme entry
A35	Wilmington Bypass, Devon	Programme entry
A40	Witney Bypass—Sturt Farm Imp, Oxfordshire	Public inquiry
A40	Witney Bypass—Cassington Dualling, Oxfordshire	Public inquiry
A46	Evesham—M5 Imp, Hereford and Worcester, Gloucestershire	Preferred route announcement
A47	Guyhirn—Wisbech Imp, Cambridgeshire	Programme entry
A47	Peterborough—West of Thorney Imp, Cambridgeshire	programme entry
A47	Sutton—West of Thorney Imp, Cambridgeshire	Programme entry
A49	Weaverham—Lower Whitley Imp, Cheshire	Programme entry
A51	Duddon and Clotton Bypass, Cheshire	Public consultation
A59	Bank Hall Diversion, Lancashire	Public consultation
A64	York—Malton Bypass Imp, North Yorkshire	Preferred route announcement
A64	Malton—Seamer Bypass, North Yorkshire	Preferred route announcement
A65	Moss Side—Lupton Imp, Cumbria	Programme entry
A65	Hornsbarrow Diversion, Cumbria	Programme entry
A65	Ilkley Bypass, Bradford, North Yorkshire	Preferred route announcement
A127	M25—Rayleigh Weir Imp, Essex	Public consultation
A140	Dickleburgh—Norwich Imp, Norfolk	Programme entry
A140	Long Stratton Bypass, Norfolk	Programme entry
A140	Beacon Hill—Scole Imp, Suffolk	Programme entry
A140	Stoneham Bypass, Suffolk	Programme entry
A205/ A221	Burnt Ash Hill Junction Imp, LB Lewisham	Programme entry
A339	Black Dam GSJ, Hampshire	Programme entry
A406	Popes Lane—Western Avenue Imp, LB Ealing	Public inquiry
A417	M5–A40 Elmbridge Court Imp, Gloucestershire	Programme entry
A417	Nettleton—Crickley Hill Imp, Gloucestershire	Programme entry
A418	West of Aylesbury—Wing Imp, Buckinghamshire	Programme entry
A418	Wing Bypass, Buckinghamshire	Programme entry
A420	Cumnor Hill—Kingston Bagpuize Imp, Oxfordshire	Programme entry
A420	Southmoor—A419 Imp, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire	Programme entry
A421	Bedford—M1 J13 Imp, Bedfordshire	Programme entry
A428	Eaton Socon—Caxton Common Imp, Cambridgeshire	Programme entry
A458	Woolaston Cross—Buttington Cross Imp, Shropshire	Programme entry
A483	Pant—Llanymynech Bypass, Shropshire	Public consultation
A550	A5117—Ledsham, Cheshire	Public inquiry
A550	Ledsham—M53 Imp, Cheshire	Preferred route announcement
A570	Scarisbrick and Pinfold Bypass, Lancashire	Public consultation
A595	Carlisle Southern Bypass, Cumbria	Preferred route announcement
A616/ A628	Salters Brook—Stonebridge Imp, Barnsley MB, Sheffield MB	Programme entry
A650	Saltaire Relief Road, Bradford MB	Programme entry
A1079	Shiptonthorpe Bypass, Humberside	Preferred route announcement

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each road scheme which has been deferred to the long-term list *(a)* the reason for that deferral, *(b)* the latest annual accident figures for the roads affected by the scheme and *(c)* the current volumes of traffic affected by the scheme. [6456]

Mr. Watts: I have set out the schemes in preparation which are now included in the longer-term category of "Managing the trunk road programme November 1995". During the review, careful consideration was given to allocating the limited road construction resources where the need is greatest. While these longer-term schemes have been retained in the road programme, they are not as pressing as certain others. Consequently, funds cannot be allocated to take them forward in the immediate future. All preparation work on these schemes will be stopped by the end of this financial year 1995–96.

Information relating to the accident and traffic figures is currently being collated and I will write to the hon. Member separately as soon as it is available

Route	Scheme title
A1(M)	Leeming—Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire
A1(M)	Dishforth—Leeming, North Yorkshire
A1(M)	Tuxford—Blyth, Nottinghamshire
A1(M)	Newark—Tuxford, Nottinghamshire
A1(M)	Stamford—Newark, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire

Route	*Scheme title*
A1(M)	Stamford Bypass, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire
A1(M)	Peterborough—Stamford, Cambridgeshire
A1(M)	Baldock—Alconbury, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire
A1(M)	J9—10 Widening, Hertfordshire
A1(M)	J4—6 Widening, Hertfordshire
A1(M)	J1—4 Widening, Hertfordshire
A6(M)	Stockport North/South Bypass, Stockport MB
A2	Lydden—Dover Imp, Kent
A5	Nesscliffe Bypass, Shropshire
A5	Weeford—Fazeley Imp, Staffordshire
A5	Dunstable Eastern Bypass, Bedfordshire
A6	Disley and High Lane Bypass, Stockport MB, Cheshire, Derbyshire
A6	Kibworth Bypass, Leicestershire
A6	Bedford Western Bypass A6—A428 Link, Bedfordshire
A6	Bedford Western Bypass A428—A421 Link, Bedfordshire
A10	Wadesmill High Cross—Colliers End Bypass, Hertfordshire
A12	Wrentham Bypass, Suffolk
A12	Yoxford Bypass, Suffolk
A12	Wickham Market—Saxmundham Imp, Suffolk
A12	Martlesham—Wickham Market Imp, Suffolk
A12	Hatfield Peverel—Marks Tey Imp, Essex
A12	M25 J28—Chelmsford Imp, Essex
A21	Kippings Cross—Lamberhurst Imp, Kent
A23	Coulsden Inner Relief Road, LB Croydon
A23	Handcross—Warninglid Imp, West Sussex
A27	Arundel Bypass, West Sussex
A30	Temple—Higher Carblake Imp, Cornwall
A30	Zelah—Chiverton Imp, Cornwall
A30	St. Erth—Newtown Imp, Cornwall
A35	Chideock/Morcombelake Bypass, Dorset
A36	Beckington—East of Bath Imp, Avon
A36	Wylye—Codford Imp, Wiltshire
A38	Stoketon Cross—Trerulefoot, Cornwall
A38	Dobwalls—Bodmin Imp, Cornwall
A46	Alcester—Stratford Imp, Warwickshire
A47	Acle Straight Imp, Norfolk
A47	Blofield Acle Imp, Norfolk
A47	North Tuddenham—Easton Imp, Norfolk
A47	Little Fransham Bypass, Norfolk
A47	Middleton and East Winch Bypass, Norfolk
A47	Wisbech Bypass A1101 Junction Imp, Norfolk
A47	Tilney—Kings Lynn Imp and A47/A17 GSJ, Norfolk
A49/A51	Calverley—Tiverton Bypass, Cheshire
A51	Littleton Bypass, Cheshire
A52	Saxondale—Grantham Imp, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire
A52	Radcliffe on Trent Bypass, Nottinghamshire
A65	Coniston Cold Bypass, North Yorkshire
A69	Warwick Bridge Bypass, North Yorkshire
A102	Blackwall 3rd Crossing, LB Greenwich, LB Tower Hamlets (candidate for private funding)
A120	Braintree—Marks Tey Imp, Essex
A259	Dymchurch—M20 J11 Imp, Kent
A259	St. Mary's Bay and Dymchurch Bypass, Kent
A259	New Romney Bypass, Kent
A259	Rye Bypass, East Sussex
A259	Winchelsea Bypass, East Sussex
A259	Guestling Thorn and Icklesham Bypass, East Sussex
A380	Kingskerswell Bypass, Devon
A406	East London River Crossing, LB Greenwich, LB Newham
A419	Blunsdon Bypass, Wiltshire
A428	Great Barford Bypass, Bedfordshire
A435	Studley Bypass, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester
A449/A456	Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass, Straffordshire, Hereford and Worcester
A523	Poynton—Macclesfield Imp, Cheshire
A590	Ulverston—Dalton Bypass, Cumbria
A650	Shipley Eastern Bypass, Bradford
A5225	Wigan—Westhoughton Bypass, Bolton, Wigan

Route	*Scheme title*
—	Western Orbital Route, Hereford and Worcester, Staffordshire[1]
M1	J28–31 Widening, Derbyshire, Rotherham MB
M1	J25–28 Imp (Phase 2: Widening), Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire
M1	J21A–23A Widening (Phase 2), Leicestershire
M1	J21–21A Widening (Phase 2), Leicestershire
M1	J19–21 Widening, Leicestershire
M1	J15–19 Widening, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire
M3	J2–3 Widening, Surrey
M3	J3–4 Widening, Surrey
M4	J8/9–10 Widening, Berkshire
M4	J10–12 Widening, Berkshire
M4	J12–15 Widening, Berkshire, Wiltshire
M4	J18–20 Widening, and M5 J15–J17 Widening, Avon
M5	J29–30 Imp, Devon
M6	J19–20 Widening, Cheshire
M6	J2–4 Widening, Warwickshire, Coventry MB, Solihull MB
M6	M1–J2 Widening, Leicestershire, Warwickshire
M11	J9–14 Widening, Cambridgeshire, Essex
M20	J3–5 Widening, Kent
M23	J9–10 Widening, Surrey, W Sussex
M25	J3–5 Widening, Kent
M25	J5–7 Widening, Kent, Surrey
M25	J19–23 Widening, Hertfordshire
M25	J23–26 Widening, Hertfordshire, Essex
M25	J26–28 Widening, Essex
M25	J30–31 Imp, Essex
M27	J11–12 Widening, Hampshire
M27	J4–11 Widening, Hampshire
M40	J3–4 Widening and J4 Imp, Buckinghamshire
M42	J1–3A Widening, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester
M62	J1–24 Widening, Rochdale MB, Calderdale MB, Kirklees MB
M62	J18–21 Widening, Rochdale MB
M62	J6–7 Widening, Knowsley MB
—	M4–A4 Link Hounslow, LB Ealing, LB Hounslow

[1] Scheme to be reviewed for possible smaller scale solution.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Macshane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual budget of the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising; and how much of that total has been spent to date (i) in the current financial year and (ii) for each year since the office's inception, on legal fees. [7264]

Mr. Watts: The information on the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising is as follows:

Financial year	*Annual budget (thousand)*	*Expenditure on legal fees*
1993–94	2,443	827
1994–95	1,799,631	5,059
1995–96	1,620,604	4,164

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the Office of Passenger Rail

Franchising's total expenditure, in the most recent available year, on *(a)* car allowances and *(b)* chauffeur-driven cars. [7327]

Mr. Watts: In 1994–95 the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising spent:

(a) £1,070 travel on private cars;

(b) £46,254 on chauffeur-driven cars;

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to encourage the staff of the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to use British Rail services in their duties; and if he will make a statement. [7329]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director encourages his staff to use the most cost-effective mode of transport available when travelling in the course of their duties.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total number of his Department's Ministers and staff entitled to the use of a chauffeur-driven car in each of the last five years. [7262]

Mr. Norris: Between 1990 and 1994, five Ministers and the permanent secretary were entitled to a chauffeur-driven car.

Since July 1994, four Ministers and the permanent secretary have been entitled to a chauffeur-driven car.

Heathrow and Manchester Airports

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of *(a)* passenger and *(b)* freight capacity is being used currently at Heathrow and Manchester international airport. [7015]

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for BAA plc and Manchester Airport plc, respectively.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers used each of the terminals at *(a)* Heathrow and *(b)* Manchester international airport in the last 10 years. [7014]

Mr. Norris: I understand from BAA plc and Manchester Airport plc respectively, that the information requested is as follows:

Million passengers

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Heathrow										
Terminal 1	12.43	12.36	13.87	15.41	16.46	17.99	17.34	19.13	20.03	21.36
Terminal 2	7.97	7.21	7.24	7.70	8.22	8.21	7.23	7.41	7.64	8.22
Terminal 3	10.88	6.93	6.49	6.98	7.13	7.86	7.52	8.87	9.88	10.79
Terminal 4	[1]—	4.80	7.12	7.42	7.78	8.57	8.14	9.53	10.03	10.97
Manchester										
Terminal 1	6.06	7.53	8.56	9.51	10.07	10.16	10.15	11.69	9.13	9.35
Terminal 2	[2]—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.72	4.99

[1] Terminal opened April 1986.

[2] Terminal opened March 1993.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of the airports at *(a)* Heathrow and *(b)* Manchester international airport. [7016]

Mr. Norris: For Heathrow the Department publishes an aircraft noise exposure index in the form of annual noise exposure contours using Leq—equivalent continuous sound level, 16 hour dBA. Similar information about Manchester is available from the airport authorities. It is the responsibility of airport operators or developers to undertake appropriate environmental impact assessments of any major new developments proposed at airports.

Eccles-Stratford Quays Metrolink Extension

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what progress has been made with the Greater Manchester transport authority's application for European regional development fund funding for the Metrolink extension to Eccles via Stratford quays; [7162]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that ERDF funding is available to the Salford quays and Eccles Metrolink. [7163]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* I can give no assurances and no guarantees. The Greater Manchester transport authority's application for ERDF funding is being considered by colleagues at the Department of the Environment. I understand that the application will be submitted to the Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire monitoring committee in the new year.

Roads (Complex Schemes)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which road schemes are now being reassessed as complex schemes following the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment report; and how many complex schemes are *(a)* motorway widenings, *(b)* bypasses, *(c)* estuarial crossings and *(d)* new roads. [6677]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Dr. Tony Wright, dated 20 December 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport which road schemes are being assessed as complex following the report by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment on "Trunk Roads And The Generation Of Traffic".

Schemes are being assessed at the appropriate stage in their development. To date 12 schemes have been provisionally assessed as "Complex". These are:

Motorway Widenings

M1 Junctions 6A–10

M1 Junctions 10–15

M1 Junctions 15–16

By-passes

A1 Gateshead Western Bypass

A6 Clapham Bypass

Estuarial Crossings

None

New Road

Birmingham Western Orbital Route

On line Widening or Junction Improvements

A13 Ironbridge—Canning Town Improvement

A13/A112 Prince Regent Lane Junction Improvement

A13/1117 Junction Improvement

A27 Worthing—Lancing Improvement

A46 Alcester—Stratford Improvement

A249 Iwade—Queenborough Improvement

M6

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to extend motorway lighting on the M6 from its present point close to the M1 to junction 3. [7137]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 20 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about M6 motorway lighting between the M1/M6 Interchange and Junction 3.

There are no plans to light the M6 between these junctions.

As you would expect, the key test in any appraisal of lighting need is the performance, from a safety point of view, of the road during the hours of darkness. Having examined the overnight safety record for this section of motorway over the last three years, we cannot justify extending the existing lighting provision to this area. Any proposal to go forward in this way would not be an effective use of funds and would certainly be at the expense of other much-needed lighting schemes elsewhere.

However, all sections of the motorway and trunk road network are the subject of periodic review and factors could emerge at some stage in the future which may be significant and be such to justify the Agency taking a fresh look at the lighting need.

In the meantime, I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Government Car Service

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *549*, what increases in charges were made by the Government car service in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement regarding the reasons for the increase in spending on these services over the last five years. [7328]

Mr. Norris: The Government car service charges are as follows:

Date	*Financial year*	*Increase (percentage)*
—	1990–91	—
1st July 1990	1991–92	12.0
1st January 1991		10.0
1st April 1992	1992–93	16.5
1st April 1993	1993–94	2.5
1st April 1994	1994–95	1.0

VAT rates changed from 15 per cent. to 17.5 per cent. on 1 April 1991.

Road Accidents (Summer Time)

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will estimate the change in *(a)* road accident fatalities, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* total casualties that would have occurred in 1994, based on the figures published in "Road Accidents GB", if Great Britain had adopted double summer time. [4509]

Mr. Norris: Figures based on 1992 for a change at the end of October were given in a reply on 20 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *958*. The Transport Research Laboratory calculates that updating these figures to take account of changes in casualty numbers since then results in a forecast that approximately 2,080 casualties of all severities would have been saved in 1994, including 110 deaths and 590 serious injuries. These estimates are based on an analysis of accidents in the period 1968 to 1971 when summer time continued throughout the year, compared with years when it did not, and take account of subsequent changes in accident patterns and vehicle usage. Estimates published in "Summertime: A consultation document" in 1989 were obtained using the same method applied to the year 1987. These are GB estimates and cannot be taken to show what might happen in any particular region of the country where special circumstances may exist.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5865]

Mr. Hanley: The cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the last five years was as follows:

Government Car Service contracts

1990–91: £248,546

1991–92: £268,332

1992–93: £370,656

1993–94: £383,188

1994–95: £383,188.

The figures above represent the cost of agreed hours of usage and do not include VAT. The Government car service says that it has not been possible to calculate the charges for additional hours.

In addition, the cost of chauffeur-driven cars provided from the FCO car pool during the 1994–95 was £86,266. Prior to this date no separate breakdown of figures was recorded.

Information on expenditure by overseas posts on hauffeur-driven cars is not readily available and could be rovided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for oreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate f the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, with an estimate or the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and ccommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *b)* car and chauffeuring costs of ministers, *(c)* ministerial ecurity costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation xpenses of Ministers. [6402]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested will take some ime to compile; I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcom Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 with an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6401]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested will take some time to compile; I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the outcome of his department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice in respect of *(a)* the diplomatic wing and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration. [6655]

Mr. Hanley: Diplomatic wing purchasing forms relating to suppliers now also identify the size of companies by number of employees; FCO and ODA contact points have been included in the DTI booklet "Tendering for Government Contracts". FCO procurement literature on access for small firms to departmental business has been sent to the central unit on procurement at HM Treasury.

FCO departmental guidance on purchasing has been updated to reflect present Government policy on small and medium enterprises. The ODA is revising its own "Guide to Aid Procedures" to reflect present policy. All newcomers to purchasing attending the FCO introductory course on purchasing and supply—which is run in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply—are shown the DTI film "Thinking Big, Buy Small" Copies of the booklet with the same title are being ordered for distribution to purchasing staff.

FCO model tender documentation ensures that appropriate contacts are identified and made available to deal with the procedural and technical issues relating to the contract.

China

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the United Kingdom Government plan to take against the Chinese Government as a result of their gaoling of Wei Jingsheng; and if he will make a statement. [7209]

Mr. Hanley: We and our European Union partners have raised with the Chinese authorities our deep concern about the detention, trial and imprisonment of Wei Jingsheng. We look to the Chinese to show clemency and allow his early release.

On 14 December, the Spanish presidency, on behalf of the EU, issued a statement in Madrid and Brussels, calling for Wei Jingsheng's unconditional release. A copy of the statement has been placed in the Library.

High Commissions

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, columns *577–79*, if he will make a statement on the function of British high commissions; and what were the costs of the sub-leases for the residences in list B, the date on which they were taken out and the date of expiry. [7058]

Mr. Hanley: The function of British high commissions is to promote UK interests in Commonwealth countries and to provide the full range of diplomatic, commercial and consular services of an overseas post.

The details requested for the relevant high commissioners' residences are shown on the list.

Location	*Lease Premium £*	*Lease Commenced*	*Lease Ends*
Accra	Nil	1 November 1956	21 August 2019
Banjul	7,500	1 January 1965	31 December 2063
Canberra	Nil	1 July 1951	30 June 2060
Dhaka	39,230	13 June 1978	12 June 2077
Honiara	76,212	1 November 1970	31 October 2020
Islamabad	158,915	30 November 1962	in perpetuity
Kampala	17,500	1 February 1962	31 January 2061
Lusaka	14,000	1 July 1975	30 June 2075
Nuku'alofa	Nil	1 November 1951	31 October 2001
Port Moresby	17,000	2 August 1973	1 August 2073
Vila	125,000	30 July 1980	29 July 2030

Embassies and Consulates

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the average cost of operation for United Kingdom *(a)* embassies and *(b)* consulates worldwide for each of the past five years; and if he will provide a breakdown by FCO geographical department. [7270]

Mr. Hanley: This information could not be produced in the format requested without incurring disproportionate cost.

Information on the FCO's overseas expenditure can be found in the FCO's departmental reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Mykola-Zelyukin

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the migration and visa correspondence unit received a letter on behalf of Mr. Pawlo-Trtiakow in regard to his relative Mr. Mykola-Zelyukin; when it replied; and what factors determined the length of the interval. [7376]

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Member's letters of 3 October and 15 November, addressed to the entry clearance section at Kiev, were received in the migration and visa correspondence unit on 28 November. Having in the interim obtained information from Kiev, the unit replied to the hon. Member on 7 December about the outcome of the application.

GCHQ

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the conditions of service of staff employed at GCHQ. [7741]

Mr. Rifkind: The conditions of service of staff employed at GCHQ are set out in the GCHQ staff handbook. Following advice from the director of GCHQ and, in agreement with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I have today agreed that they should be amended.

The Government's purpose in introducing new conditions of service in 1984 was to protect national security by ensuring continuous operations at GCHQ.

This required that GCHQ's activities and operations should be protected from industrial disruption, whether in pursuit of national or local disputes; and should be protected from any risk arising from a conflict of loyalty of the staff; that negotiations on departmental issues should be carried out by departmental staff representatives answerable only to the staff of GCHQ; and that, for national security reasons, GCHQ staff should not have access to industrial tribunals. These objectives have been secured. The amendments I am now making will not affect them or the Government's original purpose, which remains unchanged.

The Government have always accepted that staff at GCHQ should have the right to join a staff association which would represent their interests in negotiations over pay, conditions of service and a wide range of other issues. Since 1985 staff have been represented by the Government Communications Staff Federation; this arrangement has worked well, and a good working relationship has been developed between GCHQ management and the GCSF. The GCSF has been recognised by the certification officer for trade unions and employers associations as a trade union.

However, certain details of the arrangement whereby the staff federation must be approved by the director of GCHQ, and his power to veto membership of its by staff, have caused the GCSF some difficulty in gaining a certificate of independence.

In response to representations from the GCSF, the Government have considered how the conditions of service might be amended, consistent with the needs of national security, to remove this obstacle. The amendments which I have agreed today should do this. They reflect the Government's desire to recognise and to maintain the good working relationship which has been developed between GCHQ management and GCSF. For reasons of national security, staff at GCHQ will continue to be restricted to membership of a body whose officers and representatives are appointed from, and answerable only to, GCHQ staff. Their conditions of service will continue to exclude any form of industrial action. Within this framework, I have agreed to the director's recommendations that his power of approval, and his power of veto over membership of a staff association, should be withdrawn. He will instead exercise the right that every employer has, to choose to recognise for purposes of negotiation and staff representation only one union, and that one remains GCSF.

Through these changes, I have carried forward the Government's policy of protecting national security, while also protecting to the maximum extent possible the employment rights of the staff of GCHQ on whose diligence, professionalism and commitment the nation depends.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Attorney-General what estimate he has made of the savings to public funds from allowing the CPS rights of audience in Crown courts. [7229]

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor and designated judges have not yet reached a final decision on whether Crown prosecutors should have rights of audience in the higher courts and, if so, to what extent. Pending such decisions, there are too many variables to make a reliable estimate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the famine decade to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [7386]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 29 January to Friday 2 February 1996.

WALES

Council Tax

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what revenue was raised from council tax in Wales for the last available three years; and what is his estimate of revenue for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [5954]

Mr. Hague: The amounts Welsh local authorities expected to raise from council tax when setting the tax and their annual budgets were:

£325.3 million for 1993–94;

£354.4 million for 1994–95 and

£394.2 million for 1995–96.

If authorities budget in line with the spending plans announced on 13 December 1995, council tax revenue for 1996–97 would be £380.5 million. However, it will be for individual authorities to determine their own budgets for the year. Estimates for 1997–98 are not yet available.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to issue guidance to new unitary authorities with regard to arrangements for staff who will be employed by more than one authority following reorganisation. [5412]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has no plans to issue such guidance,. It is for local authorities to advise their employees on matters relating to their employment and to comply with relevant employment legislation.

Reservoirs (Business Rates)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the reservoirs in Wales which have a rateable value accorded to them together with the business rate or other rates paid on account of each. [7041]

Mr. Hague: At 1 April 1995 the following seven reservoirs were the subject of separate entries in the rating list. Other reservoirs in Wales form part of larger hereditaments in either the cental or local rating lists and, as a consequence, have no separate rateable values. The rate yield is calculated by multiplying the rateable value listed by the Welsh poundage for 1995–96 of 39p.

Entry	*Rateable value* £
Reservoir, pipeline and appurtenances BSC Waltwood Reservoir, Bishton	395,000
Reservoir and premises Port Talbot Steelworks	300,000
Reservoir Blag-y-Cwm, Ebbw Vale	62,000
Reservoir Waun-y-Pound and Rhyd-y-blew, Ebbw Vale	12,000
Reservoir and appurtenances Rhose Lan Reservoir, Cwm Bargoed, Merthyr Tydfil	13,000
Reservoir and premises BSC, Rhymney Bridge, Rhymney, Gwent	21,300
Reservoir Jepsons Road, Rhymney Common, Gwent	4,400

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was spent in Wales in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area payments scheme and *(b)* total arable area payments in 1994–95. [7194]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1994–95 payments in Wales under the arable area payments scheme amounted to *(a)* £1,104,525 for set-aside payments and *(b)* £7,923,953 in total.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money is forecast to be spent in Wales in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area payments scheme and *(b)* total area payments in 1995–96. [7195]

Mr. Jones: The forecast expenditure in 1995–96 in Wales under the arable area payments scheme is *(a)* £1.1 million for set-aside and *(b)* £10 million in total.

Council House Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new money he has made available to local authorities in Wales for the modernisation of aging council house stock. [6469]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has made available £48.2 million for capital works to council housing in 1996–97.

Interreg II Programme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for *(a)* each county *(b)* Wales, the amount of money expressed in pounds sterling paid or committed under the Interreg programme for each available year since its inception. [7039]

Mr. Hague: Nil. The Wales-Ireland II programme was officially launched by the two member states on 25 November 1995. Wales has been allocated approximately £11.4 million of EC grant—at current exchange rates—for implementation of the programme. Applications for funding are currently being considered.

Negative Equity

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of home buyers in each of the past five years experiencing negative equity in Wales. [7249]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Estimates of the percentage of home buyers experiencing negative equity in Wales in each of the past five years are as follows:

1990: 1 per cent.

1991: 2 per cent.

1992: 3 per cent.

1993: 3 per cent.

1994: 2 per cent.

These estimates are prepared by the Department of the Environment on the basis of a house price index. The estimates are sensitive to the assumptions made and are intended to provide only a broad indication of the level of negative equity.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Grants)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is, for each police authority in England and Wales, *(a)* the revenue grant that he proposes to make in 1996–97 and the revenue grant offered for 1995–96 and for each of the previous five years, together with *(b)* the actual figure of revenue grant paid where it is different from the figure offered and *(c)* any supplementary revenue grant offered or paid in any year. [7273]

Mr. Maclean: For allocations to each police authority in 1995–96, and proposed allocations for 1996–97, I refer to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend on 30 November, columns *891–92* to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon). Details of allocations of Home Office specific grant paid in 1995–96 are set out in the "Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1995–96". Details of proposed allocations for 1996–97 are set out in the draft "Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1996–97". Copies of both are in the Library.

Information on Home Office specific grant advanced to police authorities, and actual grant paid, is set out in the Table. No supplementary revenue grant was offered or paid.

£ million

Police authority	*Advances 1990–91*	*Grant paid in respect of 1990–91*
Avon and Somerset	50.52	52.20
Bedfordshire	23.63	24.46
Cambridgeshire	28.77	28.41
Cheshire	39.36	40.62
Cleveland	31.41	32.21
Cumbria	24.85	26.37
Derbyshire	30.63	31.24
Devon and Cornwall	51.04	53.89
Dorset	23.63	25.00
Durham	21.20	22.93
Essex	50.16	53.40
Gloucestershire	18.66	20.52
Hampshire	54.08	56.69
Hertfordshire	29.24	29.96
Humberside	34.37	35.55
Kent	51.53	55.60
Lancashire	51.89	55.15
Leicestershire	31.73	31.25
Lincolnshire	20.24	21.21
Norfolk	22.99	24.54
Northamptonshire	20.01	20.44
North Yorkshire	23.40	24.17
Nottinghamshire	36.57	38.61
Staffordshire	35.11	37.88
Suffolk	20.78	21.93
Surrey	26.90	29.13
Sussex	43.79	47.43
Thames Valley	64.03	68.40
Warwickshire	17.76	18.40
West Mercia	33.86	35.04
Wiltshire	18.93	20.85
Greater Manchester	110.91	116.56
Merseryside	78.73	81.96
Northumbria	58.99	61.90
South Yorkshire	48.21	48.34
West Midlands	106.70	116.92
West Yorkshire	91.28	92.40
City of London	25.14	25.43
Metropolitan	610.23	622.94
Dyfed-Powys	15.17	15.75
Gwent	15.88	16.98
North Wales	22.60	22.81
South Wales	50.60	54.19

£ million

Police authority	*Advances 1991–92*	*Grant paid in respect of 1991–92*
Avon and Somerset	57.44	56.87
Bedfordshire	19.98	19.97
Cambridgeshire	23.81	24.03
Cheshire	35.05	34.15
Cleveland	28.20	27.95
Cumbria	22.42	22.99
Derbyshire	34.38	33.68
Devon and Cornwall	59.02	59.89
Dorset	27.51	26.52
Durham	25.23	24.78
Essex	58.76	58.93
Gloucestershire	22.58	22.75
Hampshire	62.37	63.73
Hertfordshire	32.96	32.06
Humberside	39.11	39.47
Kent	61.17	65.65
Lancashire	60.68	62.23
Leicestershire	34.38	34.27
Lincolnshire	23.34	24.09
Norfolk	27.00	27.59
Northamptonshire	22.49	23.20
North Yorkshire	26.60	26.36
Nottinghamshire	42.49	42.14
Staffordshire	41.68	41.90
Suffolk	24.13	24.52
Surrey	32.06	32.34
Sussex	52.18	54.15
Thames Valley	75.32	76.20
Warwickshire	21.69	20.32
West Mercia	38.56	39.39
Wiltshire	22.94	23.57
Greater Manchester	128.25	126.89
Merseyside	89.89	91.23
Northumbria	68.24	67.74
South Yorkshire	53.19	52.61
West Midlands	128.65	127.92
West Yorkshire	101.68	100.59
City of London	20.80	20.82
Metropolitan	677.97	696.59
Dyfed-Powys	17.21	17.93
Gwent	18.59	18.71
North Wales	24.94	25.86
South Wales	59.25	60.45

£ million

Police authority	*Advances 1992–93*	*Grant paid in respect of 1992–93*
Avon and Somerset	61.52	63.40
Bedfordshire	21.40	22.55
Cambridgeshire	25.46	25.51
Cheshire	37.49	37.21
Cleveland	30.99	30.50
Cumbria	24.02	25.25
Derbyshire	36.82	38.65
Devon and Cornwall	63.98	65.42
Dorset	29.47	28.38
Durham	27.03	27.15
Essex	62.93	64.17
Gloucestershire	24.18	24.51
Hampshire	66.81	69.07
Hertfordshire	35.31	34.95
Humberside	41.89	42.90
Kent	66.58	70.23
Lancashire	65.00	65.62
Leicestershire	36.83	37.12
Lincolnshire	25.00	26.04

£ million

Police authority	*Advances 1992–93*	*Grant paid in respect of 1992–93*
Norfolk	29.13	30.13
Northamptonshire	25.39	25.81
North Yorkshire	28.59	29.81
Nottinghamshire	45.51	45.64
Staffordshire	44.64	44.75
Suffolk	25.85	25.87
Surrey	34.68	36.15
Sussex	57.93	58.71
Thames Valley	82.46	81.86
Warwickshire	21.69	21.67
West Mercia	41.34	42.16
Wiltshire	24.57	26.21
Greater Manchester	142.04	138.82
Merseyside	96.59	96.53
Northumbria	72.95	69.63
South Yorkshire	58.82	59.95
West Midlands	139.07	144.98
West Yorkshire	108.90	106.45
City of London	22.92	22.57
Metropolitan	734.80	756.06
Dyfed-Powys	19.69	19.84
Gwent	19.79	19.87
North Wales	27.67	28.58
South Wales	63.99	64.92

£ million

Police authority	*Advances 1993–94*	*Grant paid in respect of 1993–94*
Avon and Somerset	64.47	67.53
Bedfordshire	23.63	24.46
Cambridgeshire	28.77	28.41
Cheshire	39.36	40.62
Cleveland	31.41	32.21
Cumbria	24.85	26.37
Derbyshire	39.53	39.89
Devon and Cornwall	68.39	69.69
Dorset	29.78	29.36
Durham	27.65	29.10
Essex	66.40	68.62
Gloucestershire	26.09	25.65
Hampshire	69.84	73.01
Hertfordshire	36.27	36.99
Humberside	44.09	45.36
Kent	74.12	72.93
Lancashire	68.79	70.76
Leicestershire	38.09	38.68
Lincolnshire	26.60	27.60
Norfolk	31.13	31.71
Northamptonshire	27.31	27.24
North Yorkshire	31.07	31.35
Nottinghamshire	48.49	48.74
Staffordshire	45.68	47.98
Suffolk	26.67	27.77
Surrey	37.18	38.07
Sussex	61.92	61.04
Thames Valley	88.15	88.71
Warwickshire	23.37	23.50
West Mercia	44.19	45.71
Wiltshire	27.75	27.31
Greater Manchester	151.84	150.97
Merseyside	98.68	103.27
Northumbria	77.36	78.99
South Yorkshire	62.88	63.56
West Midlands	148.67	149.06
West Yorkshire	114.53	111.80
City of London	25.14	25.43
Metropolitan	773.71	787.90
Dyfed-Powys	20.64	21.17
Gwent	20.06	21.12
North Wales	29.38	29.68
South Wales	66.47	66.75

£ million

Police authority	*Advances 1994–95*	*Grant paid in respect of 1994–95*
Avon and Somerset	67.90	70.85
Bedfordshire	25.37	25.98
Cambridgeshire	29.46	29.27
Cheshire	41.42	42.20
Cleveland	34.46	33.36
Cumbria	26.92	27.11
Derbyshire	41.68	42.29
Devon and Cornwall	69.47	71.08
Dorset	31.13	31.75
Durham	29.88	29.82
Essex	70.31	72.72
Gloucestershire	26.94	27.68
Hampshire	74.97	77.82
Hertfordshire	38.36	39.78
Humberside	46.23	46.20
Kent	77.52	77.15
Lancashire	72.20	72.21
Leicestershire	38.59	40.65
Lincolnshire	29.03	29.42
Norfolk	32.16	33.83
Northamptonshire	28.21	29.66
North Yorkshire	31.77	31.49
Nottinghamshire	52.98	52.29
Staffordshire	48.84	50.21
Suffolk	27.84	28.59
Surrey	41.34	42.61
Sussex	63.12	65.19
Thames Valley	95.76	95.01
Warwickshire	23.62	24.66
West Mercia	46.48	48.82
Wiltshire	30.78	29.99
Greater Manchester	158.65	158.93
Merseyside	106.88	107.02
Northumbria	82.54	86.18
South Yorkshire	69.23	67.08
West Midlands	154.46	154.70
West Yorkshire	115.71	116.67
City of London	26.75	26.36
Metropolitan	795.96	816.37
Dyfed-Powys	21.53	22.63
Gwent	21.60	21.90
North Wales	31.22	31.19
South Wales	66.87	66.90

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is, for each police authority in England and Wales, *(a)* the capital grant that he proposes to make in 1996–97 and the capital grant offered for 1995–96 and for each of the previous five years, together with *(b)* the actual figure of capital grant paid where that is different from the figure offered and *(c)* any supplementary capital grant offered or paid in any year for special or designated purposes. [7274]

Mr. Maclean: Details of capital grant proposed for allocation to each police authority in 1996–97 and allocated in each of the previous six years are given in the table. Figures for proposed allocations in years prior to 1996–97, and for additional sums paid in year, are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Capital grant allocated to police authorities in England and Wales 1990–91 to 1996–97[1]

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[2]	*1996–97*[3]
Avon and Somerset	3.953	3.845	3.110	3.862	5.283	5.144	2.122
Bedfordshire	0.143	0.375	0.773	0.806	0.735	0.944	1.167
Cambridgeshire	0.338	0.806	1.200	1.625	1.092	0.812	0.629
Cheshire	0.656	1.234	1.234	1.429	1.139	1.154	0.961
City of London	0.322	0.416	0.454	0.756	1.222	0.505	0.421
Cleveland	0.460	0.573	0.880	0.885	0.889	0.888	0.740
Cumbria	0.579	0.673	0.771	0.885	0.794	0.702	0.585
Derbyshire	0.402	0.929	1.371	2.314	1.891	1.156	1.122
Devon and Cornwall	1.087	2.056	3.511	3.745	2.143	2.262	1.907
Dorset	0.606	1.362	2.355	2.026	1.355	0.797	0.666
Durham	0.328	1.249	1.559	2.172	1.280	0.853	0.870
Dyfed Powys	0.298	0.999	1.163	1.653	0.737	0.606	0.477
Essex	1.100	1.584	3.055	2.937	3.144	3.895	3.728
Gloucestershire	0.701	0.942	0.866	1.180	0.971	1.136	1.015
Greater Manchester	2.754	4.180	4.747	5.817	5.762	4.802	4.286
Gwent	1.602	1.897	1.998	1.049	1.092	1.200	0.680
Hampshire	1.039	1.917	2.064	2.489	2.267	2.524	2.911
Hertfordshire	0.809	1.076	1.044	1.052	0.996	1.079	1.375
Humberside	0.799	1.679	1.448	1.434	1.269	1.350	1.593
Kent	0.654	1.614	2.222	2.134	1.880	2.736	3.338
Lancashire	1.431	1.551	3.039	2.459	3.412	2.557	1.699
Leicestershire	2.847	1.866	1.601	1.809	1.561	2.837	1.982
Lincolnshire	0.707	0.865	1.329	1.902	1.071	1.589	1.465
Merseyside	1.194	2.708	2.784	2.925	3.504	3.558	3.245
Norfolk	0.150	0.681	0.934	1.124	1.046	0.950	1.283
Northamptonshire	0.435	0.972	1.186	1.270	0.961	0.762	0.876
Northumbria	3.505	2.484	3.074	3.838	5.324	5.844	4.334
North Wales	0.406	0.851	0.825	1.328	0.861	1.235	1.079
North Yorkshire	0.446	0.945	0.836	0.836	1.032	0.841	1.092
Nottinghamshire	1.261	1.771	3.371	3.354	3.016	2.610	3.042
South Wales	0.627	1.743	2.263	2.516	3.352	4.197	3.573
South Yorkshire	1.939	1.798	2.416	2.097	3.270	2.840	2.791
Staffordshire	1.502	1.378	2.018	2.099	1.686	1.821	1.788
Suffolk	0.381	1.175	0.869	0.843	0.729	0.732	0.609
Surrey	1.621	1.448	1.565	1.844	1.920	2.546	3.021
Sussex	1.968	3.051	2.553	2.104	1.948	3.886	3.746
Thames Valley	3.096	2.389	2.822	2.571	3.203	3.425	3.485
Warwickshire	0.307	0.795	1.052	1.291	1.535	0.971	0.521
West Mercia	3.747	2.247	3.659	4.586	2.513	1.893	2.036
West Midlands	4.940	5.452	4.667	5.573	6.419	5.889	4.570
West Yorkshire	4.020	6.798	7.221	4.090	3.590	4.449	3.918
Wiltshire	0.572	0.665	0.761	1.838	2.326	1.441	0.747
Metropolitan Police	28.507	34.214	32.968	36.327	34.383	33.723	27.749
	84.239	107.253	119.638	128.874	124.603	125.141	109.244

---

[1] Excludes grant paid to lead forces for regional crime squads.[2] Position as at 19 December 1995. £1.365 million still to be allocated for purchase of building sites.

[3] Position as at 19 December 1995. £5.006 million still be to allocated for purchase of building sites and central funding for air support.

London Fire Stations

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average number of on ground calls for each category *(a)* A, *(b)* B, *(c)* C, and *(d)* D fire station in London for (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94 and (iii) 1994–95 and (iv) for the latest period available; [6925]

(2) what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of incidents in London were attended by each London fire station within the recommended attendance standards in (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95 and (iv) the latest period available; and how this breaks down by risk category. [6924]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not available centrally.

UK Passport Agency

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which consultancy firms have been employed in market testing the UK Passport Agency; how much each has been paid; and which offices they are considering for contracting out. [7212]

Mr Kirkhope: No consultancy firms have been employed in market testing the UK Passport Agency. There are no plans for contracting out passport offices.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if staff in the Belfast UK Passport Agency office will be permitted to submit in-house bids for any areas which are under consideration for contracting out. [7210]

Mr. Kirkhope: If any areas of work in the Belfast passport office are considered suitable for contracting out it would not be appropriate for staff to submit in-house bids.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff *(a)* are currently employed in the UK Passport Agency Offices and *(b)* were employed 12 months ago. [7211]

Mr. Kirkhope: The UK employs a mixture of permanent staff and seasonal staff. The latter are either retained on part-year appointments or as casual employees. The number of seasonal staff in post varies according to demand for passports, which is abnormally high at present in anticipation of the abolition of the British visitor's passport from 1 January 1996. The information requested is as follows:

	Permanent	*Part year*	*Casual*
30 November 1995	1,213.5	123.5	155.5
30 November 1994	1,269.5	36	21

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many consultants have been employed to consider the contracting out of the UK Passport Agency Belfast Office; with what terms of reference; over what time period; to consider what functions of the agency; and how many staff were involved on each occasion. [7153]

Mr. Kirkhope: The UK Passport Agency has no plans to contract out the Belfast Office.

Civil Servants (Asylum Cases)

Mr. Mellor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants were employed to deal with asylum cases on *(a)* 1 October 1980, *(b)* 1 October 1985, *(c)* 1 October 1990 and *(d)* 1 October 1995. [6944]

Mr. Kirkhope: The numbers of civil servants employed to deal solely with asylum cases—screening, determination and appeals—were as follows:

1 October 1980: 30

1 October 1985: 48

1 October 1990: 91

1 October 1995: 596

Prisoners (Shopping Visits)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what shopping visits were made by prison officers for prison inmates detained in prisons in England and Wales during the week of 5 December. [6458]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 20 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about shopping trips by prison officers for prison inmates.

No shopping trips by prison officers were made during the week of 5 December. This is in line with the Home Secretary's announcement in December 1994 that the practice of prison officers going shopping at the behest of prisoners had stopped.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6400]

Mr. Howard: The estimated cost for myself and my departmental Ministers for the current year and for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are as follows:

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Overseas travel/accommodation	38,892	40,441	70,000
Car and chauffeuring costs	228,424	228,424	232,669
Domestic travel/accommodation	29,524	41,000	56,000

The figures for car and chauffeuring costs are inclusive of value added tax.

Ministerial security costs, which include the cost of chauffeuring myself, are not collected in the format requested. Part is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department which is published in the annual report, annexe 3, and part is covered by the Metropolitan police.

Figures for 1991–92 and 1992–93 can be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Education Provisions)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the minimum education provisions per prisoner per week in *(a)* Prison Service and *(b)* privately run prisons; what safeguards exist to ensure that these provisions are met; and if he will make it his policy not to reduce the minimum education provision during (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996 in respect of (1) the Prison Service and (2) privately run prisons. [6029]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 December 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about education provisions in Prison Service and privately run prisons.

Statutory minima for education (which apply both to directly and privately managed establishments) are set out in Rule 35(2) of the Young Offender Institution Rules 1988, which states that young offenders under seventeen years old are required to attend classes for at least fifteen hours within the normal working week, and Rule 29(2) of the Prison Rules 1964, which states that evening classes must be provided.

The Prison Service Code of Operating Standards stipulate that establishments should provide an education programme, including vocational training courses, based on a needs assessment and that classes should, subject to local needs, be provided in the morning and afternoon, five days a week for fifty weeks in the year, and in the evenings five days a week for forty two weeks of the year. A system of standards audit has recently been put in place to monitor compliance with the code of operating standards, including those relating to education.

Within this framework governors are responsible for determining the level and nature of provision, having regard to the relevant Service-wide plans and policies, and to the resources available.

The Service's strategic plan for 1995–98 includes a strategic priority of improving the quality, relevance, and delivery of regime activities and to this end the 1995–96 business plan includes a commitment to implement a core education curriculum which will be common to all establishments.

Delivery of adequate education programmes is assured through the normal line management process of the Prison Service, supported by standards audit and specialist advice from the central education and training advisory service. In the case of privately operated prisons, and of Manchester prison, which operates under a service level agreement, this is underpinned by specific requirements in the contracts and service level agreement.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings his Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6626]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Treasury central unit on procurement arranged a meeting with the Confederation of British Industry small firms panel, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of Private Business in September 1995 to review tendering procedures. Representatives of some individual Departments attended; the Home Office will consider any recommendations which are made.

Home Office tendering procedures are subject to periodic review. Measures which may assist small firms include the use of simple written requests for quotations, rather than formal tenders, for lower value purchases of goods and services, and increased delegated powers to managers to buy locally.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications for purchasing from small to medium enterprises. [6627]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Procurement staff are advised that the size of a company is relevant to the selection of tenderers only in so far as it affects its capability to meet our requirements. Once that capability is established, there is no discrimination between small, medium or large companies. Contracts are awarded to firms which best meet our value for money criteria, which will include skills, efficiency, experience, price, delivery and quality. Small and large firms should be equally capable of meeting these criteria.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what work his Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs; [6625]

(2) what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives; [6716]

(3) what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6662]

Mr. Howard *[holding answers 18 and 19 December 1995]:* Although we have undertaken no formal review of measures to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of procurement, the inherently devolved nature of Home Office procurement provides an excellent opportunity for small firms to establish local contact. The Home Office procurement unit has a number of staff with special responsibility for policy in relation to small to medium enterprises and for ensuring that those wishing to supply the Home Office receive all the necessary support and information. In response to the Government White Paper, "Setting New Standards", the Home Office will shortly be publishing a small business contact point in a revised booklet for new suppliers. This will contain additional information of interest to small to medium enterprises. In addition, the Home Office procurement manual, widely circulated throughout the Home Office, contains guidance on purchasing from small firms.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been moved from prisons in England and Wales to prisons in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland since September 1994; and if he will make a statement. [6831]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Since September 1994, 22 prisoners have been transferred from England and Wales to prisons in Northern Ireland. Ratification of the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons by the Republic of Ireland came into force on 1 November 1995. To date, no prisoners have been repatriated to the Republic.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Services Ombudsman

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will conduct an inquiry into the actions of Chambers and Co. solicitors of Brighouse, west Yorkshire, in relation to the case of Mrs. Daphne Turner of Huddersfield and the recommendations of the legal services ombudsman; [7417]

(2) what powers he has to ensure that compensation recommended by the legal services ombudsman is paid. [7317]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The office of the legal services ombudsman is statutorily independent from the Government and I have no powers to intervene in individual cases. The ombudsman's powers to make recommendations in his reports are set out in section 23 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. Should any persons fail to comply with a recommendation, they are required to publicise that failure. Should they not do so, the ombudsman may publicise the matter.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will review legislation establishing the legal services ombudsman, with particular reference to circumstances in which solicitors fail to carry out his recommendations; [7315]

(2) if he will meet the Law Society to discuss cases in which solicitors ignore recommendations from the legal services ombudsman for compensation. [7318]

Mr. Evans: My Department will carry out its quinquennial review of the office of the legal services ombudsman next year. I do not see any need for an earlier review of this aspect of the legislation or for a discussion on it with the Law Society.

Child Witnesses (Judicial Training)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received *(a)* regarding the need for more training for judges in handling child witnesses, particularly in cases of alleged child abuses, and *(b)* suggesting the exclusion of certain judges from sitting on cases involving child witnesses particularly in cases of child abuse. [7173]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the past year, the Lord Chancellor received one representation specifically on judicial training in handling child witnesses, from the shadow Minister for children and the family. Other representations primarily on other matters may also refer to judicial training, but to collate information on these would incur disproportionate cost. Two representations to exclude certain judges from sitting in such cases were considered by the Lord Chancellor in the same period, one of which was made by the hon. Member. To collate the information requested over an extended period of time would incur disproportionate cost.

Magistrates (Ethnic Minorities)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of the magistracy in England and Wales were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995; and what in each year was the total number of magistrates. [7625]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No figures are currently available for the total number of magistrates who are from an ethnic minority. In England and Wales, excluding the Duchy of Lancaster, 4.7 per cent. of those appointed in 1989 were from an ethnic minority; between 1 January and 31 October 1995 the figure was 8.1 per cent. At 31 December 1989, excluding the Duchy of Lancaster, there were 24,521 magistrates and at 1 January 1995 there were 25,723.

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellors Department what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the last five years. [5866]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Chauffeur-driven cars are used by the Lord Chancellor, Parliamentary Secretary and the permanent secretary. The Law Lords and members of the Scottish Office also use the cars on occasions. Expenditure over the last five years has been calculated as follows:

1991: £409,909.10

1992: £353,818.05

1993: £195,995.35

1994: £227,229.70

1995: Figures for the complete year are not yet available.

It should be noted that the figures above do not include cars used by the judiciary on the circuits.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7569]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has its own web site held on the Government information service, an Internet server maintained by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency.

The Department's home page contains extracts from the LCD strategic plan for 1995–96 to 1997–98 providing details about the Department, its aims and key challenges, plans for the future and some departmental facts and figures. It also includes a summary of the consultation paper "Legal Aid—Targeting Need". The information was published on the Internet in August and no updates have taken place.

The address of the home page is
http://www.open.gov.uk/lcd/lcdhome.htm.

The Department neither answers questions nor supplies additional information through the Internet and has no current plans to do so.

The Court Service agency has two sites on the Internet: the home page and the charter for court users. The home page contains information on the structure and workings of the Court Service in England and Wales. The charter site contains the substantive pages of the charter for court users published in July 1995. The sites have not been updated since they were established in October 1995; they are currently being updated and it is intended to place Court Service leaflets on the Internet by June 1996. The addresses of the site are as follows:

home page—http://www.open.gov.uk/courts/court/cs_home.htm
charter—http://www.open.gov.uk./courts/charter/courts.htm

The Court Service neither answers questions nor supplies additional information through the Internet.

The Public Trust Office does not have a site on the Internet at present.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and (i) other. [6409]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: This information is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of the Lord Chancellor's Department which is published in the annual report, Cm 2809. Projections for 1995–96 are in line with overall expenditure for next year as published in the public expenditure survey statement.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including an estimate for the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6410]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on expenditure in the format requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of the new franchises on legal aid cash; and if he will make a statement. [7592]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. However, the Legal Aid board, whose initiative franchising is, conducted extensive research to assist it in setting up the franchising scheme, and is monitoring its operation closely.

HEALTH

Health Authorities and Trusts (Advertising)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of advertising by trusts and health authorities in each region in each year since 1990. [4186]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Advertising is not defined in the national health service manual accounts and may be undertaken, for example, both for staff recruitment and for health promotion purposes.

Expenditure on advertising by health authorities and national health service trusts

	Expenditure (£)			
Region	*1993–94*	*1992–93*	*1991–92*	*1990–91*
Northern	1,536,557	1,308,722	1,399,551	1,323,781
Yorkshire	1,686,291	1,854,389	1,546,213	1,859,669
Trent	2,704,686	2,293,997	2,085,979	2,216,819
East Anglian	1,172,152	1,036,682	907,766	1,025,380
North West Thames	2,498,796	2,194,458	2,207,702	2,486,098
North East Thames	2,455,868	2,490,538	2,621,400	3,221,808
South East Thames	2,337,759	2,420,354	2,031,840	2,274,056
South West Thames	1,833,519	1,653,714	1,867,469	2,328,691
Wessex	1,270,588	1,201,590	1,070,856	1,334,230
Oxford	1,666,551	1,611,181	1,363,725	1,811,388
South Western	1,674,348	1,416,404	1,509,019	1,495,296
West Midlands	2,110,235	2,273,185	2,271,774	2,788,696
Mersey	1,016,055	974,966	868,299	881,187
North Western	1,469,480	1,306,521	1,504,003	1,761,767
Special Health Authorities	633,838	633,378	735,386	784,834

Expenditure on advertising by health authorities and National Health Services trusts

Region	*Expenditure 1994–95*[1] *£*
Northern and Yorkshire	3,597,713
Trent	3,327,513
Anglia and Oxford	4,263,608
North Thames	8,214,511
South Thames	6,398,960
South and West	4,080,457
West Midlands	3,355,466
North Western	3,310,769
Special Health Authorities	135,606

[1] Provisional.

Research

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money his Department has spent in each of the last 10 years and how much it estimates it will spend in the current year and each of the next three years on research *(a)* into the risk of transmission of the BSE agent from cattle to (i) humans and (ii) other primates, *(b)* into an early diagnostic test for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and *(c)* effective treatment for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [6188]

Mr. Horam: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. For information on the amount spent by the MRC on research, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology gave him on 18 December at columns *863–64*.

The Department of Health has recently funded a series of studies, at the Institute for Animal Health, Edinburgh, into time-temperatures combinations required to inactivate BSE and related agents. Total expenditure on the studies was £340,000.

The Department of Health and the Scottish Office jointly fund the National CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh. Set up in 1990, the unit monitors and investigates the epidemiology of the disease, paying particular attention to occupation and eating habits, so that any change in the pattern of CJD following the advent of BSE can be detected. The unit produces annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library. Funding for the unit by this Department since 1990 is given in the table.

The Government receive independent expert advice on matters relating to BSE and CJD from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, chaired by Professor John Pattison. The committee advises on research needs and priorities. The committee's latest report, "Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies—A Summary of Present Knowledge and Research", is available in the Library.

DH Funding of Surveillance of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

£ Thousand

Year	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*Total*
Surveillance	80	79	89	99	105	149	169	131	9	910
Neuropathology	154	102	59	62	74	114	122	126	129	942
Total	234	181	148	161	179	263	291	257	138	1,852

Notes:

1. Figures for 1998–99 are estimates of expenditure.
2. 1990–91 figure of £234,000 includes expenditure on capital equipment of £134,000.
3. 1995–96 figure of £263,000 includes expenditure on capital equipment of £35,000.
2. 1996–97 figure of £291,000 includes expenditure on capital equipment of £47,000.

Deparmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6384]

Mr. Horam: The available information is shown in the table.

Financial year	*Total overseas travel* *£*	*Total ministerial transport* *£*
1992–93	11,085	not available
1993–94	53,404	£280,536
1994–95	20,507	£281,174
1995–96[1]	45,000	£284,000

[1] Estimated.

Information is not available for 1991–92.

Expenditure on the other items is not collected in the format requested, but is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the annual report.

NHS Staff Earnings

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average earnings of *(a)* consultants, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* chief executives of trusts and health authorities in each year since 1989. [6240]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Benzodiazepine

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the individuals or organisations receiving Health Department research funds for projects investigating the effects of medium and long-term use of benzodiazepine tranquillisers; and if he will indicate the total moneys allocated, a brief description of research hypothesis, the length of time for research projects and the expected date of publication of research results for each project. [6325]

Mr. Bowis: None. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the guidance notes issued to health authorities and general practitioners regarding the prescription of benzodiazepine tranquillisers since 1985. [6326]

Mr. Bowis: Guidance on the prescribing of benzodiazepines was given to doctors by the Committee on Safety of Medicines in "Current Problems" No. 21 issued in January 1988; in the *British National Formulary*, a twice yearly publication which is issued free to all doctors; in "Drug Misuse and Dependence: Guidelines on Clinical Management" issued to all doctors in 1991; in "Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Benzodiazepine Dependence" published by the Mental Health Foundation, sent to all family health services authorities in March 1994; and in the MeReC bulletin issued to all doctors in October 1995. "The Health of the Nation" key area handbook, published in 1993, suggested that family health services authorities should agree with general practitioners local targets for reducing benzodiazepine prescriptions.

Computerised General Practices

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practices are computerised in the United Kingdom; and what assessment he has made of computerisation of general practices in the Netherlands. [6299]

Mr. Malone: The average of computerised general practices in the United Kingdom is estimated at 88 per cent. My Department has made no assessment of computerisation in the Netherlands.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6383]

Mr. Horam: The available information is shown in the table:

Financial year[1]	*Total staff cost* £	*Hospitality*[2] £
1992–93	1,083,758	31,164
1993–94	1,387,955	31,814
1994–95	1,525,940	22,567
1995–96[3]	1,525,074	17,787

Expenditure on the other items is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the Departmental report.

[1] Information is not available for 1990–91 or 1991–92.

[2] Expenditure on hospitality includes entertainment, alcoholic drinks and non-alcoholic drinks.

[3] Estimated.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his Department's estimate of the number of sufferers from myalgic encephalomyelitis in the United Kingdom in the last five years for which figures are available; [6897]

(2) how much his Department has spent on funding research into myalgic encephalomyelitis in each of the last five years; and how much is planned to be spent in each of the next five years. [6898]

Mr. Horam: The nature of myalgic encephalomyelitis—which is increasingly being referred to as chronic fatigue syndrome—is not fully understood or defined. Until this is resolved, it will not be possible to determine the number of sufferers from chronic fatigue syndrome nor commission research into the prevalence of the condition.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. During the past five years, the MRC funded a study at the Institute of Psychiatry at an estimated cost of £91,000 to investigate chronic fatigue in general practice attenders. The MRC is always willing to consider high-quality research proposals.

Meningitis

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out information held by his Department or on his behalf concerning the causes, frequency and locations of outbreaks of meningitis. [7370]

Mr. Horam: Outbreaks of meningitis are usually due to meningococcal infection. Two thirds of cases in the United Kingdom are from the group B meningococcal strain, one third from the group C strain. Outbreaks of the latter tend to occur more in closed or semi-closed communities, such as schools and military establishments. There are no known causes for outbreaks. They occur throughout the year, but the frequency increases over the winter months. There are approximately 2,000 notified cases of meningococcal infection—meningitis and septicaemia—each year. Some of the cases are sporadic; when more than one case occurs and there appears to be an epidemiolocical association between cases, there may be considered to be an outbreak. Information on the particular localities and number of notified cases of meningococcal infection is held by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and is published in the OPCS Monitor MB2 series, copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he has made within his Department, or by co-ordination between relevant authorities, for logging, analysing and indexing monthly, or annually, the number of cases when admission to hospital of seriously ill people is delayed by failure within given times to local suitable centres of treatment, length of journey, or combination of both. [7374]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities and national health service trusts should work together to plan and ensure that facilities are adequate to meet demand. In some areas emergency beds services will play a co-ordinating role in matching patients to beds. We would expect any incident where there is an unnecessary delay in the admission of a seriously ill patient to be thoroughly investigated by local management.

Psychiatrists

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary for Health how many *(a)* community-based and *(b)* hospital-based psychiatrists in the NHS (i) left the NHS and (ii) were appointed in each of the last five years. [7391]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement in respect of *(a)* morale and *(b)* recruitment of psychiatrists in the NHS. [7392]

Mr. Malone: Information about the morale of psychiatrists is not available centrally. We recognise that some of the psychiatry specialties, such as adult mental illness, have been experiencing difficulties in recruiting consultants. This matter is currently being given high priority by the specialist workforce advisory group, whose responsibility is to ensure an adequate number of doctors in higher specialist training in each specialty to meet likely future consultant opportunities.

Alternative Therapies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what alternative therapies are available on the NHS; and what steps he is taking to publicise their availability. [7705]

Mr. Horam: Homoeopathy has been an integral part of the national health service since its inception. NHS purchasers—district health authorities and general practitioner fundholders—have the freedom to purchase other forms of complementary medicine for their patients where they consider that is the most appropriate means of meeting assessed health needs of their local population. Like other forms of treatment—both orthodox and complementary—availability on the NHS and publicity of availability is a matter for local decision in the light of competing priorities against available resources.

Hospital Bed Availability

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date form KH03 on hospital bed availability was issued to NHS providers; and on what date completed returns have been requested. [7432]

Mr. Horam: The last KH03 form issued to providers was for 1994–95. Forms were sent to national health service trusts and other provider hospitals on 10 March 1995, and they were asked to send back completed forms to reach the Department of Health no later than 31 May 1995.

Forms for 1995–96 will be sent out in February-March 1996.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to publish in full the results of his Department's survey on bed availability among NHS providers collected on form KH03. [7431]

Mr. Horam: It is the policy of the Department of Health to publish the results of KH03 in full. The latest Publication of "Bed availability for England" contains figures for the financial year 1994–95. Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7568]

Mr. Horam: The Department has maintained an Internet world wide web site on the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency's open government WWW server since 20 June. It is amongst the most heavily used of the departmental home pages. The site includes details of the Department of Health strategic aims and objectives, national health service developments, research and development activities, departmental publications and events, progress on "The Health of the Nation" initiative and details of departmental public information phone lines. In addition, departmental press releases are available, as are links to departmental agencies. The period of update of the pages varies according to the information. For example, the text of departmental press releases is updated daily. A "What's New" page is available to help alert users to new amendments to the Department's home pages. The address of the Department's Internet site is http://www.open.gov.uk/doh/dhhome.htm and a feedback form facility is available. Details of departmental publications and their availability, as well as the full text of some departmental publications and information packs, can be downloaded. A departmental Internet mail box is under consideration.

Sheffield Hospitals

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have been closed or are to be closed in the Sheffield area; what sums are expected to be raised from the sales for development; how much of this will be returned to the successor hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [7594]

Mr. Horam: In the Sheffield area three hospitals have closed since 1990, including King Edward VII hospital, St. George's hospital and Fulwood hospital.

It is anticipated that, with the rationalisation programme of future health care provision, a further four hospitals may close wholly or in part; including Lodge Moor, Jessops, Middlewood and Nether Edge hospitals.

It is not possible at this time accurately to identify what sums are expected to be raised from the sales of those hospitals. However, the amount of reinvestment directed into health care services for Sheffield is expected to be substantially more than sale proceeds will realise.

Paediatric Intensive Care

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by his Department on implementing the plans made as a result of the review of intensive care for children undertaken by regional health authorities to achieve a national service; and if he will make a statement. [7326]

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities are responsible for implementing these plans through contracts with hospitals providing appropriate facilities. To assist, the Department is collaborating with the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, on research to identify the optimum size and distribution of a national network of paediatric intensive care units.

Workplace Injuries

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of workplace injuries, and other work-related medical complaints and deaths for each of the last 10 years. [7316]

Sir Paul Beresford: The table shows the total number of fatal and other injuries in all industries reported to all health and safety enforcing authorities between 1986–87 and 1994–95.

Comparable comprehensive figures for work-related medical complaints are not available. Many occupational diseases have long latency and the link with work may not be immediately obvious. The Health and Safety Executive obtains information on work-related diseases from a variety of sources and detailed discussion of these is included in its annual publication, "Health and Safety Statistics", copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House. However, global estimates for work-related ill health compiled by the HSE from the 1990 labour force survey pointed to some 2.2 million cases of work-related ill health.

Injuries reported to enforcing authorities 1986–87 to 1994–95[1]

	Fatal			Major injuries			Over three-day injuries	
Year	*Employees*	*Self Employed*	*Members of the public*	*Employees*	*Self employed*	*Members of the public*	*Employers*	*Self employed*
1986–87	355	52	92	20,695	690	14,575	159,011	1,029
1987–88	361	84	113	20,057	867	12,880	159,852	1,159
1988–89	[2]529	80	121	19,944	1,152	12,614	163,119	1,503
1989–90	370	105	[3]206	20,396	1,310	11,378	165,244	1,865
1990–91	346	87	139	19,896	1,326	9,981	160,811	2,077
1991–92	297	71	105	17,597	1,101	11,009	152,506	1,832
1992–93	276	63	113	16,938	1,115	10,669	141,147	2,136
1993–94	245	51	107	16,705	1,274	11,552	134,928	2,531
1994–95[1]	190	73	118	16,503	1,291	11,298	135,940	2,846

[1] Provisional.

[2] Data includes the 167 fatalities of the Piper Alpha disaster, 6 July 1988.

[3] Data includes the 95 fatalities to members of the public in the Hillsborough disaster, 15 April 1989.

HSE gets to know of virtually all workplace deaths. However, non-fatal injuries are subject to under reporting. HSE included a set of questions in the 1993–94 and the 1994–95 Labour Force Surveys (LFS) to establish the true levels of workplace injury. The results of the surveys show that just over 40 per cent. of non fatal injuries to employees are reported.

Sewers (Rodent Infestation)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent studies have been made concerning the volume of rodent infestation of sewers and its impact on public health. [7122]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

No national studies have been undertaken into the level of rats in sewers. However, all sewerage undertakers have programmes to control and reduce the number of rats in their systems. The scale of the problem of rat infestation is generally considered to be static or declining in some areas.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Citizens Charter Unit

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what criteria are used to measure the success of the citizens charter unit. [6896]

Mr. Willetts: The key criterion is improvement in the standards and responsiveness of public services. A full account of this is set out in "The Citizen's Charter: The Facts and Figures", Cm 2970.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the responsibilities of the citizens charter unit. [6894]

Mr. Willetts: The unit works with the Prime Minister's advisory panel on the citizens charter and aims to improve the standard and responsiveness of public services. Its main tasks are:

(i) promoting use of Charters.quality improvement through workshops, conferences, support to local Charter Quality Networks, Charter News;

(ii) advising services on Charters;

(iii) running the annual Charter Mark awards scheme and associated Charter Mark nomination scheme;

(iv) monitoring and reporting progress through the Charter White Paper and other means.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost to public funds in each financial year since its establishment of the citizens charter unit. [6893]

Mr. Willetts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *634*.

"Charter News"

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the cost per issue of *(a)* the production and *(b)* the distribution of "Charter News" since its inception. [6895]

Mr. Willetts: The average production cost for issues 1 to 9 of "Charter News" was £43,632.14. The average distribution cost for issues 1 to 8 was £28,823.14. The distribution cost for issue 9 is not yet available.

Private Finance Initative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5714]

Mr. Freeman: Costs incurred by the Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service, HMSO and Central Office of Information directly identifiable to PFI administration are negligible. The Department is undertaking a procurement exercise for the upgrade of the Government's metropolitan telecommunications service, for which overall project development and procurement costs are estimated at around £250,000, and private finance options are being considered.

Local Government Enforcement Review

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action the Government are taking in response to the local government enforcement review published last year. [7952]

Mr. Freeman: The then President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for the Environment commissioned the local government enforcement review on 17 January 1994. Its remit was to look at the scope for improving co-ordination and reducing inconsistencies in the way legislation is enforced by local authorities. This follows concerns about burdens on business raised by the business deregulation task forces chaired by Lord Sainsbury.

The report of the review team was published on 30 September 1994. It identified examples of existing best practice which might be more widely adopted by local authorities, including means of making enforcement more transparent, providing guidance, and encouraging flexibility. Relevant organisations including local authorities, business and professional bodies were consulted. Some 150 replies were received and carefully considered. There was broad support for the report's recommendations.

The Government's conclusions in response to the review are as follows:

> The Government welcome the fact that the local authority associations have responded to the review by commissioning the production of a guide to good practice in local authority enforcement, accepting many of the recommendations of the review including the setting and publishing of clear and fair enforcement policies and complaints procedure; communicating effectively with business about requirements imposed by legislation; and involving business in the enforcement process generally, in a spirit of co-operation designed to reduce the need for heavy-handed enforcement. Work on the guide is underway, and the Government look forward to final publication with great interest.
>
> The Government agree that the review's recommendation that local authority officials be consulted at an early stage about proposed new EC laws which will have an impact on local authority enforcement. The Government accept that this should also be the practice for United Kingdom legislation—as it frequently is. Local business partnerships, which promote a dialogue between business and enforcement officers, have an important part to play by extending this consultation process to the business community who ultimately have to fulfil the requirements of the legislation.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, which received Royal Assent after the local government enforcement review was published, takes the review's recommendations further in two areas:

> Section 5 of the Act enables Ministers to introduce into existing legislation requirements which the review proposed as good practice. This includes a requirement for enforcement officers to provide a *written* explanation of any remedial action suggested, what action is necessary and why with a chance to make representation, and to provide details of the mechanisms for appealing against the enforcement action.
>
> Section 6 of the Act provides for the introduction of a model appeals mechanism which will be available for take-up by Departments, which should provide a quicker, simpler and less expensive way for business to challenge decisions when other means of resolving the difference of views have been exhausted.

The review also made recommendations concerning co-ordination by different local enforcement departments of inspection visits they make on business. These were echoed by similar recommendations in the September 1995 deregulation task force report, which have been accepted by Ministers. The Cabinet Office deregulation unit will discuss with central Government Departments and with enforcers how best these recommendations might be taken forward.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Lord President of the Council what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5859]

Mr. Newton: The information is as follows:

	£
1991–92	146,000
1992–93	151,000
1993–94	158,000
1994–95	167,000
1995–96[1]	101,000

[1] To date.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Construction and Engineering Courses

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many colleges of further education in the United Kingdom have facilities for students who wish to pursue vocational qualifications in construction and engineering at N/SVQ levels 2 and 3; [6074]

(2) what measures are being taken to safeguard those who wish to pursue lifetime learning in construction and engineering at local colleges of further education. [6072]

Mr. Paice: Information on the number of further education colleges in the United Kingdom which provide courses in construction and engineering is not held centrally. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible only for further education in England.

Details of the type of provision available in further education colleges in England are matters for the Further Education Funding Council. I am therefore asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which bodies will be involved in the investigation into allegations of misinformation concerning the grant maintained ballot at Hurworth school; what are their terms of reference; and how much the investigation will cost. [5778]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* My officials have written to the chairman of the governing body of Hurworth school and the local education authority inviting their comments on the allegations. This is in accordance with normal departmental procedures. As with all other such investigations, officials will review the evidence submitted taking account of any other available information. The costs of the investigation to the Department will largely depend on the time spent by the officials concerned as part of their normal duties and cannot readily be identified.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many complaints about disinformation she has received in connection with ballots on grant-maintained status; how many such complaints she has investigated; how many of the complaints investigated have been upheld; and how much, in total, investigations into such complaints have cost. [5779]

Mrs. Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* My Department receives a considerable volume of correspondence about ballots on grant-maintained status, and information on the number of letters complaining about misinformation is not available. Since the implementation in January 1994 of section 31(1)(g) of the Education Act 1993, my Department has received complaints of misinformation leading to a formal investigation concerning 35 ballots. Of the completed cases, two complaints relating to misinformation have been upheld and the ballots—one of which resulted in a yes vote, and in one a no vote—were declared void. The costs of such investigations to the Department largely depend on the time spent by the officials concerned as part of their normal duties and cannot readily be identified.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in respect of each school which has been the subject of a formal inquiry by her Department into the running of its ballot on opt-out status, in which instances was *(a)* a letter sent by her to the local hon. Member informing them of the setting up of the inquiry, *(b)* was the letter also released to the press and *(c)* did the letter contain references to the hon. Member's spouse or child. [5937]

Mrs. Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* In the case of Hurworth school in Durham, serious allegations had been made in the press relating to its ballot for grant-maintained status, and it was reported that the head teacher of the school had written to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) expressing his concern. In the light of these circumstances, I considered it appropriate to write to the hon. Member as I did.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in respect of each school which has been the subject of a formal inquiry by her Department into the running of its ballot on opt-out status, in which cases the setting up of the inquiry also announced in a press release; how long the inquiry took; and how was the outcome of the inquiry was made public. [5939]

Mrs. Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The available information indicates that inquiries into ballots on grant-maintained status have been announced in press releases relating to the following schools:

Eastwood School, Nottinghamshire
George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire
Grangefield School, Cleveland
Laisterdyke Middle School, Bradford
Abbs Cross School, Havering
Sacred Heart High School, Hammersmith and Fulham
George Tomlinson School, Bolton
Canon Slade School, Bolton
All Saints Schools, Sheffield
Rutlish School, Merton
St. Thomas Becket School, Knowsley
Codsall High School, Stafordshire
Great Wyrley High School, Staffordshire
Calday Grange Grammar School, Wirral
Wirral Grammar School for Boys, Wirral
Hurworth School, Durham.

The investigation into the ballot at Hurworth school continues. Information on the length of previous inquiries and how the outcomes were made public is not readily available.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the total cost so far to her Department of the decision to hold an inquiry into the ballot at Hurworth school. [5935]

Mrs. Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The cost to my Department of the decision to hold an inquiry into the ballot at Hurworth school cannot readily be identified because the work has been undertaken by a number of officials as part of their normal duties.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list each school which has been the subject of a formal inquiry by her Department into the running of its ballot on opt-out status, and in each case indicating *(a)* who or what prompted her Department to launch a formal inquiry, *(b)* what had been the result of the ballot into which the inquiry was held and *(c)* what was the outcome of the inquiry, *(d)* what was the parliamentary constituency of the schools. [5936]

Mrs. Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The following table shows such information as is readily available:

GM ballots investigated

LEA	*School*	*Ballot*	*Constituency*	*Complainent*	*Outcome of enquiry*
Ballot Irregularity Cases					
Norfolk	Acle High School	Yes vote	Mid Norfolk	LEA School	Ballot results upheld
Walsall	Aldridge County High School	No vote	Aldridge-Brownhills	Local Councillor	Ballot result upheld
Northumberland	Astley County High School	Yes vote	Blyth Valley	Registered electors school	Ballot result upheld
Lancashire	The Baines School	Yes vote	Wyre	LEA	Ballot result upheld

GM ballots investigated

LEA	*School*	*Ballot*	*Constituency*	*Complainent*	*Outcome of enquiry*
Kirklees	Boothroyd Junior and Infants	No vote	Dewsbury	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Wirral	Calday Grange Grammar School	Yes vote	Wirral West	LEA	Ballot result declared void
Bedfordshire	Cardinal Newman School	No vote	Luton North	Other organisation	Ballot result declared void
Bolton	Crompton Fold County Primary	Yes vote.	Bolton North-East	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Surrey	de Stafford County Secondary	Yes vote	Surrey East	LEA	Ballot results upheld
Kirklees	Deighton School	Yes vote	Huddersfield	LEA	Ballot result declared void
Derbyshire	Derby Moor School	No vote	Derby South	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Kent	Edenbridge Middle School	Yes vote	Sevenoaks	LEA	Ballot result declared void
Oldham	Failsworth School	No vote	Oldham West	Parents	Ballot results upheld
Birmingham	George Dixon School	Yes vote	Birmingham-Edgbaston	LEA	Ballot results upheld
Greenwich	Hawksmoor School	Yes vote	Woolwich	LEA another local school	Ballot results upheld
Kent	Hextable School	No vote	Sevenoaks	LEA	Ballot result declared void
Waltham Forest	Highams Park School	Yes vote	Chingford	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Cambridgeshire	Jack Hunt, Peterborough School	Yes vote	Peterborough	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Wiltshire	Kingsdown County Secondary	Yes vote	Devizes	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Bromley	Langley Park School	Yes vote	Beckenham	Parents	Ballot results upheld
Leicestershire	Manor High School	No vote	Harborough	Parent	Ballot result upheld
Calderdale	Moorside Junior School	No vote	Halifax	LEA	Ballot result declared void
Birmingham	Ninestiles	Yes vote	Sparkrook	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Hillingdon	Oak Farm Junior and Infant School	Yes vote	Uxbridge	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Bury	Peel Brow County Primary	Yes vote	Bury North	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Gloucestershire	Picklenash School	Yes vote	Gloucestershire West	Parents	Ballot result upheld
Calderdale	Ryburn Valley High School	No vote	Calder Valley	Other organisation	Ballot result upheld
Hampshire	St. Joseph's RC Primary School	Yes vote	Aldershot	Parent	Ballot result upheld
Kirklees	St. Patrick's Catholic Primary	No vote	Huddersfield	Parent	School told to hold ballot
Humberside	Waltham Toll Bar	No vote	Brigg and Cleethorpes	MP	Ballot result upheld
Rochdale	Wardle High School	Yes vote	Littlebrgh and Saddleworth	Parent LEA	Ballot result upheld
Dudley	Windsor High School	Yes vote	Halesowen and Stourbridge	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Misinformed Cases					
Lancashire	Ashleigh Primary School	Yes vote	Rossendale and Darwin	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Liverpool	Blue Coat School	No vote	Liverpool Mossley Hill	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Kent	Brockhill Park	Yes vote	Folkestone and Hythe	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Surrey	Burpham County Primary	Yes Vote	Guildford	LEA and Parent	Ballot result upheld
Derbyshire	Chinley Primary	Yes vote	High Peak	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Staffordshire	Christ Church Middle	No vote	Stafford	Other organisation Parent	Ballot result declared void
Staffordshire	Christ Church Middle—2nd Ballot	No vote	Stafford	Parent and LEA	Ballot result upheld
Staffordshire	Anglesey	Yes vote	Burton	LEA	Ballot results declared void.
Liverpool	Croxteth Community Comp	No vote	Liverpool West Derby	School Parent	Ballot result upheld
Devon	Devonport High School	Yes vote	Plymouth Drake	Other organisation, Parent	Ballot result upheld
Somerset	Enmore Primary School	Yes vote	Bridgewater	Parent	Ballot result upheld.
Kent	Gravesend Grammar	Yes vote	Gravesend	LEA	Ballot result upheld

GM ballots investigated

LEA	*School*	*Ballot*	*Constituency*	*Complainent*	*Outcome of enquiry*
Ham and Fulham	Holy Cross	No vote	Fulham	School and Councillors	Ballot result upheld
Liverpool	King David	Yes vote	Liverpool Broad Green	LEA and Parent	Ballot result upheld
Lancashire	Longridge School	Yes vote	Ribble Valley	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Avon	Merrywood Girls School	No vote	Bristol South	Other organisation MP	Ballot result upheld
Leicestershire	New Parks Comm College	No vote	Leicester West	Parent	Ballot result upheld
Berkshire	Prospect School	Yes vote	Reading West	LEA Councillors	Ballot result upheld
Derbyshire	Ripley Mill Hill School	Yes vote	Amber Valley	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Essex	Rochford Primary	Yes vote	Rochford	Parents	Ballot result upheld
Manchester	St. Kentigems	Yes vote	Manchester–Gorton	LEA	Ballot result upheld
Buckinghamshire	Two Mile Ash	Yes vote	Milton Keynes North East	Other organisation	Ballot result upheld
Tameside	Two Trees High School	No Vote	Denton and Reddish	School Parent	Ballot result upheld
Waltham Forest	Whitefields School and Centre	Yes vote	Chingford	LEA Parent other LEAS	Ballot result upheld
Ballots currently under investigation					
Staffordshire	Anglesey (2nd Ballot)	Yes vote	Burton	LEA	Under consideration
Lancashire	Beltham Primary School	Yes vote	Blackburn	LEA	Under consideration
Tower Hamlets	Bethnal Green High School	No vote	Bethnal Green and Stepney	Parent	Under consideration
Shropshire	Castlefields	No vote	Ludlow	Parent	Under consideration
Wiltshire	Herod Parkway	No vote	Swindon	Parent and MP	Under consideration
Durham	Hurworh School	No vote	Sedgefield	Arose from press articles	Under consideration
Berkshire	Lynch Hill School	Yes vote	Slough	LEA	Under consideration
Essex	The Manningtree School	Yes vote	Colchester North	LEA—Parents Electors,	Under consideration
Devon	South Dartmoor Community College	No vote	Teignbridge	Parents LEA Governors	Under consideration
Staffordshire	St. Benedict Biscop	Yes vote	South Staffordshire	LEA	Under consideration
Warwickshire	Stockingford First School	Yes vote	Nuneaton	LEA	Under consideration
Warwickshire	Stockingford Middle School	Yes vote	Nuneaton	LEA	Under consideration

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will arrange for all press releases and letters to hon. Members relating to every school which has been the subject of a formal inquiry by her Department into the running of its ballot on opt-out status to be placed in the Library. [5932]

Mrs. Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Press releases which have been issued by my Department relating to inquiries into the running of ballots on grant-maintained status have been placed in the Library. Letters to hon. Members concerning school ballots on grant-maintained status are between my Department and the hon. Member concerned.

Dangerous Weapons

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines her Department has issued to schools regarding pupils found with dangerous or offensive weapons while attending school. [6981]

Mr. Robin Squire: None on this specific subject, but in May 1994 the Department issued guidance on a whole range of issues relating generally to pupil behaviour and discipline in the "Pupils with Problems" series of circulars.

Student Support

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial assistance is available to students registered for full-time courses required to attend only to retake an examination and not eligible for *(a)* a student loan, *(b)* a grant or *(c)* income support, and who cannot register as unemployed. [6335]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Students required to attend full time remain eligible for grant, student loan and access fund payments. Those required to attend part time are able to take part-time employment. Vulnerable students, such as lone parents and the disabled, retain their right to state benefits whether they are attending full time or part time.

Part-time Teachers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number of part-time teachers in each of the past three years. [7012]

Mr. Robin Squire: The numbers of part-time qualified teachers serving in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools sector in England were as follows:

January 1993: 54,900
January 1994: 57,300
January 1995: 59,400.

Teachers in sixth form colleges, pupil referral units, unattached special units and teachers providing education other than in schools are excluded throughout.

Learning Credits

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans her Department has to introduce learning credits for post 16-year-olds; when it intends to implement them; and what funding mechanism it intends to use. [6960]

Mr. Paice: The Government remain attracted in principle to the idea of learning credits for all 16 to 19-year-olds but recognise that their introduction would have significant practical implications. Comments have been invited on the Coopers and Lybrand study of learning credits which has published alongside the second Competitiveness White Paper, "Forging Ahead", in May.

We are now considering how best to develop the idea of learning credits further in the context of the Department's wider programme, set out in the White Paper, to improve education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Pupil: teacher Ratios

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the average pupil:teacher ratio for each year since 1992; and if she will make a statement on the average pupil:teacher ratio forecast for the year 1996. [7011]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table. Information on the 1996 overall pupil:teacher ratio will be available in April 1996.

Overall pupil:teacher ratio[1] in schools[2] in England 1992–95 position in January each year

Year	Including sixth form colleges	Excluding sixth form colleges
1992	17.4	—
1993	17.7	17.8
1994	—	18.1
1995	—	18.3

[1] Including the full-time equivalent of part-time teachers and counting part-time pupils as 0.5 FTEs.

[2] Maintained nursery,primary and secondary schools.

Enterprise Allowances

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost of the enterprise allowance initiative in each of the years since its introduction. [6978]

Mr. Paice: The enterprise allowance scheme was introduced in 1982. Its successor, from 1991, was the business start-up programme.

The information requested is given in the following table:

Year	Cost £ million
1982–83	2.4
1983–84	23.2
1984–85	80.1
1985–86	108.4
1986–87	149.7
1987–88	200.7
1988–89	196.7
1989–90	170.9
1990–91	133.1
1991–92	161.8
1992–93	149.2
1993–94	123.3

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have benefited, and how many businesses have been generated by the enterprise allowance since its inception. [6979]

Mr. Paice: A total of 565,700 people joined the enterprise allowance scheme between 1982–83 and 1990–91 and 162,800 joined its successor, business start-up, between 1991–92 and 1994–95. In 1994–95 the budget for the programme was absorbed by the single regeneration budget.

The number of businesses generated is lower than the number of people in the programme because not all grants were made to sole proprietors.

Greenbank Project, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the timing of European social fund payments to the Greenbank project, Liverpool. [7158]

Mr. Forth: The Greenbank project submitted claims for three projects in 1994. The payments were issued on the following dates:

		Date
940892UK1	First advance	25 October 1994
	Second advance	3 April 1995
	Interim payment	13 December 1995
940912UK1	First advance	9 December 1994
	Second advance	3 April 1995
	Interim payment	8 December 1995
940913UK1	First advance	10 March 1995
	Second advance	10 March 1995

The Department has issued first advances for two of the three projects submitted by Greenbank in 1995.

		Date
950992UK1	First advance	2 October 1995
950993UK1	First advance	25 August 1995

The third project—950991UK1—will receive its first advance once the Department has received a public match funding certificate. The Government have not yet received sufficient second advanced claims from objective 1 projects in 1995 for the second advance payment to be drawn down from the European Commission.

European Social Fund

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations she has received in 1995 about payments to voluntary organisations from the European social fund; and if she will make a statement. [7124]

Mr. Forth: There have been 60 recorded representations from or on behalf of voluntary organisations made to the Department in 1995, about payment delays and the European social fund payment process. Payment delays have been caused by a series of difficulties arising from the late signing of the 1994–96 programme and from the interpretation of the new 1993 ESF regulations.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what work her Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to small and medium enterprises' needs. [6631]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Department has produced a purchasing manual which deals with all aspects of procurement, including purchasing from small and medium enterprises.

In addition, staff follow central guidance such as the best practice guides, issued by the central unit on procurement, and other recommendations, as in "An Efficiency Unit Scrutiny: The Government's Use of External Consultants", to keep documentation issued as simple and user-friendly as is practicable.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what meetings her Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6632]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Department was represented at a meeting with the CBI small firm panel, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of Private Business held on 27 September 1995 to review tendering procedures.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice has been given to procurement staff on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6633]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* All staff involved in procurement have been issued with a purchasing manual which deals with all aspects of procurement including purchasing from small and medium enterprises.

Procurement staff also have copies of guidance issued by the central unit on procurement which has issued a series of best practice guides, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress her Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6714]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* A contact telephone number for the purchasing co-ordinating unit of the former Employment Department is given in "Tendering for Government Contracts", a copy of which is available in the Library. That contact remains extant.

Access to Work

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the budget for the access to work programme in each region of Britain in the current financial year. [7164]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* I have been asked to reply.

The regional distribution of resources is a matter for the Employment Service to manage as an agency. The Employment Service allocates and monitors resources so as to achieve the most effective use of the money available.

Teacher Recruitment (Priority Subjects)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money will be available to trainee teachers under the new priority subject recruitment scheme for 1996–97; and how this money will be allocated to individual students. [7333]

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of £1.4 million has been retained in the bursary scheme to cover students in the second year of two-year courses in England and Wales. In 1996–97 £7.869 million will be available under the new priority subject recruitment scheme in England, administered by the Teacher Training Agency. I have asked the chairman of the TTA to write with details of the allocation arrangements. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales will be administering a similar initiative in Wales in 1996–97.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much funding has been made available in bursaries to trainee teachers in priority subjects since the commencement of the scheme; and what subjects have been covered. [7334]

Mr. Squire: By the end of the current financial year some £67 million will have been made available since the start of the scheme in 1986–87. The following subjects have been included at some time in the course of the scheme: chemistry, physics, biology, technology, mathematics, modern foreign languages and Welsh.

Nursery Education Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many nursery vouchers will be issued to parents in respect of three terms of nursery education; and how many vouchers in total will be issued in *(a)* the pilot phase of the scheme and *(b)* in the first year of national implementation of the schemes. [7345]

Mr. Robin Squire: In each phase, every eligible parent of a four-year-old child will receive vouchers for a maximum of three terms of nursery education, concluding with the term before the child attains compulsory school age. Parents will receive one voucher for each term.

Teacher Training

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the target intake and *(b)* the actual intake to teacher training courses, in each subject area, in each year since 1989. [7342]

Mr. Robin Squire: Intake targets, and the actual intakes, for initial teacher training courses for each year since 1989 are given in the following table:

ITT target and actual intake in each subject area since 1989

		England and Wales					England	
		1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]
Primary	Target	11,124	12,229	12,660	13,070	13,937	12,990	12,115
	Actual	12,814	14,331	16,263	18,364	15,775	13,713	13,601
Secondary								
Art	Target	420	475	520	530	725	810	825
	Actual	454	475	616	629	703	751	818
History	Target	335	380	455	475	605	790	780
	Actual	390	491	596	633	669	915	898
Music	Target	317	478	500	500	485	580	585
	Actual	282	341	403	459	461	490	564
RE	Target	371	388	405	405	421	500	510
	Actual	298	252	338	371	367	441	497
English	Target	908	925	1,125	1,130	1,362	1,710	1,832
	Actual	963	1,103	1,341	1,437	1,465	1,804	1,928
Modern Language	Target	1,032	1,376	1,380	1,380	1,665	2,060	2,092
	Actual	821	1,032	1,343	1,459	1,542	1,772	1,806
Geography	Target	353	392	420	420	560	645	700
	Actual	327	342	456	520	599	618	696
Maths	Target	1,533	1,727	1,715	1,715	1,755	2,230	2,267
	Actual	1,139	1,091	1,549	1,787	1,769	1,930	1,832
Science	Target	1,752	2,061	2,040	2,040	2,615	3,200	3,402
	Actual	1,607	1,651	2,279	2,269	2,373	2,860	2,809
Technology	Target	1,840	1,811	1,745	1,735	2,119	2,360	2,312
	Actual	1,314	1,379	1,975	2,311	1,991	2,064	1,860
PE	Target	883	723	750	750	1,156	1,255	1,250
	Actual	1,001	933	1,130	1,204	1,074	1,273	1,305
Other	Target	319	279	220	220	500	460	445
	Actual	349	376	505	542	481	327	360
All Secondary	Target	10,063	11,015	11,275	11,300	13,968	16,600	17,000
	Actual	8,943	9,464	12,529	13,619	13,491	15,245	15,373
Total	Target	21,187	23,244	23,935	24,370	27,905	29,590	29,115
	Actual	21,757	23,795	28,792	31,983	29,266	28,958	28,974

English includes Drama

Technology includes Business Studies and Home Economics.

"Other" includes Classics, Economics and Social Sciences.

[1] Figures for 1995–96 are provisional.

Private Sector Loans

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how the savings in 1996–97 resulting from the delay in the introduction of subsidised private sector loans will now be accounted for in the budget of the Department for Education and Employment. [7382]

Mr. Forth: The postponement of the introduction of private loans will mean that the resultant savings will not be made in 1996–97. The Government will be considering what, if any, steps need to be taken as a consequence in the light of expenditure plans for 1996–97 as a whole. The Department's estimate for 1996–97 will provide for expenditure on student loans.

Education Outside School

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children between the ages of five and 16 years receive their education outside school; and what percentage of the total five to 16-year-old population this figure represents. [7651]

Mr. Robin Squire: As of January 1995, a total of some 17,650 children between the ages of five and 16 years were receiving education "otherwise than at school" provided by local education authorities. Of that number, some 9,170 were registered at pupil referral units. The figure of 17,650 represents approximately 0.24 per cent. of the total of five to 16-year-old population in England.

ENVIRONMENT

Queens Square Hotel, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what account was taken of the impact the hotel element of the Queens square development, Liverpool, on the position of the existing hotels; how many beds *(a)* will be provided and *(b)* jobs created; how much Government grant was provided; what capacity of rooms is expected; what will be the average room rate; and if he will list the projects which were turned down following the funding provided for the hotel development; [5171]

(2) what consultation, took place with existing hoteliers and Liverpool businesses before embarking on the Liverpool Queens square hotel development; what assessment he has made of *(a)* the extent of discussions with the local community and *(b)* the effect of subsidies to surrounding infrastructure development on the competitiveness of the new hotel. [5172]

Mr. Gummer: The proposal for a new hotel, as part of the overall development of Queens square, is a key element of Liverpool city challenge's action plan, which has been subject to consultation with a wide range of interests.

An application for funding has been submitted by the developers to English Partnerships and EP is seeking European funding from the European regional development fund under the objective 1 programme. No decision has yet been taken by either. The package is being appraised in the normal way both by EP and the objective 1 secretariat to determine costs, benefits and value for money.

Structural Funding (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the objective 1 money allocated for tourism and related purposes in Liverpool has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* designated; and what remains. [5117]

Mr. Gummer: Allocations in the objective 1 programme cover the whole of Meseyside. The total allocation to support the cultural, media and leisure industries—driver 4—is approximately £42 million, of which £2.4 million has been committed in offer letters. Projects seeking a further £15.5 million are under consideration. Within driver 4, some £10 million is allocated specifically to support the development of visitor attractions. Of this, £887,000 has been committed in offer letters; projects seeking a further £9 million are under consideration.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department spent on official hospitality in 1994–95 and the financial year to date; and what is the 1995–96 projected budget for official hospitality. [5591]

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1994–95 the cost of hospitality, which is included in the running cost budget for my Department, was £121,000. Figures for the financial year to date are £63,000.

The projected budget for 1995–96 is £114,000.

Pipeline Link (Yorkshire Water)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the cost of constructing a mains pipeline link into the Yorkshire Water area from an adjacent water authority area. [6431]

Mr. Clappison: The cost of such a pipeline would depend on the length, the type of terrain to be crossed and whether there are suitable water treatment facilities to process the water. Yorkshire Water announced a new programme on 13 December, estimated to cost around £50 million and to be completed by early next summer, to provide some 35 miles of new pipeline and five new pumping stations to create a new east-west link from the Yorkshire grid near Selby to the major conurbations of West Yorkshire.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6567]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not kept in the required format and is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Research Studies (Wearside)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all Department of Environment funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1989 involving the residents of *(a)* the City of Sunderland, *(b)* Wearside district and *(c)* the Sunderland travel-to-work area identifying (i) title, summary and duration of the pilot-trial, (ii) target population and total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot, trial or research finding was published and date of publication; and if he will give details of all other non-Department of the Environment research bodies or other organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [6306]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on this range of activities is not held centrally, either by the Department of the Environment or the Government office for the north-east.

The only information held centrally by the Department of the Environment relates to statistical surveys and is shown in the table. The Department has carried out a number of national surveys since 1989, in which residents of the Sunderland-Wearside area may have been selected to take part. However, the Department does not have a central record of the residence of all persons participating in these surveys.

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Location*	*Researchers*	*Number of respondents and target population*
Ventilation in homes	To evaluate the effectiveness of building regulations	October 1993. Results available March 1994	Cambridge, Cotswold, East Devon, Luton, Rushcliffe, Sunderland, Wakefield and Walsall	PAS	250 owner-occupiers of modern homes
Energy monitoring of low energy multi-residential student accommodation	To assess behaviour in building related to energy efficiency and attitude to energy issues	Early summer 1995. Results available late summer 1995	Linacre college, Oxford and Sunderland university	Wimpey environmental Ltd.	100 students

Water Grid

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the likely cost of constructing a water grid in Great Britain. [6420]

Mr. Clappison: The National Rivers Authority's discussion document "Water Resources Development Strategy" estimates that the capital cost of a water grid to meet additional demands of 2,000 ml/d would be several billion pounds.

Telephone Helplines

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial support Government give through *(a)* the standard spending assessments, *(b)* the rate support grant and *(c)* other means to local authorities to fund rape crisis or sexual assault telephone helplines; and which authorities receive such funding. [6433]

Sir Paul Beresford: As part of the safer cities initiative, we provide grant direct to a number of voluntary bodies and other organisations for the provision of rape crisis or sexual assault telephone helplines.

Standing spending assessments are made in relation to the major groups of services. They do not distinguish such detailed provision as telephone helplines. Revenue support grant is based on the total of SSAs, without distinction between services. It is for authorities to decide how much of their revenue from RSG and other sources they will spend on such telephone helplines. The Department has no information on authorities' expenditure on these services.

Discharge Consents (Appeals)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals have been lodged by water companies against National Rivers Authority consents; if he will list each appeal; and how long each appeal has been on file. [6048]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Since 1990, water companies have lodged a total of 1,854 appeals against NRA discharge consents. Following clarification of policy issues arising in the appeals, the NRA has been reviewing the consents in question with the water industry. As a result, over 700 appeals have now been satisfactorily resolved and work is continuing to deal with the remaining cases as expeditiously as possible. I am placing the information requested in the Library of the House.

Air Pollution (London)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information was received by his Department concerning air pollution levels in London between 8 and 11 December; and if he will make a statement. [6479]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Department of the Environment receives information on hourly concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, fine particles—PM10—carbon monoxide, ozone, benzene and 1, 3–butadiene from its data dissemination unit at the national environmental technology centre, Culham, Oxfordshire. This information is also made available on the Internet. Information on hourly levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and ozone, described as "very good", "good", "poor" or "very poor", together with a forecast for the following day, is made available on Ceefax, Teletext and a range of other media.

Between 8 and 11 December "poor" air quality was forecast for London. "Poor" air quality then occurred for nitrogen dioxide for a period of eight hours at the Department's automatic monitoring site at Cromwell road and for two hours at Earls Court. One hour of "poor" sulphur dioxide occurred at Bexley. There were no forecasts or occurrences of "very poor" air quality.

Repossessions

Mr. Jim Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of schemes to assist home owners threatened with repossession by banks and building societies. [7004]

Mr. Clappison: Mortgage lenders are pursuing a range of initiatives designed to help borrowers in difficulty and to avoid unnecessary repossessions. The success of Government policies in securing sustainable economic growth, increased employment opportunities and low interest rates means fewer people are likely to get into difficulties with their mortgage payments and those in arrears are more likely to be able to pay them off.

Do-it-yourself Shared Ownership Programme

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation was undertaken with housing associations before amendments were made to the eligibility criteria of the do-it-yourself shared ownership programme in respect of private tenants; what account was taken of the practice of housing associations in respect of their policy towards applications from private tenants when their quotas were filled; and what action his Department intends to take to help those private tenants who have *(a)* signed agreements with housing associations, *(b)* given notice to their present landlords and *(c)* paid for valuation fees, mortgage offers or local authority searches who were subsequently informed that their agreements have been cancelled. [6910]

Mr. Clappison: Housing associations were not consulted about our decision, as part of the Budget settlement for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme, to direct the whole of the DIYSO programme at housing association and local authority tenants from April 1996, to ensure that for every successful DIYSO applicant a social letting would be released for another family in housing need.

We have asked the Housing Corporation to honour any firm pre-commitments it has made on the DIYSO programme. My officials are considering with the corporation what procedures should be adopted by housing associations to protect private sector tenants who have been accepted onto the DIYSO scheme.

Homelessness

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of individuals registered as being homeless in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region and *(c)* each local authority in each year since 1979; and what was the percentage change on the previous year. [7000]

Mr. Clappison: I have today placed in the Library tables giving the figures for, and percentage changes in, the numbers of households for which each local authority in England reported it had accepted responsibility to secure accommodation, under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 in the years 1979 to 1994.

The table also gives regional and England totals, which include estimates for missing data.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation for homeless persons for the last five years; and if he will provide a breakdown by *(a)* region and *(b)* local authority. [7001]

Mr. Clappison: The net costs of housing homeless households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation are reported by local authorities in England on their revenue outturn returns.

I have today placed in the Library a table giving the reported information for the years 1990–91, the first year in which this information was collected on the revenue outturn return, to 1993–94.

Data on local authorities' expenditure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation are also published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in its annual "Homelessness Statistics Actuals" publication. Copies of these publications, which are available for all years since 1989–90, are in the Library.

Water Conservation

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of customers' willingness to respond to appeals to save water since privatisation. [6675]

Mr. Clappison: The issues of demand and consumption management are being considered as part of the longer-term review of water resource management announced by my right hon. Friend on 1 September this year.

Rented Accommodation (Expenditure)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much he is spending on the rental of accommodation in *(a)* London and *(b)* Greater Manchester. [7002]

Mr. Clappison: My Department's spend on the rental of accommodation includes:

(a) £231.4 million per annum in Central London; and

(b) £16.1 million per annum within the old Greater Manchester boundary,

both sums being inclusive of VAT.

New Forest Heritage Area

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be able to make an announcement on the extent of the New Forest heritage area. [6984]

Sir Paul Beresford: In his answer of 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *767–69*, announcing that the same planning policies as apply to a national park will apply to the wider New Forest heritage area, my right hon. Friend, the former Minister for the Environment and Countryside, said that the boundary of the heritage area would emerge from the current local plan process. The preparation and adoption of local plans is the responsibility of the statutory local planning authorities.

I understand that the relevant New Forest district local plans defining the New Forest heritage area boundary were adopted recently, but that an area of land north of Totton and to the east of the Totton western bypass is proposed by the district council in the deposited New Forest district local plan to be included in the heritage area. This proposal will be considered in the context of the emerging New Forest district-wide local plan.

Rivers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of rivers in England is in good or fair condition and what is the European average. [7005]

Mr. Clappison: The recent Dobris report prepared by the European Environment Agency on the state of the pan-European environment includes estimates of the percentage of river length in various European countries which, on the basis of the definitions given in the report, can be described as of good or fair quality. These definitions do not necessarily correspond to those used in individual countries.

The report includes data in respect of 12 European Union countries, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, and 10 other European states. The table provides a comparison, as a percentage of river length, between the data for England and Wales and, respectively, the average for the European Union countries and for all the countries for which data are provided.

	Good	*Fair*
England and Wales	65	23
European Union	43	36
All countries	34	43

Rented Housing

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make additional resources available for the provision of affordable housing for rent. [7003]

Mr. Clappison: Over the next three years, 1996–97 to 1998–99, we estimate that public resources and private finance will provide an average each year of around 60,000 new social lettings for rent and shared ownership reflecting our estimate of need.

Wearmouth Colliery (Regeneration)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his definition of suitable regeneration use in respect of the Wearmouth colliery site in Sunderland. [7155]

Sir Paul Beresford: Urban development corporations can reclaim land for a wide variety of uses, subject to their general object of securing the regeneration of their areas. The phase 2 scheme at Wearmouth colliery is expected to be taken forward on the basis of offers of interest from the private sector, and it is not appropriate at this stage to predetermine what uses might be the most suitable for the site.

Enterprise Allowances

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) in how many regions of the United Kingdom enterprise allowances are currently available through training with enterprise councils; [6996]

(2) in how many TEC areas enterprise allowances are currently available. [6977]

Sir Paul Beresford: The enterprise allowance scheme is no longer available.

Since 1 April 1995, support for new businesses is one of the objectives of the SRB challenge fund, which is available throughout England. Some 80,000 new business start-ups are forecast to be supported over the lifetime of schemes approved in the first and second challenge fund bidding rounds. These new business-start-ups will take place in all regions in England.

Training and enterprise councils may also provide additional support for enterprise and the expanding network of business links will give access to practical advice and guidance for new and growing businesses.

Workplace Accidents

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the accident, work-related medical complaint and death rates for workplaces where the work force was *(a)* represented by a trade union in collective bargaining and *(b)* not represented by a trade union, for each of the last 10 years. [7203]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive does not collect the information in the form requested. However, the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985, RIDDOR, require work-related deaths, certain injuries and cases of occupational disease to be reported to the enforcing authority for the purposes of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The table gives the overall rates for injuries reported under RIDDOR for each of the years since the regulations came into force on 1 April 1986.

Based on the global estimates for work-related ill health compiled by HSE from the 1990 labour force survey, which pointed to some 2.2 million cases of work-related ill health, it is estimated that work-related illness may affect some 6 per cent. of the adult population.

Injury rates (per 100,000 workers) as reported to enforcing authorities 1986–87 to 1994–95[1]

	Fatal		*Major injuries*		*Over three-day injuries*	
	Employees	*Self employed*	*Employees*	*Self employed*	*Employees*	*Self employed*
1986–87	1.7	2.0	99.1	26.9	761.1	40.1
1987–88	1.7	3.0	94.0	31.0	748.90	41.40
1988–89	[2]2.4	2.7	91.4	39.4	747.7	51.4
1989–90	1.7	3.3	91.8	41.2	743.4	58.6
1990–91	1.6	2.7	89.9	41.2	726.5	64.5
1991–92	1.4	2.3	81.7	35.9	708.5	59.8
1992–93	1.3	2.0	80.4	36.1	670.0	69.1
1993–94	1.2	1.6	79.3	40.7	640.4	80.5
1994–95[1]	0.9	2.2	78.2	39.8	644.5	87.6

[1] Provisional.

[2] Data includes the 167 fatalities of the Piper Alpha disaster, 6 July 1988.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his assessment of *(a)* the number of employers discouraging employees from reporting workplace accidents and *(b)* the effect of such discouragement on industrial accident statistics collected by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [7314]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available to make such an assessment.

Whatley Stone Quarry

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the plan to double the output of Whatley stone quarry on the immediate environment, the City of Bath's hot springs and on the water supply to Bristol; and if he will make a statement. [7332]

Sir Paul Beresford: Two planning applications for the proposed extension of Whatley quarry were the subject of a public inquiry in the spring of 1992, at which their environmental effects, including those on the Bath hot springs and the water supply to Bristol were considered. The planning applications were subsequently refused by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. A revised planning application for a smaller extension to the quarry is now before my right hon. Friend for him to decide whether to call it in for his own determination following another public inquiry. His decision will be made shortly.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received about plans to increase the size of Whatley stone quarry in Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [7341]

Sir Paul Beresford: A planning application for the extension of Whatley quarry is currently before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for him to decide whether it should be called in for his own determination following a public inquiry. We have received over 500 representations about the proposal from the local authorities, organisations and individuals. Many are objecting to the application or requesting that it be called in; others request that it be left to Somerset county council as planning authority to determine.

Hedgerows

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will publish their consultation paper on the draft regulations to protect important hedgerows as provided for by section 97 of the Environment Act 1995; what is the delay in the production of hedgerow evaluation criteria by ADAS; and when he expects the final regulations to be implemented. [7075]

Mr. Clappison: The hedgerow evaluation criteria, which are being developed by ADAS under a research contract, will be an integral feature of the consultation paper on the draft regulations to protect important hedgerows. Production has been delayed by several factors associated with our aim to introduce a scheme which is fair, workable and practical. For example, additional effort was devoted to testing the criteria on a large number of hedgerows of different types. ADAS was asked to undertake more detailed analysis of the data that resulted from this field trial and survey. The consultation paper will be produced following publication of the ADAS research report. It remains our aim to introduce the hedgerow protection scheme by July 1996.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of hedgerow loss between January 1995 and January 1996. [7071]

Mr. Clappison: The results of the last hedgerows survey commissioned by the Department were announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) on 21 July 1994. These indicated a net loss, as a result of both removal and change in management, of 18,100 km of hedges per year in England and Wales during 1990–93. No further research into hedgerow loss has been undertaken.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the original timetable for the production of hedgerow evaluation criteria by ADAS; what is now the timetable; and if he will make a statement. [7146]

Mr. Clappison: The original research contract was due to end on 8 August 1995. This has since been extended to 29 February 1996.

Negative Equity

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage of home buyers in each of the past five years experiencing negative equity in England. [7247]

Mr. Clappison: Estimates of negative equity are sensitive to underlying assumptions such as changes in house prices. Using the Department's house price index, it is estimated that, in each of the last five years, the percentage of households in England buying their home with a mortgage who experienced negative equity was as follows:

1990: 3 per cent.

1991: 6 per cent.

1992: 10 per cent.

1993: 11 per cent.

1994: 8 per cent.

Average Rents

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average rent in *(a)* local authority, *(b)* housing association and *(c)* private sector accommodation in each year since 1979 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms. [7242]

Mr. Clappison: The available information is given in the tables.

Average rents in England, 1979–80 to 1994–95
(i) Cash

£ per week

Financial year	*Local authority rents*	*Calendar year*[1]	*Housing association rents*[2]	*Private sector rents*[2]
1979–80	6.49	1979	n/a	n/a
1980–81	8.19	1980	n/a	n/a
1981–82	11.53	1981	n/a	n/a
1982–83	13.58	1982	n/a	n/a
1983–84	14.03	1983	n/a	n/a
1984–85	14.79	1984	16	16
1985–86	15.63	1985	17	18
1986–87	16.48	1986	20	23
1987–88	17.40	1987	24	26
1988–89	19.01	1988	23	29
1989–90	20.86	1989	22	31
1990–91	23.92	1990	27	43
1991–92	27.59	1991	30	51
1992–93	30.84	1992	37	55
1993–94	33.70	1993	38	68
1994–95	35.79	1994–95	43	69

[1] The Family Expenditure Survey changed from a calendar to a financial year basis in 1994.

[2] These figures are from the Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling variability. They cover all types of tenancy, i.e. both assured and non-assured tenancies.

(ii) Real terms (1994–95 prices)[1]

Financial year	*Local authority rents*	*Calendar year*[2]	*Housing association rents*[3]	*Private sector rents*[3]
1979–80	16.22	1979	n/a	n/a
1980–81	17.30	1980	n/a	n/a
1981–82	22.20	1981	n/a	n/a
1982–83	24.41	1982	n/a	n/a
1983–84	24.10	1983	n/a	n/a
1984–85	24.19	1984	26	27
1985–86	24.24	1985	26	29
1986–87	24.81	1986	31	34
1987–88	24.87	1987	35	38
1988–89	25.47	1988	32	40
1989–90	26.12	1989	29	40
1990–91	27.73	1990	32	50
1991–92	30.10	1991	33	57
1992–93	32.34	1992	39	58
1993–94	34.33	1993	39	69
1994–95	35.79	1994–95	43	69

[1] Real terms figures are cash figures adjusted for inflation as measured by the GDP market prices deflator.

[2] The Family Expenditure Survey changed from a calendar to a financial year basis in 1994.

[3] These figures are from the Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling variability. They cover all types of tenancy, i.e. both assured and non-assured tenancies.

Health and Safety

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which organisations he consulted about changes to the guidance on health and safety enforcement practice; and if he will make a statement; [7243]

(2) when he issued his proposals on health and safety enforcement practice for consultation under section 3(1) of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994; and if he will make a statement. [7244]

Sir Paul Beresford: Guidance on arrangements for the enforcement of health and safety at work is a matter for the Health and Safety Commission. The commission has drawn up statutory guidance under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, which reflects the enforcement principles of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. In so doing the Commission has sought the views of local authorities through the Health and Safety Executive local authority enforcement liaison committee and the deregulation task force. I understand that the commission plans to issue the guidance early next year. It will be reflected in instructions to Health and Safety Executive inspectors.

Police Authorities (Standard Spending Assessments)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is, for each police authority in England and Wales, the proposed standard spending assessment for 1996–97 and the standard spending assessment set for 1995–96 and each of the previous five years. [7275]

Sir Paul Beresford: The total standard spending assessments of police authorities in England are given in table 1. SSAs for police authorities in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

In non-metropolitan counties before 1995–96, the element of the SSAs relating to police formed part of the SSA for the county council. The police elements of the SSAs for all authorities are given in table 2.

Table 1: Total standard spending assessments[1] (SSAs) for police authorities

£ million

Police authority	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996—97*[2]
City of London	41.625	42.683	44.490	48.307	69.888	65.873	62.146
Metropolitan Police	632.132	697.623	750.134	783.503	813.137	736.737	743.791
Greater Manchester Police	114.059	125.715	144.294	150.493	157.194	164.724	170.674
Merseyside Police	76.806	84.448	97.596	101.870	106.323	108.325	109.231
South Yorkshire Police	48.861	53.800	62.880	65.646	68.558	74.173	77.184
Northumbria Police	58.132	63.987	74.897	78.204	82.049	90.780	94.334
West Midlands Police	112.329	124.362	143.595	149.870	156.545	166.072	171.747
West Yorkshire Police	86.473	95.826	110.489	115.606	120.675	126.306	130.468
Avon and Somerset Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	74.669	77.406
Devon and Cornwall Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	73.793	76.349
Hampshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	85.057	87.197
Sussex Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	73.436	75.315
Thames Valley Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	97.053	100.877
West Mercia Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	49.634	51.882
Bedfordshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27.861	28.589
Cambridgeshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31.593	33.090
Cheshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	46.851	48.982
Cleveland Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	35.606	36.544
Cumbria Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27.241	28.456
Derbyshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	44.524	46.150
Dorset Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31.619	32.348
Durham Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	34.286	35.673
Essex Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	73.969	75.593
Gloucestershire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	28.427	29.227
Hertfordshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	43.794	44.635
Humberside Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	49.433	51.467
Kent Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	79.504	81.637
Lancashire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	78.370	81.489
Leicestershire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.433	47.456
Lincolnshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	28.005	29.170
Norfolk Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	35.797	37.795
Northamptonshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27.981	29.079
North Yorkshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33.560	34.767
Nottinghamshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	55.734	57.752
Staffordshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	51.044	54.281
Suffolk Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	29.414	30.700
Surrey Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	40.778	41.054
Warwickshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24.063	24.547
Wiltshire Police	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	29.613	30.277

[1] The total SSA is made up from elements for police, interest receipts, net costs of financing capital expenditure and boundary changes. For the City of London the total SSA also includes the elements for Education, Personal Social Services, Highway Maintenance, and All Other Services. For the Metropolitan Police the total SSA also includes allowances for Probation and Magistrates' Courts and School Crossing Patrols.

[2] Proposed.

n/a = not available

Table 2: Police elements of SSA

£ million

Police authority	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*[2]1996—97*
City of London	17.983	20.639	23.187	26.570	29.690	26.772	26.141
Metropolitan Police	613.875	676.931	729.511	761.712	791.008	701.446	707.299
Greater Manchester Police	115.636	126.349	144.376	149.884	156.167	163.283	169.412
Merseyside Police	77.791	84.622	97.563	101.359	105.608	107.231	108.232
South Yorkshire Police	49.279	53.967	62.838	65.282	68.019	73.418	76.443
Northumbria Police	58.132	63.939	74.676	77.581	80.833	89.262	92.687
West Midlands Police	113.021	124.080	143.090	148.656	154.888	163.619	169.443
West Yorkshire Police	87.025	95.027	109.774	114.045	118.825	124.155	128.520
Avon and Somerset Police[1]	50.802	55.443	63.999	66.488	69.276	73.454	76.055
Devon and Cornwall Police[1]	47.095	51.537	60.702	63.064	65.707	73.082	75.706
Hampshire Police[1]	54.289	59.904	71.551	75.453	79.133	84.418	86.626
Sussex Police[1]	50.826	56.093	60.753	64.003	67.155	72.712	74.543

Table 2: Police elements of SSA

£ million

Police authority	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*[2]1996—97*
Thames Valley Police[1]	63.248	70.893	85.179	90.574	95.202	96.078	99.744
West Mercia Police[1]	32.947	36.416	42.562	44.218	46.071	48.779	51.154
Bedfordshire Police	18.039	20.238	25.127	26.498	27.790	27.679	28.357
Cambridgeshire Police	19.824	21.691	26.516	27.547	28.702	31.295	32.824
Cheshire Police	30.911	33.986	39.805	41.353	43.087	46.465	48.708
Cleveland Police	24.640	27.037	31.139	32.350	33.706	35.314	36.290
Cumbria Police	19.129	21.151	24.609	25.566	26.638	27.007	28.253
Derbyshire Police	29.670	32.276	38.354	39.846	41.516	43.990	45.604
Dorset Police	20.801	22.879	26.993	28.043	29.218	31.109	31.891
Durham Police	22.753	24.751	28.796	29.917	31.171	33.905	35.297
Essex Police	49.255	54.851	64.662	67.767	71.273	73.103	74.640
Gloucestershire Police	19.262	20.953	24.546	25.501	26.570	28.062	28.860
Hertfordshire Police	29.917	32.973	38.803	40.290	42.413	43.466	44.352
Humberside Police	32.963	36.128	42.168	43.809	45.645	48.947	50.972
Kent Police	51.544	57.435	68.381	72.419	76.389	78,976	81.005
Lancashire Police	52.506	57.873	66.943	69.547	72.462	77.487	80.669
Leicestershire Police	29.124	32.636	38.416	39.910	41.583	44.646	46.644
Lincolnshire Police	19.576	21.547	25.002	25.975	27.064	27.600	28.757
Norfolk Police	22.538	25.345	29.978	31.144	32.450	35.557	37.586
Northamptonshire Police	18.550	20.539	24.671	25.630	26.705	27.734	28.850
North Yorkshire Police	22.886	25.345	29.398	30.541	31.821	33.270	34.395
Nottinghamshire Police	38.358	42.194	48.595	50.485	52.894	54.772	56.700
Staffordshire Police	36.207	39.638	45.921	47.707	49.707	50.507	53.753
Suffolk Police	19.626	21.673	25.562	26.557	27.670	29.191	30.519
Surrey Police	30.103	33.255	39.239	40.503	42.834	40.274	40.492
Warwickshire Police	16.415	18.451	21.520	22.443	23.384	23.711	24.188
Wiltshire Police	17.954	21.115	26.495	27.763	28.927	29.223	29.860

[1] The figures for the years up to and including 1994–95 have been derived by adding the police SSA elements for the constituent authorities.

[2] Figures between years are not strictly comparable because of minor changes in function and boundary changes

Krypton Gas

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what inquiries are being made into the climatic effects of krypton gas being released into the atmosphere as a result of uranium reprocessing. [7254]

Mr. Clappison: I am not aware of any inquiries in progress at present. In 1993, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution published a report, entitled "A Review of the Potential Effects of the Release of Krypton-85", which had been prepared for it by the university of Manchester institute of science and technology. This confirmed the conclusion of an earlier study, commissioned by British Nuclear Fuels from Imperial college, London, that the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield would have insignificant effects on cloud microphysics.

Waste Regulations

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made on the revision of waste regulations. [7807]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is currently working on a number of measures in the waste management field, which are at various stages of development. We have been concerned about the implications of implementing these proposals for local waste regulation authorities, including those affected by local government reorganisation, and for the new environment agencies which take over the waste regulation function on 1 April.

In order to avoid overloading regulators with change during this busy transitional period, and to help to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibilities, we envisage a progressive timetable for these new measures. Against this background, the Government have also decided to provide a further extension to 30 September of the transitional arrangements for trade effluent treatment plants, further to the extension introduced last August which expires on 1 April. The proposals are as follows:

Proposed new Special Waste Regulations, published for consultation last March, are intended to be made and laid before Parliament by 1 April, which will come into force in the summer.

Regulations to extend until 30 September current transitional arrangements for effluent treatment plant which will be made in the New Year, which will come into force before 1 April. Proposed changes to requirements concerning technical competence may also be included, subject to consultation.

Measures to extend and amend waste management licensing exemptions for composting, and sewage/water treatment plant and possibly other activities will be proposed in the Spring, with a view to their coming into operation by 1 October.

Measures to extend waste management controls to certain types of agricultural and mining and quarrying waste; and provisions about consulting and compensating those with rights in land adjoining waste facilities, will also be proposed later in the year, with a view to these taking effect by the end of the year.

Local Authority Housing Stock

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage more local authorities to transfer their housing stock to alternative landlords. [4875]

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply 19 December 1995, c. 1327]:* I have today issued bidding guidance to enable authorities to bid for resources from a challenge fund to improve the remaining poor-quality council estates. The name of the fund is the estates renewal challenge fund.

The estates renewal challenge fund is worth more than £300 million over the next three years and will help improve the remaining poor quality estates by speeding their transfer to housing associations and other new landlords.

The money will be available to meet a wide range of costs associated with transfer and I want all local authorities to consider this option as part of their housing strategy. Transfers, which would go ahead only if both councils and tenants wanted them, can bring real benefits to tenants living in the worst conditions where there is the greatest need for investment.

I will be placing copies of the guidance in the Libraries of both Houses.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people paid tax at marginal rates of 50 per cent. and above, broken down *(a)* into 10 per cent. bands and *(b)* by family type in (i) 1988 and (ii) the latest date available. [7187]

Mr. Jack: Nobody has had a marginal rate of income tax of 50 per cent. or above since 1988.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was raised by the 1p on the basic rate of income tax in each year since 1985. [5500]

Mr. Jack: Information for years 1985–86 to 1993–94 is available in table 4.5 of the Autumn Statement. Information for later years is available in table 6 of the tax ready reckoner. Copies of these are available in the Library.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update, to take account of the 1995 Budget, the information on tax changes contained in his answer of 21 October 1986, *Official Report*, columns *812–14*, and indicate separately the effects of the 1995 Budget on each of these levels. [4513]

Mr. Jack: Readily available information on the annual reduction in income tax liability for 1996–97 compared with the 1978–79 indexed regime is given in the table. This comparison is hypothetical since if an indexed version of the 1978–79 tax regime had prevailed over the last 18 years the income base would not have grown in the way it has. The effect of changes in mortgage interest relief cannot be included in the analysis because most mortgage interest relief is given at source and therefore is not recorded on individual tax records.

Table A: Average reduction in income tax per individual[1] in 1996–97 compared with the 1978–79 indexed regime

Range of individual's income in 1996–97 (£)	*Number of individuals 1996–97[1] (million)*	*Total reduction (£ million)*	*Average reduction (£ per annum)*
Under 5,000	2.6	380	150
5,000 to 10,000	8.0	3,100	390
10,000 to 15,000	6.0	4,900	810
15,000 to 20,000	4.2	5,200	1,240
20,000 to 30,000	4.1	7,300	1,790
30,000 to 50,000	1.7	4,700	2,780
50,000 to 80,000	0.4	3,000	7,420
Over 80,000	0.2	9,700	47,200
Total	27.2	38,300	1,410

[1] Individuals liable to income tax under the 1978-79 indexed regime.

In contrast to these hypothetical figures, table B shows how the share of income tax actually paid by high-income groups has risen since 1979, while the share of the income tax burden borne by low-income tax payers has fallen.

Table B: Calculation using the income base for each year

Per cent.

Quantile group of taxpayers	*1978–79*	*1996–97*
Top 1	11	17
Top 5	24	34
Top 10	35	45
Bottom 50	18	13
All taxpayers	100	100

Motability

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the measures he has taken to prevent the Motability scheme from being used for tax evasion purposes. [5095]

Mr. Jack: I cannot comment on a particular body or organisation's tax affairs.

Value Added Tax (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue was raised from *(a)* VAT and *(b)* income tax in Wales in 1994–95; and what is his estimate for revenue from *(a)* and *(b)* for 1996–97. [5955]

Mr. Jack: Consumer spending in Wales on goods and services subject to VAT is a little under 5 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. On this basis, VAT in Wales was about £1.8 billion in 1993–94 and £2 billion in 1994–95. The income tax liability for residents of Wales was around £2.3 billion in 1993–94, excluding the impact of mortgage interest relief at source. Estimates are not available for later years.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6573]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Newspaper advertising is not distinguishable from other types of advertising. The total expenditure is as follows:

Year	£
Treasury	
1992–93	286,538
1993–94	281,330
1994–95	302,814
1995–96[1]	108,097
Paymaster	
1993–94	6,777
1994–95	51,017
1995–96[1]	6,289
Central statistical office	
1990–91	69,000
1991–92	113,100
1992–93	125,100
1993–94	123,000
1994–95	92,983
1995–96[1]	172,442
Royal mint	
1992–93	254,635
1993–94	411,331
1994–95	296,580
1995–96[2]	869,758
Valuation office	
1991–92	1,900
1992–93	1,200
1993–94	3,800
1994–95	8,000
1995–96[2]	13,000

[1] To end November.

[2] Estimated.

Sale of shares in BT and the electricity generating companies

1992–93: £0

1993–94: £12 million

1994–95: £8 million

1995–96 (estimate): £0.

The non-departmental public bodies have reported no spending on advertising in any of these three years.

Disposable Incomes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each member state of the European Union the level of net disposable income per head in constant 1995 prices for the last available three years. [6001]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Information on the net disposable income per head at constant 1995 prices is not available. Information on disposable income per head is published in the Eurostat publication "National Accounts ESA, Detailed tables by sector, Volume 1, Non-financial transactions, 1982–1993" which is available in the Library.

The ESA term gross disposable income corresponds to personal disposable income in the United Kingdom national accounts.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6396]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Expenditure for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other departmental Ministers is shown in the table:

	Overseas travel and accommodation £	*Cars and chauffeuring* £	*Domestic travel and accommodation* £
1991–92[1]	66,444	—	2,185
1992–93[1]	49,005	—	1,725
1993–94	77,266	284,694	4,268
1994–95	67,335	283,518	2,564
1995–96[2]	43,785	192,569	1,142

[1] The cost of chauffeur-driven cars was centrally accounted for and the costs for the Ministers' cars are indistinguishable from other officials' cars.

[2] To end November.

Departmental spending on ministerial security *(c)* forms an indistinguishable part of the Department's overall security budget.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6395]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Figures for running the departmental office of the Chancellor are given in the table.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93* £	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[4]
Telephone[1]	4,391	3,391	5,154	13,303	13,661	8,727
Staff costs	345,907	387,921	424,805	475,078	461,577	283,414

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93* £	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[4]
Press[2]	468,125	503,474	493,517	600,761	591,192	383,607
Other[3]	98,498	178,738	142,844	211,025	196,426	96,502

[1] The increase in costs between 1992–93 and 1993–94 largely reflects the delegation of the costs of the Reuters service.

[2] Press and Communications have been defined as the running costs of the Press Office.

[3] Figures for entertainment and drinks are not separately identifiable and have been included in Other.

[4] To end November.

Stationery costs are centrally funded.

Figures for refurbishment are not readily available but are included as part of the running cost expenditure shown in the departmental annual report.

This table does not include the Chancellor's car, as this cost is not distinguishable from the other Ministers' cars.

Family Expenditure Survey

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of those in households *(a)* responding to the family expenditure survey of 1994–95 and *(b)* completing census forms in 1991 were (i) aged 75 to 84 years, (ii) aged 85 years or older, (iii) long-term sick and/or because of handicap limited in their activities, (iv) sharing household with others in the same dwelling, (v) homeless and (vi) unemployed for six months or more. [6799]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information for (iv), (v) and (vi) is not available from either the family expenditure survey or the 1991 census. Information for (iii) is not available from the FES of 1994–95.

(a) Percentage of those in households responding to the family expenditure survey of 1994–95

(i) aged 5 to 84 years: 4.5

(ii) aged 85 years or older: 1.1

(b) Percentage of those in households completing census forms in 1991

(i) aged 75 to 84 years: 5.5

(ii) aged 85 years or older: 1.5

(iii) long term sick and/or because of handicap limited in their activities: 12.2

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the disposable household income at April 1995 prices of *(a)* the poorest decile group, *(b)* the poorest quintile group, *(c)* the average household, *(d)* the richest quintile group and *(e)* the richest decile group in the family expenditure surveys of (i) 1965, (ii) 1970, (iii) 1980, (iv) 1990 and (v) 1994–95. [6800]

Mrs. Knight: Data from the family expenditure survey are given in current prices.

Information from the 1980 FES may be found for category *(c)* in table 44, and for categories *(a)*, *(b)*, *(d)* and *(e)* in table 47 of the 1980 FES report.

Information from the 1990 FES may be found for category *(c)* in table 31, and for categories *(a)*, *(b)*, *(d)* and *(e)* in table 25 of the 1990 FES report.

Information from the 1994–95 FES may be found for category *(c)* in table 8.1, and for categories *(b)* and *(d)* in table 8.3 of the 1994–95 FES report. Average weekly disposable household income of category *(a)* was £60.41, and of category *(e)* was £800.66.

All these reports may be found in the House of Commons Library.

Information from the 1965 and 1970 family expenditure surveys could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to Tables 4.1 and 10.4, how many one adult and two adult retired households participating in the family expenditure survey for 1994–95 received income from *(a)* state pensions and/or income support only, *(b)* state pensions and occupational pensions, *(c)* state pensions and personal pensions, *(d)* state pensions, occupational pensions and personal pensions and *(e)* none of these sources, by gross income decile group. [6798]

Mrs. Knight: Pursuant to tables 4.1 and 10.4 in the report on the 1994–95 family expenditure survey, in each gross income decile group, over 90 per cent. of one adult and two adult retired households received income from category *(b)* state pensions and occupational pensions, category *(c)* state pensions and personal pensions and category *(d)* state pensions, occupational pensions and personal pensions. In each gross income decile group, less than 5 per cent. of one adult and two adult retired households received income from category *(a)* state pensions and/or income support only, and category *(e)* none of these sources.

Labour Statistics

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change between 1992 and 1995, in absolute terms and as a percentage of the work force, in *(a)* full-time permanent employment, *(b)* part-time permanent employment, *(c)* temporary employment, *(d)* full-time self-employment and *(e)* part-time self-employment. [6913]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The requested information is shown in the following table.

Employees in Great Britain[1]

	Change—Summer 1992 to Summer 1995 Thousands	*Per cent.*
Full-time permanent	–126	–1
Part-time permanent	205	5
Temporary	339	25

Employees in Great Britain[1]

	Change—Summer 1992 to Summer 1995 Thousands	Per cent.
Full-time self-employed	21	1
Part-time self-employed	74	13

Source:
Labour Force Survey, CSO.

[1] Not seasonally adjusted.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the extended life of the private finance panel and the provision of grant in aid. [7953]

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has agreed that the life of the private finance panel be extended to 30 September 1997. Grant in aid to meet the running costs of the private finance panel executive, which provides administrative and other assistance to the panel, will be sought in estimates for Her Majesty's Treasury's vote, class XVI, vote 1.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter of comfort to be provided to financial institutions and other participants in consortia participating in the private finance initiative to cover business expectations beyond the public sector contracting cycle. [2821]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* I know of no such general letter of comfort and have no plans to issue one. Particular contracts may provide for possible extension of the contract beyond the period initially planned, although in general there will be competitive benefits if the original supplier is not guaranteed to recover the original investment. I would like to draw the hon. Member's attention to the case studies, which discuss optimum contract length, in chapter 4 of the private finance guidance handbook "Private Opportunity, Public benefit", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Small and Medium Enterprise

Mr. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the outcome of his Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice; [6671]

(2) what progress his Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison and relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise related public procurement initiatives. [6721]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Treasury set up a central purchasing unit five years ago to deal with all matters relating to the procurement of goods and services within the Department. This follows advice on good procurement practice issued by the central unit of procurement and acts as a focal point for all suppliers' business inquiries irrespective of the size of supplier.

Manufacturing Employees

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs in manufacturing were lost between *(a)* the first quarter of 1974 and the second quarter of 1979 and *(b)* the second quarter of 1979 and the present day. [7032]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Employees in Great Britain (seasonally adjusted) (net change—thousands)

	June 1974–June 1979	June 1979–October 1995
Standard Industrial Classification 1980 Divisions 2, 3 and 4	–609	—
Standard Industrial Classification 1992 Section D	—	–2,761

Source:
CSO.

Housing Authorities (Loan Books)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the decision to sell the loan books of the Housing Corporation, Scottish Homes and Tai Cymru was made; and for what reasons it was not included in the Red Book expenditure tables. [6929]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The decision to sell the loan books was taken alongside other public expenditure decisions announced in the Budget. Allowance for the sales was made in the Red Book expenditure tables.

Benefits-in-kind

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultation the Inland Revenue has had with the chairmen of non-departmental public bodies concerning revenue investigations into the value of benefits-in-kind, executive car leasing and other prerequisites. [6818]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* I am not aware of any such consultations. But, as part of its general tax compliance programme, the Inland Revenue may seek to satisfy itself that all benefits that are taxable on directors and employees have been disclosed.

Landfill Levy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the two rates at which the landfill levy will be applied were arrived at; and if he will make a statement. [6889]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The different rates of landfill tax for inactive and other wastes reflect the different effects on the environment caused by landfilling these different types of waste.

Commemorative Coins

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government plan to issue any new commemorative coins. [7769]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that a Crown be issued in 1997 with new obverse and reverse designs to mark the 50th anniversary of the wedding of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

It is not intended that these coins should go into general circulation although the coins will be available at most banks and post offices for £5 and special collectors' versions will be issued in precious metal and base metal. The coins will not be issued to the public until 1997.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for *(a)* each standard region of the United Kingdom and for *(b)* the United Kingdom, all inward investment projects published (i) during 1994 and (ii) since January 1995, indicating (1) the number of jobs committed and (2) the amount of gross investment, where published, expressed in pounds sterling at constant prices. [7040]

Mr. Oppenheim: A record number of inward investment projects were notified to the Invest in Britain Bureau in the financial year 1994–95. The regional breakdown of this is as follows.

Table A: 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995

Region	*Number of projects*	*Total jobs (created/ safeguarded)*
East	12	2,462
East Midlands	44	11,670
North-east	41	15,281
Northern Ireland	23	5,259
North-west	53	7,494
Scotland	81	10,795
South-east	40	18,195
South-west	21	2,093
Wales	51	5,235
West Midlands	62	12,266
Yorkshire and Humberside	25	6,274
Total	453	91,394

Table B: 1 April 1995 to 18 December 1995

Region	*Number of projects*	*Total jobs (created/ safeguarded)*
East	2	400
East Midlands	4	353
North East	11	1,095
Northern Ireland	4	237
North West	13	1,276
Scotland	21	2,592
South East	23	10,439
South West	4	1,648
Wales	13	2,215
West Midlands	24	3,613
Yorkshire and Humberside	23	4,394
London[1]	1	150
N/S[2]	2	210
Total	145	28,622

[1] Figures for London are now separate from those of the South East.

[2] Not specified—project will create or safeguard jobs in more than a Single region.

Capital expenditure is not quoted in the preceding tables. This is because the information is not always made available to the Invest in Britain Bureau by the investor. Figures in table (B) should be taken only as indicative, as there is often a delay between a project announcement and official notification reaching the IBB.

IBB figures are based on numbers of projects notified to the IBB at the time of the decision to invest. Companies are under no obligation to notify their investment decisions and the figures take no account of subsequent developments.

New Companies

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many new companies in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland have registered in each of the past seven years; and if he will provide a breakdown by sector. [7245]

Mr. Oppenheim: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Companies House under its chief executive Mr. David Durham. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Andrew Welsh, dated 20 December 1995:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade for information on the registration of new companies. The President has asked me to deal with your request, as I have responsibility as Chief Executive and Registrar of Companies.

We are able to give you separate figures for the seven years for Scotland and Northern Ireland, but only a combined figure for England and Wales. We are not sure what you mean by "breakdown by sector". If you are referring to industry type, this information could be gathered from our database, but the exercise would be extremely time consuming and would not be economically viable.

New Companies Incorporated

Financial year	*England/Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*
1994–95	124,800	7,100	1,053
1993–94	109,000	6,400	955
1992–93	102,700	6,100	891
1991–92	105,400	6,600	1,075
1990–91	108,700	6,800	1,103
1989–90	119,300	7,000	1,186
1988–89	128,100	6,900	1,067

The statistics for England/Wales and Scotland are taken from DTI report "Companies in 1994–95": statistics for Northern Ireland are provided by the Information Unit, NI Registry.

I hope this information is helpful.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in his Department in each of the last three years. [5561]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Expenditure on furnishing and decorating ministerial offices in each of the last three years is included in the running cost expenditure of my department, which is published in the annual report.

Export Credits Guarantees

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of export credits guarantees in each of the past five years; and if he will provide a breakdown by sector. [7267]

Mr. Oppenheim: The figures requested are as follows:

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Civil	1,318	1,442	1,881	1,507	1,325
Defence	640	276	1,591	1,973	543
Aerospace	342	377	330	606	1,137
Total	2,300	2,095	3,802	4,086	3,005

These figures relate to guarantees issued for project capital goods only. They do not include guarantees for short-term credits by ECGD's insurance service group prior to privatisation in 1991, nor do they include contracts covered under ECGD reinsurance treaties.

Shipyards

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, how many shipyards were operational in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland in each of the past 10 years. [7276]

Mr. Eggar: The following table gives the numbers of operational United Kingdom shipyards known to the Department, and building merchant ships of 100 gross tonnes or more, over the past six years.

Year	*Number*
1990	25
1991	19
1992	19
1993	16
1994	14
1995	13

Information for earlier years and by country could be produced only at disproportionate costs.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were, in 1995 prices, the construction costs of each of the advanced gas-cooled reactor nuclear power stations currently scheduled for privatisation. [7060]

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the notes on tangible fixed assets on pages 55 and 65 of the report and accounts of Nuclear Electric 1994–95 and pages 49 and 56 of the report and accounts of Scottish Nuclear 1994–95, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the amount of the nuclear levy spent on the AGR stations currently scheduled for privatisation for each year of operation. [7059]

Mr. Eggar: Income from the fossil fuel levy forms part of Nuclear Electric's total income; the uses to which this income has been put are a commercial matter for the company.

Foreign Investment

Mr. Booth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the estimated figures for foreign investment into the United Kingdom for each year since 1979; and what equivalent figures his Department compiled in respect of *(a)* Germany and *(b)* France for the same period. [5893]

Mr. Oppenheim: Data on foreign direct investment into the United Kingdom, Germany and France are regularly published in "International Direct Investment Statistics Yearbook, OECD", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Data from this source are currently available for the years 1981 to 1993. Definitions of foreign direct investment differ from country to country.

Inward direct investment flow figures into the selected countries 1981–93

Year	*UK $bn*	*Germany $bn*	*France $bn*
1981	5.9	0.3	2.4
1982	5.3	0.8	1.6
1983	5.1	1.8	1.6
1984	-0.2	0.6	2.2
1985	5.8	0.6	2.2
1986	8.6	1.2	2.7
1987	15.5	1.9	4.6
1988	21.4	1.2	7.2
1989	30.4	7.1	9.6
1990	32.9	2.5	9.0
1991	15.8	4.2	11.1
1992	16.4	2.5	15.9
1993	14.5	0.5	12.1

Notes:

1. Flow figures are volatile and fluctuate year to year in part due to the cyclical nature of reinvested profits and the lumpiness of merger and acquisition activity.

2. The definition of direct investment differ between countries.

Source:

"International Direct Investment Statistics Yearbook, OECD," editions 1993 and 1995.

British Coal

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when British Coal sold CINMan; what was the total number of bidders; which bid was successful; and what criteria were used to make the choice. [6740]

Mr. Page: These are matters for British Coal as vendor.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the sale on CINMan by British Coal; and if he will indicate where the advertisements were placed. [6739]

Mr. Page: These are matters for British Coal. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mineworkers' Pension Scheme

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the latest valuation of the *(a)* mineworkers' pension scheme and *(b)* the staff superannuation fund; how many trustees of the scheme there are including the chairperson; who is the sponsoring body of each trustee; and what is the annual salary that has been proposed or agreed for the scheme's trustee's. [6741]

Mr. Page: The market values of the mineworkers' pension scheme and the staff superannuation scheme funds at the end of October 1995 were £8.52 billion and £8.87 billion respectively.

The current trustees of the mineworkers' pension scheme are:

M. Butler (Chairman)
P. Keenan
S. Gleig
G. Ferguson
M. Atkinson
G. Bolton
N. Greatrex
J. Stones
J. Wills
T. Gay

Mr. Butler, Mr. Keenan, Mrs. Gleig, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Atkinson have been selected and appointed by the Secretary of State, in accordance with the provisions of the appendix to the articles of the trustee company. These provisions also allow for the phased replacement of union-appointed trustees by elected pensioner representatives. Mr. Bolton and Mr. Greatrex, both of whom were previously union-appointed representatives, were elected as pensioner representatives in their respective constituencies from 1 October 1995. The election process for the remaining three constituencies begins this month with the three further elected trustees due to take office from 1 April 1996. No remuneration is currently paid to MPS trustees, although I understand the question of modest remuneration remains under consideration.

The trustees of the staff superannuation scheme, their sponsors and remuneration, remain as set out in my answer to the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *546*.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the annual salary that was *(a)* proposed and *(b)* agreed for the (i) chairperson of the mineworkers' pension scheme and (ii) the chairperson of the staff superannuation fund; and what salary was paid to the previous chairperson of each fund. [6742]

Mr. Page: Under the rules of the staff superannuation scheme the remuneration of the trustees may be determined by me after consultation with them. The salary of the current chairman was accordingly determined by me at £15,000 per annum. Her predecessor received no remuneration.

The rules of the mineworkers' pension scheme do not currently allow remuneration to be paid to the chairman or to the trustees.

Electro-shock Batons

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade of whom inquiries were made by his Department in the process of investigating allegations concerning British companies' involvement in the sale of electro-shock batons abroad. [7312]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Inquiries were made by the Department of the companies concerned and within government.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the human rights record of the country for which the electronic batons were destined for which his Department issued a trans-shipment licence in 1993; and what monitoring the Department is undertaking of their use. [7313]

Mr. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to my letter to her of 3 August 1995 in response to her question tabled on 17 July 1995. No further details can be released about this matter.

Fuel Rods

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is (i) the average cooling time for reprocessed fuel rods and (ii) the effect on containment of radiation shortening the cooling time of reprocessed fuel rods has on a reprocessing plant. [7261]

Mr. Page: The cooling time for spent fuel rods prior to reprocessing is dependent on the nature of the fuel and the conditions under which it was irradiated.

Dounreay

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigations have been conducted in response to Dounreay management's failure to disclose a 1977 explosion in an intermediate-level waste shaft to the COMARE committee. [7289]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to a question from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 21 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *316*.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide details of *(a)* maintenance procedures at Dounreay and *(b)* any fires or other accidents occurring during maintenance procedures at Dounreay. [7293]

Mr. Page: Maintenance procedures at Dounreay are matters for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. Details of all incidents at Dounreay are contained in site newsletters, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to change the requirement that Dounreay workers maintain secrecy regarding materials deposited in a sealed-up intermediate-level waste disposal shaft. [7292]

Mr. Page: An inventory of the intermediate level waste disposal shaft at Dounreay was published in the 1988 report of R. M. Consultants Ltd. which was placed in the Library of the House. The inventory has since been updated and was made available at the Dounreay local liaison committee meeting on 28 November 1995.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average number of fuel rods reprocessed at Dounreay for each year between 1965 and 1990. [7252]

Mr. Page: During the period 1965 to 1990, UKAEA reprocessed 9,027 material test reactor fuel elements at Dounreay. The reprocessing plant has not always operated continuously in the past but in discrete campaigns; it would be misleading therefore to quote an annual average. However, for eight of the years in this period the plant reprocessed more than 600 elements in each year. These figures do not include the reprocessing of oxide fuel from the prototype fast reactor.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to privatise the Dounreay facility. [7378]

Mr. Page: I have no plans to privatise the Dounreay facility.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what types of public consultation have been undertaken with the Scottish or United Kingdom public to determine the acceptability of processing foreign waste at Dounreay. [7255]

Mr. Page: Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel at Dounreay is an established industrial process which has been undertaken at Dounreay for more than 30 years. It is carried out subject to nuclear installations inspectorate and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate regulation. There has been no reason to engage in public consultation about the continuation of such a well-established and well-regulated activity.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is the minimum cooling period for reprocessing fuel rods enforced by the management of Dounreay; [7277]

(2) what is the estimated time from shipment of spent nuclear fuel from a foreign country to Dounreay with the return of uranium per the return to sender clause; [7284]

(3) what steps have been taken to reduce the fire risk at the Dounreay facility especially during maintenance operations; [7279]

(4) what disposal methods are used to deal with the nitric acid used to wash out contaminated areas of the Dounreay facility prior to maintenance; [7257]

(5) what process is in place for analysing alpha contamination at Dounreay; [7260]

(6) what percentage of low-level waste produced as a result of re-processing at Dounreay ends up in the low-level waste dump site at Dounreay; [7285]

(7) what further checks were made on containment of radiation immediately after the windows and concrete shielding were replaced in the Dounreay facility's D1206 caves; [7280]

(8) what is the current status of the dissolver tank at Dounreay that experienced an incident eight years ago resulting in high levels of neutron radiation in the area; [7258]

(9) what actions were taken at Dounreay to remedy or replace the leaking transportation flasks responsible for contaminating the area around the Caithness complex; [7377]

(10) what action has been taken over the last 10 years to resolve the problems of inadequate containment of radiation in the Dounreay facility's D1206 caves where irradiated fuel rods are dissected; [7379]

(11) what long-term contingency plans there are for the Dounreay intermediate level waste shaft in the event of a breach in the next 100 years. [7290]

Mr. Page: These are operational matters for UKAEA. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Radioactive Waste

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the definition of *(a)* high-level waste and *(b)* low-level waste used by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. [7283]

Mr. Page: UKAEA uses the waste category definitions given in the Reviews of Radioactive Waste Management Policy (Final Conclusions), Cm 2919.

ECGD

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the future of the transitional reinsurance facility provided by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [7844]

Mr. Nelson: On 24 June 1993, *Official Report*, column 265, my predecessor announced to the House that the Government would extend the transitional reinsurance facility until at least the end of 1997. At the same time he undertook to give two years' notice of any decision to withdraw from the facility. The case for the continuation of the facility beyond 1997 would be reviewed in 1995.

The review has now been completed. It remains the Government's objective to maximise the provision of this type of reinsurance by the private market, with the aim of ultimately eliminating the need for this form of Government support. The review has confirmed that we are making progress towards this objective. Only minimal support was required in 1995, and we do not expect the facility to be called on at all in 1996. Nevertheless, the Government recognise that there remains a need for the facility to remain in place for the time being, to be used as a last resort in the unexpected event that the private reinsurance market is not able to meet fully the needs of United Kingdom exporters. The terms and conditions under which the facility is offered will continue to reflect this objective. We intend that the facility should be reviewed again in 1999, and as before, in order to provide a stable framework of support for both insurers and UK exporters and to avoid disruption to the market, adequate notice will be given of any decision to withdraw the facility.

Research Masters

Mr. Forman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made by the pilot scheme for research masters, announced by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in October 1994. [7846]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The progress has been encouraging. It is plainly too early to reach firm conclusions about either the first year or the pilot more generally, but I congratulate all the university and research council staff involved on their achievements to date.

The new, one-year, research master's—"MRes"—degree comprises: a significant, original research component; a grounding in research techniques and/or development of specialist knowledge; and modules to broaden the student's experience by equipping him or her with transferable skills and knowledge, such as team-working, communication, and the exploitation of research. The purpose of the pilot is to test the effectiveness of this new degree as a direct route into employment or as a preparation for a PhD. Courses began admitting students for the first time this October.

We estimated that the research councils would support some 250 students. However, in view of the quantity and quality of submissions from university departments, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council—BBSRC—Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council—EPSRC—Medical Research Council—MRC—and Natural Environment Research Council—NERC—made provision to support a total of 275 students on some 35 courses in 25 universities. A total of 265 places had been taken up by the end of October. Successful applicants were required to hold at least an upper second class honours degree, as for research council PhD studentships. The table gives the numbers of studentships offered, applications made, and awards taken up by the end of October in more detail.

	Offered	*Applications*	*Taken up*
BBSRC	45	321	45
EPSRC	160	442	150
MRC	25	166	25
NERC	45	467	45
Total	275	1,396	265

I understand that many of the courses have additional students supported by industry or other means, and that other industry or external involvement includes offers of placements for research projects, of contributions to teaching and course modules; and of assistance in final examinations.

The research councils are currently collecting more detailed information from the first year's intake by means of an "entry" questionnaire. Preliminary analysis will be available in the spring. The councils also plan to visit courses, and to collect further data using an "exit" questionnaire. I shall publish a more detailed report on overall experience with the first year of the pilot as soon as this is possible.

The Economic and Social Research Council—ESRC—and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council—PPARC—are not involved directly in the pilot. The ESRC has very largely anticipated the research master's in the social sciences through its research training guidelines and course recognition procedures. There will, for example, be some 350 ESRC students on 135 master's courses with a recognised research weighting in 1995. The ESRC is asking students starting standard and research-weighted master's course to complete the "entry" questionnaire which is being used in the pilot. PPARC is monitoring the EPSRC's experience with the pilot, as well as the progress of recently introduced, four-year, first degrees—"MPhys" and "MSci".

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what decision has been reached on the financial control regime under which the National Weights and Measures Laboratory will operate. [7845]

Mr. Lang: Following endorsement by the Treasury, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory will begin operating on a net expenditure control basis from 1 April 1996. From this date I shall expect it to recover its costs in full from income from customers, including the DTI. I am confident that by moving to net control the agency will have the flexibility needed to develop its business further and to meet a wider range of customer needs.

Patent Office

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many consultants were employed in each of the years 1993, 1994 and 1995 in the information technology section at the Patent Office; and what were the costs of employing them in each year. [6688]

Mr Ian Taylor: The Patent Office made no use of external consultants in the years 1993 and 1994 in the information technology section. In 1995 it employed Coopers and Lybrand at a total cost of £35,900 plus expenses. The Patent Office has also used a number of external IT experts for specialist work as particular needs arose.

Shipbuilding

Sir Giles Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the OECD agreement on shipbuilding. [7847]

Mr. Eggar: The signatory countries to the OECD agreement decided in Paris on 11 December to postpone the entry into force of the agreement from 1 January to 15 July 1996 at the latest. This was necessary to allow more time for the United States and Japan to complete their ratification of the agreement.

The Community had already decided that, if the OECD agreement could not enter into force on 1 January 1996, it would extend its current regime for shipbuilding under the seventh directive for a further nine months until 30 September 1996 or until entry into force of the OECD agreement, if earlier. The current EC regime for shipbuilding under the seventh directive will therefore now continue on this basis in 1996.

In the United Kingdom the home credit guarantee scheme will continue on its current basis until the OECD agreement enters into force in 1996. As we announced in

March, the future of the scheme is under review and I will make a further announcement about the results of the review when this is completed.

An announcement about shipbuilding intervention fund grants will be made early in 1996 once the Commission has decided the level of the EC subsidy ceiling.

Arms Export Licences

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the procedures for *(a)* reviewing and *(b)* renewing arms export licences. [7063]

Mr. Ian Taylor: All export licences for military equipment, both individual and open, are issued and, as appropriate, reviewed in accordance with United Kingdom Government policy and criteria, which are agreed with European partners and in other international forums.

Ceramic Industry

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will visit Stoke on Trent to assess developments in the ceramic industry. [6938]

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to visit Stoke on Trent. I was pleased to note the recent publication of the interim report of the ceramic industry's tableware strategy group. This sets out for wider consultation a series of issues likely to affect this sector's global prospects in the long term. I welcome this initiative and hope that it will lead to an agreed agenda of competitiveness issues on which my Department can work with the industry.

Redundancies

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *338*, what is the required run-down in staff numbers; and what posts he expects to lose at what grades within his Department. [6509]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Department's MINIS process is currently being used to seek savings in all areas of the Department's running costs. The balance between staff-related and other savings will not be clear until that process is completed. As in past years, the outcome of MINIS will be published and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6495]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* My Department procured goods and services to the value of £311 million in financial year 1994–95.

OECD Comparisons

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library figures for the United Kingdom's position relative to other OECD countries in terms of *(a)* gross domestic product growth, *(b)* the level of investment in the United Kingdom as a share of gross domestic product, *(c)* employment creation and *(d)* growth in exports between (i) the second quarter of 1979 and the latest figures available and (ii) the first quarter of 1974 and the second quarter of 1979. [7022]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Details of the UK's position relative to other OECD countries are not readily available on a quarterly basis for the information requested.

Trade Deficits

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which years a deficit in invisible trade has been recorded since 1965; and what was the deficit. [7033]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The information is published by the Central Statistical Office as table 1.16 of the "Economic Trends" annual supplement. The publication is available in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which year since 1965 the highest deficit in real terms has been recorded in *(a)* visible trade and *(b)* the balance of payments current account. [7053]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The visible trade deficit was equivalent to 6.2 per cent. of money GDP in 1974. The current account deficit was equivalent to 4.3 per cent. of GDP in 1989.

Manufacturing Output

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the manufacturing output change between the first quarter of 1974 and the second quarter of 1979 *(a)* in total and *(b)* as annual growth. [7030]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Manufacturing output rose by 2.9 per cent. between the first quarter of 1974 and the second quarter of 1979, an annual growth rate of 0.5 per cent. However, manufacturing output in these periods was affected by the miners' strike and the winter of discontent. Between the first half of 1974 and the first half of 1979, manufacturing output fell by 2.5 per cent. an annual rate of fall of 0.5 per cent.

Manufacturing Trade

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom's percentage share of world trade in manufacturing goods for *(a)* the first quarter of 1974, *(b)* the second quarter of 1979 and *(c)* the present day. [7034]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Information of the UK's percentage share of world trade is available only on a half-yearly basis.

Nuclear Electric

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the reasons for the change from previous plans of £650 million in 1997–98 and £150 million in 1996–97 in the financial requirements of Nuclear Electric; [7035]

(2) if he will make a statement on the financial requirements of Nuclear Electric in 1996–97 and 1997–98; [7037]

(3) if he will make a statement on the effect the announcement of privatisation has had on Nuclear Electric's ability to contribute to the Exchequer. [7054]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The financial requirements of Nuclear Electric in 1996–97 and 1997–98 are shown in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" for 1996–97. As outlined in the report, there will be a change in Nuclear Electric's external financing requirements following the privatisation of the company's advanced gas-cooled reactor and pressurised water reactor stations in 1996, which will leave only the magnox stations in the public sector. The change also includes revision of economic and other estimates such as electricity prices, station outputs, and cost savings, as in normal practice.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of building, designing and commissioning Sizewell B and the seven advanced gas-cooled reactors; and what are the expected receipts from the privatisation of Nuclear Electric. [7036]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the notes on tangible fixed assets on pages 55 and 65 of the report and accounts of Nuclear Electric 1994–95 and pages 49 and 56 of the report and accounts of Scottish Nuclear 1994–95, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

The receipts from the Government's planned privatisation of parts of the nuclear power industry will depend on a variety of factors, including market conditions at the time of the sale.

Inflation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the United Kingdom's position relative to OECD countries in respect of inflation. [7024]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The information is published by the OECD in "Main Economic Indicators," which is available in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if the Millennium Commission will take into account in deliberating on the content and siting of any millennium exhibition, the ability of the United Kingdom to provide suitable venues for sporting events and festivals of *(a)* international and *(b)* worldwide significance; [4614]

(2) what guidelines *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Millennium Commission, have issued for the inclusion of (1) covered and (2) open (i) arenas and (ii) stadiums to be provided in submitted plans of prospective operators of millennium exhibitions sites. [4615]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 11 December 1995]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the Millennium Commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

National Lottery

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the Director General of the National Lottery visited Australia; who paid for the visit; how long was the visit; and what assessment he made as to the conformity of the visit with guidelines. [6684]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Office of the National Lottery is a non-ministerial Department and therefore responsible for implementing its own hospitality and travel arrangements, taking into account the principles and rules set out in the civil service management code. Oflot is under no obligation to clear with, or inform my department about, detailed arrangements. This is therefore a matter for the director general and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what occasions for each certificate under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984 was signed by a member of his Department what was the length of time for which the certificate was valid; and in what circumstances benefit records can be used for the purpose of safeguarding national security. [5304]

Mr. Burt: No such certificates have been issued by the Department of Social Security. It seems unlikely that benefit records would have any relevance to national security.

We cannot deal in advance with the circumstances that might apply in the event of an application for a section 27 certificate being made.

War Pension

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now end the policy of counting the first £10 of a war pension received as a result of an injury sustained while fighting as income; and if he will make a statement. [4942]

Mr. Heald: The first £10 of a war disablement pension is disregarded in all income-related benefits. We have no plans to end this arrangement.

Housing Benefit

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many discretionary payments under regulation 69(8) have been made; for what amounts; and what percentage this was of total housing benefit expenditure, in each year since 1991–92. [5055]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit discretionary expenditure: Great Britain

Year	*Discretionary payment expenditure £*	*Percentage of total housing benefit expenditure*
1992–93	740,000	0.01
1993–94	960,000	0.01

1. Expenditure figures are final audited returns rounded to the nearest £10,000.
2. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest hundredth of a per cent.
3. Reliable data is not available for 1991-92.
4. Detail of the numbers of discretionary payments made is not collected.

Motability

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the extent to which Motability Finance Ltd., Motability Car Leasing, Motability Hire Purchase and Motability Quarter End Partnerships have used their tax capacity status for the sole and full benefit of disabled people in the scheme. [5137]

Mr. Burt: The Motability scheme has been structured to take advantage, whenever possible, of capital allowances against corporation tax to reduce the size of loans needed to finance the scheme. This is normal business practice and disabled people receive the benefit in the form of lower charges for obtaining personal transport.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the special privileges and protection from competition in respect of car leasing and hire purchase agreements enjoyed by Motability. [5089]

Mr. Burt: In general, the reliefs and benefits which underpin the Motability scheme apply equally to any suppliers whose predominant business is the supply of vehicles on lease or hire purchase to disabled people. There is one exception. Regulations provide for direct payment of a beneficiaries' qualifying benefit, in whole or in part, in support of an agreement through the Motability scheme. The Motability scheme has to compete for business in the normal way.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost to the national insurance fund of all current holders of an appropriate personal pension with an annual income of *(a)* £2,000 or below, *(b)* up to £3,000, *(c)* up to £4,000, *(d)* up to £5,000, *(e)* up to £6,000, *(f)* up to £7,000, *(g)* up to £8,000, *(h)* up to £9,000 and *(i)* up to £10,000, opting back in to SERPS in 1995–96 basing this estimate on the assumptions that (i) those contracting into SERPS continue within SERPS up to the year 2050 instead of being in an APP and (ii) future earnings remain the same in real terms. [5523]

Mr. Heald: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is readily available is in the table, and is based on the following assumptions:

(i) the year in which opting into SEEPS is assumed to take place is 1997–98;

(ii) earnings have been assumed to increase with age and, in addition, by 1.5 per cent. above prices for each age level;

(iii) not all earners have been assumed to work until they reach State pension age.

Extra SERPS expenditure in selected years if APP holder in low earnings bands opt back into SERPS

£ million 1995–96 prices

Earnings band for opting back into SERPS	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*	*2040–41*	*2050–51*
<2,000	—	—	—	—	—
<3,000	—	—	—	—	—
<4,000	0	0	0	10	10
<5,000	0	0	20	50	50
<6,000	0	10	40	130	120
<7,000	1	10	80	250	240
<8,000	1	20	130	420	400
<9,000	2	30	200	650	610
<10,000	3	50	300	920	860

1. Little extra cost until 2010 as most APP holders are under age 45.
2. Estimates of numbers affected based on data for 1993–94, the most recently available, used to estimate proportions of APP holders in respect of people in the earnings bands quoted.
3. Earnings under £3,000 would not accrue SERPS so no financial effect in respect of that year.
4. Earnings have been used, as a breakdown by income is not available.
5. All expenditure of £10 million and above has been rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost to local authorities of the software and other administrative changes that will be necessitated by the provisions of the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996 in respect of payments four-weekly in arrears. [6131]

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated total gross administrative cost to local authorities arising from the introduction of new payment rules for housing and council tax benefit is some £3 million. However, there are offsetting savings for local authorities because we estimate that there will be a reduction in overpayments of benefit as a result of the changes. On-going costs after introduction are expected to be negligible although authorities will continue to benefit from savings arising from overpayments avoided.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of reducing the housing benefit taper for those in work to (i) 60 per cent., (ii) 55 per cent., (iii) 50 per cent., (iv) 45 per cent., (v) 40 per cent., (vi) 35 per cent. and (vii) 30 per cent., and how many people would be entitled to housing benefit in each of these cases. [7185]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated cost of reducing the housing benefit taper for those in work

Taper	*Net cost £ million*	*Housing benefit caseload*
65 per cent.	—	4,875,000
60 per cent.	70	4,895,000

Estimated cost of reducing the housing benefit taper for those in work

Taper	*Net cost £ million*	*Housing benefit caseload*
55 per cent.	160	4,925,000
50 per cent.	265	4,975,000
45 per cent.	390	5,030,000
40 per cent.	545	5,105,000
35 per cent.	740	5,195,000
30 per cent.	980	5,295,000

Notes:

Estimates based on the Family Expenditure Surveys of 1991, 1992 and 1993, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels.

Estimates of costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Estimates of caseloads are rounded to the nearest 5,000.

Figures may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Retirement Pension

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made based on assumptions used in "Equality in State Pension Age", Cm. 2420, of the amount of *(a)* basic retirement pension and *(b)* SERPS addition payable to someone newly retired in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 2025 and (iii) 2035, giving figures separately for men and women with a full contribution record and lifetime earnings equal to (1) average male or female earnings and (2) half of average male or female earnings, expressed in cash terms in April 1996 prices and as a percentage of average earnings in the relevant years. [6530]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

	1996	*2025*	*2035*
Basic retirement pension	61.15	61.15	61.15
Additional pension based on average earnings			
Male	77.30	99.60	103.50
Female	47.70	68.90	79.60
Additional pension based on half average earnings			
Male	32.10	43.90	50.60
Female	17.30	25.50	31.70
As percentage of average earnings			
Basic retirement pension			
Male	15	10	9
Female	21	14	12
Additional pension based on average earnings			
Male	20	16	15
Female	17	16	15
Additional pension based on half average earnings			
Male	8	7	7
Female	6	6	6

Notes:

1. Estimated average earnings 1996–97 Males 397.44
Females 288.91

2. Real earnings are assumed to increase by 1.5 per cent. a year.

3. Estimates take Annualisation from 2000 and the equalisation of State pension age from 2020 into account.

4. Amounts are expressed in 1996 prices. Estimates are rounded to nearest 10 pence. Percentages are rounded to nearest whole per cent.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times since incapacity benefit began the adjudicating authorities have decided against the opinion of Benefits Agency medical services doctors in cases of *(a)* mental illness and *(b)* physical illness in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Wales, and (iii) England. [6257]

Mr. Burt: Decisions on capacity are taken by independent adjudication officers who are required to take account of all relevant evidence, including medical advice from a Benefits Agency doctor. Information on the extent to which the decisions of adjudication officers concur with medical advice is not available.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list be each independent tribunal service region-area the total number of industrial disease mucous membrane medical appeal tribunal appeal hearings held each month since January 1994 giving (i) the number of successful awards and the average percentage of disability awarded and (ii) the number of percentage of (1) successful cases and; (2) unsuccessful cases conducted with *(a)* a claimant's representative present and *(b)* no claimant's representative present. [6323]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not readily avaiable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has undertaken to assess differences in social security appeal tribunal, MAT and disability appeal tribunal appeal outcomes for claimants with or without representation at the appeal hearing. [6322]

Mr. Roger Evans: No research has been undertaken by this Department specifically on this subject.

Lone Parents

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of introducing a maintenance disregard for lone parents on income support of (i) £10, (ii) £15, (iii) £20; and how many lone parents would receive maintenance in each case. [7180]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: It is estimated that by 1998–99 the annual cost of a £10 maintenance disregard would be around £110 million; the cost of a £15 disregard would be around £140 million; and the cost of a £20 disregard would be around £170 million. Actual costs would depend on the exact level and pattern of compliance among absent parents. It is estimated that around 300,000 lone parents on income support will be in receipt of maintenance by 1998–99. In the long run, as the number of lone parents with a child support maintenance assessment increases, the annual cost of maintenance disregard is likely to double.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of disregarding child care costs for lone parents on income support. [7182]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available.

Income Support

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate what the earnings disregard for income support claimants would now be if it had been uprated since 1975 under supplementary benefit; and what the costs to public funds would have been of that uprating. [7184]

Mr. Roger Evans: The earnings disregards until November 1975 were £1 a week for those required to register for work and £2 for all other claimants. Those disregards uprated in line with the Rossi index[1] would now be £4.45 and £8.65 respectively. It is not possible to make a meaningful estimate of the current costs of such an uprating because the structure and rules of earnings disregards changed with the introduction of income support in 1988.

The current standard disregard is £5 a week but a higher £15 disregard is available to lone parents, people entitled to the disability premium, couples aged under 60 who have been receiving income support continuously for two years or more, members of certain specialist forces—for example, part-time firefighters—and carers entitled to the carer premium.

Note:

[1] Rossi is the CSO retail prices index minus adjustments for housing expenditure. Rossi is the price index used for uprating most income support allowances.

Family Credit

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of providing free school meals for children living in families receiving family credit. [7186]

Mr. Roger Evans: About £130 million a year.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of increasing the maintenance disregard for lone parents in receipt of family credit by (i) £20, (ii) £25, (iii) £30 and how many lone parents would receive maintenance in each case. [7181]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated cost of increasing the maintenance disregard in family credit for lone parents 1996–97

Maintenance disregard increased to £	*Additional net benefit costs* £ *million*
20	5
25	10
30	15
35	20

Estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

It is estimated that around 90,000 lone parents would receive maintenance in each case.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of reducing the family credit taper for those in work to (i) 65 per cent., (ii) 60 per cent., (iii) 55 per cent. and (iv) 50 per cent.; and how many people would be entitled to family credit in each of these cases. [7198]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated cost of reducing the family credit taper: 1996–97

Taper	*Family credit* £ *million*	*Housing benefit* £ *million*	*Council tax benefit* £ *million*	*Net cost* £ *million*	*Family credit estimated caseload*
70 per cent.	—	—	—	—	680,000
65 per cent.	120	–15	[1]—	105	700,000
60 per cent.	260	–25	–5	230	755,000
55 per cent.	435	–40	–5	390	820,000
50 per cent.	645	–50	–10	585	900,000

Estimates based on the Family Expenditure Surveys of 1991, 1992 and 1993, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels.

Estimates of costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Estimates of caseloads are rounded to the nearest 5,000.

Figures may not sum exactly due to rounding.

[1] Indicates less than £2.5 million.

Voluntary Unemployment Deduction

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people received a voluntary unemployment deduction, grouped by the reason for the deduction, on the latest date for which figures are available. [7188]

Mr. Roger Evans: Based on a 5 per cent. sample taken in February 1995, 33,000 people[1] were receiving income support with a voluntary unemployment deduction.[2] The precise reason for the deduction in these cases is not known. However information as to the numbers and types of adjudication officer decisions taken in relation to voluntary unemployment is routinely kept and produced as the analysis of adjudication officers' decisions, copies of which are available in the Library.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1995.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost of reducing the council tax benefit taper for those in paid work to (i) 15 per cent. and (ii) 10 per cent.; and how many people would be entitled to benefit in each of these cases. [7179]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated cost of reducing the council tax benefit taper for those in work

Taper	*Net cost* £ *million*	*Council tax benefit caseload*
20 per cent.	—	5,620,000
15 per cent.	40	5,675,000
10 per cent.	120	5,870,000

Estimates based on the Family Expenditure Surveys of 1991, 1992 and 1993, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels.

Estimates of costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Estimates of caseloads are rounded to the nearest 5,000.

Figures may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Earnings Disregard

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of increasing the earnings disregard for income support claimants by (i) £5, (ii) £10 and (iii) £15 a week. [7183]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Increase in disregard £	*Cost* £ *million*
5	35
10	65
15	100

1. Modelled on the 1991, 1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys and the 1994 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry uprated to 1995–96 prices, benefits and earnings levels.

2. Costs include the increased costs of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit due to increased entitlement to these benefits.

3. It has been assumed that both the head and the spouse of a couple each gain by the increases in the earnings disregards.

4. It has been assumed that no behavioural changes take place.

Benefit Savings

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each local authority in England which achieved *(a)* less than 50 per cent. and *(b)* between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. of its target level of weekly benefit savings resulting from the detection of housing benefit fraud in the last available year; and if he will list the actual percentage achieved by each local authority which achieved less than 50 per cent. of its target. [7147]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information for the latest available year, 1994–95, is set out in the table.

Local authority	*Percentage of weekly benefit savings threshold achieved*
Between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. of threshold achieved	
Chiltern	58
Blyth Valley	58
Tower Hamlets	57
Bromley	56
Thamesdown	53
North Wiltshire	53
Coventry	52
Sutton	51
Colchester	51
Wirral	51
Kirklees	50
Kingston Upon Hull	50
Bexley	50
Less than 50 per cent. of threshold achieved	
Hart	45
Sedgefield	38
Knowsley	30
Rutland	27
Wansbeck	24
Nuneaton	20
Congleton	18
North-west Leicester	8
Isles of Scilly	0
South Bedfordshire	0
Teesdale	0

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5734]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Revenue costs from public funds will not arise until 1997 when the first of our PFI systems has been developed and successfully delivered. Estimated revenue costs are subject to continuing negotiation and are commercial in confidence.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5733]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The administrative costs incurred in the DSS in 1994–95 on PFI work are estimated at around £2 million. The estimated costs for 1995–96 are £8 million. It is not possible to forecast, with confidence, future administrative costs associated with PFI work.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5735]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is not available in the format requested. It is a fundamental principle when considering schemes under the private finance initiative that what is assessed is the overall best value for money in providing a specified service, taking into account all aspects of design, building, finance and operation as a unified whole.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what technical difficulties the Child Support Agency has encountered in meeting requests for subject access under the Data Protection Act 1984; what investigations were instigated in respect of those difficulties; and what steps he has taken to ensure that future software procurement programmes will include, as part of their design criteria, routines which support the rights of data subjects under the Data Protection Act 1984. [5301]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 19 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary for Social Security about the Data Protection Act 1984.

Prior to August 1995 the Agency experienced some difficulties in providing information from the Child Support Computer System to the public in a clear and understandable format.

System enhancements introduced during August this year have eradicated the major technical difficulty which meant that explanations and other actions had to be undertaken clerically before personal information held on the Child Support Computer System could be issued.

The latest information that I can give you is that in over 90 per cent. of cases the Agency is answering requests for information within 40 days as required by the Data Protection Act 1984.

The Child Support Agency is registered with the Data Protection Registrar's Office in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984. Any future software procurement programmes will take full account of its requirements.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his answer of 23 November, *Official Report,* column *231,* regarding savings achieved by the Child Support Agency, to the same format as his answer of 19 July, *Official Report,* column *1499,* to provide a full breakdown of the maintenance contributing to benefit savings from *(a)* pre-CSA arrangements paid direct by absent parent to parent with care, *(b)* pre-CSA arrangements paid through the agency collection service, *(c)* CSA assessments and paid direct by absent parent to parent with care and *(d)* CSA assessments and paid via the agency collection service. [5651]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. John Greenway, dated 19 December 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about benefit savings.

You asked for an answer given on 23 November 1995 to be updated to provide a breakdown of maintenance contributing to benefit savings between that arising from pre CSA assessments and that arising from CSA assessments.

The Child Support Agency is responsible for recording all Social Security benefit savings arising as a result of action taken to arrange maintenance. During the first two years we sought to estimate a breakdown between pre and post CSA maintenance. This was appropriate as, like any new organisation, the Agency wished to monitor its progress.

As an ever increasing proportion of **all** the maintenance paid has now been arranged by the Agency, producing estimates between "old" and "new" money would no longer be either valid or useful; the Agency no longer has a business need to try to divide maintenance paid in this way. I cannot therefore provide the data you ask for.

Day Centres (Homeless People)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many day centres for the homeless have received funding from his Department in the last 12 months. [7216]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

My Department does not fund the capital costs or the overall running costs of day centres for homeless people, but 21 day centres have received grant under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 which is paid to voluntary sector organisations for specific projects to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many day centres for homeless people there are in the United Kingdom. [7217]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held by my Department.

SCOTLAND

National Lottery

15. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of benefits to Scotland from the national lottery. [5211]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scotland is doing extremely well from the national lottery. To date, over 560 awards have been made, totalling around £125 million.

Lockerbie

16. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the meeting of the hon. Member for Linlithgow with the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor-General concerning the request for a trial in The Hague, under Scottish rules of evidence, and under a Scottish judge, of the two Libyans accused of bombing Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, what approach the Lord Advocate has made to lawyers in Germany and the United States, and Scots lawyers representing the accused Libyans. [5214]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Local Government Finance

17. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage change in aggregate external finance to local authorities between 1995–96 and 1996–97 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms. [5216]

Mr. Kynoch: It is plus 2.6 per cent.; and minus 0.1 per cent.

Failing Schools

18. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what policies he is pursuing to deal with failing schools in Scotland. [5217]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Examples of the policies we are following to raise standards and improve quality include:

inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools with appropriate and systematic follow up

the requirement on all schools to draw up school development plans, and

the publication of extensive information for parents on schools' performance.

Nursery Education

19. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve quality and choice in nursery education. [5218]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: We plan to run the pilot phase of our pre-school education voucher initiative from August 1996. We intend to ensure that this initiative delivers high-quality provision and parental choice.

Ministers' Constituencies

20. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance is given to Ministers in his Department in respect of their treatment of their own constituencies. [5219]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Guidance is contained in the Cabinet Office booklet "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", a copy of which is available in the House Library.

Forfar Bypass

21. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the Kirriemuir and Glamis junctions on the Forfar bypass. [5221]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has recently received three representations about the Kirriemuir and Glamis junction on the Forfar bypass, including one from my hon. Friend. As a result of the representations, a package of measures to address road safety will be introduced at the junctions early in the new year.

Private Nursing Homes

23. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of private nursing homes in Scotland to discuss the powers of health boards in respect of registration and inspection; and if he will make a statement. [5223]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has agreed to meet nursing home proprietors in Tayside to discuss community care issues. The date has yet to be arranged.

Homelessness

24. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are homeless or living in overcrowded or substandard accommodation in Scotland. [5224]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information on the number of people homeless at any one time is not available. During the financial year 1993–94—the latest year for which figures are available—a total of 23,000 households containing 40,800 people in Scotland were assessed as homeless by local authorities.

At the time of the 1991 census of population, 213,900 people in Scotland were in accommodation which fell below the occupancy norm used in the census. This represents a very substantial reduction on the 1981 figure of 698,000.

It is estimated from the Scottish house condition survey that in 1991 some 217,000 people were living in dwellings which fell below the tolerable standard.

Income Tax

25. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the practicalities of a different rate of income tax for Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [5225]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As I carry out my duties in Scotland I am constantly being made aware of the deep anxiety felt by all sections of the community on the implications of the "tartan tax".

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

26. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he is making towards the eradication of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement. [5226]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Very good progress is being made towards the eradication of BSE in cattle in Scotland. In 1988 we identified the reason for the sudden outbreak of the disease and took early action to eradicate that cause by banning the use of animal protein in cattle feed. Further control measures have been taken in the light of advice from our independent scientific advisers.

The success of that action is demonstrated by the continuing downward trend of cases which are now at their lowest level for five years. Out of a total number of cattle of over 2 million, the number of confirmed cases of BSE in Scotland in 1995 is expected to be around 600, which is some 27 per cent. of the 1993 level.

Our preventive measures are recognised as being safe and effective by independent experts in the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, the chief medical officers and international bodies including the World Health Organisation.

Scottish Constitution

27. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received *(a)* seeking and *(b)* opposing independence for Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [5227]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the past six months I have received 44 representations on constitutional issues of which 37 favoured Scotland remaining within the United Kingdom. Of the remainder, two argued the case for an independent Scotland, and five for a multi-option referendum on Scotland's constitutional future.

28. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future relationship of the Government of the United Kingdom with the Scottish people. [5228]

Mr. Forsyth: The vast majority of Scots remain convinced that Scotland's best future lies within the United Kingdom. The Government agree with that view.

European Regional Fund

29. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total value of grants that Scotland

has received from the European regional fund since the fund's inception. [5230]

Mr. Kynoch: Since the inception of the European regional development fund in 1975, Scotland has received awards totalling almost £1.5 billion. The Government place great emphasis on ensuring value for money from these receipts, particularly as the UK is a net contributor to the European Community budget. To ensure transparency of these receipts in the UK's public expenditure system it was announced in the House on 17 February 1992 that the Government would provide automatic cover for, and identify separately, all forecast ERDF receipts.

Crime Prevention

30. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what crime prevention measures he intends introducing for Scotland. [5231]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 11 December, my right hon. Friend announced plans for the deployment of 500 additional operational police officers, backed up by improved technology, which we expect will help to prevent crime. I announced, on 13 December, a £4 million CCTV challenge competition for Scotland to help fund more CCTV schemes, which have a clear effect on preventing crime. The Scottish Crime Prevention Council will continue its programme of crime prevention measures, which have achieved much since the council was set up in 1992. My right hon. Friend and I welcome the fact that recorded crime is falling—7 per cent. in the first six months of 1995, following reductions in the three previous years—and further reduction remains a major concern of the Government.

Gaelic

32. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps the European Commission has taken to promote the speaking of Gaelic in Scotland. [5233]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: This information is not held by the Scottish Office. We do, however, have details of EU structural funding of a number of projects which contribute to the promotion of Gaelic.

Monklands District Council

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects Mr. Nimmo Smith QC to complete his inquiry into the employment practices of Monklands district council. [8018]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Mr. Nimmo Smith delivered his report to me on the afternoon of 15 December. I told him that I would advise the House of the completion of his inquiry and the submission of his report. I have now read the report, which is lengthy, and I am placing copies in the House Library today.

Mr. Nimmo Smith's report concludes that Monklands district council has not failed to comply with the requirements of section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. No further action is therefore required by me. I would like to place on record my thanks to him for the speed with which he has conducted his inquiry.

Crime

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is pursuing to reduce crime.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I expect that further reductions in crime will be achieved by the deployment of the extra 500 operational police officers, backed up by improved technology, which he announced to the Scottish Grand Committee on 11 December. I announced, on 13 December, a £4 million CCTV challenge competition for Scotland to help fund more CCTV schemes, which have a clear effect on reducing crime. The Scottish Crime Prevention Council will continue its programme of crime prevention measures, which have achieved much since the council was set up in 1992. My right hon. Friend and I welcome the fact that recorded crime is falling—7 per cent. in the first six months of 1995, following reductions in the three previous years—and further reduction remains a major concern of the Government.

Highlands and Islands

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the economic prospects of the highlands and islands. [5234]

Mr. Kynoch: The highlands and islands area continues to benefit from the Government's careful economic policies. These have helped to reduce unemployment in the highland and islands area by 1,940 between November 1994 and November 1995 and have encouraged new enterprise. Highlands and Islands Enterprise continues to promote economic development and it is estimated that in 1995–96 HIE will have invested some £20 million in highland businesses, attracting around £64 million in private investment and creating or securing 3,000 jobs.

Field Cropping Forms

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many forms MCAP009.114 his Department received and processed in each of the past four years; [2334]

(2) if the information on form MCAP009.119 is held in computer form; what categories of analysis are used; if the information is held centrally; and if the method of information processing is standard for each area. [2336]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The forms referred to are the covering letter requesting details of a farmer's field by field cropping for the period 1982 to 1991 and the blank cropping record itself. These forms are issued to farmers by the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department in order that the eligibility of individual fields for aid under the arable area payments scheme can be determined.

The information is held locally in the Department's area offices and is not held on computer. The forms are analysed to ensure that individual fields meet the strict EC rules covering the eligibility of land for AAPS aid. Aid can be paid only on land which on 31 December 1991 was not in permanent grass, permanent crops, woodland or non-agricultural use. The process of analysis is standard throughout Scotland.

Information on the number of forms received and processed could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5980]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department's policy is to canvass relevant views of the public wherever this is appropriate and cost-effective, and to make responses widely available subject to any essential safeguards of confidentiality.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6558]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Press advertising expenditure by Scottish Office departments was as follows:

Newspaper	*£*
1992–93	
The Sun (Scotland)	3,404
Daily Record	11,300
News of the World (Scotland)	630
Sunday Mail	10,989
Sunday Post	11,424
Edinburgh Herald and Post	828
The Glaswegian	1,080
The Strathclyder	1,275
1993–94	
The Sun (Scotland)	16,680
Aberdeen Evening Express	1,435
Aberdeen Press and Journal	13,658
Daily Record	58,712
Dundee Courier	11,849
Dundee Evening Telegraph	1,150
The Scotsman	16,219
Edinburgh Evening News	1,284
Edinburgh Herald and Post	1,526
The Herald	22,428
Glasgow Evening Times	5,544
Scotland on Sunday	5,522
News of the World (Scotland)	2,376
Sunday Express	840
Sunday Mail	46,334
Sunday Post	50,157
Sunday Times (Scotland)	360
Scottish Daily Express	420
Greenock Telegraph	743
Helensburgh Advertiser	297
Scottish and Universal Lanarkshire Package	3,324
Scottish and Universal Paisley Package	1,281
Scottish and Universal West Lothian Package	1,423
Scottish and Universal Ayrshire Package	2,287
Arbroath Herald	610
Buchan Observer	554
The Glaswegian	950
North Clyde Series	835
Dunfermline Press	1,032
Falkirk Herald	815
Fife Free Press Group	2,615
Fife Leader	643
Guthrie Newspaper Group	1,937
Scottish Provincial Press	5,029
Lennox Herald	559
Motherwell Times Series	471
Oban Times	438
Orcadian	277
Paisley and Renfrew Gazette Series	1,203
Perthshire Advertiser	529
Scottish County Press Group	1,159
Stirling Observer	844
Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser	1,347
Airdrie and Coatbridge World	147
The Strathclyder	2,500
Cumbernauld News and Advertiser	393
East Kilbride News	525
Glenrothes Gazette	213
Irvine Times	484
Lothian Courier	690
1994–95	
Scottish Daily Express	1,731
The Sun (Scotland)	10,258
News of the World (Scotland)	4,126
Daily Record	49,040
Aberdeen Evening Express	6,600
Aberdeen Press and Journal	8,426
Dundee Courier	6,928
Dundee Evening Telegraph	2,299
The Scotsman	11,565
Scotland on Sunday	11,614
Edinburgh Evening News	6,678
The Herald	12,306
Glasgow Evening Times	10,842
Sunday Mail	45,795
Sunday Post	49,306
Sunday Times (Scotland)	6,880
Oban Times	335
Orcadian	498
Shetland Times	445
Stornoway Gazette and Westcoast Advertiser	1,001
Tweeddale Press Group	2,065
Greenock Telegraph	780
Scottish and Universal Lanarkshire Package	3,168
Scottish and Universal West Lothian Package	1,388
Scottish and Universal Dumfries and Galloway Package	851
Scottish and Universal Ayrshire Package	2,059
Arbroath Herald	652
Buchan Observer	519
Dunfermline Press	990
Edinburgh Herald and Post	1,568
Falkirk Herald	883
Fife Free Press Group	1,635
The Glaswegian	2,786
Guthrie Newspaper Group	2,208
Scottish Provincial Press	2,577
Lennox Herald	540
Linlithgow Journal and Gazette	216
Northern Scot Series	826

Newspaper	£
Paisley and Renfrew Gazette Series	1,161
Perthshire Advertiser	554
Scottish County Press Group	1,176
Stirling Observer	811
The Strathclyder	2,500
Highland News Group	618
Galloway Gazette and Stranraer News	157
1995–96[1]	
Scottish Daily Mail	240
Scottish Daily Express	1,224
The Sun (Scotland)	3,792
Aberdeen Press and Journal	5,264
Daily Record	15,776
Dundee Courier	3,685
The Scotsman	5,600
Scotland on Sunday	2,786
The Herald	7,719
Sunday Mail	7,423
Sunday Post	7,423
The Times Education Supplement	1,174

[1] Expenditure to date.

There are no current plans for further press campaigns in this financial year. Details for previous years are not held centrally.

Expenditure by my agencies was:

Historic Scotland

	£
1994–95	
Daily Mirror	360
Glasgow Evening Times	296
The Herald	1,388
The Scotsman	1,286

Figures for previous years could be provided only at disproportionate costs. Historic Scotland has no plans for press advertising in 1995–96.

Details of press advertising by non-departmental public bodies are not held centrally.

Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the sources of funding of the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board. [6291]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board receives funding from the Secretary of State for Scotland and when operational will also receive registration fees from qualified conveyancers and executry practitioners.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the current membership of the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board. [6292]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The current membership is:

Professor Philip Love CBE (Chairman)

Ian Buchanan Esq

R. Gavin Burnett Esq

John Murray Esq

Mrs. Joyce Simpson

Hugh Torrance Esq

Duncan White Esq OBE.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the annual costs to public funds of the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board since the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provision) (Scotland) Bill 1990 received Royal Assent; and what is his assessment of such costs in the future. [6293]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board was established in June 1991 and the costs to public funds are as follows:

1991–92: 113,756

1992–93: 108,796

1993–94: 31,093

1994–95: 26,299

1995–96: 10,000.

The costs for 1996–97 are estimated to be £100,000. In future years costs will depend on the volume of business. The board is expected to become self-financing in due course.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if practitioners under the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board will be required to subscribe financially to a guarantee fund at their own expense; [6294]

(2) if practitioners under the Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board will be required to take out professional indemnity insurance at their own expense. [6295]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Yes.

Scottish National Heritage

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the budget for Scottish Natural Heritage for the financial years *(a)* 1994–95 *(b)* 1995–96 *(c)* 1996–97 *(d)* 1997–98. [7205]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The information is set out:

£ million

1994–95: £39.9

1995–96: £40.3

1996–97: £36.0.

The budget for 1997–98 has not yet been decided. SNH has, however, been given a planning figure of £36.2 million for each of the years 1997–98 and 1998–99. These figures will be reviewed in the context of the Government's annual public expenditure survey and are subject to possible change in light of survey decisions.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what surveys he has conducted into the popularity of the bridge to Skye among local residents. [5213]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Highland regional council conducted a survey among local residents in 1986 in which 70 per cent. of respondents supported the idea of a bridge replacing the ferries. Earlier this year, and prior to the bridge opening, further research was carried out on behalf of the Scottish Office by PA Cambridge Economic Consultants in liaison with the Transport Research Laboratory as part of a longer-term study of the impacts of the bridge. That work indicated varying perceptions of the bridge. Visitors to the area think the bridge will be of more benefit to residents of the area whereas residents of the area consider it likely to be more benefit to visitors. There have been no surveys since the bridge opened on 16 October.

Scottish Assembly

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in favour of a tax-raising Scottish Assembly. [5229]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the past six months, I have received 16 representations in favour of a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers.

Balmoral Estate

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the contents of the memorandum of understanding relating to Scottish Natural Heritage in respect of the Balmoral estate; and if he will indicate the terms of the financial agreement. [5495]

Mr. Kynoch: The memorandum of understanding between Balmoral Estates and the former Nature Conservancy Council was drawn up in 1991. It is designed to cover the management of areas of special conservation interest on the Balmoral and Birkhall estates, bearing in mind that the statutory procedures for the notification of sites of special scientific interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 do not apply to Her Majesty's private estates in Scotland.

The provisions of the memorandum include measures for the identification of important sites, the formulation of management plans, dialogue on operations which might harm their special interest and steps which might be taken to enhance the interest.

There is no financial agreement within the terms of the memorandum. It does, however, contain provision for financial terms to be included within any voluntary agreement made in pursuance of the management plans for the site. To date, no such agreements have been entered into.

Forth Road Bridge

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Forth road bridge was last painted; how many people were involved; what was the cost to public funds; and if he will make a statement. [5496]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Forth road bridge is the responsibility of the Forth road bridge joint board, a statutory body made up of members from Lothian regional council and Fife regional council. However, I understand from the joint board that painting of the Forth road bridge is a continuous process carried out in an eight-year cycle. Some 17 people are involved in painting the bridge, and these include both permanent and seasonal workers. In common with other expenditure on the bridge the costs are met from toll revenue. No public funds are used.

Kincardine Bridge

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if specific funding has been allocated for the replacement of the Kincardine bridge, the building of a bypass and an improved West Fife road network; [6724]

(2) what is the timetable for *(a)* the replacement of the Kincardine bridge, *(b)* the construction of a bypass and *(c)* the improvement of the West Fife road network; [6834]

(3) what plans he has for public consultation on all the options outlined by consultants for routes for a replacement Kincardine bridge and bypass; [6835]

(4) what is his preferred option for the replacement of the Kincardine bridge and bypass; [6836]

(5) when construction will begin on *(a)* the replacement of the Kincardine bridge and *(b)* the bypass; [6837]

(6) if he will make a statement on the funding of the Kincardine bridge and bypass. [6931]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will be holding public consultation early in the new year on the conclusions drawn from studies of the various options at Kincardine. These studies consider the requirements of the crossing and the bypassing of Kincardine village. This will include a public exhibition in Alloa and Kincardine. A number of routes will be exhibited and information will be displayed setting out their relative merits. This will enable the options to be fully examined by the public, and individuals and local interests will be invited to give their views. At this stage my right hon. Friend has not come to any decision on the option which best meets local and national needs and careful account will be taken of all the views expressed.

When the responses to the consultation have been considered, further detailed studies will be undertaken on the preferred option to allow the preparation and publication of draft statutory orders. Subject to those responses and the progress made on that work publication is unlikely to be before mid-1997. No date is fixed for construction, and the further progress of the scheme will be dependent on the reaction of the public to the published orders and on the availability of finance in the light of other competing priorities.

The viability of an improved road between Kincardine and the M90, the West Fife regional road, has been examined as part of the Kincardine studies. However the Government's present view is that such a road could be provided only in the longer term.

Water Supplies

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the United Kingdom's resources of water for domestic and individual supply is located in Scotland. [7269]

Mr. Kynoch: Some 12.4 per cent. of the public water resources available for domestic and industrial purposes are located in Scotland.

Negative Equity

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the percentage of home buyers in each of the past five years experiencing negative equity in Scotland. [7248]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in Scotland in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area scheme and *(b)* total arable area payments in 1994–95. [7192]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Payments which have been made to farmers in Scotland under the 1994 arable area payments scheme are as follows:

(a) Set-Aside: £22,834,883.66

(b) Total AAPS Payments: £115,992,045.88.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money is forecast to be spent in Scotland in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area scheme and *(b)* total arable area payments in 1995–96. [7193]

Mr. Robertson: Forecast payments which will be made to farmers in Scotland under the 1995 arable area payments scheme are as follows:

(a) Set-Aside: £23,572,834

(b) Total AAPS Payments: £151,892,010.

Fisheries (Expenditure)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the level of structural support expenditure on fisheries in Scotland from *(a)* the United Kingdom Government and *(b)* European Community funds has been in each of the past three years; what is the projected expenditure in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [7286]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The table shows support to the Scottish fishing industry from *(a)* UK Government public aid sources and *(b)* EC funds paid in the last three years and forecast for the next three years.

	(a) UK Government public aid sources £	*(b) EC funds* £
1992–93	8,024,582	2,112,221
1993–94	11,140,188	5,915,329
1994–95	9,654,932	5,887,707
1995–96	13,844,000	8,500,000
1996–97	[1]8,420,000	[1]3,420,000
1997–98	[1]7,250,000	[1]3,750,000

[1] Does not include decommissioning—forecast not available.

Radiation Discharge Levels

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what increase the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has petitioned Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate to authorise regarding emissions of *(a)* alpha particles, *(b)* caesium 137, *(c)* plutonium and *(d)* iodine. [7288]

Mr. Kynoch: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has not applied to HMIPI for any increase in discharge limits for releases to the sea for alpha-emitting radionuclides, caesium 137, any isotope of plutonium, or any isotope of iodine. For releases to air, the UKAEA has not sought any increase for alpha-emitting radionuclides or iodine 129. However, the UKAEA has sought an increase in the discharge limit for caesium 137 from seven to 10 gigabecquerels, an increase in the limit for iodine 131 from 3 to 14 gigabecquerels and an increase in the limit for plutonium 241 from 5 to 5.5 gigabecquerels.

Dounreay

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what quantity of *(a)* alpha particles, *(b)* caesium 137, *(c)* plutonium and *(d)* iodine the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is authorised to discharge into the air and sea at the Dounreay facility each year; [7287]

(2) what amount of alpha radiation Dounreay normally is allowed to release into the atmosphere in the form of particles of plutonium 239. [7278]

Mr. Kynoch: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is authorised to dispose of radioactive waste to air and sea by two separate authorisations which set limits on the quantity of radionuclides or groups of radionuclides which may be discharged by a variety of routes. Full details of these authorisations are given in the published Scottish Office statistical bulletin—Env/1995/3—entitled "Radioactive Waste Disposals From Nuclear Sites in Scotland: 1990 to 1994" and a copy of the bulletin is available from the Library of the House. The following limits apply specifically to alpha emitting radionuclides, caesium 137, plutonium 241 and iodine 131.

Discharges to sea

Alpha emitting radionuclides (excluding curium 242)	0.75 Terabecquerels per annum
Caesium 137	50 Terabecquerels per annum
Plutonium 241	15 Terabecquerels per annum
Curium 242	1 Terabecquerel per annum

Discharges to air from the Fuel Cycle Area

Alpha emitting radionuclides (including plutonium 239 but excluding curium 242 and 244)	1 Gigabecquerel per annum
Caesium 137	7 Gigabecquerels per annum
Plutonium 241	5 Gigabecquerels per annum
Iodine 129	4 Gigabecquerels per annum
Iodine 131	3 Gigabecquerels per annum
Curium 242	1 Gigabecquerel per annum
Curium 244	0.1 Gigabecquerel per annum

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries he has undertaken into the hazards of radioactive elements discharged from the Dounreay facility into the sea and atmosphere. [7251]

Mr. Kynoch: Extensive monitoring of the environment around Dounreay is carried out by both the site operator and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate. The results of this monitoring are published and copies of the

Scottish Office bulletin "Environmental Monitoring for Radioactivity in Scotland" and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's publication on "Radioactive Waste Discharges from UKAEA Establishments" are available in the Library of the House. The published results demonstrate that doses to the public as a result of discharges from Dounreay are small and well within internationally agreed limits.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring of the area around Dounreay, including Orkney coastal areas, is taking place to ascertain where plutonium particles accidentally discharged on 11 February of the current year were deposited. [7259]

Mr. Kynoch: The unplanned discharge of plutonium particulate material from the Dounreay site which occurred on 11 February was small when compared with the authorised discharge limits. These limits are set to ensure that the dose to the most exposed group in the population is extremely low and well within internationally agreed limits. The very extensive environmental monitoring programme in place around Dounreay is adequate to provide information on this and other discharges from the site. Information on this environmental monitoring programme is contained in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin "Environmental Monitoring for Radioactivity in Scotland" and a copy of this bulletin is in the Library of the House.

Food Exports

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scottish exports are in the food sector, and what action he is taking to promote the Scottish food sector in international markets. [7268]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In 1994, the Scottish food and drink processing industry, excluding whisky, accounted for 3 per cent. of Scottish manufacturing exports.

There is a wide range of current initiatives to assist the promotion and marketing of the Scottish food industry in overseas markets. These are either done directly through the Scottish Office or through its economic development agencies Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and their network of local enterprise companies. In addition to this purely Scottish effort, Food From Britain has a United Kingdom remit to assist British food and drink companies in export markets and to promote British food and drink products.

Inward Investment

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures and what resources are available to his Department for the promotion of inward investment. [5208]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Inward investment in Scotland is promoted by Locate in Scotland, which employs around 95 staff worldwide and has a budget of £8.9 million in the current year. Locate in Scotland also draws heavily on partnership arrangements with other bodies to assist it in its task.

The measures available to support inward investment are those available to support economic development generally, including, in particular, the regional selective assistance scheme.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what major investments have been made by overseas companies in Scotland's economy over the last 12 months. [5212]

Mr. Kynoch: Our continuing success in attracting inward investment to Scotland includes major announcements during the past 12 months by Chungwa Picture Tubes, Shin-Etsu Handotai, Lexmark, MIC Textiles, Selfcare International, Canon, Motorola and IBM, among others.

Community Care

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of the community care arrangements in Scotland. [5210]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities, health boards and housing agencies are together making considerable progress towards ensuring that vulnerable people receive effective community care services.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any items accepted in lieu of inheritance tax have been allocated in Scotland since he last made an announcement. [7808]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased to announce that I am allocating three paintings—"A Village Wedding" by Jan Steen, "The Castle of Bentheim from below" by Jacob van Ruisdael and "The Bird Trap" by Nicholas Berchem—to the Royal Scottish Academy on permanent loan. The paintings have been accepted in lieu of tax arising from the death of Mrs. E. S. Borthwick-Norton.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 268**

SESSION 1994–95

4th December—20th December 1995

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

259325 2U

INDEX—SESSION 1994–95

4th December 1995–20th December 1995

A1
67–8w, 673w
Air pollution 184w, 186w
Public inquiries 185–6w

A36
Speed limits 59w

A41
Road traffic 1177–8w

A63
674w

A75
Road works 813w

A477
1158–9w

A540
673w

A5209
Public petitions (11.12.95) 809

Abandoned cars
Fees and charges 212w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 728, 765–8, 793
Financial services (14.12.95) 1162, 1164, 1167
Repatriation, Caribbean (19.12.95) 1441–2

Aberdeen
Dept of Trade and Industry 471–2w, 640w

Abortion
378–9w

Access Committee for England
942–3w

Access to countryside
1090
Public footpaths 1089–90
Scotland 821–2w

Access to work programme
736w, 1226w
Finance 1031–2w
Take-up of employment 1033w
Wales 665–6w

Accident and emergency departments
122
Bradford Royal Infirmary 132–3
Edgware Hospital 1138w
King George Hospital Ilford 121–2
Lancaster 122
Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority 121
Wales 993w

Accidents
Schools 665w

Accounting
Civil service 503w

Action for community employment
1077w

Acute beds
Northern Ireland 1077–8w

Adams, Mrs Irene
Questions
Civil service agencies, Stirling 645–6w

Admission charges
Cathedrals 695–6

Adult education
144w

"Advance Statements About Medical Treatment"
521w

Advanced gas-cooled reactors
Construction costs 1255–6w
Fossil fuel levy 1256w

Advertising
Dept for Education and Employment 139–40w
Health authorities 1205–6w
NHS 1001w

Advertising—continued
NHS trusts 1205–6w
Postal services 774–5w

Advertising Advisory Committee
878–9w

Advisory Committee on Pesticides
Public appointments 1153w

Advisory services
Business 71w, 467w

Age addition
Retirement pensions 670w

Age discrimination
Training for work 561–2w

Agricultural marketing
EC grants and loans 1166w

Agricultural production
Economic and monetary union 1092
Food exports 1092–3
Milk 1092

Agricultural subsidies
Expenditure 55w
Finance 55w
Scotland 1513

Agriculture
EC grants and loans 927w
Wales 13, (06.12.95) 336–43

Ainger, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 707
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1390–1
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 852, 881–6
Interest on Debts Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1022
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1013–4
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1246–7
Questions
A477 1158–9w
Antismoking campaign 525w
Antismoking campaign, Wales 668w, 1160w
Armed forces housing, Haverfordwest 349–50w
Birds, Carmarthen bay 147w
Breast cancer, Health services 1145w, 1154w
Chemical and biological warfare, Defence research 761–2w
Countryside Council for Wales, Expenditure 1159–60w
Education vouchers, Wales 13–4
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, North Yorkshire 55w
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Wales 996w, 1159w
Fraud 881w
Funeral payments 89w
Local government finance, Wales 995–6w
M25, Road safety 758w
NHS finance, Wales 1160–1w
Occupational health, Wales 573w
Oil pollution control, Coastal areas 269–70w
Petroleum exploration licences, Wales 773w
Ports, Waste disposal 269–70w
Rescue services, Helicopters 839–40w
Welsh Development Agency, Expenditure 1162w
Welsh Development Agency, Leader programme 75w, 77w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Questions
Industrial diseases, Rhinitis 151w
NHS Pensioners' Trust 41w
Rural areas 829–30w

Ainsworth, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 230, 232

Ainsworth, Mr Robert—continued
Questions
Family income 503–4w
Voluntary schools, Grant maintained schools 975–6

Air accidents
Harrier aircraft 594w
Hercules aircraft 592–3w
Inquiries 475–6w
Tornado aircraft 593w

Air force
Armed forces training 478w

Air force bases
Closures 1111–2w

Air pollution
A1 184w, 186w
Greater London 1232w
Krypton 1243w

Air pollution control
Carbon dioxide 726w
Environment protection 508w
Local government finance 735w

Air traffic
Heathrow Airport 1184w
Manchester Airport 1184w

Air traffic control
772w

Air transport
Baggage 558w, 560w

Air travel
Arrests 1008w

Airbus Industrie
British Airways 360

Aircraft engines
British Airways 363

Aircraft noise
RAF Tain 475w

Aircrew
Armed forces deployment 984w

Airlines
363–4

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Debates etc.
St Peter's School Broadstairs (20.12.95) 1497–501, 1503

Alcoholic drinks
1140w

Alcoholism
1140w
EC action 1140w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Questions
Cathedrals, Admission charges 695–6
Tenant farmers 1095

Algeria
Entry clearances 24w
Immigration applications 24w
Political refugees 159w

Algrade Trust
171–2w

***Alison, Rt Hon Michael**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Questions
Cathedrals, Admission charges 695–6
Church Commission Projects (Ashford Great Park) Review 393w
Church Commissioners, Income 501w, 694–5
Church Commissioners, Investment 393w
Church Commissioners, Overseas investment 696
Church of England, Turnbull Commission 501w
Clergy, Sheffield 694
General Synod, Elections 859w
Redundant churches 858–9w

Allason, Mr Rupert
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1384–6, 1397
Questions
Armed forces officers, Publications 474–5w
Foreign investment in UK, Rural areas 354
Immunity certificates 14–5
Kingskerswell bypass 63w
"Nemesis File" 799w

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Cable television (07.12.95) 594–7, 600–1
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1557–60, 1567, 1574–5
Questions
Abandoned cars, Fees and charges 212w
Air travel, Arrests 1008w
M1, Road works 758w
Members' visits abroad, Brussels 568w
Motor vehicle testing 841w
Opposition, Higher civil servants 842w
Road construction 757w
Road finance 1043w
Transport policy 841–2w

Alltami bypass
Road construction 145–6w

Alport Dale
370–1w

Alternative dispute resolution
Legal aid 1219

Alternative energy
465–6w
Local authorities 590w

Alternative medicine
1211w
Departmental leaflets 223–4w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 699–700, 715, 734–9
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (13.12.95) 1018–9
Standing Order No 20 applications, Points of order (13.12.95) 1019
Questions
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 213w
Council housing, Political refugees 12w
Disability living allowance, Political refugees 1119–20w
EC grants and loans, Merseyside 1229w
Empty housing, Political refugees 12–3w
Government grants to local authorities, Crime victims 1231w
Greenbank project, EC grants and loans 1224–5w
Home Office, Civil service manpower 201–2w
Homelessness, Political refugees 12w
Hotels, Liverpool 1229w
Immigration appeals, Immigration rules 882–3w
Iran, Human rights 79w
Iran, Trials 78w
National Blood Authority 41w
Overseas investment, Burma 636w
Political refugees 20–2w, 952–4w
Political refugees, Germany 952w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 20w
Political refugees, Immigration controls 215–6w
Political refugees, Temporary accommodation 13w, 236w
Pre-school education 974w
Public sector housing 908w
Saudi Arabia, Religious freedom 79w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 95–7w
Tawafig, Hagdi Elfons, Deportation 1007–8w

Ambulance services
City of Durham 523w

Ambulance services—continued
Greater Glasgow Health Board 611–6w, 813–4w

Ambulances
Defence procurement 347w

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Solicitors Complaints Bureau (20.12.95) 1468–71
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1489
Questions
Local government reform, Finance 581–2w
NHS administration 829–30

Ammunition
Defence procurement 347w
Surpluses 429–30w
Waste disposal 164w

Amniocentesis tests
225w

Amphibious forces
3w

Ancram, Mr Michael, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Action for community employment 1077w
Belfast Airport, Belfast City Airport 483
Campbell Soups 476
Campbell Soups, Northern Ireland 475–6
Conductive education, Northern Ireland 801w
Devolution, Northern Ireland 903w
Electoral register, Public access 900w
Employment, Northern Ireland 316w, 481–2
Employment opportunities, Northern Ireland 311–2w
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Northern Ireland 107–8w
Farm incomes, Northern Ireland 316w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 313–5w, 386w, 482–3, 1169w
Further education colleges, Industrial tribunals 105–6w
Further education colleges, Northern Ireland 101w
Further education colleges, Redundancy 103–4w
Further education teachers, Northern Ireland 103–6w
Further education teachers, Part-time employment 105–8w
Government assistance to industry, Northern Ireland 1077w
Hotel and catering industry, Further education colleges 107w
Industrial development, Northern Ireland 310–1w
Land drainage, Northern Ireland 318–9w
Local Enterprise Development Unit, Equal opportunities 798w
National vocational qualifications, Northern Ireland 107–8w
Northern Ireland 101–2w
Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards, Educational administration 1167–8w
Northern Ireland government 484–5
Playing fields, Northern Ireland 101–2w
Rugby, Northern Ireland 545w
School meals, Cost per pupil 98–100w
School meals, Nutrition 98w
School milk, Northern Ireland 899w
Schools, Northern Ireland 652–6w
Set-aside schemes, Northern Ireland 1168–9w
Special education, Northern Ireland 801–2w
Student grants, Northern Ireland 315w
Student numbers, Northern Ireland 166w
Teachers, Employment discrimination 904w
Tourism, Northern Ireland 482–3
Universities, Research finance 109–11w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1236–7
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1012
Questions
Assisted areas, Wales 390w
Ministers' domestic visits, Wales 780w
Office of the National Lottery 1538
Privatisation, Wales 6
Welsh Development Agency, Finance 70w

Anderson, Ms Janet
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 650, 668–73
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 218w
Judiciary, Ethnic minorities 324w
Magistrates, Ethnic minorities 1203w
Magistrates' courts, Ethnic minorities 323–6w
Parole, Ethnic groups 23w
Pre-sentencing reports 188w
Prison population 23–4w
Prison population, Ethnic groups 450–2w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 211w
Prisoners on remand 730w
Prisoners on remand, Ethnic groups 209–10w, 447w
Racial attacks 206–7w
Security industry, Government contracts 659w
Stop and search 210–1w
Supervision orders, Probation and aftercare 209–10w
Yates, Craig, Tomography 1140w

Animal experiments
965w
Inspections 965–6w

Animal feed
Cattle 1128–9w

Animal housing
Animal welfare 1163w

Animal welfare
Animal housing 1163w
Cattle 1089
Dogs 488–9
Horses 534w
Transport of animals 232w, 530w, 533–4w
Veal 1088
Wild animals (13.12.95) 1020

Animal Welfare and Research Advisory Committee
1171w

Animals
722–3w

Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995
Questions
1163w

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
965w

Antarctic Treaty
1056w

Antibiotics
(05.12.95) 276–82

Antismoking campaign
525w
Children 192–3w
Wales 668w, 1160w

Apache AH-64 helicopter
769w
Armed forces training 717w

Apples
Intervention prices 1093–4
Intervention stocks 1166w
Marketing 1093

Arabic language
Languages education 692w

Arable area payments scheme
928–9w
Northern Ireland 1168–9w

***Arable area payments scheme**—continued*
Scotland 1287w
Wales 1191–2w

Arable farming
EC action 54–5w

Aral Sea
Overseas aid 85w

***Arbuthnot, Mr James**, Minister of State for Defence*
Questions
Ambulances, Defence procurement 347w
Ammunition, Defence procurement 347w
Ammunition, Surpluses 429–30w
Animal Welfare and Research Advisory Committee 1171w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 769w
Apache AH-64 helicopter, Armed forces training 717w
Arcadia Land 430w
Armed forces, Theft 343–4w
Armed forces civilians, Scotland 431w
Armed forces housing 1w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 1w, 431w, 1112–3w
Armed forces housing, Valuation 986w
Armed forces uniforms, Defence contracts 990–1w
Billing, Ministry of Defence 764–5w, 1113–4w
Cellular phones, Ministry of Defence 720w
Chemical and biological warfare, Defence research 761–2w, 1170w
Chemical and biological warfare, Treaties 1107w
Chemical weapons, Disclosure of information 1171–2w
Civil service manpower, Ministry of Defence 707–14w
Defence contracts 345w, 1106–7w
Defence equipment 477–8w
Defence equipment, Defence contracts 347–8w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 984–5w
Defence procurement, Nuclear weapons 1173w
Defence procurement, Roll-on roll-off ships 4w
Defence procurement, USA 1172w
Defence research, Armed forces 1170w
Defence research, International cooperation 430w
Defence research, LSD 761w
Departmental correspondence, Ministry of Defence 1w
Devonport Dockyard, Privatisation 473w
European Fighter Aircraft, Guided weapons 165w
Foxley, Gordon, Defence contracts 714–5w
Fraud, Ministry of Defence 765–6w
Guided weapons 347w
Harrier aircraft, Navigational aids 2w
Hawk aircraft, Arms trade 163w
Helicopters, Defence procurement 595w, 1112w
Identification friend or foe systems 431w
Members' correspondence, Ministry of Defence 984–5w
Military aircraft, International cooperation 1173–4w
Military aircraft, Spare parts 3–4w
Military satellites, Defence procurement 348w
Military vehicles, Army 1107w
Military vehicles, Defence procurement 431–2w
Mines 340–1w, 716w, 1171w
Mines, Arms control 164w
Ministers' private offices, Ministry of Defence 769w
Ministry of Defence, Consultants 349w
Ministry of Defence, Theft 429w
Ministry of Defence police 241w
Mustard gas 428–9w
National Defence Industries Council 430–1w
Official cars, Ministry of Defence 1171w

***Arbuthnot, Mr James**—continued*
Press advertising, Ministry of Defence 983w
Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 341w, 760–1w, 1174w
Rosyth Dockyard 346w
Small businesses, Ministry of Defence 1106w, 1173w
South Africa 716w
Trident missiles, USA 983w
Type 23 frigates, Defence procurement 430w
Uzzourni, Fouad 346w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 714w

Arcadia Land
430w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
North Downs 1332

Argyll and Bute
Japanese knotweed 1061w

Argyll and Clyde Health Board
1515

Armed forces
Defence research 1170w
Per capita costs 478w
Postal services 477w
Redundancy 717–8w, 770w
Theft 343–4w

Armed Forces Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
2R (13.12.95) 1024–69

Armed forces casualties
Suffield 981–2w

Armed forces civilians
Manpower 240w
Scotland 431w

Armed forces deployment
Aircrew 984w
Bosnia-Herzegovina 239w, 595w, 1111w, 1344
Northern Ireland 477w
Rules of engagement 239w
Territorial Army 343w

Armed forces desertion
771w, 1105w

Armed forces discharges
Army 1107–8w

Armed forces education allowances
476w, 981w
Quantock School 476–7w, 980–1w

Armed forces housing
1w
Avon 481w
Bedfordshire 479–80w
Central London 985w
Cleveland 479w
Derbyshire 480w
Empty housing 348–9w, 479w, 985w
Essex 479w
Greater Manchester 480w
Hampshire 481w
Hart, David 164–5w
Haverfordwest 349–50w
House purchase 1w, 431w, 577w, 595w, 1112–3w, 1336–7
Housing occupancy 987w
Humberside 593w
Kent 480–1w
Privatisation 982w
Property transfer 478–9w
RAF Finningley 985w
Rents 986–7w
RNAS Yeovilton 719w
Scotland 766–7w
Valuation 986w

Armed forces leave
766w

Armed forces married quarters
Hart, David 165w

Armed forces medical services
NHS 345w

Armed forces officers
Business appointments 473–4w, 987–8w
Civil service agencies 703–7w
Publications 474–5w

Armed forces pensions
241w

Armed forces recruitment
164w
Army 240–1w
Cannabis 240w

Armed forces reserves
Bosnia-Herzegovina 242w

Armed forces storage depots
1172–3w
Ashchurch 162–3w

Armed forces strength
240w

Armed forces training
Air force 478w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 717w
Goose Bay 592w
Low flying 984w
Military aircraft 592w
Scotland 478w

Armed forces uniforms
Defence contracts 990–1w

Armed forces women
Vaccination 569–70w

Arms control
Mines 164w

Arms Decommissioning International Body
384w, 479–80

Arms exports
Export licensing 1263w
Human rights 1085w

Arms to Iraq Inquiry
17–8w, 46w, 219w
Butler, Robin 686

Arms trade
Hawk aircraft 163w
Mines 331–2w
Nigeria 596w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 406–10
Ratings (Caravans and Boats) Bill, 2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (12.12.95) 902–3
Questions
Brent Irish Centre 643w
Departmental correspondence, Dept of Health 38w
Departmental correspondence, Dept of Social Security 150w
Departmental correspondence, Dept of the Environment 6w
Departmental correspondence, Home Office 205w
Departmental correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 97–8w
Departmental correspondence, Ministry of Defence 1w
Departmental correspondence, Northern Ireland Office 113–4w
Departmental correspondence, Scottish Office 65w
Departmental correspondence, Welsh Office 145w
Local government services 908–9w

Army
Armed forces discharges 1107–8w
Armed forces recruitment 240–1w
Disciplinary proceedings 1104–5w
Drug abuse 715–6w
Military vehicles 1107w

Army Base Repair Organisation
718w

Army in Northern Ireland
385w

Army strength
  Gurkhas 346w
  Royal Irish Regiment 346w, 770–1w

Army Technical Support Agency
  348w, (13.12.95) 962–9

Arnold, Mr Jacques
  Debates etc.
  Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 714, 787, 791
  Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 38–41
  Grant maintained schools (20.12.95) 1462–6
  Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1559–60, 1563, 1565, 1572–5, 1577
  Intervention during Christmas adjournment debate (20.12.95) 1450, 1452, 1484
  Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1491
  Questions
  Apples, Marketing 1093
  British Academy of Sport 153–4w
  Business questions 1105–6, 1547–8
  Crown Prosecution Service, Bail 15
  Electricity supply industry, Licensing 636w
  Foreign investment in UK, Wales 4–5
  Government Communications Headquarters, Conditions of employment 1189–90w
  Grant maintained schools 691w
  Museums and galleries 1210
  Office of the National Lottery 1538
  Schools, Scotland 1276w
  Scotland, Trade competitiveness 681

Arnold, Sir Thomas
  Debates etc.
  Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 181–3
  Financial services (14.12.95) 1156–61

Arrest warrants
  Compensation 245w

Arrests
  Air travel 1008w

Art works
  Australia 325w

Arts finance
  1214–5

Asbestos
  East Kilbride 174w
  Public sector housing 1067–8w

Asbestosis
  War pensions 621–2w

Ashby, Mr David
  Questions
  Land pollution, Inner city areas 1338

Ashchurch
  Armed forces storage depots 162–3w

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
  Debates etc.
  Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1227–8
  Questions
  European Court of Human Rights 488
  Irish Steel, Privatisation 1344

Ashford Great Park
  393w

Ashton, Mr Joseph
  Questions
  Pharmacists, Prescriptions 127

Assisted areas
  Wales 4, 390w

Assisted places scheme
  117w, 537w, 693w, 738–9w, 973w, 981–2, 986
  Earnings rules 306w
  Expenditure 537w
  Royal Ballet School 981
  Scotland 646w, 817–21w, 996–7w
  Wales 72w, 781–3w

Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96
  Debates etc.
  2R (11.12.95) 699–808

Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96—continued
  Questions
  213w, 359w, 494w, 604–6w, 731w
  Social security benefits rules 785w

Atkins, Rt Hon Robert,
  Questions
  European Fighter Aircraft 359–60
  Lancashire, Educational finance 694w, 979–80, 1331
  Neighbourhood noise 588–90w
  Tourism, Northern Ireland 482–3

Atkinson, Mr David
  Questions
  Chechnya 456w
  Computers 488, 747–8w
  Dorset County Council 173–4w
  Gaming Act 1968 210w
  Hostels, Social security recipients 585w
  Housing benefits, Bournemouth 376–7w
  Nagorno Karabakh, Peace keeping operations 456w

Atkinson, Mr Peter
  Questions
  HM Inspectorate of Pollution 1101w
  Milk, Production quotas 1086
  National parks authorities, Public appointments 1101–2w
  Potato Marketing Scheme 531–2w

Attorney General
  Billing 759w, 1005w
  Civil service manpower 86w
  Opinion polls 759–60w
  Private finance initiative 219w, 759w

Audit
  Church Commissioners 329w

Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 1995/96
  Debates etc.
  2R (06.12.95) 376–412

Austin-Walker, Mr John
  Debates etc.
  Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 768
  Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1121–2, 1135–9
  Business question time intervention (14.12.95) 1106
  Questions
  Housing associations, Capital investment 181w
  Housing Corporation, Privatisation 180–1w
  Housing finance, Private investment 237w
  Planning inquiries 351–2w
  Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital 181w, 198–9w

Australia
  Art works 325w
  Company registration 334w
  Radiation hazards 1172w

Autism
  Children 75w, 120w
  Special education 801–2w
  Wales 75w

Availability for work
  887w
  Northern Ireland 317–8w
  Part-time education 655w
  Unemployment benefits 305–6w

Average earnings
  Scotland 1516–7
  Wales 391w

Avon
  Armed forces housing 481w

Baby care units
  934w

Bacterial diseases
  Methicillin resistant staphylococus aureau (05.12.95) 276–82

Badgers
  Newtownabbey 904w
  Paignton Zoo 532w
  Pest control 687–8w

Baggage
  Air transport 558w, 560w

Bail
  Crown Prosecution Service 15
  Offenders 209w

Bail hostels
  Closures 209w

Bailiffs
  Cumbria 881w
  Debt collection 227w

Baker, Mr Nicholas,
  Debates etc.
  Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 739–42, 745
  Questions
  Business questions 497

Balance of payments
  280w

Balance of trade
  1264w
  Fruit 828–9w

Baldry, Mr Tony*, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
  Debates etc.
  Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 302–5
  Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1362, 1365, 1368–9, 1374–5, 1395–9
  Questions
  Arable farming, EC action 54–5w
  Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Dairy farming 1091–2
  Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 828w
  Common fisheries policy 1088
  Dairy Crest 830w
  Dairy products, Food hygiene 1091
  Drift nets 369–70w
  Drift nets, Nature conservation 833w
  European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, North Yorkshire 55w
  Fish, Imports 688w
  Fisheries 926w
  Fishing, Licensing 530–2w
  Fishing catches 369w
  Fishing quotas 1087–8
  Fishing quotas, White fish 233w
  Fishing vessels, Compensation 413w
  Fishing vessels, Spain 232–3w, 413w
  Food industry, EC grants and loans 411–2w
  Milk, Common agricultural policy 827w
  Milk, Production quotas 531w, 1085–6
  North Sea, Dredging 412w
  Orange juice 928w
  Radioactive waste disposal, Seas and oceans 14w
  School milk 1086
  Waste disposal, Seas and oceans 1122–3w

Ballots
  Grant maintained schools 76w, 691w, 1217–22w

Balmoral
  Scottish Natural Heritage 1285w

Bangor Co Down
  Roads 905w

Bank of England
  Credit 259w

Bankruptcy
  Regional selective assistance 1089–91w

Banks, Mr Matthew
  Debates etc.
  Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 845
  Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 168
  Crime (08.12.95) 638, 642, 649–50, 658–62
  Questions
  Business questions 502
  Coinage 410–1w
  Commemorative coins 1252–3w
  Credit cards, Liability 773w

Banks, Mr Matthew—continued
Deregulation initiative, Trade competitiveness 486w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 828
EC Labour and Social Affairs Council 402w
Environment Agency 516w
Finance Bill 1995/96 330w
Overseas aid 693
Paymaster-General 15–6w
Private Finance Panel 1251w
Public service pensions 15w
Waste management 515–6w

Banks, Mr Robert
Questions
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 1207

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 704–5, 709–10
Intervention during Christmas adjournment debate (20.12.95) 1456, 1483
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1233
Oral question time intervention (12.12.95) 821
Speaker, Points of order (07.12.95) 505
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1490, 1492–3
Whales, Japan (20.12.95) 1466–8
Questions
Badgers, Newtownabbey 904w
Badgers, Pest control 687–8w
Battersea power station 643w
Business questions 504
Church Commissioners, Income 694–5
County Hall 586w
Dogs, Animal welfare 488–9
Football 1213
Local government, Greater London 908w
Ministers' private offices, Dept for Education and Employment 1017–8w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Health 930w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Social Security 889w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of the Environment 908w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Trade and Industry 1255w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Transport 559w
Ministers' private offices, Deputy Prime Minister 628w
Ministers' private offices, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 644w
Ministers' private offices, Home Office 966w
Ministers' private offices, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 831w
Ministers' private offices, Ministry of Defence 769w
Ministers' private offices, Northern Ireland Office 905w
Ministers' private offices, Scottish Office 1060w
Ministers' private offices, Treasury 1048w
Ministers' private offices, Welsh Office 989w
Monuments, World War II 833–4
Official hospitality, Dept for Education and Employment 1018w
Official hospitality, Dept of Health 933w
Official hospitality, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Official hospitality, Dept of Social Security 1120w
Official hospitality, Dept of the Environment 1230w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 636–7w
Official hospitality, Dept of Transport 559w
Official hospitality, Deputy Prime Minister 748w
Official hospitality, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 644–5w
Official hospitality, Home Office 966–7w

Banks, Mr Tony—continued
Official hospitality, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 927w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Defence 769w
Official hospitality, Northern Ireland Office 905w
Official hospitality, Prime Minister 567w, 644w
Official hospitality, Scottish Office 815w
Official hospitality, Treasury 634w
Official hospitality, Welsh Office 777w
Operation Charm 967–8w
Passports 659w
Passports, Fraud 732w
Political refugees 954–5w

Barings
Serious Fraud Office 16

Barking
Health services (06.12.95) 344–50

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 846
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 1001
Homelessness, Public petitions (06.12.95) 462
Intervention during Christmas adjournment debate (20.12.95) 1482
Questions
Business questions 502–3, 1107–8, 1548
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 848w
EC Finance Council 157–8w
EC Health Council 41–2w
EC Telecommunications Council 293w
Handicapped, Employment opportunities 828–9
Land pollution, Opencast mining 1338
Land registration 880w
Northern Ireland government 385w
Office of the National Lottery 1538–9
Palace of Westminster, Reprography 656–7w

Barnet
Hospital admissions 935–6w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 894–6
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 122
Tobacco advertising 426–7w, 933–4w

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Questions
Personal pensions 620w

Baton rounds
Northern Ireland 903w

Battersea power station
174w, 643w

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Advanced gas-cooled reactors, Construction costs 1255–6w
Advanced gas-cooled reactors, Fossil fuel levy 1256w
Bilateral aid 691
Breast cancer, Screening 39w
British Coal Enterprise 1080w
Electricity generation, Fuels 862w
Electricity tariffs, Electricity meters 861–2w
Energy conservation, Ministry of Defence 590w
Energy prices 862–3w
European Regional Development Fund 860w
Land pollution 1337–8
Natural gas, North Sea 352
Opencast mining, Planning permission 723w
Paracetamol 37w
Prison accommodation 24–5w
Prison overcrowding 25w
Shareholders 563w
Trams, Leeds 188w

Battle, Mr John—continued
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust 191w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 229–30
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1245
Questions
Armed forces medical services, NHS 345w
Beef, Food contamination 489
Bilateral aid 1067–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1123–4w
Class sizes, Educational finance 979
Clinical psychologists 33–4w
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 487–8w
Finance 467–8w
Foreign investment in UK 278–9w
Labour migration, Bilateral aid 470w
Medical Research Council, Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 861–2w, 1206–8w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Education and Employment 972w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of Trade and Industry 773w
National Lottery 567w
NHS, Cash limits 934–5w
NHS, Land acquisition 379w
NHS finance 680w
NHS trusts, Contracts for services 40w
Private finance initiative 147–8w
Railway transport, Privatisation 1044w
Sixth form colleges, VAT 970–1w
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust 222w
Today newspaper 373w

Bazelya, Khalifa Amed
836w, (20.12.95) 1471–3

BBC
416–7w, 847w, 853w
Broadcasting finance 852w
Private finance initiative 852–3w
Television engineering 417w

BBC External Services
81w
Broadcasting finance 338–9w

Beaches
Welsh Water 414w

Beaufort Dyke
Explosives 609w, 815w
Radioactive waste disposal 45–6w

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Questions
Balance of trade 1264w
Buy outs 286–7w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministers' private offices 284–6w
Deregulation Task Force 167w
Economic growth, OECD countries 1263–4w
Enterprise and Deregulation Unit 167w
Inflation, OECD countries 1265w
Investment 352–3
Invisible trade balance 1264w
Manufactured goods, International trade 1264w
Manufacturing industries 1252w
Manufacturing industries, Industrial production 1264w
Nuclear Electric, Finance 1264–5w
Retail prices index, Electricity tariffs 1080–1w
Shareholders 257w
Shares 154–6w
Sizewell B, Construction costs 1265w

Bed and breakfast accommodation
Homelessness 1233–4w

Bedfordshire
Armed forces housing 479–80w

Beef
Food contamination 489
Food standards 1513–4
School meals 120w

Beer
- 355–6

Beggs, Mr Roy
- *Questions*
  - Building industry, Further education 1216w
  - Extradition, USA 385–6w
  - Fish farming, Larne Lough 798–9w
  - Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 482
  - Further education colleges 1018w
  - House of Commons accommodation 843–4w
  - International Investments 1074w
  - Medical students 490
  - Roads, Carrickfergus 1167w
  - Roads, Northern Ireland 1079w
  - Ross, Finbar, Extradition 1074w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
- *Debates etc.*
  - Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 149–50, 177–81
  - Common fisheries policy, Points of order (19.12.95) 1408
  - HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1278, 1301, 1320
- *Questions*
  - HMSO 252–3w
  - HMSO, Privatisation 453–5w, 1091–3w
  - Homelessness, Social security reform 1097
  - Political refugees 22w
  - Select committees, Video conferencing 330w

Belfast
- Road construction 385w
- Road works 99w

Belfast Airport
- Belfast City Airport 483

Belfast City Airport
- Belfast Airport 483

Belfast Corporation Act 1932
- *Questions*
  - 1075w

Belfast Lough
- Oceanography 799w

Bell, Mr Stuart
- *Questions*
  - Electrical industry, Export promotion 361–2

Bellingham, Mr Henry
- *Debates etc.*
  - Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 844
  - Intervention during Ministerial statement (12.12.95) 837
- *Questions*
  - Access to countryside, Public footpaths 1089–90
  - Campbell Soups 476
  - Drift nets, Scotland 1528
  - NHS trusts, Contracts for services 189w

Benefits Agency
- see Social Security Benefits Agency

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
- *Questions*
  - Environment, EC law 5w
  - "House of Commons Members' Handbook" 657w
  - Investment 287w

Benzodiazepines
- Civil proceedings 1014w
- Medical research 1208w
- Prescription drugs 1208w

***Beresford, Sir Paul**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment*
- *Debates etc.*
  - Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 410–2
  - Lancashire (04.12.95) 117–20
  - Public participation in planning (06.12.95) 331–5
  - Ratings (Caravans and Boats) Bill, 2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (12.12.95) 901–2, 905
  - Waste disposal, West Drayton (18.12.95) 1325–8
- *Questions*
  - Areas of outstanding natural beauty, North Downs 1332
  - Battersea power station 174w, 643w
  - Billing, Dept of the Environment 723w, 1098w
  - Brent Irish Centre 643w
  - Buckinghamshire, Standard spending assessments 353–4w
  - Buckinghamshire County Council, Non-domestic rates 352–3w
  - Cellular phones, Dept of the Environment 352w
  - Coal mining, Industrial accidents 722w
  - Computer terminals 909–10w
  - Consultants, Dept of the Environment 176w
  - Council tax 350w
  - Councillors' attendance allowances 235w
  - Councillors' interests 7w
  - County Hall 586w
  - Dorset County Council 173–4w
  - Dredging, Licensing 404w
  - Ealing Borough Council, Local government finance 351w
  - Educational finance 236–7w
  - Employment Medical Advisory Service, Manpower 234w
  - Gas pipelines, Zeebrugge 9w
  - Government grants to local authorities, Crime victims 1231w
  - Government offices for the regions 511–2w
  - Health and Safety Executive, Public appointments 176w
  - Housing action trusts 512–4w
  - Industrial accidents 1236–7w
  - Industrial development, South Hams 924w
  - Industrial health and safety 1239–40w
  - Industrial injuries 1212–4w
  - Integrated regional offices, Finance 236w
  - Lancashire County Council, Sick leave 9w
  - Local authorities, Political activities 915w
  - Local government finance 1094w
  - Local government finance, Buckinghamshire 404–5w
  - Local government land, Land acquisition 1103–4w
  - Local government pensions 724–5w
  - Local government reform 721w, 724w
  - Local government reform, Leicestershire 1097w
  - Local government reform, Local government elections 406w
  - Local government reform, Local government finance 921w
  - Local government reform, Metropolitan districts 176–7w
  - Local government services 908–9w
  - Members' correspondence, Dept of the Environment 922w
  - Ministers' private offices, Dept of the Environment 908w
  - New businesses 1236w
  - New Forest, Natural heritage areas 1234w
  - Newham Borough Council, Local government finance 512w
  - North Yorkshire County Council, Debts 9w
  - Official cars, Dept of the Environment 911–2w
  - Official hospitality, Dept of the Environment 1230w
  - Opencast mining, Planning permission 723w
  - Planning inquiries 351–2w
  - Planning permission, Rural areas 5–6w
  - Press advertising, Dept of the Environment 1230w
  - Private finance initiative, Dept of the Environment 237w, 352w, 915–6w
  - Public inquiries, Welbeck 7w
  - Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital 181w
  - Rates and rating, Appeals 641–2w

Beresford, Sir Paul—continued
  - Rating revaluations 642w
  - Rating revaluations, Administrative delays 642w
  - Rating revaluations, Costs 642w
  - Research, Dept of the Environment 1230–2w
  - Single regeneration budget 13w
  - Standard spending assessments, Education vouchers 175–6w
  - Standard spending assessments, London boroughs 1341–2
  - Standard spending assessments, Police authorities 1240–4w
  - Tipping of waste, Taxation 1099w
  - Trichlorothylene 584w
  - Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, Land reclamation 404w
  - Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, Property transfer 642–3w
  - Valuation tribunals 642w, 1104w
  - Valuation tribunals, Public appointments 642w
  - Valuation tribunals, Training 642w
  - Village halls 235w
  - Warwickshire Council Council, Local government finance 354w
  - Wearmouth Colliery 1235w
  - Whatley quarry 1237w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
- *Debates etc.*
  - Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 794–5
  - Children in care (06.12.95) 315, 318–20
  - HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 996
  - Members' conduct, Points of order (12.12.95) 847
  - Railway travel (18.12.95) 1242
  - Taxis, Points of order (06.12.95) 374–5
- *Questions*
  - Business questions 1546–7

Berry, Mr Roger
- *Questions*
  - EC Committee of the Regions, Councillors 84–5w
  - International Court of Justice 81w
  - Unemployment, Waveney 142–3w

Berwickshire
- Forestry 173w

Betts, Mr Clive
- *Questions*
  - Billing, Attorney General 759w
  - Billing, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 748w
  - Billing, Dept for Education and Employment 737w
  - Billing, Dept of Health 804w
  - Billing, Dept of National Heritage 855w
  - Billing, Dept of Social Security 785w
  - Billing, Dept of the Environment 723w
  - Billing, Dept of Trade and Industry 773w
  - Billing, Dept of Transport 754w
  - Billing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 752w
  - Billing, Home Office 729w
  - Billing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 728w
  - Billing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 831–2w
  - Billing, Ministry of Defence 764–5w
  - Billing, Northern Ireland Office 800w
  - Billing, Scottish Office 816–7w
  - Billing, Treasury 1050w
  - Billing, Welsh Office 778w
  - Capital investment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 252w
  - Private finance initiative 727w, 733–4w
  - Private finance initiative, Attorney General 219w, 759w
  - Private finance initiative, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 253–4w, 748w, 1214–5w
  - Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Employment 309w, 401w, 972–3w
  - Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 222w, 382w, 803–4w
  - Private finance initiative, Dept of National Heritage 371–2w

Betts, Mr Clive—continued
- Private finance initiative, Dept of Social Security 246w, 377w, 1274w
- Private finance initiative, Dept of the Environment 237w, 352w, 915–6w
- Private finance initiative, Dept of Trade and Industry 287–8w, 331w, 774w
- Private finance initiative, Dept of Transport 275w, 321w, 754w
- Private finance initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 337w, 752w
- Private finance initiative, Home Office 244w, 354–5w, 955w
- Private finance initiative, Lord Chancellor's Dept 228w, 727–8w
- Private finance initiative, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 233w, 369w, 831w
- Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 341w, 760–1w
- Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland Office 320w, 386–7w, 906w
- Private finance initiative, Scottish Office 300–1w, 367w
- Private finance initiative, Treasury 255–6w, 328–9w, 734w, 877w
- Private finance initiative, Welsh Office 278w, 392w, 780–1w
- Railway timetables 264w
- South Yorkshire Supertram 57–8w

Bicycles
- China 362–3
- Imports 49–51w
- Railway travel 187w

Bilateral aid
- 690–1, 1067–9w
- Labour migration 470w
- Small businesses 664–5w
- Southern Africa 689

Billing
- Attorney General 759w, 1005w
- Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 748w
- Dept for Education and Employment 737w, 1033w
- Dept of Health 804w
- Dept of National Heritage 855w
- Dept of Social Security 785w
- Dept of the Environment 723w, 1098w
- Dept of Trade and Industry 773w
- Dept of Transport 754w, 1039–40w
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office 752w, 1056w
- Home Office 729w
- Interest charges 45–6w
- Lord Chancellor's Dept 728w, 1014w
- Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 831–2w, 1165–6w
- Ministry of Defence 764–5w, 1113–4w
- Northern Ireland Office 800w
- Pharmacists 126, 578w
- Scottish Office 816–7w, 1063w
- Treasury 1050w
- Welsh Office 778w

Biographical collections
- Monuments 113w

Birds
- Cardiff Bay barrage 276w
- Carmarthen bay 147w

Birmingham
- GP fundholders 124–5

Birmingham relief road
- Public inquiries 186–7w

Blair, Rt Hon Tony
- *Debates etc.*
  - Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1223–5
- *Questions*
  - Economic and monetary union 487–8
  - Educational standards 134
  - Railway transport, Privatisation 1343
  - Railway travel, Privatisation 830

Block grant
- Welsh Office 73w

Blood
- Exports 41w

Blood alcohol levels
- Drinking and driving 1040w
- EC countries 1040w

Blood transfusion services
- 193w
- Hepatitis 425–6w

Blunkett, Mr David
- *Questions*
  - Advertising, Dept for Education and Employment 139–40w
  - Assisted places scheme 117w
  - Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 216w
  - Dept for Education and Employment, Government information services 1018w
  - Dept for Education and Employment, Green papers 140–2w
  - Discretionary student grants 739w
  - Education vouchers, Pre-school education 120–1w, 974–5w, 1227–8w
  - Educational finance 975w
  - Educational standards 975w
  - Educational standards, General certificate of secondary education 1033–4w
  - Grant maintained schools 116–7w, 737–8w
  - Grant maintained schools, Ballots 1217w
  - Hurworth School, Inquiries 1216–7w
  - Local education authorities, Capital investment 976–7w
  - Office for Standards in Education, Finance 535w
  - Pre-school education, School population 436–8w
  - Primary education, Literacy 118w
  - School administration 142w
  - School meals, Expenditure 303–4w
  - Schools, Capital investment 438–9w
  - Standard spending assessments 980–1
  - Student loans 1227–8w
  - Teacher training, Shortage subjects 1226–7w
  - Teacher training, Student numbers 1228w
  - Teachers, Pay 742–4w
  - Technology colleges 118–9w
  - Training 118w
  - Vocational guidance 152–3w
  - Voluntary schools 737w

Board of Inland Revenue
- see Inland Revenue

Boateng, Mr Paul
- *Debates etc.*
  - Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 708
  - Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 383, 386, 403–6, 411–2
- *Questions*
  - Courts, Contracts for services 728w
  - Courts, Private sector 728w
  - Family law 1220
  - Private finance initiative 726–7w

Body, Sir Richard
- *Debates etc.*
  - Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1364, 1376–7

Bolton
- (04.12.95) 115–20

Bombings
- Lockerbie 57w, 86w, 148w, 750w, 997w, 1276w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- *Questions*
  - Antarctic Treaty 1056w
  - Diplomatic service, Scotland 574w
  - Estonia 82w
  - European Convention on Human Rights 80–1w, 645w
  - Guatemala, Human rights 339–40w
  - Guatemala, Police training 339w
  - Guatemala, Trials 340w
  - International Court of Justice 81w
  - Ministers' domestic visits, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1057w
  - Peru, Human rights 1054w
  - St Helena, Custodial treatment 457w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas—continued
- Treaties 837w
- United Nations 82–3w
- United Nations, UK contributions 837w

Booth, Mr Hartley
- *Debates etc.*
  - Prisoners Earnings Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1023
- *Questions*
  - Civil service, Accounting 503w
  - EC countries, English language 835–6w
  - Foreign investment in UK 1081w, 1256w
  - Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Codes of practice 803w
  - Industrial investment 1081–2w

Borders Health Board
- Finance 361–2w

Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Armed forces deployment 239w, 595w, 1111w, 1344
- Armed forces reserves 242w
- European Convention on Human Rights 488
- International assistance 1073w
- Ministerial statements (12.12.95) 835–46

Boswell, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
- *Debates etc.*
  - Farm incomes (11.12.95) 812–6
- *Questions*
  - Access to countryside 1090
  - Access to countryside, Public footpaths 1089–90
  - Agricultural marketing, EC grants and loans 1166w
  - Alport Dale 370–1w
  - Apples, Intervention prices 1093–4
  - Apples, Intervention stocks 1166w
  - Apples, Marketing 1093
  - Billing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 831–2w, 1165–6w
  - Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 229–32w
  - Consultants, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 684–7w
  - Dioxins, Pollution monitoring 1131w
  - Farmers, Early retirement 54w, 829w
  - Farmers, Lichfield 830w
  - Fruit, Balance of trade 828–9w
  - Government contracts, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1165w
  - Hill farming 828w
  - Investors in people, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 56w
  - Legislation, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 368w
  - Ministers' private offices, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 831w
  - Ministers' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1163–4w
  - Official hospitality, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 927w
  - Opinion polls, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 832–3w
  - Orders and regulations, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 580–1w, 1132w
  - Pesticides 689–90w
  - Potato Marketing Scheme 531–2w
  - Private finance initiative, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 233w, 369w, 831w
  - Public expenditure, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1166w
  - Public footpaths, Ramblers' Association 1090
  - Rural areas 829–30w
  - Small businesses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1164–5w
  - Tenant farmers 1095
  - Weymouth 829w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
- *Questions*
  - Army, Drug abuse 715–6w
  - Drinking and driving, Road accidents 273w

Bottomley, Mr Peter—continued
Excise duties, Diesel fuel 14w
Mortgage relief 15w
Public order policing, Exhibitions 360–1w
Road accidents, Children 270–2w
Road accidents, Pedestrians 273–4w
Take-home pay 563–4w
Taxation, Diesel fuel 259w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia, Secretary of State for National Heritage
Questions
BBC 847w
BBC, Broadcasting finance 852w
Broadcasting 1210–1
Broadcasting, Regulatory system 1210
Broadcasting controls 1211–2
Camelot Group 1115w
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 848w
Film industry 849w
G-Tech, Office of the National Lottery 847w, 1115w
Millennium Commission, Ethnic groups 417w
Millennium Commission, Exhibitions 1265–6w
Millennium Exhibition 1215–6
Millennium Fund 1216
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of National Heritage 261w
National Lottery 847w, 1214–5
National Lottery, Charities 1205
National Lottery, Licensing 1206
Office of the National Lottery 1205–7, 1533–43
Office of the National Lottery, Official visits 1266w
Public libraries 850–2w
S4C 1211
Schools, Languages 1208
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 1207

Bournemouth
Housing benefits 376–7w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
51–2w, 534w, 581w, 690w, 827–8w, 926–7w, 940–2w, 1094–5, 1123–8w
Dairy farming 1091–2
Medical Research Council 861–2w, 1206–8w
Organophosphorous pesticides 1123w
Research finance 1206–8w
Scotland 1278w, 1513
Slaughterhouses 1094
Wales 73w

Bowden, Sir Andrew
Questions
Mortgage relief 506w
Occupational pensions, VAT 1047w

Bowis, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Children in care (06.12.95) 323–7
Questions
Alcoholic drinks 1140w
Alcoholism 1140w
Alcoholism, EC action 1140w
Benzodiazepines, Medical research 1208w
Benzodiazepines, Prescription drugs 1208w
Breast cancer 127–8
Breast cancer, Royal Marsden Hospital 128
Child workers 523w
Chiropody 223w
Community care 943w
Community health services, Expenditure 43w
Compulsorily detained mental patients, Deportation 1133w
Day care of children 1138w
Drug abuse, Children 192–3w
EC Health Council 41–2w
Geriatric patients, Hospital beds 1132w
Health services, Elderly 191w
Home care services 191–2w, 195–6w
Hospices, Children 521–2w

Bowis, Mr John—continued
Hospital beds, Elderly 521w
Hospital closures 807w
Hospital discharges 380w
Intensive care, Paediatrics 1212w
Local government social services, Buckinghamshire 383w
Mental health community care 524w, 1133w, 1140w
Mental health services 808w, 937w
Mental health services, Local government expenditure 1132w
Mental hospitals, NHS and private practice 523–4w
Mental patients, Hospital beds 381w, 1133w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prisoners' rights 1132–3w
Mentally handicapped, Residential care 1141–2w
Nursing homes 382w
Paracetamol, Drug abuse 936w
Partnerships in Care 524w
Physiotherapists, Royal Charters 197w
Portman Group 1145w
Refugees, Young people 938w
Residential care 196w, 200w
Residential care, Handicapped 523w
Residential care, Mentally ill 131
Residential care of children 226w, 682w
St Christopher's House 935w
Secure accommodation, Tiffield 43w, 427w
Secure psychiatric units 681–2w
Special hospitals 220w
Supervision registers 807w
Systemic lupus erythematosus 1136w

Bradford Royal Infirmary
Accident and emergency departments 132–3

Bradley, Mr Keith
Questions
Habitual residence test 891w
Handicap benefits, Expenditure 89–90w
Homelessness, Young people 820–1
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 432w
Jobseeker's allowance 139–40w
Social fund, Maternity payments 502w

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 167
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 27, 50–5
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1232
Questions
Nigeria 692
Science and technology 282–3w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 701
Questions
Mathematics, Educational standards 972
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 671w

Breast cancer
127–8
Estimates days (14.12.95) 1112–55
Health services 1145w, 1154w
Research finance 517–8w
Royal Marsden Hospital 128
Screening 39w
Wales 11, 77–8w, 991w, 1154–5w

Breast feeding
33w

Brent Irish Centre
643w

Brewing industry
356
Public houses 355

Bridges
Lorries 321w
Wales 392w

Brightlingsea
Public order policing 361w

Bristol Development Corpaoration (Area and Constitution) Order 1995
Debates etc.
(05.12.95) 275

British Academy of Sport
153–4w, 852w

British Airways
Airbus Industrie 360
Aircraft engines 363
Lancashire 359

British Broadcasting Corporation
see BBC

British Coal Corporation
292w
Privatisation 1256–7w

British Coal Enterprise
49w, 1080w

British Council
Know-how Fund 691

British embassies
Closures 577w
Kiribati 575–6w
Official residences 575–7w, 1188w
Operating costs 1188w

British Rail
Noise control 186w
Privatisation 555–6w, 559w

British residents abroad
Offences against children 449–50w

British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1020

British Transport Police
216w

Brixton
Civil disorder 1098

Broadcasting
1210–1
Regulatory system 1210

Broadcasting controls
1211–2

Broadcasting engineering
Privatisation 416–7w, 847w, 853w

Broadcasting Etc Select Committee
(18.12.95) 1322

Broadcasting finance
BBC 852w
BBC External Services 338–9w

Bronchitis
Industrial disablement benefits 86–7w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 723–5
Questions
Office of the National Lottery 1535–6

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1553, 1555, 1558, 1562, 1564, 1566–70, 1575, 1580
Questions
Chemical industries 135

Browning, Mrs Angela, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
Advisory Committee on Pesticides, Public appointments 1153w
Animal welfare, Animal housing 1163w
Badgers, Pest control 687–8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 51–2w, 534w, 581w, 827–8w, 926–7w, 1123–8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Organophosphorous pesticides 1123w

Browning, Mrs Angela—continued
Cattle, Animal feed 1128–9w
Cattle, Animal welfare 1089
Cattle, Offal 1127w
Dietary supplements, EC action 834w
Dioxins 688–9w
Dogs, Transmissible encephalopathies 1128w
Food 1084–5
Food industry 1085
Frogs legs, Imports 232w
Horses, Animal welfare 534w
Lettuces, Nitrates 233w
Lindane 1134w
Meat, Export promotion 829w
Organophosphorous pesticides, Sheep dipping 229w
Paignton Zoo, Badgers 532w
Pesticide residues, Food contamination 1129w
Pesticides 830w
Pesticides, Cattle 1129–31w
Poultry, Organic farming 830–1w
Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995 1124w
Transport of animals, Animal welfare 232w, 530w, 533–4w
Transport of animals, Inspections 529–30w
Veal, Animal welfare 1088
Veal, Export of live animals 1089
Weedkillers 581w

Browning Ferris
Waste disposal 992w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 144
Committee on standards in public life, Points of order (06.12.95) 374
Questions
Armed forces housing, House purchase 1337
Export promotion 362
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 1290w
Technology foresight programme 281w
Weymouth 829w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 230–1
Financial services (14.12.95) 1163, 1170–2
Questions
Armed forces desertion 1105w
Chartermark scheme 629–32w
Citizen's Charter 630w
Citizen's Charter Unit 629–31w, 634w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Public appointments 809w
Finance Bill 1995/96 410w
Fraud, Dept for Education and Employment 740w
Fraud, Dept of Social Security 785–6w
Fraud, Dept of Transport 754w
Fraud, Government departments 734w
Fraud, Ministry of Defence 765–6w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 505w
Inheritance tax, Tax rates and bands 505w
Medicines Act 1968, Orders and regulations 809w
Medicines Control Agency, Performance standards 808w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept of Health 1207w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept of Transport 1042w
Ministers' visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1187w
Ministers' visits abroad, Home Office 1200w
Ministers' visits abroad, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1205w
Ministers' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1163–4w
Ministers' visits abroad, Prime Minister 1051–2w
Ministers' visits abroad, Treasury 1248w
Ministry of Defence police, Manpower 771–2w
Operating costs, Dept of Health 1209w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm—continued
Operating costs, Dept of Transport 1042–3w
Operating costs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1187w
Operating costs, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1205w
Operating costs, Northern Ireland Office 1074w
Operating costs, Treasury 1248–50w
Oral contraceptives 1146–51w
Post Office 877w
Post Office, Profits 777w
Press advertising, Dept for Education and Employment 1019w
Press advertising, Dept of Health 1133w
Press advertising, Dept of the Environment 1230w
Press advertising, Dept of Trade and Industry 859w
Press advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 835w
Press advertising, Home Office 1009–10w
Press advertising, Ministry of Defence 983w
Press advertising, Prime Minister 842w
Press advertising, Scottish Office 1281–3w
Press advertising, Treasury 1247w
Progestogens 1151–2w
VAT, Company liquidations 563w
Venture capital trusts 877w

Brussels
Members' visits abroad 568w

Buckinghamshire
Local government finance 404–5w
Local government social services 383w
Standard spending assessments 353–4w

Buckinghamshire County Council
Non-domestic rates 352–3w
Revenue support grant 352–3w

Buckley
Housing finance 146w

Buckley-Clwyd relief road
Road construction 146w

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 92–4
European communities (07.12.95) 511
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1232
Questions
Export promotion 357
Pharmacists 126

Budget November 1995
(05.12.95) 140–275
NHS (04.12.95) 24–114

Building industry
Employment opportunities 562w
Further education 1216w

"Building on Success"
1079w

Building repairs
Stormont 656w

Building Research Establishment
Finance 913–4w
Privatisation 513–4w

Building societies
Law reform 507w

Bull bars
Police vehicles 602–3w

Burden, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 513
Water (Conservation and Consumer Choice) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1023
Questions
Diplomatic service, Trade promotion 838–9w
Electricity tariffs 45w
GP fundholders, Birmingham 124–5
Public service vehicles, Mobility of disabled 672w

Burden, Mr Richard—continued
Tax allowances, Regional electricity companies 14w
VAT repayment, Electricity tariffs 260w

Bureaucracy
Farmers 830w
General practitioners 492–3w

Burma
Democracy 418w
Forced labour 457w, 463–4w
Overseas aid 1175–6w
Overseas investment 636w
Overseas trade 456–7w, 463–4w
Trade promotion 464–5w

Burns, Robert
Festivals and special occasions 1521

***Burns, Mr Simon**, Lord Commissioner of the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Criminal injuries compensation scheme (06.12.95) 456

***Burt, Mr Alistair**, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Access Committee for England 942–3w
Availability for work 887w
Billing, Dept of Social Security 785w
Cellular phones, Dept of Social Security 378w
Child Support Agency, Computers 1116w
Chronically sick, Carers 826
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Social Security 376w
Computer privacy, Dept of Social Security 1266w
Departmental correspondence, Dept of Social Security 150w
Dept of Social Security, Computers 1115–6w
Dept of Social Security, Operating costs 90w
Dept of Social Security, Telephone services 246–8w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 828
EC law 502w
Government contracts, Dept of Social Security 1121w
Handicap benefits 619w, 1121–2w
Handicap benefits, Expenditure 89–90w
Handicapped, Employment opportunities 828–9
Incapacity benefit 621w
Incapacity benefit, Handicapped 828
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 432w, 1270w
Incapacity benefit, Merthyr Tydfil 794w
Incapacity benefit, Social security benefits disqualification 668–9w
Invalidity benefits 95w, 249w, 375w
Invalidity benefits, Merthyr Tydfil 621w, 670w
Low pay 818–9
Members' correspondence, Dept of Social Security 889w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Social Security 889w
Motability 1118w, 1267w
Motability Finance 887–9w
National Disability Council 669–70w
National Disability Council, Public appointments 619w
Official hospitality, Dept of Social Security 1120w
Opinion polls, Dept of Social Security 786–93w
Prince's Trust 671w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Social Security 246w, 377w, 1274w
Small businesses, Dept of Social Security 1120–1w
Social security benefits 618w
Social security benefits, Carers 826–7
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 671w
Social security benefits rules, Handicapped 784w
Social security benefits uprating 885–8w

Burt, Mr Alistair—continued
Social security finance 671–2w
Unemployment 819
Unemployment benefits, Employment schemes 818
Unemployment benefits, Workfare 819

Bus services
Hydrocarbon oil duties 633w
Wales 571–2w

Buses
Motor vehicle registration 425w
Motor vehicle testing 425w

Business
(13.12.95) 1069
Advisory services 71w, 467w
Wales 71w

Business appointments
Armed forces officers 473–4w, 987–8w

Business link
290–2w

Business motions
(08.12.95) 678

Business names
1083w

Business premises
Crime prevention 1010–1w

Business questions
496–504, 1102–9, 1545–50

Business start-up scheme
1224w

Business statements
493–5, 1101–2, 1544–5

Butcher, Mr John
Questions
Millennium Exhibition 1215–6
Residential care, Coventry 929w
Residential care, Handicapped 523w

Butler, Mr Peter
Questions
Citizen's Charter 254w
Deregulation initiative, EC law 487w
Foreign investment in UK 489

Butler, Robin
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 686

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc.
British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1020
European communities (07.12.95) 512, 530
Financial services (14.12.95) 1181, 1186, 1189
Members' interests, Points of order (04.12.95) 19–20

Buy outs
286–7w

Byers, Mr Stephen
Questions
Employment 877–8w
Investors in people 308–9w
Investors in people, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 56w
Newbury bypass 675w
Nursery schools, School population 740–2w
School admission, Appeals 740w
Skilled workers, Labour market 307–8w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, Redundancy pay 774w
Training, European Social Fund 739w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 307w
Youth training 309–10w
Youth unemployment 987–8

Cabinet committees
167w
Disclosure of information 681–2

Cabinet Office
254w
Science and technology 488w

Cable and Wireless
860w

Cable television
568w, (07.12.95) 594–602

Caborn, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 148–9
Questions
Government offices for the regions 879w
HMSO 167w
Integrated regional offices 681, 863–6w
Regional aid, Expenditure 865w
Regional planning and development 925w
Regional selective assistance 865w

Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust
130

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Dept of the Environment, Government buildings 1234w
Education 1228–9w
Heathrow Airport, Air traffic 1184w
Heathrow Airport, Environmental impact assessment 1183w
Heathrow Airport, Passengers 1184w
Homelessness 1233w
Homelessness, Bed and breakfast accommodation 1233–4w
Pupil-teacher ratios 1223w
Rented housing 1235w
Repossession orders 1232w
River pollution 1234–5w
Teachers, Part-time employment 1223w
Teachers, Redundancy 972w

Camden and Islington Health Authority
Cash limits 1144w

Camden Borough Council
Playing fields 1208–9

Camelot Group
1115w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1242
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Earnings rules 306w
British Rail, Noise control 186w
Cabinet Office, Science and technology 488w
Mathematics, Educational standards 972
Research facilities, Efficiency scrutinies 351
Schools, Languages 1208
Standard of living 1095–6
Teacher training, Educational finance 115–6w
Teacher training, Information technology 692w
UK contributions to EC budget, Home Office 500w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1033, 1044–8
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 839
European communities (07.12.95) 510
Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, Rep and 3R (18.12.95) 1252
Questions
Armed forces casualties, Suffield 981–2w
Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board 1283–4w
United Nations, UK contributions 837w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 142
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 827w
Council house rents 921–2w

Campbell Soups
476, 566w
Northern Ireland 475–6
Wales 1

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 382–3
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 140–1, 151
Oral question time intervention (11.12.95) 682
Transfer of questions, Points of order (04.12.95) 20
Questions
Agricultural production, Milk 1092
Bailiffs, Cumbria 881w
Business questions 1106
Campbell Soups 566w
Campbell Soups, Northern Ireland 475–6
Campbell Soups, Wales 1
South Africa, Higher education 689

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (20.12.95) 1522
Questions
Business questions 496
Exclusion orders 949w
Ministers, Scotland 1277w
Northern Ireland government 385w
School milk, Food subsidies 1514
Unemployment 352
Waste disposal, Seas and oceans 1122–3w
Wei, Jingsheng, China 1188w

Cancer
Wales 72w, 146–7w

Cancer hazards
Nitrates 194–5w

Cann, Mr Jamie
Questions
Housing associations, Housing benefits 7–8w

Cannabis
Armed forces recruitment 240w

Capita Managed Services
974–5w
Education vouchers 698–9w

Capital
NHS trusts 1151w
Railtrack 1044w

Capital rules
Income support 97w
Residential care 669w

Car allowances
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising 1182–3w

Car hire
NHS 682w

Caravan sites
Non-domestic rates (12.12.95) 901–6

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 726w
Energy conservation 1099–100w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 1099–100w

Cardiff Airport
Road construction 989w

Cardiff Bay barrage
Birds 276w

Career structure
Hospital staff 197w

Carers
Chronically sick 826
Northern Ireland 110w
Social security benefits 826–7

Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995
Questions
110w

Caribbean
Repatriation (19.12.95) 1437–48

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 604–5, 612, 617–8, 631–2, 635–44, 677
Criminal injuries compensation scheme (06.12.95) 445, 449, 454–6
Questions
Closed circuit television, Crime prevention 601w
Court of appeal 1217–8
Crown Prosecution Service, Crime victims 15
Dept of Trade and Industry, Early retirement 867w
Drug crimes, Smuggling 601–2w
Fish conservation, Wales 571–2w
Hill farming, Wales 7
Immunity certificates, Home Office 26–7w
Legal aid 227w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 42–3w
One stop shop initiative 866w
Patent Office, Contracts for services 865–6w, 1088–9w
Patent Office, Trade unions 865w
Police, Manpower 956–7w
Police civilians 602w
Police custody, Death 243w
Police custody, Drug abuse 243w
Police custody, Health 243w
Police surgeons 243w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 600–1w
Political refugees, Immigration appeals 244–5w
Prison population 499w
Prison visitors 600w
Prisoners, Suicide 448w
Prisoners on remand 497–9w
Prisoners on remand, Housing 447w
River Wye 1157w
River Wye, Special areas of conservation 1157w
School crossing patrols 559w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 718, 742–3, 757–60

Carmarthen bay
Birds 147w
Oil pollution 147w

Carpal tunnel syndrome
Industrial injuries 784w

Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994
Questions
183–4w, 274–5w

Carrickfergus
Roads 1167w

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Financial services (14.12.95) 1176–8, 1192
Questions
London Ambulance Service 937w
Serious Fraud Office 86w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 142
European communities (07.12.95) 521, 523, 531
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1230
Questions
Cancer hazards, Nitrates 194–5w
Lettuces, Nitrates 233w
Water supply, Lead pollution 176w

Cash limits
Camden and Islington Health Authority 1144w
Health authorities 1136w
NHS 934–5w

Casualties
Road accidents 225–6w

Cathedrals
Admission charges 695–6

Cattle
Animal feed 1128–9w
Animal welfare 1089
Offal 1125–7w
Pesticides 1129–31w

CD-ROM
Wales 9

Cellular phones
968w
Dept for Education and Employment 401–2w, 1034w
Dept of Health 382–3w
Dept of National Heritage 371w
Dept of Social Security 378w
Dept of the Environment 352w
Dept of Trade and Industry 332w, 467w
Dept of Transport 321–2w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 338w
Fraud 638w, 776w
Home Office 355w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w, 533w
Ministry of Defence 346w, 720w
Northern Ireland Office 546w
Scottish Office 367w
Treasury 328w
Welsh Office 392–3w

Cemfuel
177–8w

Census of population
937–8w

Central heating
Pensioners 583w

Central London
Armed forces housing 985w

Ceramic industries
Stoke on Trent 1263w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (06.12.95) 413, 418, 424, 427

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Billing 748w
Members' correspondence 878w
Official cars 1093–4w
Private finance initiative 253–4w, 748w, 1214–5w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
Railway network (14.12.95) 1197–204

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1294–6, 1319
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1241
Questions
HMSO, Privatisation 455w
House of Commons, Operating costs 846w
Local government reform, Local government elections 406w

Chapman, Sir Sydney,
Questions
Infant mortality 128–9
Listed buildings 848w
Overseas aid 690

Charities
National Lottery 950–1w, 1205
Police 729w

Charities Board
see National Lottery Charities Board

Chartermark scheme
629–32w
Museums and galleries 1209

Chechnya
456w

Cheese
Deregulation initiative 686

Chemical and biological warfare
Defence research 761–2w, 1170w
Treaties 1107w
Vaccination 346–7w

Chemical Chase Manhattan Bank
Wales 75w

Chemical industries
135

Chemical weapons
Disclosure of information 1171–2w

Chemical Weapons Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
Rem stages (06.12.95) 413–43

Cheshire
Dioxins 721w
Educational finance 691–2w

Cheshire Constabulary
606w

Chidgey, Mr David
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1240
Questions
Bicycles, Railway travel 187w
Buses, Motor vehicle registration 425w
Buses, Motor vehicle testing 425w
Cycling, Road accidents 60w
Exhaust emission controls 63–4w
Motor vehicle type approval, EC action 1040–1w
Railway track, Fees and charges 271w
Road traffic 61w
Transport Research Laboratory 274w

Child abuse
North Wales 551–4w, 993w

Child benefit
Northern Ireland 1078w
Overseas students 982

Child care
Income support 1270–1w
Lone parents 502–3w

Child health
129

Child minding
Family credit 901w
Northern Ireland 901w

Child Support Agency
626w, 822–3, 827–8
Computer privacy 1118w, 1274–5w
Computers 1116w
Disclosure of information 149–50w
Labour costs 432–3w
Performance standards 622–3w

Child support appeal tribunals
662w
Operating costs 1118w

Child Support (Compensation for Recipients of Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 461–2

Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No 2) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 461–2

Child workers
523w, 975, 1072w
China 836w, 1177w
Wales 391–2w

Children
Antismoking campaign 192–3w
Autism 75w, 120w
Drug abuse 192–3w
Hospices 521–2w
Maintenance 149w, 433–6w, (06.12.95) 461–2, 623–7w, 891–4w, 1077–8w, 1116–8w, 1275w
Missing persons 949–50w
Offensive weapons 1221–2w

Children—continued
Play 849w
Road accidents 107–8w, 270–2w
Smoking 578w
Witnesses 1203w

Children Act 1989
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 306–27
Questions
806w

Children in care
(06.12.95) 306–27
Grant maintained schools 985–6

Chile
Pensions 824

China
Bicycles 362–3
Child workers 836w, 1177w
Forced labour 1177w
Wei, Jingsheng 1188w

Chiropody
223w
Clwyd 145w
Diabetes 779w
Wales 779w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm
Questions
External financing limits, Scotland 1276w

Cholera
579–80w

Chorley
Employment opportunities 985

Christmas bonus
832

Christmas Island
Radiation hazards 1172w

Chronically sick
Carers 826

Church, Ms Judith
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 216–8
Questions
Employment 1250–1w
Public sector borrowing requirement 874w

Church Commission Projects (Ashford Great Park) Review
393w

Church Commissioners
358w
Audit 329w
Income 501w, 694–5
Investment 393w
Overseas investment 696

Church of England
Turnbull Commission 501w

Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Amendment Order Confirmation Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (06.12.95) 350
Rep* (12.12.95) 817
3R* (13.12.95) 970
Royal Assent (19.12.95) 1409

Church schools
Grant maintained schools 976

Cirencester/Stratton bypass
Contracts 460–1w

Citizens' advice bureaux
Expenditure 288–90w, 640w

Citizen's Charter
254w, 630w, 1214w
Travelling expenses 1093w

Citizen's Charter Unit
629–31w, 634w, 1213–4w

City challenge
Annual reports 1094w

City of Durham
Ambulance services 523w

City of Westminster Bill (HL) 1993/94
Debates etc.
Motion to proceed in present session (07.12.95) 475, (14.12.95) 1083

Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(12.12.95) 848

Civil disorder
Brixton 1098

Civil proceedings
Benzodiazepines 1014w
Inland Revenue 735w

Civil servants
Dept of Trade and Industry 637w
Former prime ministers 17w, 842w
Northern Ireland 797w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 167–8w
Royal family 797w

Civil servants' visits abroad
Dept of Social Security 376w
Dept of Trade and Industry 46–9w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 80w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 52–4w
Scottish Office 168–71w

Civil service
488w
Accounting 503w
Deregulation initiative 686

Civil service agencies
Armed forces officers 703–7w
Civil service manpower 707–14w
Dept of Health 200–2w
Exservicemen 703–7w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 54w, 229–32w
Ministry of Defence 481–5w
Scottish Office 296–300w
Stirling 645–6w
Treasury 16–7w

Civil service manpower
684–5
Attorney General 86w
Civil service agencies 707–14w
Dept for Education 535–6w
Dept of Employment 535–6w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 574w
Home Office 201–2w
Inland Revenue 633w
Ministry of Defence 707–14w
Scottish Office 617w
Trade promotion 421–4w
Treasury 633w
Wales 5–6, 685
Welsh Office 572–3w

Civil service pensions
Northern Ireland 1076–7w

Civil service recruitment
Higher civil servants 746–7w
Northern Ireland 905–6w

Civil service redundancies
Dept of Trade and Industry 336w, 867w, 1263w
Welsh Office 573w

"Civil Service Year Book, 1996"
746w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 1256–7w
Mineworkers' pension scheme 1257–8w
Nuclear power, Privatisation 360–1
Trade competitiveness, Regional selective assistance 680

Clappison, Mr James, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Water pollution (20.12.95) 1589–94

Clappison, Mr James—continued
Questions
Air pollution, Greater London 1232w
Air pollution control, Local government finance 735w
Animals 722–3w
Carbon dioxide, Energy conservation 1099–100w
Cemfuel 177–8w
Central heating, Pensioners 583w
Clinical wastes, Waste disposal 234w
Coal mining, Durham County 721w
Council house rents 921–2w
Council housing, Empty housing 1332
Council housing, Housing investment programmes 1336
Council housing, Political refugees 12w
Countryside Commission, Government grants 1100w
Cryptosporidia, Water supply 1097w
Defective housing, Mundic blocks 915w
Dept of the Environment, Government buildings 1234w
Dioxins, Cheshire 721w
Dioxins, Pollution control 643w
Empty housing, Government buildings 1332
Empty housing, Political refugees 12–3w
Energy conservation 584w
Environment, EC law 5w
Environment Agency 516w
Environment protection, Economic policy 403w
Environment protection, Rural areas 585w
Exhaust emissions, Research 511w
Frogs, Pest control 582–3w
Furs, Imports 235w, 907w
Glow worms 1097–8w
Hazardous wastes, Waste disposal 922w
Hazardous wastes, Waste management 585w
Hedges and ditches 514w, 1237–8w
HM Inspectorate of Pollution 1101w
Home improvement agencies 583w
Homelessness 1233w
Homelessness, Bed and breakfast accommodation 1233–4w
Homelessness, Day centres 1275–6w
Homelessness, Government grants to voluntary organisations 6–7w
Homelessness, Political refugees 12w
Hostels, Social security recipients 585w
Housing and elderly 583w
Housing associations, Capital investment 181w
Housing associations, Housing benefits 7–8w
Housing associations, Housing construction 587–8w
Housing Corporation, Privatisation 180–1w
Housing finance, Private investment 237w
Housing starts, Kirklees 585–8w
Housing starts, Public sector housing 1336
Incinerators 910w
Industrial energy conservation 584w
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 511–2w
Joint Nature Conservation Committee 587w
Krypton, Air pollution 1243w
Land pollution 1337–8
Land pollution, Inner city areas 1338
Land pollution, Opencast mining 1338
Ministry of Defence, Empty housing 1332–3
National parks authorities, Public appointments 1101–2w
Nature Conservancy Council for England, Government grants 1100w
Negative equity 643w, 1238w
Neighbourhood noise 588–90w
Orders and regulations, Dept of the Environment 13–4w
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Environmental policy 508w
Pennines, Environment protection 1095w
Pigeons, Greater London 403w
Political refugees, Temporary accommodation 13w, 236w

Clappison, Mr James—continued
Public sector housing 588w, 908w
Rented housing 1095–6w, 1235w
Rents 1238–40w
Repossession orders 1232w
River pollution 1234–5w
Secondary liquid fuel 176w
Sewers, Rodents 1213w
Shared ownership schemes 1233w
Sites of special scientific interest 583w
Small businesses, Rural areas 174w
Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1995 924w
Squirrels, North East region 584–5w
Tipping of waste, Essex 1097w
Tipping of waste, Local government functions 1098–9w
Village halls 235w
Waste disposal, Orders and regulations 1243–4w
Water companies, Profits 909w
Water companies, Prosecutions 912–4w
Water conservation 586w, 1234w
Water distribution, Yorkshire and Humberside 1230w
Water pollution, Appeals 1231–2w
Water supply 1231w
Water supply, Lead pollution 176w
Water supply, Pesticides 1100–1w
Yorkshire Water 237–8w

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 836–7
Questions
Air force bases, Closures 1111–2w
Ambulances, Defence procurement 347w
Ammunition, Defence procurement 347w
Arcadia Land 430w
Armed forces, Theft 343–4w
Armed forces desertion 771w
Armed forces discharges, Army 1107–8w
Armed forces housing 1w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 431w, 577w, 595w, 1112–3w
Armed forces housing, Housing occupancy 987w
Armed forces housing, Property transfer 478–9w
Armed forces housing, Rents 986–7w
Armed forces housing, RNAS Yeovilton 719w
Armed forces housing, Valuation 986w
Armed forces officers, Business appointments 473–4w, 987–8w
Armed forces pensions 241w
Armed forces recruitment, Army 240–1w
Armed forces recruitment, Cannabis 240w
Armed forces storage depots 1172–3w
Armed forces storage depots, Ashchurch 162–3w
Armed forces strength 240w
Armed forces uniforms, Defence contracts 990–1w
Army, Disciplinary proceedings 1104–5w
Army Base Repair Organisation 718w
Army Technical Support Agency 348w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 239w, 595w, 1111w
Chemical and biological warfare, Treaties 1107w
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 346–7w
Defence contracts 345w
Defence costs study 239–40w
Defence equipment 477–8w
Defence equipment, Defence contracts 347–8w
Defence equipment, Theft 760w, 771w
Defence procurement, Roll-on roll-off ships 4w
Defence research, LSD 761w
Devonport Dockyard, Privatisation 473w
Foxley, Gordon, Defence contracts 714–5w
General practitioners 427w
General practitioners, Wales 415w
Guided weapons 347w
Gurkhas, Army strength 346w
Helicopters, Defence procurement 595w, 1112w

Clark, Dr David—continued
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Medical examinations 478w, 985–6w, 1114w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 594–5w
Military aircraft, Spare parts 3–4w
Military exercises, Merchant ships 341–2w, 1108–11w
Military police, Colchester 1112w
Military vehicles, Army 1107w
Military vehicles, Defence procurement 431–2w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service agencies 481–5w
Ministry of Defence, Consultants 349w
Ministry of Defence, Cost effectiveness 3w, 590w, 595w
Ministry of Defence, Ministerial policy advisors 772w
Ministry of Defence, Theft 429w
Ministry of Defence police, Colchester 1111w
Ministry of Defence police, Redundancy 1112w
National Defence Industries Council 430–1w
Peace keeping operations, Rwanda 718w
Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 1174w
Rules of engagement, Armed forces deployment 239w
Territorial Army, Armed forces deployment 343w
Type 23 frigates, Defence procurement 430w
Walker, John 772w

Clark, Dr Michael
Questions
Nuclear power, Privatisation 361

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, *Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 154–5, 164–5, 187–8, 191–2, 226–7, 229–36
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 41, 45, 108
Questions
Coinage 410–1w
Commemorative coins 1252–3w
EC Finance Council 157–8w, 565w
Members' correspondence, Treasury 873w
Ministers' domestic visits, Treasury 257w

Class sizes
561w
Educational finance 979
Educational standards 977
Scotland 823w

Clelland, Mr David
Questions
Local government finance 1094w

Clergy
Sheffield 694

Cleveland
Armed forces housing 479w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Public participation in planning (06.12.95) 329, 332
Radio Gloucestershire (13.12.95) 947–50, 953
Questions
Courts martial 344–5w
Data Protection Registrar, Government departments 493w
Fire services, Training 343w
International Red Cross, Finance 1176–7w
Latton bypass, Contracts 460–1w
"Lifetime Learning Consultation Paper" 144w
Manufacturing industries, Industrial investment 367
Military satellites, Defence procurement 348w
Overseas aid, Family planning 662–4w
Royal Ballet School, Assisted places scheme 981

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey—continued
Royal Naval College 1105w

Clinical psychologists
33–4w

Clinical wastes
184w
Waste disposal 234w

Closed circuit television
Crime prevention 214–5w, 601w
Video recordings 206w, 450w

Clwyd
Chiropody 145w
Housing estates 390w
Road construction 389w

Clwyd, Ann
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 142
Transfer of questions, Points of order (04.12.95) 20–1
Questions
Breast cancer, Research finance 517–8w
Breast cancer, Wales 11, 77–8w, 991w, 1155w
Business questions 1546
Child workers 523w, 975
Child workers, Wales 391–2w
East Timor, Hawk aircraft 837w
Electric shock equipment, Exports 86w, 1258w
Health, Wales 991w
NHS trusts, Wales 783w
Police, Political activities 360w, 366w
Tower Colliery, Coal mining 1100
Welsh Grand Committee 778w

Coal mine closures
Durham County 466w

Coal mining
280w, 351–2
Durham County 721w
Industrial accidents 722w
Opencast mining 723w
Tower Colliery 1100

Coastal areas
Oil pollution control 269–70w

Coe, Mr Sebastian
Debates etc.
Sports (20.12.95) 1473–6
Questions
Television licences 751w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 892–4
Questions
Compensation, Arrest warrants 245w
Intensive care, Leeds General Infirmary 807w
Residential care of children 226w, 682w
Tomography 806w
Valuation Office, Stockport 328w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1051–4
Bacterial diseases, Metticillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (05.12.95) 276–9
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 844
Chemical Weapons Bill, Rem stages (06.12.95) 415–6, 418–27, 432, 442
Questions
Arts finance 1214
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 828w
Business questions 1104
Child Support Agency, Computer privacy 1118w, 1274–5w
Computer privacy, Dept for Education and Employment 1017w
Computer privacy, Dept of Health 678w
Computer privacy, Dept of Social Security 1266w
Computer privacy, Dept of Trade and Industry 637w
Computer privacy, Dept of Transport 558–9w
Computer privacy, EC law 606w

Cohen, Mr Harry—continued
Computer privacy, Home Office 658w
Computer privacy, Treasury 633w
Crime, Industrial health and safety 209w
Criminal records, Disclosure of information 968–9w
Divorce, Pensions 880w
Educational finance, Teachers 832
Employment Medical Advisory Service, Manpower 234w
Fingerprints, Data banks 969w
Health and Safety Executive, Public appointments 176w
House of Commons, Operating costs 846w
Identity cards 968w
Immunity certificates, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 158–9w
London Regional Transport, Electronic equipment 558w
Medical records, Privacy 523w
MI5, Computer privacy 644w
National security, Departmental coordination 658w
Pigeons, Greater London 403w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 221w
Public service, Tax allowances 155–6w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Balmoral 1285w
Television, Sports 848w
Travel to interview scheme, Greater London 445w

Coinage
410–1w

Colchester
Military police 1112w
Ministry of Defence police 1111w

Cold weather payments
784–5w, 817, (20.12.95) 1449–52
Departmental coordination 784w
Standing Order No 20 applications (06.12.95) 371

Colin Glen Trust
904–5w

Colostomy
Prescriptions 224w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 838
European communities (07.12.95) 529, 546–50
Questions
New forest, Natural heritage areas 1234w
Rural areas, Taxation 1048w

COM(95)333
(13.12.95) 1070

COM(95)434
(12.12.95) 906

Commemorative coins
1252–3w

Commission for Racial Equality
Public appointments 963–4w

Commission for the New Towns
Land acquisition 175w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Committee on Safety of Medicines
518–21w
Oral contraceptives 518w
Public appointments 809w

Common agricultural policy
(06.12.95) 283–305, 1092
Expenditure 828w
Milk 827w

Common fisheries policy
1088, (14.12.95) 1194, (19.12.95) 1348–409, (20.12.95) 1452–60
Scotland 1519–20

Common land
Northern Ireland 108–9w

Commonhold
(13.12.95) 1022

Community action
440–5w
Wales 989w

Community care
943w
Scotland 1290w

Community Forest Scheme
Wales 73w

Community health services
Expenditure 43w, 811–2w
Isles of Scilly 192w

Companies House Executive Agency
Contracts for services 1088–9w

Company and Business Names (Amendment) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(13.12.95) 1069

Company liquidations
598–9w
VAT 563w

Company registration
Australia 334w

Company voluntary arrangements
Insolvency 291w

Competition
Electricity supply industry 636w
Railway transport 559w

"Competitiveness Forging Ahead White Paper"
485w

Complaints against police
1012w

Compulsorily detained mental patients
Deportation 1133w

Computer applications
General practitioners 1209w

Computer privacy
Child Support Agency 1118w, 1274–5w
Dept for Education and Employment 1017w
Dept of Health 678w
Dept of Social Security 1266w
Dept of Trade and Industry 637w
Dept of Transport 558–9w
EC law 606w
Government Communications Headquarters 644w
Home Office 658w
MI5 644w
Treasury 633w

Computer terminals
909–10w

Computers
488, 747–8w
Child Support Agency 1116w
Dept of Social Security 1115–6w
General practitioners 1209w
Highland Health Board 997–8w
Stocks and shares (13.12.95) 1069
Student Loans Company 394w

Computers in government departments
Deputy Prime Minister 487w

Computers in schools
Teacher training 304w
Technicians 304w

Concessionary fares
Elderly 840–1w
Greater London 841w
Pensioners 841w

Concessionary television licences
Pensioners 848w

Conditions of employment
Government Communications Headquarters 1189–90w

Conductive education
745–6w
Northern Ireland 801w
Scotland 821w

Confederation of British Industry
Industrial tribunals 869–70w

Congdon, Mr David
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1120–5, 1127
Questions
Arable area payments scheme 928–9w
Business questions 1545
Contracts for services, Government departments 488w
Crime prevention, Closed circuit television 214–5w
Crown Prosecution Service, Information technology 16–7
Educational standards 489–90
Elderly, Hospital discharges 133
Food composition, Orders and regulations 928w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 71w
Health service staff, Skin disorders 1135w
Mathematics, Primary education 971–2
Metropolitan Police, Emergency calls 607–8w
Packaging industry 1102–3w
Prodigy prescribing system 1152–3w
Sustainable Development Round Table 1102w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 198, 221–4
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1425–7
Questions
Offensive weapons, Scotland 1528

Conservative Party
Party conferences 136

Consolidated Fund Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (14.12.95) 1195
2R* and 3R* (18.12.95) 1247
Royal Assent (19.12.95) 1409

Construction costs
Advanced gas-cooled reactors 1255–6w
Sizewell B 1265w

Consultants
Dept for Education and Employment 694w
Dept of Health 517w
Dept of National Heritage 373–4w
Dept of the Environment 176w
Dept of Transport 842w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 251w
Home Office 496–7w
Jobseeker's allowance 402w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 455–6w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 684–7w
Ministry of Defence 241–2w, 349w
Northern Ireland Office 542w
Patent Office 1262w
Prime Minister 149w
Treasury 326–7w
Welsh Office 389w

Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest
664w

Consumer councils
Expenditure 288–90w, 640w

Consumer credit
National income 564w

Consumer expenditure
National income 564w
Pensions 564–6w

Contempt of court
Newspaper press 18

Contracts
Cirencester/Stratton bypass 460–1w
Latton bypass 460–1w

Contracts for services
Companies House Executive Agency 1088–9w
Court Service Agency 660–1w
Courts 728w
Dept of Trade and Industry 868–9w

Contracts for services—continued
Government departments 488w
Insolvency Service 597w, 1089w
Local government services 50w
NHS trusts 40w, 189w
Northern Ireland Central Services Agency 797–8w
Official receiver 598w
Patent Office 865–6w, 1088–9w
Social Security Benefits Agency 671w
Wales 388w

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Local government finance 1524–5

Convictions
Serious Fraud Office 16

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 841
Children in care (06.12.95) 316–8

Cook, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 518, 520–30
Questions
Hospital beds, Scotland 172–3w
Nurses' training, Scotland 812w

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Questions
Armed forces housing, House purchase 1w
Council of Europe, UK delegations 1053–4w
Economic and monetary union, Employment opportunities 1099
GP fundholders 125
Local government reform, Supplementary credit approvals 1161w
Morocco, Human rights 751w
Nigeria 692

Coombs, Mr Simon
Questions
Business questions 1548
CD-ROM, Wales 9
Devolution, Scotland 1278w
Office of the National Lottery 1540–1
Swindon Town Football Club 1213
Unemployment, Scotland 1517

Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee
487–8w

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Government bills (13.12.95) 918–22
Questions
Licensing, Steam engines 875w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Good Hope Hospital (06.12.95) 469–71, 474
Questions
Deregulation initiative 688
Deregulation initiative, Ministers' visits abroad 747w
Fire service pensions 446w
Hospital beds 1211w
Housing action trusts 512–4w
Stack, Louise, Prisoners' transfers 831

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 703, 717, 764, 770–2
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1146, 1152–4
Questions
Air pollution, Greater London 1232w
Antarctic Treaty 1056w
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96, Social security benefits rules 785w
Camden and Islington Health Authority, Cash limits 1144w
Child workers 1072w
Children Act 1989 806w
China, Child workers 836w, 1177w
Northern Ireland government 385w
Pension funds, Corporation tax 1045w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy—continued
Peru, Human rights 1054w
Political refugees 731w, 954w
Political refugees, Social security benefits rules 151w
Prisoners' transfers, Northern Ireland 1202w
Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1995 890w, 924w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 840–1
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 994, (18.12.95) 1276, 1280, 1283, 1285, 1287
Questions
Staffordshire, Educational finance 984

Cornwall
Defective housing 915w
Handicapped children 935w
Public expenditure 135

Corporation tax
Pension funds 1045w

Corston, Ms Jean
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 708, 731, 774–7
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1122, 1139–43
Working hours (13.12.95) 937
Questions
Disposable income 504–6w
Family income 504w, 1249–50w
Households 1249w
Income tax 137
National insurance contributions 1120w
NHS and private practice 190w
Pensioners, Income support 505w
Pensions, Consumer expenditure 564–6w
Ritalin 803w

Cost per pupil
Derbyshire 303w
Educational finance 696–8w
Primary education 745w
School meals 98–100w
Secondary education 693w, 745w
Wales 783w

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 763–5
Wildlife Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1021–2

Council for Education in World Citizenship
Overseas aid 692–3

Council house rents
921–2w

Council house sales
Wales 1156–7w

Council housing
1329
Empty housing 1332
Housing improvement 1096w, 1192w
Housing investment programmes 1336
Political refugees 12w
Property trahsfer 1244–5w
Scotland 1524–5
Wales 1192w

Council of Europe
UK delegations 1053–4w

Council of Ministers
418–21w, 1518

Council tax
350w
Educational finance 1331
Local government revenue 1190–1w
Wales 414w, 546w, 1190–1w

Council tax benefits
1272w
War pensions 88w

Council tax capping
Suffolk County Council 1331

Council tenants
Noise control 1339
Social problems 1338–40

Councillors
EC Committee of the Regions 84–5w

Councillors' attendance allowances
235w

Councillors' interests
7w

Countryside Commission
Government grants 1100w

Countryside Council for Wales
Expenditure 1159–60w
Finance 1160w

Countryside stewardship scheme
Wales 14

County courts
Northern Ireland (06.12.95) 462

County Courts (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 462

County Hall
586w

Court of appeal
1217–8
Criminal proceedings 1217
Judicial review 1218

Court Service Agency
662w
Contracts for services 660–1w

Courts
Contracts for services 728w
Private sector 728w

Courts' Charter
Judges 323–4w

Courts martial
344–5w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Armed forces, Redundancy 770w
Armed forces leave 766w
Dept for Education, Civil service manpower 535–6w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Civil servants 637w
Government offices for the regions 511–2w
Integrated regional offices, Finance 236w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Vaccination 569–70w
Mental patients, Hospital beds 381w
Mines 340–1w, 716w
Mines, Arms trade 331–2w
Personal equity plans 640–1w
Postal services, Advertising 774–5w
Protective clothing, Export licensing 775w
Telephone selling 596w
Training for work 306–8w, 400w
Ulcers, Medical equipment 578–9w
War pensions 883w
War pensions, Appeals 660w, 795–6w

Coventry
Residential care 929w

Cox, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
St George's Hospital Tooting (20.12.95) 1460–1
Questions
Battersea power station 174w
Electoral register, Disclosure of information 450w
Kashmir 835w
Naviede, Mohammed, Prisoners 499–500w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 496w
Prisoners, Shopping 1199–200w
Prisons, Drug crimes 495–6w
Racial attacks, Greater London 1008w
Rented housing 1095–6w
Road works, Norfolk 1043–4w
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 470w

Cran, Mr James
Debates etc.
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1579
Questions
A63 674w
Defence land, Humberside 593w
Museum of Army Transport 983w

Credit
Bank of England 259w

Credit cards
Liability 773w

Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia
525–6w, 861–2w, 926–7w, 940–2w
Death 220w

Crime
(08.12.95) 603–78, 970w
Industrial health and safety 209w

Crime prevention
Business premises 1010–1w
Closed circuit television 214–5w, 601w
Offensive weapons 1527–8
Prince's Trust 951–2w
Scotland 1279–80w
Warwickshire Constabulary 1010–1w

Crime Prevention Agency
213–4w

Crime victims
Crown Prosecution Service 15
Government grants to local authorities 1231w

Crimes of violence
Health service staff 946w
Night clubs 969w
Northern Ireland 318w, 799–800w
Scotland 1527

Criminal injuries compensation
Homicide 27w

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
216w

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 1995
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 444–61

Criminal Justice Act 1988
Questions
1009–10w

Criminal Justice Social Services Fund
Scotland 1003–4w

Criminal proceedings
Court of appeal 1217

Criminal records
Disclosure of information 968–9w

Cross border cooperation in Ireland
Security 900w

Crossrail
672w

Crown jewels
566w, 853w

Crown Prosecution Service
Bail 15
Crime victims 15
Information technology 16–7
Manpower 218w
Police 17
Rights of audience 1190w
Westminster City Council 14
Witnesses 17

Cryptosporidia
Water supply 1097w

Cumbria
Bailiffs 881w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Education vouchers, Pre-school education (18.12.95) 1322
Questions
Access to work programme, Finance 1031–2w

***Cunningham, Mr Jim**—continued*
Access to work programme, Take-up of employment 1033w
Arms trade, Nigeria 596w
Bail, Offenders 209w
Bail hostels, Closures 209w
Central heating, Pensioners 583w
Child Support Agency, Labour costs 432–3w
Cold weather payments, Departmental coordination 784w
Deputy Prime Minister, Computers in government departments 487w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 975w
Educational publications 400w
Empty housing, Government buildings 1332
Environment protection, Economic policy 403w
Free movement of labour, EC nationals 958w
Handicap benefits 1121–2w
HMSO 32–3w
Homelessness, Government grants to voluntary organisations 6–7w
Hospices, Children 521–2w
Housing and elderly 583w
Illegal immigrants, Deportation 1005–6w
Illegal immigrants, Employment 958–9w, 978w
Libraries 849w
Milk, Production quotas 1085–6
Nigeria 691–2
Night clubs, Crimes of violence 969w
Night clubs, Security 606w
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Environmental policy 508w
Planning permission, Rural areas 5–6w
Pre-school education 978w
Pre-school education, School population 978w
Prisoners, Suicide 448–9w
Prisoners on remand 207–10w
Prisoners on remand, Employment 447–8w
Schools, Libraries 400–1w
Serious Fraud Office, Regulatory system 17–8
Small businesses, Rural areas 174w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 1119w
West Coast railway line 1097

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Questions
Millennium Commission, Ethnic groups 417w
Office of the National Lottery 1205–6, 1533–5

Cunningham, Roseanna
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 760–3
Questions
Defence procurement, Nuclear weapons 1173w
Dounreay 1258–9w
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 1288–9w
Krypton, Air pollution 1243w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 1258w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Dounreay 1259w
Nuclear power stations, Dounreay 1259w
Nuclear safety, Dounreay 1259–60w
Radioactive wastes 1260w
Radioactive wastes, Scotland 1287–8w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc.
Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations (18.12.95) 1262–4, 1267
European communities (07.12.95) 523–4, 542, 569–73, 575
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1233

***Curry, Mr David**, Minister of State, Dept of the Environment*
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 376–7, 379
Questions
Armed forces housing, House purchase 1336–7
City challenge, Annual reports 1094w
Commission for the New Towns, Land acquisition 175w
Council housing, Housing improvement 1096w
Council tenants, Noise control 1339
Council tenants, Social problems 1338–40
Educational finance, Staffordshire 1330–1
Government Office for the South West, Publications 181–2w
Housing associations, Taxation 509w
Housing finance 725w
Housing starts, Rented housing 1341
Local government finance, Metropolitan districts 8w
Local government finance, North East Lincolnshire 1094–5w
Local government reform, Finance 581–2w
London Docklands Development Corporation 1096w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of the Environment 238–9w
Regional planning and development 925w
Rough sleepers initiative 1095w
Single regeneration budget 514–5w, 924w
Standard spending assessments 177–80w, 1329–30
Standard spending assessments, Travel-to-work areas 1330
Yorkshire Water, Droughts 9–12w

Custodial treatment
St Helena 457w

Custody
Grandparents 387w
Northern Ireland 387w

Customs and Excise
Dover 1342

Cycleways
59w
Sheffield 59w

Cycling
Road accidents 60w

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Questions
Countryside stewardship scheme, Wales 14
Forestry Commission, Public appointments 407–8w
Forestry Commission, Wales 388w
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 76w
House condition survey, Wales 392w
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 511–2w
Joint Nature Conservation Committee 587w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 8
S4C 1211
Shorthold tenancies, Wales 75–6w
Student accommodation 438w
Town and country planning, Wales 546–9w

Dairy Crest
830w

Dairy farming
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1091–2

Dairy products
Food hygiene 1091

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Bazelya, Khalifa Amed (20.12.95) 1471–3
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 840
Chemical Weapons Bill, Rem stages (06.12.95) 415–7, 419, 421, 423–4, 426, 430, 436–7, 439, 441
Collier, John, Points of order (06.12.95) 372
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1349

Dalyell, Mr Tam—continued
Dept of the Clerk of the House, Points of order (13.12.95) 1019
HMSO, Points of order (19.12.95) 1347
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 998, 1001, (18.12.95) 1277, 1283, 1307, 1312–3, 1319, 1322
Intervention during Christmas adjournment debate (20.12.95) 1456
Intervention during Ministerial statement (13.12.95) 1001
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1233–4
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1243
Questions
Aral Sea, Overseas aid 85w
Bazelya, Khalifa Amed 836w
Custody, Grandparents 387w
Languages education, Arabic language 692w
Lockerbie, Bombings 57w, 86w, 148w, 750w, 997w, 1276w
Physiotherapists, Royal Charters 197w
Sanctions, Libyan Arab Republic 332w
Ukraine, Nuclear power 1175w

Darling, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Financial services (14.12.95) 1178–88, 1192
Questions
Building societies, Law reform 507w

Dartford
GP fundholders 125

Data banks
Fingerprints 969w
Genetics 817w, 959w

Data Protection Act 1984
Questions
360w, 558–9w, 633w, 637w, 644w, 658w, 678w, 1017w, 1266w

Data Protection Registrar
970w
Government departments 493w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Questions
Redundancy pay 867w
Redundancy pay, Industrial arbitration 867–8w
Redundancy pay, National insurance fund 868w

Davies, Mr Bryan
Questions
Further education colleges, Per capita costs 399–400w
Higher education, Educational finance 983–4
Higher Education Funding Council for England, Educational assessment 534–5w
School milk, EC grants and loans 827w
Student grants, Mature students 396–8w
Student loans 119–20w, 394–6w, 534w, 970w
University finance 397–9w

Davies, Mr Chris
Questions
Breast feeding 33w
Educational standards, Class sizes 977
Gas pipelines, Zeebrugge 9w, 45w
Natural gas, Gas reserves 45w
Pennines, Environment protection 1095w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
Welsh Development Agency, Finance 70w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 513

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1007–8
Questions
Council tax 350w
Council tax, Wales 414w, 546w
EC grants and loans, Wales 3, 5

Davies, Mr Ron—continued
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 1270w
National income, Wales 391w
Welsh Office, Departmental correspondence 551w
Welsh Office, Press releases 415w

***Davis, Mr David**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 526, 563, 586–93
Questions
Chechnya 456w
Council of Ministers 418–21w
Disclosure of information 252w
EC Committee of the Regions, Councillors 84–5w
EC external relations, Diplomatic service 753w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 336–7w
EC grants and loans 835w
EC staff 837–8w
EC staff, Greater London 702w
European Commission 1056–7w
European Commission, Information 251–2w
European Commission, Manpower 251w
European Commission, Offices 838w
European Commission, Official publications 836w
European Council 837w
Gibraltar, Foreign policy 751–2w
International Court of Justice, Nuclear weapons 250–1w, 336w
Nagorno Karabakh, Peace keeping operations 456w

Davis, Mr Terry
Questions
Social security, Income distribution 627w

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Billing, Interest charges 45–6w

Day care of children
1138w

Day centres
Homelessness 1275–6w

Death
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 220w
Heart diseases 196–8w
Lung diseases 196–8w
Meningitis 221–2w
Mental illness 809–10w
Pedestrian crossings 74w
Police custody 243w
Road accidents 270–2w

Debt collection
Bailiffs 227w

Debts
Interest charges (13.12.95) 1022
Iran 573–4w
North Yorkshire County Council 9w
Saudi Arabia 573–4w

Deer
Scotland 651w

Defective housing
Cornwall 915w
Mundic blocks 915w
Northern Ireland 901–2w
Orlit houses 901–2w
Westminster City Council 14

Defence contracts
345w
Armed forces uniforms 990–1w
Defence equipment 347–8w
Foxley, Gordon 714–5w

Defence costs study
239–40w

Defence equipment
477–8w
Defence contracts 347–8w
Theft 760w, 771w

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
984–5w

Defence expenditure
164w

Defence land
Humberside 593w
Land pollution 485w
Scotland 485w
Sites of special scientific interest 474w

Defence procurement
Ambulances 347w
Ammunition 347w
Helicopters 595w, 1112w
Military satellites 348w
Military vehicles 431–2w
Nuclear weapons 1173w
Roll-on roll-off ships 4w
Type 23 frigates 430w
USA 1172w

Defence research
Armed forces 1170w
Chemical and biological warfare 761–2w, 1170w
International cooperation 430w
LSD 761w

Democracy
Burma 418w

Demolition
Gourock Ropeworks 816w
RAF Finningley 767–8w

Denham, Mr John
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Surveys 502w
Exhaust emissions, Telephone services 59w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 1047–8w
National insurance fund, Personal pensions 249–50w
Pensions, Married women 151–2w
Personal pensions 90–4w
Personal pensions, Marketing 635w
Personal pensions, State earnings related pension scheme 92w
Personal pensions, Tax allowances 1049–50w
Prime Minister 487w
Residential care 196w
Residential care, Capital rules 669w
Road traffic offences 424w
State earnings related pension scheme 91w
State earnings related pension scheme, Expenditure 1267–8w
State earnings related pension scheme, Low pay 824
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 693w

Denmark
Pre-school education 1031–2w

Dental services
Scotland 1002–4w

Dentists
Manpower 190w

Departmental coordination
Cold weather payments 784w
National security 658w

Departmental correspondence
Dept of Health 38w
Dept of Social Security 150w
Dept of the Environment 6w
Home Office 205w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 97–8w
Ministry of Defence 1w
Northern Ireland Office 113–4w
Scottish Office 65w
Welsh Office 145w, 551w

Departmental forms
Scottish Office 1280–1w

Departmental leaflets
Alternative medicine 223–4w
Social security benefits rules 152w

Departmental publications
Political refugees 954w

Departmental responsibilities
490–2w

Deportation
Compulsorily detained mental patients 1133w
Illegal immigrants 1005–6w
Tawafig, Hagdi Elfons 1007–8w

Dept for Education
Civil service manpower 535–6w

Dept for Education and Employment
Advertising 139–40w
Billing 737w, 1033w
Cellular phones 401–2w, 1034w
Computer privacy 1017w
Consultants 694w
Fraud 740w
Government contracts 1033w
Government information services 1018w
Green papers 140–2w
Ministerial policy advisors 972w
Ministers' domestic visits 310w
Ministers' private offices 1017–8w
Ministers' visits abroad 310w
Official cars 971w
Official hospitality 1018w
Orders and regulations 537w
Press advertising 1019w
Private finance initiative 309w, 401w, 972–3w
Public relations 972w
Small businesses 978w, 1225–6w

Dept of Employment
Civil service manpower 535–6w
Expenditure 971w

Dept of Health
Billing 804w
Cellular phones 382–3w
Civil service agencies 200–2w
Computer privacy 678w
Consultants 517w
Departmental correspondence 38w
Government information services 811w
Internet 1211–2w
Members' correspondence 938w
Ministers' domestic visits 226w
Ministers' private offices 930w
Ministers' visits abroad 226w, 1207w
Official hospitality 428w, 933w, 1144w
Operating costs 1209w
Orders and regulations 426w, 524–5w
Press advertising 1133w
Private finance initiative 222w, 382w, 803–4w
Small businesses 946w, 1142–3w
Telephone services 810w
Travelling expenses 1207w

Dept of National Heritage
Billing 855w
Cellular phones 371w
Consultants 373–4w
Ministers' domestic visits 261w
Ministers' private offices 854w
Ministers' visits abroad 261w
Official cars 854w
Official hospitality 854w
Opinion polls 855–8w
Orders and regulations 854w
Private finance initiative 371–2w

Dept of Social Security
Billing 785w
Cellular phones 378w
Civil servants' visits abroad 376w
Computer privacy 1266w
Computers 1115–6w
Departmental correspondence 150w
Fraud 785–6w, 820
Government contracts 1121w
Members' correspondence 889w
Ministerial duties 619w
Ministers' domestic visits 249w
Ministers' private offices 889w
Ministers' visits abroad 249w
Official hospitality 1120w
Operating costs 90w
Opinion polls 786–93w
Private finance initiative 246w, 377w, 1274w

Dept of Social Security—continued
Public transport 149w
Small businesses 1120–1w
Smoking 619w
Surveys 502w
Telephone services 246–8w

Dept of the Environment
Billing 723w, 1098w
Cellular phones 352w
Consultants 176w
Departmental correspondence 6w
Government buildings 1234w
Members' correspondence 922w
Ministers' domestic visits 238–9w
Ministers' private offices 908w
Ministers' visits abroad 238–9w
Official cars 911–2w
Official hospitality 1230w
Opinion polls 916–22w
Orders and regulations 13–4w
Press advertising 1230w
Private finance initiative 237w, 352w, 915–6w
Public expenditure 406–8w
Research 1230–2w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Aberdeen 471–2w, 640w
Billing 773w
Cellular phones 332w, 467w
Civil servants 637w
Civil servants' visits abroad 46–9w
Civil service redundancies 336w, 867w, 1263w
Computer privacy 637w
Contracts for services 868–9w
Early retirement 867w
Government contracts 1263w
Legislation 161w
Members' correspondence 873w
Ministerial policy advisors 773w
Ministers 325–6w
Ministers' domestic visits 288w
Ministers' private offices 284–6w, 1255w
Ministers' visits abroad 288w
Official cars 1082w
Official hospitality 636–7w
Opinion polls 1090w
Orders and regulations 161w
Press advertising 859w
Private finance initiative 287–8w, 331w, 774w
Small businesses 1084w

Dept of Trade inquiries
Rom Data 332–3w

Dept of Transport
Billing 754w, 1039–40w
Cellular phones 321–2w
Computer privacy 558–9w
Consultants 842w
Fraud 754w
Government contracts 1039w
Legislation 458w
Members' correspondence 840w
Ministers' domestic visits 267–8w
Ministers' private offices 559w
Ministers' visits abroad 267–8w, 1042w
Official cars 674w, 1183–4w
Official hospitality 559w
Operating costs 1042–3w
Opinion polls 753w
Orders and regulations 187w
Private finance initiative 275w, 321w, 754w
Royal visits 63–4w
Travelling expenses 1042w

Deputy Prime Minister
682
Computers in government departments 487w
Members' correspondence 1091w
Ministerial duties 487w
Ministers' private offices 628w
Official hospitality 748w
Small businesses 1091w

Derbyshire
Armed forces housing 480w
Cost per pupil 303w

Derbyshire
see MV Derbyshire

Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994
Questions
728w

Deregulation initiative
486w, 686–8, 975
Cheese 686
Civil service 686
EC law 487w, 660w
Educational policy 974–5
Employment protection 486w
Environmental policy 974–5
Food industry 928w
Industry 487w
Licensing laws 603w
Ministers' visits abroad 747w
Motor vehicle testing 557w
Orders and regulations 487w
Scotland 1520
Small businesses 486w
Trade competitiveness 486w

Deregulation (Long Pull) Order 1995
Questions
603w

Deregulation (Motor Vehicles Tests) Order 1996
Questions
557w

Deregulation (Special Hours Certificates) Order 1996
Questions
603w

Deregulation Task Force
167w

Deregulation Unit
see Enterprise and Deregulation Unit

Derelict land
Leeds 1337–8

Deva, Mr Nirj Joseph
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 728, 743, 745, 761, 768–70
Questions
Housing benefits, Fraud 820
Pharmacists 127

Developing countries
Overseas aid 1069–71w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Questions
Hurworth School 135
Organophosphorous pesticides, Sheep dipping 229w
Pre-school education, Scotland 1277w

Devolution
Northern Ireland 903w
Scotland 134, 1278w

Devon
Public expenditure 135

Devonport Dockyard
Privatisation 473w

Diabetes
Chiropody 779w

Dicks, Mr Terry
Questions
Metropolitan Police, Emergency calls 606–7w

Diesel fuel
Excise duties 14w
Taxation 259w

Dietary supplements
EC action 834w

Digital television
567w

Dioxins
688–9w
Cheshire 721w
Pollution control 643w
Pollution monitoring 1131w

Diplomatic service
EC external relations 753w
Scotland 574w
Trade promotion 838–9w

Dir92/50/EEC
659w

Direct selling
(13.12.95) 1021

Director General of the National Lottery
see Office of the National Lottery

Director of Passenger Rail Franchising
see Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Director of Public Prosecutions
665w

Directorate of Operational Capability
1106w

Directors
Ferranti 333–4w
Government grants 332w
NHS trusts 39w

Disability appeal tribunals
1270w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
672w, 828

Disability living allowance
Elderly 245–6w
Political refugees 1119–20w
Residential care 621w
Social security appeals 88w
Social security claims 88w, 1122w

Disability working allowance
378w

Disciplinary proceedings
Army 1104–5w

Discretionary student grants
561w, 699–701w, 739w, 1033w

Disposable income
504–6w
EC countries 1247–8w

District health authorities
522w
Management 1143–4w

Divers
Police 206w

Divorce
Pensions 880w

Divorce law
879w

Dixon, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1020

"Do You Still Believe All You Read in the Newspapers"
836w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 377–87, 410
Questions
Dept of the Environment, Public expenditure 406–8w
Educational finance, Staffordshire 1330–1
Local government reform, Government grants 405–6w
Opinion polls, Attorney General 759–60w
Opinion polls, Dept of National Heritage 855–8w
Opinion polls, Dept of Social Security 786–93w
Opinion polls, Dept of the Environment 916–22w
Opinion polls, Dept of Trade and Industry 1090w
Opinion polls, Dept of Transport 753w
Opinion polls, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 752–3w
Opinion polls, Home Office 959–62w

Dobson, Mr Frank—continued
Opinion polls, Lord President of the Council 750w
Opinion polls, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 832–3w
Opinion polls, Ministry of Defence 762–4w
Opinion polls, Scottish Office 1281w
Opinion polls, Treasury 1050w

Docks and Harbours (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Order 1995
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 461

Doctors
Manpower 190w
Vacancies 577–8w

Dogs
Animal welfare 488–9
Transmissible encephalopathies 1128w

Dogs (Fouling of Land) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1022–3

Domestic gas appliances
Poisoning 289w

Doncaster
Magistrates 661–2w

Doncaster Healthcare NHS Trust
EC law 679–80w

Doncaster prison
732w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Assisted places scheme 738–9w, 973w
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 817–21w
Assisted places scheme, Wales 781–3w
Burns, Robert, Festivals and special occasions 1521
Cellular phones, Dept for Education and Employment 401–2w, 1034w
Cellular phones, Dept of Health 382–3w
Cellular phones, Dept of National Heritage 371w
Cellular phones, Dept of Social Security 378w
Cellular phones, Dept of the Environment 352w
Cellular phones, Dept of Trade and Industry 332w, 467w
Cellular phones, Dept of Transport 321–2w
Cellular phones, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 338w
Cellular phones, Home Office 355w
Cellular phones, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w, 533w
Cellular phones, Ministry of Defence 346w, 720w
Cellular phones, Northern Ireland Office 546w
Cellular phones, Scottish Office 367w
Cellular phones, Treasury 328w
Cellular phones, Welsh Office 392–3w
Class sizes, Scotland 823w
Cost per pupil, Primary education 745w
Cost per pupil, Wales 783w
Dept of Health, Government information services 811w
Dept of Health, Telephone services 810w
Dept of Social Security, Telephone services 246–8w
Educational finance, Scotland 822–3w
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 648–50w
Forth rail bridge 267w
Genetics, Data banks 817w, 959w
Government information services, Telephone services 248w
Greater Glasgow Health Board, Finance 361–2w
Health Information Service 225–6w
Irvine Development Corporation, Irvine Housing Association 1064–6w
Irvine Housing Association, Finance 823w
Local government reform, Scotland 68–70w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H—continued
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept for Education and Employment 310w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Health 226w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of National Heritage 261w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Social Security 249w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of the Environment 238–9w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Trade and Industry 288w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Transport 267–8w
Ministers' domestic visits, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1057w
Ministers' domestic visits, Home Office 245w
Ministers' domestic visits, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w
Ministers' domestic visits, Ministry of Defence 240w
Ministers' domestic visits, Northern Ireland Office 545w
Ministers' domestic visits, Treasury 257w
Ministers' domestic visits, Welsh Office 278w
New towns, Property transfer 823w
New towns development corporations, Property transfer 1064–5w
NHS trusts, Loans 609w
NHS trusts, Scotland 301w, 362–5w
Private education 745w
Private education, Scotland 821w
Private education, Wales 779w, 781w
Railway accidents, Passengers 268–9w
Regional selective assistance, Scotland 294–6w, 649–52w
Road works, Telephone services 268w
Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise 301–2w
Scottish health boards, Executives 361w
Scottish health boards, Finance 362w
Telephone services, Scottish Office 469–70w
Trains, Emergencies 303w, 1045w
Water authorities, Scotland 302–3w, 468–9w
Water charges, Scotland 302–3w

***Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 24–37, 39, 44
Questions
Bradford Royal Infirmary, Accident and emergency departments 132–3
Child health 129
Elderly, Hospital discharges 133
GP fundholders 122–5
GP fundholders, Birmingham 124–5
GP fundholders, Dartford 125
GP fundholders, Isle of Wight 124
GP fundholders, Suffolk 124
GP fundholders, Ulcers 124
Health authorities, Costs 37w
Health services, Social conditions 129
Human embryo experiments 1141w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 132
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, In Vitro Fertilisation 131–2
Infant mortality 128–9
Infant mortality, Social conditions 129–30
London Ambulance Service 937w
NHS finance, Huntingdon 125

Dorset County Council
173–4w

Double taxation
Netherlands (18.12.95) 1271

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Estates of Deceased Persons and Inheritances and on Gifts) (Netherlands) Order 1996
Debates etc.
(18.12.95) 1271

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James, Minister of State, Scottish Office
- *Questions*
  - A1 67–8w
  - A75, Road works 813w
  - Algrade Trust 171–2w
  - Ambulance services, Greater Glasgow Health Board 611–3w
  - Billing, Scottish Office 816–7w, 1063w
  - Cellular phones, Scottish Office 367w
  - Civil servants' visits abroad, Scottish Office 168–71w
  - Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 296–300w
  - Civil service agencies, Stirling 645–6w
  - Community care, Scotland 1290w
  - Crime prevention, Scotland 1279–80w
  - Crimes of violence, Scotland 1527
  - Criminal Justice Social Services Fund, Scotland 1003–4w
  - Departmental correspondence, Scottish Office 65w
  - Edinburgh Royal Infirmary 610w
  - Electric shock equipment, Exports 86w
  - Fine defaulters, Television licences 614–6w
  - Forfar bypass, Road works 1277w
  - Forth Road bridge, Repairs and maintenance 1285–6w
  - Gaelic language, EC grants and loans 1279w
  - Genetics, Data banks 817w
  - Gourock Ropeworks, Demolition 816w
  - Government contracts, Scottish Office 1063w
  - Greater Glasgow Health Board, Finance 361–2w, 365–6w
  - Hairmyres Hospital 68w
  - Highland Health Board, Computers 997–8w
  - Hospitals, Stonehaven 610w, 1516
  - Immigrant detainees, Scotland 615–6w
  - Kincardine bridge, Road works 1286w
  - Land ownership and tenure, Scotland 610w
  - Legislation, Scotland 65–7w
  - Lockerbie, Bombings 997w, 1276w
  - Ministers' private offices, Scottish Office 1060w
  - National Lottery, Scotland 1276w, 1530–2
  - NHS, Capital investment 609–10w
  - NHS, Private finance initiative 1061–2w
  - NHS, Scotland 1516
  - NHS finance, Scotland 1515–6
  - NHS trusts, Administrative costs 1529
  - NHS trusts, Loans 609w
  - NHS trusts, Scotland 301w, 362–5w
  - Nursing homes, Scotland 70w, 1277w
  - Offensive weapons, Crime prevention 1527–8
  - Offensive weapons, Scotland 1528
  - Official cars, Scottish Office 1061w
  - Orders and regulations, Scotland 609w
  - Police, Political activities 366w
  - Press advertising, Scottish Office 1281–3w
  - Prison population, Dyslexia 998w
  - Prison population, Scotland 296w
  - Prison visits, Drug crimes 616–7w
  - Procurator Fiscal Service 999–1001w
  - Road construction, Scotland 68w
  - Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Scottish health boards 1516
  - Scottish Ambulance Service 611–6w
  - Scottish Ambulance Service, Performance standards 813–4w
  - Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board 1283–4w
  - Scottish health boards 1515
  - Scottish health boards, Administrative costs 812–3w
  - Scottish health boards, Executives 361w
  - Scottish health boards, Finance 362w
  - Scottish health boards, Local government reform 610–1w
  - Skye bridge 1284–5w
  - Small businesses, Scottish Office 1062–3w
  - Sterilisation, Scotland 366–8w
  - Telephone services, Scottish Office 469–70w
  - Trains, Emergencies 303w

Dounreay
- 1258–9w
- Nuclear fuel reprocessing 1259w
- Nuclear power stations 1259w
- Nuclear safety 1259–60w
- Radioactive wastes 1288–9w

Dover
- Customs and Excise 1342

Dover, Mr Den
- *Questions*
  - Employment opportunities, Chorley 985

Dowd, Mr Jim
- *Questions*
  - Northern Ireland Central Services Agency 798w
  - Northern Ireland Central Services Agency, Contracts for services 797–8w
  - River Thames, Tunnels 424w
  - Waterside Hospital, Hospital closures 481

Downe Hospital
- Capital investment 481

Down's syndrome
- 195w

Drama education
- Educational finance 982

Dredging
- Licensing 404w
- North Sea 412w

Drift nets
- 369–70w
- Nature conservation 833w
- Scotland 1528–9

Drinking and driving
- Blood alcohol levels 1040w
- Road accidents 273w

Droughts
- Yorkshire Water 9–12w

Drownings
- Northern Ireland 797w

Drug abuse
- Army 715–6w
- Children 192–3w
- Paracetamol 936w
- Police custody 243w

Drug crimes
- Prison visits 496w, 616–7w
- Prisons 495–6w
- Smuggling 601–2w

Drug industry
- Patents 366

Drug side effects
- MMR vaccine 677w
- MR vaccine 675–6w
- Vaccination 77w, 676w

Drugs
- Overdoses 936w
- Retail prices 44w

Dry stone walls
- Scotland 1004w

Duffryn House
- South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council 994w

Duncan, Mr Alan
- *Debates etc.*
  - House of Commons procedure, Points of order (06.12.95) 373
  - Oral question time intervention (04.12.95) 12
- *Questions*
  - Assisted places scheme, Wales 72w
  - Deregulation initiative 687–8
  - Local government reform, Leicestershire 1097w
  - Organised crime, Intelligence services 1174w
  - Rates and rating, Appeals 641–2w
  - Rating revaluations 642w
  - Rating revaluations, Administrative delays 642w
  - Rating revaluations, Costs 642w

Duncan, Mr Alan—continued
  - Severe disability premium 671w
  - Urban planning 1095w
  - Valuation tribunals 642w
  - Valuation tribunals, Public appointments 642w
  - Valuation tribunals, Training 642w

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
- *Debates etc.*
  - Medals (20.12.95) 1582
- *Questions*
  - Disclosure of information 1097
  - Trafalgar Square, Safety 261w

Dunn, Mr Bob
- *Debates etc.*
  - Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 153
  - Railway travel (18.12.95) 1243
- *Questions*
  - Business questions 498
  - Council housing, Empty housing 1332
  - Councillors' attendance allowances 235w
  - Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 1290w
  - GP fundholders, Dartford 125
  - Grant maintained schools, School population 702w
  - Local authorities, Political parties 388–9w
  - Local government land, Land acquisition 1103–4w
  - Valuation tribunals 1104w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
- *Debates etc.*
  - HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1292–3
  - Railway travel (18.12.95) 1241
- *Questions*
  - Crown Prosecution Service, Witnesses 17
  - Legal aid 1219–20
  - Road works 1178–82w

Durant, Sir Anthony
- *Debates etc.*
  - Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1552, 1555
- *Questions*
  - Business questions 1549

Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations 1995
- *Debates etc.*
  - (18.12.95) 1254–73

Durham County
- Coal mine closures 466w
- Coal mining 721w

Dwr Cymru
- see Welsh Water

Dykes, Mr Hugh
- *Debates etc.*
  - Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1234
- *Questions*
  - Agricultural production, Economic and monetary union 1092
  - Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 488w
  - Edgware Hospital 191w
  - Edgware Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 1138w
  - National Lottery, Charities 950–1w
  - Playing fields, Camden Borough Council 1208–9
  - Standard spending assessments, London boroughs 1341–2
  - Unemployment 819

Dyslexia
- Prison population 998w

Eagle, Ms Angela
- *Debates etc.*
  - Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 25, 28–9, 40, 56, 64–5, 74, 82, 87–91
- *Questions*
  - Council tax, Educational finance 1331
  - Electricity supply industry 283w
  - Homicide 963w
  - Homicide, Extradition 963w

Eaglesham bypass
Capital investment 1523

Ealing Borough Council
Local government finance 351w

Early retirement
Dept of Trade and Industry 867w
Farmers 54w, 829w
Health service staff 189w

Earnings rules
Assisted places scheme 306w
Income support 1271w, 1273w

East Anglia
Regional challenge 1087w

East Kilbride
Asbestos 174w

East Midlands
Employment 254–5w

East Timor
Hawk aircraft 837w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Questions
Post Office, Executives 162w

Ebford
Low flying 2w
Marines 2w

EC action
Alcoholism 1140w
Arable farming 54–5w
Dietary supplements 834w
Environmental impact assessment (13.12.95) 1070
Equal opportunities (04.12.95) 22
Fruit (12.12.95) 906
Herbal medicine 805–6w
Iron and steel industry 365–6
Medical treatments 775–6w
Motor vehicle type approval 1040–1w
Pollution (18.12.95) 1271
Racial discrimination 358w
Vegetables (12.12.95) 906

EC Agriculture Council
228–9w

EC aid
(12.12.95) 906

EC budget
734–5w, 874w
Unemployment 874w

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC Committee of the Regions
Councillors 84–5w

EC Cons Doc 8962/94
(12.12.95) 906

EC Cons Doc 8273/95
(04.12.95) 22

EC Cons Doc 10836/95
(20.12.95) 1550

EC countries
Blood alcohol levels 1040w
Disposable income 1247–8w
English language 835–6w
Travel concessions 841w

EC Draft 9491/93
(18.12.95) 1271

EC Draft 6612/94
(13.12.95) 1070

EC Draft 7511/95
(18.12.95) 1271

EC Draft 9284/95
(04.12.95) 22

EC Draft 9554/95
(12.12.95) 906

EC energy policy
466w

EC external relations
Diplomatic service 753w

EC Finance Council
157–8w, 565w

EC Fisheries Council
Scotland 1518–9

EC Foreign Affairs Council
336–7w

EC grants and loans
835w
Agricultural marketing 1166w
Agriculture 927w
Fisheries 926–7w
Food industry 411–2w
Gaelic language 1279w
Greenbank project 1224–5w
Greyhound racing 873w
Merseyside 1229w
Metrolink 1183–4w
Northern Ireland 112–3w, 386w
School milk 827w
Textile industry 289w
Wales 3, 5, 9–10

EC Health Council
41–2w

EC immigration
Visas 417–8w

EC internal relations
(20.12.95) 1477–9

EC internal trade
600w, 879w
Pornography 599–600w

EC Labour and Social Affairs Council
402w

EC law
502w, 599w, 735w
Computer privacy 606w
Deregulation initiative 487w, 660w
Doncaster Healthcare NHS Trust 679–80w
Electromagnetic interference 599w
Environment 5w

EC nationals
Free movement of labour 958w

EC Social Affairs Council
see EC Labour and Social Affairs Council

EC Social Charter
352, 694w
Scotland 1518
Tourist industry 1207

EC staff
837–8w
Greater London 702w

EC Telecommunications Council
292–3w

Eccles
Metrolink Salford 188w

Economic and monetary union
258–9w, 340w, 487–8, 832, (13.12.95) 1070
Agricultural production 1092
Employment opportunities 1099
France 487

Economic growth
OECD countries 1263–4w

Economic policy
Environment protection 403w

Edgware Hospital
191w
Accident and emergency departments 1138w

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary
610w

Education
1228–9w
Local government expenditure 177–80w
Northern Ireland (12.12.95) 906

Education (Assisted Places) (Scotland) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(12.12.95) 848

Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996
Debates etc.
(12.12.95) 906

Education (Student loans) Act 1990
Questions
119w

Education vouchers
Capita Managed Services 698–9w
Pre-school education 120–1w, 401w, 535w, 698–9w, 972–3, 974–5w, 1227–8w, (18.12.95) 1322
Public petitions (18.12.95) 1322
Standard spending assessments 175–6w
Wales 13–4

Educational administration
Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards 1167–8w

Educational assessment
English education 536w
Higher Education Funding Council for England 534–5w

Educational finance
236–7w, 975w, 980
Cheshire 691–2w
Class sizes 979
Cost per pupil 696–8w
Council tax 1331
Drama education 982
Higher education 983–4
Kent County Council 1097–8
Lancashire 694w, 979–80, 983, 1331
Local education authorities 1016–7w
North Yorkshire 983
Nottinghamshire 694w
Scotland 822–3w
Special education 693w
Staffordshire 984, 1330–1
Students 1222w
Teacher training 115–6w
Teachers 832

Educational institutions
Nurses' training 165–6w

Educational policy
Deregulation initiative 974–5

Educational population
697–8w

Educational psychology
121–38w

Educational publications
400w

Educational qualifications
English education 692w
Mathematics education 692w

Educational (School Premises) Regulations 1981
Questions
439–40w

Educational standards
134, 489–90, 691w, 975w
Class sizes 977
Employment 153w
General certificate of secondary education 1033–4w
Local education authorities 490
Mathematics 971–2
Pupil-teacher ratios 977
Reading 691w
Teacher training 976–7

Efficiency scrutinies
Government research establishments 859–60w
National Weights and Measures Laboratory 1262w
Research facilities 351
Training and enterprise councils 735–6w

Eggar, Rt Hon Tim, Minister for Energy
Questions
Advanced gas-cooled reactors, Fossil fuel levy 1256w
Electricity supply industry 283w

Eggar, Rt Hon Tim—continued
Electricity supply industry, Licensing 636w
Electricity tariffs 45w
Electricity tariffs, Electricity meters 861–2w
European Regional Development Fund 860w
Foreign investment in UK 278–9w
Future large aircraft 281–2w
Gas pipelines, Zeebrugge 45w
Government departments, Scotland 640w
Integrated regional offices 863–6w
Natural gas, Gas reserves 45w
Nuclear power stations, Licensing 465w
Petroleum exploration, North Wales 872w
Regional aid, Expenditure 865w
Regional challenge 461–3w, 872w
Regional selective assistance 865w
Shipbuilding 1255w
Shipbuilding, Treaties 1262–3w
Textile industry 282w

Elderly
Concessionary fares 840–1w
Disability living allowance 245–6w
Health services 191w
Home care services 507–8w
Home energy efficiency scheme 1096–7w
Hospital beds 521w
Hospital discharges 133

Elections
General Synod 859w

Electoral reform
Scotland 1530

Electoral register
Disclosure of information 450w
Northern Ireland 900w
Public access 900w

Electric power
Housing amenities 899w

Electric shock equipment
Exports 86w, 1258w

Electrical industry
Export promotion 361–2

Electricity generation
Fuels 862w

Electricity meters
Electricity tariffs 861–2w

Electricity supply industry
283w, 367
Competition 636w
Licensing 636w
Regulatory system 640w

Electricity tariffs
45w
Electricity meters 861–2w
Retail prices index 1080–1w
VAT repayment 260w

Electromagnetic interference
EC law 599w
Radiocommunications Agency 599w

Electronic equipment
London Regional Transport 558w

Electronic mail
638w

Electronic surveillance
Road tolls 185w

Electronics industry
Prices 282w

Elletson, Mr Harold
Questions
Disability working allowance 378w
Lancashire County Council, Sick leave 9w
Sick leave, Private sector 250w

Emergencies
Trains 303w, 1045w

Emergency calls
Metropolitan Police 606–8w

Emergency powers
Northern Ireland 801w

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 715–6
Grant maintained schools (20.12.95) 1449
Questions
Primary education, Standard spending assessments 560–1w

Emphysema
Industrial disablement benefits 86–7w
Industrial diseases 151w

Employment
877–8w, 1250–1w
East Midlands 254–5w
Educational standards 153w
Illegal immigrants 659–60w, 958–9w, 978w
Manufacturing industries 289w
Northern Ireland 316w, 481–2
Prisoners on remand 447–8w

Employment discrimination
Older workers (13.12.95) 1020
Teachers 904w

Employment (Homeworkers) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (19.12.95) 1345

Employment Medical Advisory Service
Manpower 234w

"Employment of Children Consultation Paper"
391–2w, 523w

Employment opportunities
985
Building industry 562w
Chorley 985
Economic and monetary union 1099
Handicapped 828–9
Northern Ireland 311–2w
Unemployment 984

Employment protection
Deregulation initiative 486w
Homeworking (19.12.95) 1345

Employment schemes
1021–2w, 1224w
Expenditure 1022–6w
Unemployment benefits 818

Employment (Upper Age Limits in Advertisements) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1020

Empty housing
Armed forces housing 348–9w, 479w, 985w
Council housing 1332
Government buildings 1332
Ministry of Defence 1332–3
Political refugees 12–3w

Empty property
NHS 939w

Energy conservation
584w, 724w
Carbon dioxide 1099–100w
Ministry of Defence 590w
VAT 506–7w

Energy Conservation Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1022

Energy prices
862–3w

Energy supply
VAT 506–7w

English education
Educational assessment 536w
Educational qualifications 692w

English language
EC countries 835–6w

English Nature
see Nature Conservancy Council for England

Enterprise allowance scheme
1224w

Enterprise and Deregulation Unit
167w

Entertainment licensing
Opening hours 658w

Entry clearances
645w
Algeria 24w
Kiev 1189w

Environment
EC law 5w

Environment Act 1995
Questions
735w

Environment Agency
516w

Environment protection
Air pollution control 508w
Economic policy 403w
Finance Act 1995 16w
Pennines 1095w
Rural areas 585w

Environmental health officers
1137w

Environmental impact assessment
EC action (13.12.95) 1070
Heathrow Airport 1183w
Manchester Airport 1183w

Environmental policy
Deregulation initiative 974–5
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 508w

Environmental Pollution Royal Commission
Transport policy 262–7w

Equal opportunities
EC action (04.12.95) 22
Local Enterprise Development Unit 798w

Equal Opportunities Commission
979–80w

Essex
Armed forces housing 479w
Tipping of waste 1097w

Estimates days
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1112–55
Financial services (14.12.95) 1156–94

Estonia
82w

Etherington, Mr Bill
Questions
Benzodiazepines, Civil proceedings 1014w
Benzodiazepines, Medical research 1208w
Benzodiazepines, Prescription drugs 1208w
Hospital beds, Sunderland 680–1w
Medical appeal tribunals 1270w
Medical research, Sunderland 936–7w
Nurses, Private health services 190w
Research, Dept of the Environment 1230–2w
Social security appeal tribunals 1270w
South Western Electricity 283w
Surveys, Sunderland 1008w, 1019–21w
Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, Property transfer 642–3w

Ethnic groups
Millennium Commission 417w
Parole 23w
Prison population 450–2w
Prisoners 211w
Prisoners on remand 209–10w, 447w

Ethnic minorities
Judiciary 324w
Magistrates 1203w
Magistrates' courts 323–6w
Recruitment 964w

European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund
North Yorkshire 55w
Northern Ireland 107–8w

European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund—continued
Wales 996w, 1159w

European Assembly
see European Parliament

European Commission
1056–7w
Information 251–2w
Manpower 251w
Offices 837–8w, 1047w
Official publications 836w
Publicity 875w

European Communities
487, 491–2, (07.12.95) 506–93
Information services 78w
Wales 78w

European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Statute of the European Schools) Order 1996
Debates etc.
(12.12.95) 906

European Convention on Human Rights
80–1w, 645w
Bosnia-Herzegovina 488

European Council
837w

European Court of Human Rights
488

European Fighter Aircraft
359–60
Guided weapons 165w

European Parliament
Publicity 875w

European Regional Development Fund
860w
Northern Ireland 109–10w

European schools
(12.12.95) 906

European Social Fund
Northern Ireland 99–102w
Training 739w
Voluntary organisations 1225w

Evans, Mr David
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 631–5
Questions
EC Social Charter 352
Gaelic language, EC grants and loans 1279w

Evans, Mr John
Questions
Incapacity benefit, Handicapped 828

Evans, Mr Jonathan, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Questions
Bailiffs, Cumbria 881w
Bailiffs, Debt collection 227w
Benzodiazepines, Civil proceedings 1014w
Billing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 728w, 1014w
Child support appeal tribunals 662w
Consultants, Lord Chancellor's Dept 455–6w
Court of appeal 1217–8
Court of appeal, Criminal proceedings 1217
Court Service Agency 662w
Court Service Agency, Contracts for services 660–1w
Courts, Contracts for services 728w
Courts, Private sector 728w
Courts charter, Judges 323–4w
Divorce, Pensions 880w
Divorce law 879w
EC internal trade 879w
Family law 1220
Family law, Law reform 1220
Fine defaulters, Prison sentences 227–8w
Fines, Enforcement 227w
Fraud 881w
Immigration appeals, Immigration rules 882–3w

Evans, Mr Jonathan—continued
Immigration Appellate Authorities, Administrative costs 882w
Internet, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1204w
Judicial review, Court of appeal 1218
Judiciary, Ethnic minorities 324w
Land registration 880w
Law centres 880w
Law reform, Mentally disadvantaged 728–9w
Legal aid 227w, 880–1w, 1205w, 1218–20
Legal aid, Alternative dispute resolution 1219
Legal Services Ombudsman 1202–3w
Magistrates, Doncaster 661–2w
Magistrates, Ethnic minorities 1203w
Magistrates' courts, Ethnic minorities 323–6w
Members' correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 881–2w
Ministers' visits abroad, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1205w
Official cars, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1204w
Operating costs, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1205w
Pensions appeal tribunals, Wales 1011–3w
Private finance initiative 726–7w
Private finance initiative, Lord Chancellor's Dept 228w, 727–8w
Probate Service 661w
Small businesses 883w
Small businesses, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1013–4w
War pensions, Appeals 660w
Witnesses, Children 1203w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 708
Crime (08.12.95) 619, 649, 662–6
Questions
Business questions 501
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 386w
Non-departmental public bodies 746w
Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency 545w
Orders and regulations, Cost benefit analysis 679
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 538–40w

Evans, Mr Roger, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security
Questions
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96, Social security benefits rules 785w
Carpal tunnel syndrome, Industrial injuries 784w
Cold weather payments 784–5w
Cold weather payments, Departmental coordination 784w
Council tax benefits 1272w
Departmental correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 97–8w
Dept of Social Security, Smoking 619w
Disability living allowance, Residential care 621w
Family credit, Free school meals 1271w
Family credit, Maintenance 1271w
Family credit, Social security benefits rates 1271–2w
Funeral payments 89w
Habitual residence test 891w
Housing benefits 1120w
Housing benefits, Administrative costs 1268w
Housing benefits, Expenditure 1266–7w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 1273–4w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits backdating 884–5w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rates 1268–9w
Housing benefits, Young people 784w, 890w
Income support 622w

Evans, Mr Roger—continued
Income support, Capital rules 97w
Income support, Child care 1270–1w
Income support, Earnings rules 1271w, 1273w
Income support, Families 1118–9w
Income support, Residential care 620–1w
Income support, Voluntary unemployment 1272w
Industrial disablement benefits, Emphysema 86–7w
Industrial diseases, Rhinitis 151w
Medical appeal tribunals 1270w
Residential care, Capital rules 669w
Retirement pensions, Age addition 670w
Severe disability premium 671w
Social fund, Maternity payments 150–1w
Social security appeal tribunals 1270w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 95–7w, 620w, 1119w
Social security benefits disqualification, Long stay patients 618w
Social security benefits rules, Departmental leaflets 152w
Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1995 890w
Unemployed, Social security benefits 628w
Unemployment benefits 620w
War pensions, Council tax benefits 88w

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
Crime prevention, Scotland 1280w
Handicapped children, Pre-school education 979
Housing benefits, Fraud 819–20
Local Authority Enforcement Functions Review 1215–6w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 194
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1234
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1428
Questions
Air force, Armed forces training 478w
Ammunition, Surpluses 429–30w
Armed forces, Per capita costs 478w
Armed forces civilians, Scotland 431w
Armed forces housing, Scotland 766–7w
Defence land, Land pollution 485w
Defence research, International cooperation 430w
Identification friend or foe systems 431w
Information services, Scotland 1521–2
Mustard gas 428–9w

Excise duties
Diesel fuel 14w
Fuels 256w

Exclusion orders
494–5w, 949w
Northern Ireland 949w
Terrorism 356–8w

Executives
NHS trusts 223w
Post Office 162w
Scottish health boards 361w

Exhaust emission controls
63–4w

Exhaust emissions
Research 511w
Telephone services 59w

Exhibitions
Millennium Commission 1265–6w
Public order policing 360–1w
Upper Waiting Hall 845w, 1190w

Explosives
Beaufort Dyke 609w, 815w
Wales 988w

Export controls
Nuclear materials 471w
Nuclear weapons 471w

Export credit guarantees
1255w

Export credit guarantees—continued
Financial institutions 334–5w
Iraq 334–5w

Export Credits Guarantee Department
Export insurance 1260w

Export licensing
Arms exports 1263w
Iraq 1085–6w
Military aircraft 1079–80w
Protective clothing 775w

Export of live animals
Public order policing 361w
Veal 1089

Export promotion
357–8, 362
Electrical industry 361–2
Meat 829w
Small businesses 356–7

Exports
776w, 1084w
Blood 41w
Electric shock equipment 86w, 1258w

Exservicemen
Civil service agencies 703–7w

External financing limits
Scotland 1276w

Extradition
Homicide 963w
Ross, Finbar 1074w
USA 385–6w

Faber, Mr David
Questions
Offences against children, British residents abroad 449–50w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 160–1, 224
Christmas, Points of order (20.12.95) 1550
European communities (07.12.95) 524, 526
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (06.12.95) 373
Questions
Airlines 363–4
Broadcasting 1211
Business questions 1108–9, 1549
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Export insurance 1260w
Farmers, Lichfield 830w
GP fundholders, Lichfield 133
Income tax, Scotland 1278w
Income tax, Tax yields 1246w
Manufactured exports 280w
Office of the National Lottery 1539–40
Political broadcasting 685
South Staffordshire Health Authority, Public appointments 681w
Standard spending assessments 1329–30
UK repayments from EC budget 635w

Factor VIII
1146w

Families
Family credit 1118–9w
Income support 1118–9w

Family credit
Child minding 901w
Families 1118–9w
Free school meals 1271w
Job centres 562w
Maintenance 1271w
Social security benefits rates 1271–2w

Family health services authorities
Performance related pay 525w

Family income
503–4w, 1249–50w

Family law
1220
Law reform 1220

Family Law Bill 1995/96
Questions
1220

Family planning
Northern Ireland 541–2w
Overseas aid 662–4w
Republic of Ireland 196w

Family planning clinics
1135w

Farm incomes
(11.12.95) 810–6
Northern Ireland 316w

Farmers
Bureaucracy 830w
Early retirement 54w, 829w
Lichfield 830w

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, Rep and 3R (18.12.95) 1250–2
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 17–8w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, International assistance 1073w
British embassies, Closures 577w
British embassies, Official residences 575–7w, 1188w
Burma, Forced labour 457w
Burma, Overseas aid 1175–6w
Burma, Overseas trade 456–7w
Forced labour, Burma 463–4w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Land ownership and tenure 159w
Former prime ministers, Civil servants 17w, 842w
Sequestration of assets, Iraq 1046w
Trade promotion, Burma 464–5w
Trade promotion, Civil service manpower 421–4w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (14.12.95) 1102
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1231–2
Members' attendance, Points of order (05.12.95) 138

Ferranti
217–8w
Directors 333–4w
Pension funds 334w

Festivals and special occasions
Burns, Robert 1521

Field, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1244
Royal yacht (20.12.95) 1452–60
Questions
Cryptosporidia, Water supply 1097w
GP fundholders, Isle of Wight 124
Identity cards, Social security benefits 821–2
Skye bridge 1284–5w
Small businesses, Government assistance 279w
Trust ports, Northern Ireland 387w
Water meters 1333

Field, Mr Frank
Questions
Church Commission Projects (Ashford Great Park) Review 393w
Church Commissioners 358w
Church Commissioners, Audit 329w
Church Commissioners, Investment 393w
Dept of Social Security, Fraud 820
Employment schemes 1021–2w
Employment schemes, Expenditure 1022–6w
General Synod, Elections 859w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 890–1w, 1273–4w
Legal aid 1205w
Redundant churches 858–9w

Film industry
849w

Finance Act 1995
Questions
327w

Finance Act 1995—continued
Environment protection 16w

Finance Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (05.12.95) 266
Procedure res* and Money res* (05.12.95) 266
Questions
330w, 410w

Financial institutions
Export credit guarantees 334–5w

Financial services
Estimates days (14.12.95) 1156–94

"Financial statement and budget report 1996/97"
157w

Fine defaulters
Prison sentences 227–8w, 495w
Scotland 614–6w
Television licences 614–6w

Fines
Enforcement 227w
Law enforcement 355w
Supervision orders 205–6w

Fingerprints
Data banks 969w

Finucane, Patrick
Homicide 800–1w

Fire regulations
958w

Fire service pensions
446w

Fire services
Greater London 1197–8w
Hazardous materials 950w
Training 343w
Wales 12

Firearms
Northern Ireland 1075w

Fish
Imports 688w

Fish conservation
Wales 571–2w

Fish farming
Larne Lough 798–9w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Consultants, Dept for Education and Employment 694w
Consultants, Dept of Health 517w
Consultants, Dept of National Heritage 373–4w
Consultants, Dept of the Environment 176w
Consultants, Dept of Transport 842w
Consultants, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 251w
Consultants, Home Office 496–7w
Consultants, Lord Chancellor's Dept 455–6w
Consultants, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 684–7w
Consultants, Ministry of Defence 241–2w
Consultants, Northern Ireland Office 542w
Consultants, Prime Minister 149w
Consultants, Treasury 326–7w
Consultants, Welsh Office 389w
Iron and steel industry, EC action 365–6

Fisheries
926w
EC grants and loans 926–7w
Scotland 1287w
Spain 1087–8

Fishing
Licensing 530–2w

Fishing catches
369w

Fishing quotas
1087–8
White fish 233w

Fishing vessels
559w
Compensation 413w
Shipping registration 753–4w
Spain 232–3w, 413w
Submarines 595w

Flood control
Scotland 1525

Fluoridation
1138–9w
Welsh Water 72w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 703, 714
Children in care (06.12.95) 306–11, 325–6
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (13.12.95) 1018
Members' conduct, Points of order (04.12.95) 22
Questions
Armed forces recruitment 164w
Business questions 500, 1108
Church Commissioners, Overseas investment 696
Civil service manpower, Wales 5–6
Crown Prosecution Service, Westminster City Council 14
Defence expenditure 164w
Deregulation initiative, Civil service 686
Disability living allowance, Elderly 245–6w
Funeral payments 377–8w
Grant maintained schools, Children in care 985–6
Hawk aircraft, Arms trade 163w
Legal aid 881w
Mines, Arms control 164w
Nanotechnology 283w
Political refugees 729–30w
Political refugees, Immigration controls 215w, 1011w
Select committees, Video conferencing 330w
Social security benefits rules, Departmental leaflets 152w
Social security benefits uprating 248–9w, 885–8w
Trident missiles, USA 983w

Foam
Furniture 638–9w

Food
1084–5

Food composition
Orders and regulations 928w

Food contamination
Beef 489
Pesticide residues 1129w

Food exports
Agricultural production 1092–3
Scotland 1289w

Food hygiene
940w
Dairy products 1091

Food industry
1085
Deregulation initiative 928w
EC grants and loans 411–2w

Food poisoning
579–80w

Food Safety Act 1990
Questions
940w

Food standards
Beef 1513–4

Food subsidies
School milk 1514

Football
1212–4

Forced labour
Burma 457w, 463–4w
China 1177w

Foreign aid
Northern Ireland 544w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Billing 752w, 1056w
Capital investment 252w
Cellular phones 338w
Civil servants' visits abroad 80w
Civil service manpower 574w
Consultants 251w
Government contracts 1055–6w
Immunity certificates 158–9w
Land ownership and tenure 159w
Ministers' domestic visits 1057w
Ministers' private offices 644w
Ministers' visits abroad 1057w, 1187w
Official cars 1186–7w
Official hospitality 644–5w
Operating costs 1187w
Opinion polls 752–3w
Press advertising 835w
Private finance initiative 337w, 752w
Public expenditure 84w
Small businesses 1054–5w, 1187w
Travelling expenses 1187w

Foreign investment in UK
278–9w, 489, 598w, 1081w, 1253–4w, 1256w
Northern Ireland 313–5w, 386w, 482–3, 1169w
Rural areas 354
Scotland 648–50w, 823–8w, 1290w
South West region 680–1
Wales 3–5, 8, 71w, 777w

Foreign policy
Gibraltar 751–2w

Forestry
Berwickshire 173w

Forestry Commission
Land acquisition 821–2w
Public appointments 407–8w
Wales 388w

Forfar bypass
Road works 1277w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 156
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 51, 54–61, 63, 107
European communities (07.12.95) 517
Financial services (14.12.95) 1165, 1167–8, 1172–6, 1180, 1190
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1242–3
Questions
Northern Ireland government 18w
Research councils, Postgraduate education 1261–2w

Former prime ministers
Civil servants 17w, 842w

Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for Scotland
Debates etc.
Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Amendment Order Confirmation Bill, 1R (06.12.95) 350
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1348–56, 1359, 1375–6
Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, 1R (05.12.95) 138
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1414, 1418, 1421–2, 1426, 1431–5
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 996–7w
Burns, Robert, Festivals and special occasions 1521
Common fisheries policy, Scotland 1519–20
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Local government finance 1524–5
Council housing, Scotland 1525
Council of Ministers 1518
Dental services, Scotland 1002–4w
Devolution, Scotland 1278w
Dry stone walls, Scotland 1004w
EC Fisheries Council, Scotland 1518–9

Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Flood control, Scotland 1525
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 823–8w, 1290w
Hospital beds, Scotland 172–3w
Income tax, Scotland 1278w
Information services, Scotland 1521–2
Iron and steel industry, Scotland 1519
Local government finance, Scotland 1526
Manufactured exports, Scotland 646–7w
Ministers, Scotland 1277w
Monklands District Council 1279w
NHS, Advertising 1001w
NHS charges, Scotland 998–1000w
NHS trusts, Income 1002w
NHS trusts, Scotland 1001w
North Lanarkshire Council Appointments Inquiry 409w
Nurses' training, Scotland 812w
Objects in lieu of tax, Scotland 1290w
Official hospitality, Scottish Office 815w
Public expenditure, Scotland 1058w
Public transport, Scottish Office 68w
Roads, Scotland 1058–60w
Scottish Assembly 1285w
Scottish Natural Heritage 648w
Scottish Office, Administrative costs 1003w
Scottish Office, Civil service manpower 617w
Scottish Office, Ministerial policy advisors 815–6w
Scottish Valuation Advisory Council 367–8w
Shipbuilding, Scotland 1518
Tourism, Scotland 1522
Tourist industry, Scotland 1521
Water authorities, Scotland 814w

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Questions
Water treatment, Northern Ireland 483–4

Forth, Mr Eric, Minister of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Questions
Child workers 975
Community action 440–5w
Deregulation initiative 975
Discretionary student grants 561w, 699–701w, 739w, 1033w
Drama education, Educational finance 982
EC Labour and Social Affairs Council 402w
EC Social Charter 694w
Educational policy, Deregulation initiative 974–5
Employment, Illegal immigrants 978w
Employment opportunities 985
Employment opportunities, Building industry 562w
Employment opportunities, Chorley 985
English education, Educational assessment 536w
European Social Fund, Voluntary organisations 1225w
Fraud, Dept for Education and Employment 740w
Graduates 691w
Greenbank project, EC grants and loans 1224–5w
Higher education admission 691w
Higher Education Funding Council for England, Educational assessment 534–5w
Job centres, Family credit 562w
Jobseeker's allowance 139–40w
Jobseeker's allowance, Consultants 402w
Mutual recognition of qualifications, Free movement of labour 117–8w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Education and Employment 537w
Overseas students, Child benefit 982
Overseas students, Fees and charges 982
Postgraduate students 973w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Employment 972–3w
Skilled workers, Labour market 307–8w
Special education 117–8w
Student accommodation 438w
Student grants, Mature students 396–8w, 701–2w

Forth, Mr Eric—continued
Student loans 119–20w, 394–6w, 534w, 692w, 694w, 970w, 1227–8w
Student Loans Company, Public appointments 1015–6w
Students, Educational finance 1222w
Travel to interview scheme, Greater London 445w
Unemployment 984–5
Unemployment, Employment opportunities 984
Unemployment, Waveney 142–3w
Universities, Managers 394w
Universities, Staff-student ratios 973w
Universities, Student numbers 974w
Universities, Tuition fees 143–4w
University finance 397–9w
Workstart 695w
Workstart, Take-up of employment 695–6w

Forth rail bridge
267w

Forth road bridge
Repairs and maintenance 1285–6w

Fossil fuel levy
Advanced gas-cooled reactors 1256w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 990, 1001, (18.12.95) 1280, 1285–94, 1319–20
Questions
HMSO, Privatisation 455w, 491–2w, 684

Foster, Mr Don
Questions
Educational psychology 121–38w
Employment, Educational standards 153w
Grant maintained schools, Publicity 538w
Local education authorities, Local government staff 139–40w
Special education 117–8w
Student loans 119w
Unemployment 153w

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (14.12.95) 1108
Questions
Air accidents, Inquiries 475–6w
Air traffic control 772w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 769w
Apache AH-64 helicopter, Armed forces training 717w
Apples, Marketing 1093
Armed forces training, Goose Bay 592w
Beaufort Dyke, Explosives 609w, 815w
Business questions 1109, 1547
Concessionary fares, Elderly 840–1w
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 841w
Conservative Party, Party conferences 136
Drugs, Overdoses 936w
Harrier aircraft, Air accidents 594w
Hercules aircraft, Air accidents 592–3w
Highland Regional Council, Capital investment 299w
Low flying 590–1w, 594w, 716–7w, 768–9w
Low flying, Armed forces training 984w
Low flying, Highlands of Scotland 591–2w
Low flying, Shipping 983–4w
Military aircraft, Armed forces training 592w
National Lottery 847w
Office of the National Lottery 1543
Prescription charges, Income 190w
RAF Spadeadam 594w
Small businesses, Scotland 1520
Tomahawk missiles 591w
Tornado aircraft 593w
Tornado aircraft, Air accidents 593w
Travel concessions, EC countries 841w
Travel concessions, Northern Ireland 1074w
Water charges, Scotland 299–300w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 714w

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Debates etc.
Good Hope Hospital (06.12.95) 463–7

Foxley, Gordon
Defence contracts 714–5w

Foyleside centre
111w

France
Economic and monetary union 487
Industrial disputes 832–3
Pre-school education 1031–2w
Strikes 1345

Fraud
881w
Cellular phones 638w, 776w
Dept for Education and Employment 740w
Dept of Social Security 785–6w, 820
Dept of Transport 754w
Government departments 734w
Housing benefits 819–20
Ministry of Defence 765–6w
National Lottery 608w
Passports 732w

Free movement of labour
EC nationals 958w
Mutual recognition of qualifications 117–8w

Free school meals
536–8w
Family credit 1271w
Wales 666w

***Freeman, Rt Hon Roger**, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster*
Debates etc.
HMSO, Ministerial statements (13.12.95) 989–1001
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1274–84, 1287, 1291, 1296
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Butler, Robin 686
Citizen's Charter 254w
Citizen's Charter, Travelling expenses 1093w
Contracts for services, Government departments 488w
Departmental responsibilities 490–2w
Deregulation initiative 486w, 686–8
Deregulation initiative, Cheese 686
Deregulation initiative, Civil service 686
Deregulation initiative, EC law 487w
Deregulation initiative, Employment protection 486w
Deregulation initiative, Industry 487w
Deregulation initiative, Ministers' visits abroad 747w
Deregulation initiative, Orders and regulations 487w
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 486w
Deregulation initiative, Trade competitiveness 486w
Deregulation Task Force 167w
Enterprise and Deregulation Unit 167w
HMSO 32–3w, 167w
HMSO, Privatisation 491–2w, 683–4, 1091–3w
Inquiries, Government departments 1091w
Local Authority Enforcement Functions Review 1215–6w
Orders and regulations, Cost benefit analysis 679–80
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Civil servants 167–8w
Private finance initiative, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 748w, 1214–5w
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness, Finance 489–90w

French, Mr Douglas
Debates etc.
Financial services (14.12.95) 1165–70
Oxstalls, Public petitions (19.12.95) 1436
Questions
Assisted places scheme 981–2
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Slaughterhouses 1094

French, Mr Douglas—continued
Cellular phones 968w
Cellular phones, Fraud 638w
Internet 637w, 733w

Fringe benefits
Taxation 1252w

Frogs
Pest control 582–3w

Frogs' legs
Imports 232w

Fruit
Balance of trade 828–9w
EC action (12.12.95) 906

Fry, Sir Peter
Questions
Closed circuit television, Video recordings 450w

Fuels
Electricity generation 862w
Excise duties 256w

Fulwood Hospital
935w

Funeral payments
89w, 377–8w
Social fund 150–1w

Funerals
894w

Furniture
Foam 638–9w

Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988
Questions
638–9w

Furs
Imports 235w, 776w, 907w

Further education
1223w
Building industry 1216w
Student numbers 71w
Wales 71w

Further education colleges
1018w
Hotel and catering industry 107w
Industrial tribunals 105–6w
Northern Ireland 101w, 103–6w
Per capita costs 399–400w
Redundancy 103–4w
Scotland 612w
VAT 970–1w

Further education teachers
Northern Ireland 103–8w
Part-time employment 105–8w

Future large aircraft
281–2w, 1342

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 791
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 112
Questions
Prison population, Dyslexia 998w
Student loans 694w
Student loans, Scotland 1514
Students, Educational finance 1222w

Gaelic language
EC grants and loans 1279w
Northern Ireland 315–6w

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 26, 69–73
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1428
Questions
Greater Glasgow Health Board, Finance 365–6w

Gale, Mr Roger
Questions
Broadcasting 1210–1
Cattle, Animal welfare 1089
Closed circuit television, Video recordings 206w
Grant maintained schools, Loans 1015w
Local education authorities, Educational finance 1016–7w
Schools, Inspections 1015w
Student Loans Company, Public appointments 1015–6w
Suffolk Training and Enterprise Council 1015w
Water authorities, Scotland 1063–4w
Water charges, Scotland 1068w

Gallie, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1357, 1394, 1396
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1414–5, 1419–21
Questions
Home energy efficiency scheme, VAT 1340
Monklands District Council 1279w
NHS finance, Scotland 1515–6
Opposition parties, Finance 28w
Owner occupied housing, Scotland 1346
Public expenditure, Scotland 1058w
Roads, Scotland 1058–60w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 486–7
Scottish Natural Heritage 648w
Student grants, Scotland 647–8w

Gaming Act 1968
Questions
210w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 514, 573–7
Questions
Business questions 503–4
Industrial health and safety 1239–40w
Nigeria 31–2w
Nigeria, Overseas aid 29w
Nigeria, Police 29w
Nigeria, Police training 29–30w
Overseas aid, Police training 30–1w
Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority, Accident and emergency departments 121
Small businesses 279w
West Bank, Overseas aid 1071w

Gardiner, Sir George
Questions
Pensions, VAT 1046–7w

Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1229–30

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 577–9
Questions
Bicycles, China 363
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 1344
British Academy of Sport 852w
Business questions 1106–7
Entry clearances 645w
Further education, Student numbers 71w
Gibraltar, Foreign policy 751–2w
Public footpaths, Ramblers' Association 1090
Unemployment benefits 620w

Garrett, Mr John
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 993, (18.12.95) 1275, 1278, 1296–9, 1319–20
Intervention during Ministerial statement (13.12.95) 996
Questions
HMSO, Privatisation 684
Nigeria 32w

Gas pipelines
Zeebrugge 9w, 45w

Gas reserves
Natural gas 45w, 351–2

Gas supply industry
Regulatory system 640w

Gender Identity (Registration and Civil Status) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1021

General certificate of secondary education
Educational standards 1033–4w

General household survey
Wales 665w

General practitioners
194w, 427w
Bureaucracy 492–3w
Computer applications 1209w
NHS internal market 193w, 1146w
Prescriptions 943w
Wales 415w

General Synod
Elections 859w

Genetics
Data banks 817w, 959w
Scotland 817w

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1038–42

Geriatric patients
Hospital beds 1132w

Geriatrics
Wales 779w

German measles
675w

Germany
Political refugees 952w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 701–2, 783–5
Questions
Dairy Crest 830w

Gibraltar
Foreign policy 751–2w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 297–9
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1349, 1379–82
Questions
Economic and monetary union 258–9w
Treaties 837w
UK contributions to EC budget 260–1w

***Gillan, Mrs Cheryl**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
St Peter's School Broadstairs (20.12.95) 1501–3
Questions
Assisted places scheme 117w, 537w, 693w, 738–9w, 973w, 981–2
Assisted places scheme, Earnings rules 306w
Assisted places scheme, Expenditure 537w
Beef, School meals 120w
Church schools, Grant maintained schools 976
Class sizes 561w
Conductive education 745–6w
Educational finance, Lancashire 694w
Educational finance, Nottinghamshire 694w
Educational psychology 121–38w
Educational (School Premises) Regulations 1981 439–40w
Equal Opportunities Commission 979–80w
Free school meals 536–8w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl—continued
Grant maintained schools 691w, 737–8w
Grant maintained schools, Loans 1015w
Grant maintained schools, School population 702w
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 691w
Local education authorities, Capital investment 976–7w
Local education authorities, Educational finance 1016–7w
Private education 745w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Education and Employment 309w, 401w
Quantock School 562–3w
Royal Ballet School, Assisted places scheme 981
School admission, Appeals 740w
School choice 693–4w
School meals, Expenditure 303–4w
Schools, Capital investment 438–9w
Sex discrimination 979w
Special education, Educational finance 693w
Special Educational Needs Tribunal 559–60w
Technology colleges 118–9w
Voluntary schools 737w
Voluntary schools, Grant maintained schools 975–6

Glow worms
1097–8w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1024, 1033, 1046
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 845
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1348–9
European communities (07.12.95) 506–7
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 851, 897
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1411–2, 1418, 1425, 1428–9
Questions
Beaufort Dyke, Explosives 815w
Business questions 1548–9
Criminal Justice Social Services Fund, Scotland 1003–4w
Fine defaulters, Television licences 614–6w
Gourock Ropeworks, Demolition 816w
Immigrant detainees, Scotland 615–6w
Local government social services, Scotland 1066–7w
Minebea Electronics 173w
Petroleum exploration licences 1082w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 616–7w
Public sector housing, Inverclyde 647w
Shipbuilding, Scotland 1518
Ships, Research 470w
Submarines, Fishing vessels 595w

Godsiff, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 201–3

Golding, Mrs Llin
Questions
School milk 1086

Good Hope Hospital
427w, (06.12.95) 463–74

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Questions
Electronic mail 638w
Ministerial policy advisors 488w

Goose Bay
Armed forces training 592w

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Questions
Unemployment benefits, Availability for work 305–6w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 298, 304

Gorman, Mrs Teresa—continued
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1359
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Scotland 1513
EC staff 837–8w
European Commission, Offices 838w
Strikes, France 1345
Tipping of waste, Essex 1097w

Gourock Ropeworks
Demolition 816w

Government achievements
Welsh Office 1153–4w

Government assistance to industry
London Electricity 466–7w
Northern Ireland 1077w
South West region 280w

Government bills
(13.12.95) 913–31

Government buildings
Dept of the Environment 1234w
Empty housing 1332

Government car service
Fees and charges 1185–6w

Government Communications Headquarters
Computer privacy 644w
Conditions of employment 1189–90w

Government contracts
Dept for Education and Employment 1033w
Dept of Social Security 1121w
Dept of Trade and Industry 1263w
Dept of Transport 1039w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1055–6w
Home Office 1006w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1165w
Ministry of Defence 1106–7w
Prime Minister 1052w
Scottish Office 1063w
Security industry 659w
Small businesses 256w, 873w, 1083–4w
Welsh Office 1158w

Government departments
Contracts for services 488w
Data Protection Registrar 493w
Fraud 734w
Inquiries 1091w
Scotland 471–2w, 640w

Government grants to local authorities
Crime victims 1231w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
Homelessness 6–7w

Government information services
Dept for Education and Employment 1018w
Dept of Health 811w
Telephone services 248w

Government Office for the South West
Publications 181–2w

Government offices for the regions
510–2w, 879w

Government research establishments
Efficiency scrutinies 859–60w

Government shareholding
Privatisation 1048–9w
Welsh Water 667–8w

GP fundholders
122–5, 1137w
Birmingham 124–5
Dartford 125
Isle of Wight 124
Leeds 1143w
Lichfield 133
Suffolk 124
Ulcers 124
Wales 276–7w

Graduates
691w

Graduates—continued
Northern Ireland 905–6w

Graham, Mr Thomas
Questions
Community care, Scotland 1290w

Grand Metropolitan
Minimum wage 1517

Grandparents
Custody 387w

Grant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Treasure Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1021
Questions
Legal aid, Alternative dispute resolution 1219
Standard of living, Interest rates 1096
Standard spending assessments, Travel-to-work areas 1330

Grant, Mr Bernie
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 731, 740, 755–7
Repatriation, Caribbean (19.12.95) 1437–46, 1448
Questions
Identity cards 600w, 657–8w

Grant maintained schools
116–7w, 691w, 737–8w, 974, (20.12.95) 1449, 1462–6
Ballots 76w, 691w, 1217–22w
Children in care 985–6
Church schools 976
Loans 1015w
Publicity 538w
School buildings 537w
School population 702w
Voluntary schools 975–6
Wales 12–3, 76w

Grazing land
368–9w

Great Western Railway
Privatisation 133–4, 457w, 559w, 841w

Greater Glasgow Health Board
Ambulance services 611–6w, 813–4w
Finance 361–2w, 365–6w

Greater London
Air pollution 1232w
Concessionary fares 841w
EC staff 702w
Fire services 1197–8w
Local government 908w
Pigeons 403w
Population 383w
Racial attacks 1008w
Travel to interview scheme 445w

Greater Manchester
Armed forces housing 480w
Metrolink 1041w

Green papers
Dept for Education and Employment 140–2w

Greenbank project
EC grants and loans 1224–5w

Greenbelt
510w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 706–7
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1124
Noise Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1020
Offensive weapons, Points of order (11.12.95) 698
Questions
Attorney General, Civil service manpower 86w
Beer 355–6
Business questions 499, 1108
Clergy, Sheffield 694
Deregulation initiative 688
Ealing Borough Council, Local government finance 351w

Greenway, Mr Harry—continued
Forth road bridge, Repairs and maintenance 1285–6w
Hospital wards 190–1w
Immigration Appellate Authorities, Administrative costs 882w
Internet, Schools 281w
Lawrence, Philip, Teachers 978
Lone parents, Social security recipients 627–8w
National Lottery 847w
Official engagements 148w, 325w, 566w, 750w, 1051w
Pre-school education, Education vouchers 698–9w
Public expenditure, Per capita costs 898w
Public expenditure, Wales 2
Rough sleepers initiative 1095w
Roundabouts, Northolt 58w

Greenway, Mr John
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Dairy farming 1091
International Labour Conference 736w
Maintenance, Children 1275w
National Lottery 1214–5
Training and enterprise councils, Efficiency scrutinies 735–6w
Training and enterprise councils, South London 736w

Greyhound racing
EC grants and loans 873w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Questions
Citizens' advice bureaux, Expenditure 288–90w, 640w
Domestic gas appliances, Poisoning 289w
Furniture, Foam 638–9w
Handicap benefits 619w
Hill farming 828w
Office of the National Lottery 1543
Reprography 254w
Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Scottish health boards 1516
Timesharing 638w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1016
Questions
Business questions 504
Grant maintained schools, Wales 12–3
Hill farming, Young people 1083–4
Information services, European Communities 78w
Welsh Office, Public appointments 992w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Questions
Crime 970w
Political broadcasting 685–6

"Growth competitiveness and employment"
874w

Grylls, Sir Michael
Questions
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 726w
Export promotion 357–8
Housing finance 725w

G-Tech
Office of the National Lottery 847w, 1115w

Guatemala
Human rights 339–40w
Police training 339w
Trials 340w

Guided weapons
347w
European Fighter Aircraft 165w

Gulf War
see Iraq-Kuwait conflict

Gulf War syndrome
770w

***Gummer, Rt Hon John**, Secretary of State for the Environment*
Questions
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 726w
Council housing 1329
Council housing, Property transfer 1244–5w
Council tax, Educational finance 1331
Departmental correspondence, Dept of the Environment 6w
Dept of the Environment, Public expenditure 406–8w
EC grants and loans, Merseyside 1229w
Educational finance, Lancashire 1331
Hotels, Liverpool 1229w
Local government, Greater London 908w
Local government reform, Government grants 405–6w
Opinion polls, Dept of the Environment 916–22w
Packaging industry 1102–3w
Suffolk County Council, Council tax capping 1331
Sustainable Development Round Table 1102w
Waste management 515–6w
Water meters 1333
Water supply 1335
Water supply, South West region 1335–6
Water supply industry 1334–5

Gunnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1246
Questions
Breast cancer 127–8
GP fundholders, Leeds 1143w
Mature students, Student grants 701–2w
Museums and galleries 1209–10
Primary health care 1143w
Railtrack, Members' facilities 1073w
Railway stations, Parking 1041w

Gurkhas
Army strength 346w

Gwernymynydd
Planning permission 990w

Habitual residence test
891w

Haemophilia
Hepatitis 130–1, (13.12.95) 954–61

***Hague, Rt Hon William**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Ministerial statements (13.12.95) 1002–17
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Wales 993w
Assisted areas, Wales 4
Billing, Welsh Office 778w
Breast cancer, Wales 991w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Birds 276w
Cellular phones, Welsh Office 392–3w
Chemical Chase Manhattan Bank, Wales 75w
Child abuse, North Wales 993w
Chiropody, Diabetes 779w
Consultants, Welsh Office 389w
Council tax, Local government revenue 1190–1w
Council tax, Wales 414w, 546w
Departmental correspondence, Welsh Office 145w, 551w
EC grants and loans, Wales 3, 5, 9–10
Education vouchers, Wales 13–4
Fish conservation, Wales 571–2w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 3–5, 8, 71w
Geriatrics, Wales 779w
Government contracts, Welsh Office 1158w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 778–80w
Housing estates, Clwyd 390w
Housing finance, Buckley 146w
Housing for Wales, Loans 1158w
Interreg programme, Wales 1192w

Hague, Rt Hon William—continued
Local government finance, Wales 666–7w
Local government reform, Supplementary credit approvals 1161w
Medical students, Wales 992–3w
Members' correspondence, Welsh Office 992w
Ministers' domestic visits, Welsh Office 278w
Ministers' private offices, Welsh Office 989w
National income, Wales 391w
NHS trusts, Wales 780w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 8
Official cars, Welsh Office 989w
Official hospitality, Welsh Office 777w
Orders and regulations, Welsh Office 549–50w
Prescription charges, Administrative costs 780w
Private finance initiative, Wales 74w, 994–5w
Private finance initiative, Welsh Office 278w, 392w, 780–1w
Public expenditure, Wales 2–3, 414w
Residential care, Wales 990w
River Wye 1157w
River Wye, Special areas of conservation 1157w
Road construction, Clwyd 389w
Small businesses, Welsh Office 996w, 1158w
South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council, Duffryn House 994w
South Wales Electricity, Water supply industry 550w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 778w
Training for work, Wales 550w
Unemployment, Wales 7–8
Water storage, Rateable value 1191w
Welsh assembly 3
Welsh Development Agency 551w
Welsh Development Agency, Expenditure 1162w
Welsh Development Agency, Finance 70w
Welsh Development Agency, Leader programme 75w, 77w
Welsh Grand Committee 778w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Redundancy 572w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Relocation of employees 572w
Welsh language 1157–8w
Welsh Office, Accountability 72–3w
Welsh Office, Block grant 73w
Welsh Office, Civil service manpower 572–3w
Welsh Office, Civil service redundancies 573w
Welsh Office, Government achievements 1153–4w
Welsh Office, Ministerial duties 1157w
Welsh Office, Ministerial policy advisors 414–5w
Welsh Office, Press releases 415w
Welsh Office, Public appointments 992w
Welsh Office, Smoking 992w
Welsh Water, Beaches 414w
Welsh Water, Fluoridation 72w
Welsh Water, Government shareholding 667–8w
Welsh Water, Shares 550–1w
Welsh Water, Swalec 8–9

Hain, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1015
Questions
Alternative medicine, Departmental leaflets 223–4w
Autism, Children 75w, 120w
Broadcasting, Regulatory system 1210
Dietary supplements, EC action 834w
Herbal medicine, EC action 805–6w
Medical treatments, EC action 775–6w
Northern Ireland government 477–8
Obstetrics, Neath General Hospital 7
Office of the National Lottery 1541
Special education, Scotland 67w

Hairmyres Hospital
68w

Hall, Mr Mike
Questions
Civil service 488w
Dioxins, Cheshire 721w
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 691w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1237

Hamilton, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 203–9
Questions
Access to work programme 736w
Council of Ministers 1518
Pensions, Chile 824

Hampshire
Armed forces housing 481w

Hampson, Dr Keith
Questions
One stop shop initiative, Yorkshire and Humberside 866–7w
Trams, Leeds 188w

Handicap benefits
619w, 1121–2w
Expenditure 89–90w

Handicapped
Employment opportunities 828–9
Incapacity benefit 828
Political refugees 95–6w
Residential care 523w
Social security benefits rules 784w

Handicapped children
Cornwall 935w
Pre-school education 978–9

***Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill, Rep and 3R (18.12.95) 1250, 1252–3
Questions
Algeria, Political refugees 159w
Aral Sea, Overseas aid 85w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 577w
Bazelya, Khalifa Amed 836w
BBC External Services 81w
BBC External Services, Broadcasting finance 338–9w
Bilateral aid 690–1, 1067–9w
Bilateral aid, Small businesses 664–5w
Billing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 752w, 1056w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, International assistance 1073w
British Council, Know-how Fund 691
British embassies, Closures 577w
British embassies, Official residences 575–7w, 1188w
British embassies, Operating costs 1188w
Burma, Democracy 418w
Burma, Forced labour 457w
Burma, Overseas aid 1175–6w
Burma, Overseas trade 456–7w
Capital investment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 252w
Cellular phones, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 338w
Child workers 1072w
China, Child workers 836w, 1177w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 80w
Consultants, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 251w
Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest 664w
Council for Education in World Citizenship, Overseas aid 692–3
Developing countries, Overseas aid 1069–71w
Diplomatic service, Trade promotion 838–9w

Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy—continued
East Timor, Hawk aircraft 837w
EC countries, English language 835–6w
EC immigration, Visas 417–8w
Entry clearances 645w
Entry clearances, Kiev 1189w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Civil service manpower 574w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Land ownership and tenure 159w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Public expenditure 84w
Government contracts, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1055–6w
Immunity certificates, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 158–9w
International Development Association 470w
International Red Cross, Finance 1176–7w
Iran, Debts 573–4w
Iran, Human rights 79w
Iran, Trials 78w
Iraq, Land drainage 81–2w
Islam, Religious sects 252w
Kashmir 835w
Know-how Fund 691
Labour migration, Bilateral aid 470w
Legionnaires' disease, Turkey 83–4w
Members' correspondence 159w
Ministers' private offices, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 644w
Ministers' visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1187w
Montserrat, Overseas aid 411w
Morocco, Human rights 751w
Natural Resources Institute 749w
Nigeria 31–2w, 691–2
Nigeria, Overseas aid 29w
Nigeria, Police 29w
Nigeria, Police training 29–30w, 1071–2w
North Korea 839w
Official cars, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1186–7w
Official hospitality, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 644–5w
Operating costs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1187w
Opinion polls, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 752–3w
Overseas aid 689–90, 693
Overseas aid, Family planning 662–4w
Overseas aid, Police training 30–1w
Overseas aid, Procurement 749w
Press advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 835w
Private finance initiative, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 337w, 752w
Rafiq, Mohammed, Immigration appeals 574w
Russia, Visas 574–5w
St Helena, Overseas aid 1176w
St Helena, Public appointments 1176w
Saudi Arabia, Religious freedom 79w
Shell, Nigeria 1057w
Small businesses, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1054–5w, 1187w
South Africa, Higher education 689
Southern Africa, Bilateral aid 689
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 688–9
Sri Lanka, Overseas aid 470w
Tibet, Human rights 417w
Trade promotion, Civil service manpower 421–4w
Turkey, Visas 82w
UN Conference on Women 28–9w
Wei, Jingsheng, China 1188w
West Bank, Overseas aid 1071w

Hanson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1015
Questions
Assisted places scheme 981
Assisted places scheme, Wales 72w
Availability for work 887w
Civil service manpower, Wales 685
HMSO, Privatisation 1093w
Local government reform, Local government staff 1191w
Planning permission, Gwernymynydd 990w

Hanson, Mr David—continued
Theatr Clwyd 989–90w
Unemployment 875w

Hard core unemployed
Wales 146w, 390w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1037
Questions
Aircrew, Armed forces deployment 984w
Armed forces, Redundancy 717–8w
Bridges, Wales 392w
Greyhound racing, EC grants and loans 873w
Lorries, Bridges 321w
Lorries, Motor vehicle registration 321w
Low pay 818–9
Nuclear power, Privatisation 361

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1054–6
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 867–8, 870
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1011
Questions
Pedestrian areas, Personal injury 60w

Harlow
Standard spending assessments 1341–2

Harman, Ms Harriet
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 28, 31, 35–46, 113
Questions
Advisory Committee on Pesticides, Public appointments 1153w
Alcoholic drinks 1140w
Alcoholism 1140w
Amniocentesis tests 225w
Blood, Exports 41w
Blood transfusion services 193w
Carpal tunnel syndrome, Industrial injuries 784w
Colostomy, Prescriptions 224w
Dept of Health, Official hospitality 428w, 1144w
Director of Public Prosecutions 665w
District health authorities, Management 1143–4w
Drinking and driving, Blood alcohol levels 1040w
Drug abuse, Children 192–3w
Environmental health officers 1137w
Factor VIII 1146w
Family planning clinics 1135w
General practitioners 194w
General practitioners, Bureaucracy 492–3w
General practitioners, Computer applications 1209w
General practitioners, NHS internal market 193w, 1146w
Good Hope Hospital 427w
GP fundholders 1137w
Health 1137w
Health authorities, Cash limits 1136w
Health authorities, Finance 1136–7w
Health service staff, Pay 1207w
Hepatitis, Blood transfusion services 425–6w
Hepatitis, Medical research 220–1w
Hospital beds 40w
Hospital consultants 1137–8w
Hospital waiting lists 936w, 1135w
Hospital wards 939–40w
Hospitals, Capital investment 427–8w
Hospitals, Construction 35–7w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 427w
Infant mortality 527w
Infant mortality, Research 528w, 531w
Influenza, Vaccination 219–20w
Inland Revenue, Civil proceedings 735w
Intensive care 224w
Intensive care, Paediatrics 1212w
Invalidity benefits 249w, 375w
Lindane 1133–4w
Locums 426w
Medical records 1136w

Harman, Ms Harriet—continued
Medical records, Disclosure of information 195w
Mental health services, Psychiatry 1210–1w
National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts 1137w
NHS, Capital investment 39w, 1145–6w
NHS, Private finance initiative 197–8w
NHS finance 517w
NHS finance, Huntingdon 125
NHS Management Executive 426w
NHS trusts, Directors 39w
NHS trusts, Executives 223w
Occupational health 517w
Oral contraceptives, Health hazards 528w
Out-patients 40w, 193w
Paracetamol, Drug abuse 936w
Pay beds 40w
Portman Group 1145w
Prescription charges 37–8w
Prodigy prescribing system 1152w
Road accidents, Casualties 225–6w
Road accidents, Costs 224–5w
Road accidents, NHS charges 224w
Road tolls, Electronic surveillance 185w
St Bartholomew's Hospital 195w
Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry 526–8w, 944–5w
Systemic lupus erythematosus 1136w
Tax yields, Tobacco 326w
Tuberculosis 1136w
Unemployment, Lone parent families 258w

Harrier aircraft
Air accidents 594w
Navigational aids 2w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1366–8, 1396–7
Questions
Community health services, Isles of Scilly 192w
Fishing quotas 1087–8
Foreign investment in UK, South West region 680–1

Hart, David
772w
Armed forces housing 164–5w
Armed forces married quarters 165w

Hartmann, Alfred
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness 325w

Harvey, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Chemical Weapons Bill, Rem stages (06.12.95) 430
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 994
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1247
Questions
Computer terminals 909–10w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Contracts for services 868–9w
Insolvency Service, Contracts for services 597w
Post Office, Rural areas 354–5

Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1240
Questions
Military aircraft, Export licensing 1079–80w
Public order policing, Export of live animals 361w

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 704, 726–9, 794

Haverfordwest
Armed forces housing 349–50w

Hawk aircraft
Arms trade 163w
East Timor 837w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Financial services (14.12.95) 1157
Questions
Council tenants, Social problems 1339–40
Deregulation initiative, Industry 487w
Football 1212–3
Health authorities, Costs 37w
Lancashire, Educational finance 983

Hawksley, Mr Warren
Questions
National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Efficiency scrutinies 1262w

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Questions
Lung diseases, Death 196–8w
Sports sponsorship 373w
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco industry 373w
Stansted Airport 557w
Tobacco, Health hazards 379w
Tobacco advertising 221–2w
Tobacco industry, Manpower 160w

Hazardous materials
Fire services 950w

Hazardous wastes
Waste disposal 922w
Waste management 585w

***Heald, Mr Oliver**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security*
Questions
Cold weather payments 817
Dept of Social Security, Surveys 502w
Fraud, Dept of Social Security 785–6w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 890–1w
Identity cards, Private finance initiative 822
Identity cards, Social security benefits 821–2, 884w
Lost working days, Mental illness 793w
National insurance 87–8w
National insurance contributions 670–1w, 889w, 1120w
National insurance fund, Personal pensions 249–50w
Occupational pensions 618–9w, 817–8
Pensions 818
Pensions, Chile 824
Pensions, Married women 151–2w
Pensions, Women 621w
Personal pensions 90–4w, 619–20w, 823–4
Personal pensions, State earnings related pension scheme 92w
Retirement pensions 1269w
Social security benefits uprating 248w
Social security payments 618w
State earnings related pension scheme 91w
State earnings related pension scheme, Expenditure 1267–8w
State earnings related pension scheme, Low pay 824
War pensions 883–4w
War pensions, Appeals 794–6w
War pensions, Asbestosis 621–2w
War pensions, Social security benefits rules 1266w
War widows' pensions 374–5w

Health
1137w, 1140–1w
Police custody 243w
Wales 991w

Health and Safety Executive
(20.12.95) 1481–2
Public appointments 176w

Health and Safety (Repeals and Revocations) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(05.12.95) 275

Health authorities
517w
Advertising 1205–6w
Cash limits 1136w

Health authorities—continued
Costs 37w
Finance 1136–7w
Wales 278w

Health hazards
Oral contraceptives 528w
Tobacco 379w

Health Information Service
225–6w

Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
2R and Money res* (12.12.95) 849–900

Health service staff
Crimes of violence 946w
Early retirement 189w
Industrial health and safety 901–2w
Manpower 807–8w
Northern Ireland 901–2w
Pay 1207w
Redundancy pay 189w, 681w, 1132w
Skin disorders 1135w

Health services
Barking (06.12.95) 344–50
Breast cancer 1145w, 1154w
Elderly 191w
Orders and regulations 413w
Social conditions 129

Heart diseases
Death 196–8w

Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1362–4
European communities (07.12.95) 531–5

***Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David**, Paymaster-General*
Questions
Civil service, Accounting 503w
EC budget 734–5w, 874w
EC budget, Unemployment 874w
European Commission, Offices 1047w
European Commission, Publicity 875w
Excise duties, Diesel fuel 14w
Excise duties, Fuels 256w
Fraud, Government departments 734w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 505w
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Bus services 633w
Landfill tax 1252w
Licensing, Steam engines 875w
Motability, VAT 634w
Occupational pensions, VAT 1047w
Paymaster-General 15–6w
Pensions, VAT 1046–7w
Small businesses, Government contracts 256w
Tax yields, Tobacco 326w
Taxation, Diesel fuel 259w
Taxation, Tipping of waste 257–8w
UK contributions to EC budget 155–6w, 260–1w
UK repayments from EC budget 635w
VAT, Company liquidations 563w
VAT, Energy conservation 506–7w
VAT, Home care services 154w
VAT, Public utilities 154w
VAT repayment, Electricity tariffs 260w
VAT threshold 1047w

Heathrow Airport
Air traffic 1184w
Environmental impact assessment 1183w
Passengers 1184w

Hedges and ditches
514w, 1237–8w

Helicopters
Defence procurement 595w, 1112w
Rescue services 839–40w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 781, 785–91

Henderson, Mr Doug—continued
Questions
Home Office, Civil service manpower 201–2w
Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, Land reclamation 404w
Wearmouth Colliery 1235w

Hendron, Dr Joe
Questions
Acute beds, Northern Ireland 1077–8w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 1169w
Maintenance, Children 1077–8w
Odour pollution 484
PIEDA 172w
University of Ulster 311–3w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Questions
Cost per pupil, Derbyshire 303w

Hepatitis
Blood transfusion services 425–6w
Haemophilia 130–1, (13.12.95) 954–61
Medical research 220–1w

Heppell, Mr John
Questions
Animal welfare, Animal housing 1163w
Class sizes 561w
Furs, Imports 235w
Handicapped children, Pre-school education 978–9
Teachers' pensions 697w
Transport of animals, Animal welfare 530w

Herbal medicine
EC action 805–6w

Hercules aircraft
Air accidents 592–3w

***Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael**, First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister*
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 140–52, 156, 158
Questions
Cabinet committees 167w
Cabinet committees, Disclosure of information 681–2
Cabinet Office, Science and technology 488w
Civil disorder, Brixton 1098
Computers 747–8w
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 487–8w
Deputy Prime Minister 682
Deputy Prime Minister, Computers in government departments 487w
Deputy Prime Minister, Ministerial duties 487w
Disclosure of information 1097
Economic and monetary union, Employment opportunities 1099
Foreign investment in UK, South West region 680–1
Government offices for the regions 879w
Homelessness, Social security reform 1097
Integrated regional offices 681
Kent County Council, Educational finance 1097–8
Lockerbie, Bombings 750w
Members' correspondence, Deputy Prime Minister 1091w
Members' speeches, Disclosure of information 682–3
Offensive weapons, Law reform 693–4
Official engagements 750w
Political broadcasting 685–6
Prime Minister 487w
Railway transport, Privatisation 1096
Royal Naval College 1098–9
Scotland, Trade competitiveness 681
Scottish Assembly 1098
Standard of living 1095–6
Standard of living, Interest rates 1096
Tower Colliery, Coal mining 1100

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Trade competitiveness 485w
Trade competitiveness, Regional selective assistance 680
Unemployment 1096–7
West Coast railway line 1097

Hicks, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Farm incomes (11.12.95) 814

Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1228

High rise flats
Scotland 1523

Higher civil servants
Civil service recruitment 746–7w
Opposition 842w

Higher education
Educational finance 983–4
South Africa 689

Higher education admission
691w

Higher Education Funding Council for England
Educational assessment 534–5w

Highland Health Board
Computers 997–8w

Highland Regional Council
Capital investment 299w

Highlands and Islands Enterprise
611–2w
Scottish Enterprise 301–2w

Highlands of Scotland
Government grants 1280w
Low flying 591–2w

Highways Agency
Public inquiries 185w

Hill, Mr Keith
Questions
Civil disorder, Brixton 1098
Road accidents, Summertime 1186w
Sanctions, Nigeria 597–8w

Hill farming
828w
Northern Ireland 1084
Wales 7
Young people 1083–4

Hill livestock allowances
56w
Scotland 814–5w
Wales 6–7

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Children in care (06.12.95) 311–6
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 868–73
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 534w, 581w, 940–2w, 1124–8w
Cattle, Animal feed 1128–9w
Cattle, Offal 1127w
Complaints against police 1012w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 525–6w, 942w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 1122w
Discretionary student grants 699–701w
Dogs, Transmissible encephalopathies 1128w
Employment opportunities, Building industry 562w
Family health services authorities, Performance related pay 525w
Food poisoning 579–80w
GP fundholders 122–3
Housing associations, Housing construction 587–8w
Invalidity benefits 95w
Legionnaires' disease, Turkey 42w, 83–4w, 526w
National insurance 87–8w
NHS, Car hire 682w

Hinchliffe, Mr David—continued
NHS pensions, Myalgic encephalomyelitis 678w
Police civilians 958w
Probation officers, Social workers' training 602w
Public sector housing 588w
Rafiq, Mohammed, Immigration appeals 574w
Rugby, Northern Ireland 545w
War pensions, Appeals 794–5w

Hip replacements
189–90w, 379w

HM Chief Inspector of Schools
see Office for Standards in Education

HM Inspectorate of Pollution
1101w

HMSO
32–3w, 167w, 252–3w
Ministerial statements (13.12.95) 989–1001
Privatisation 453–5w, 491–2w, 683–4, 1091–3w, (18.12.95) 1274–322
Publicity 489w
Speaker's rulings and statements (19.12.95) 1347

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Health services, Barking (06.12.95) 344–7
Questions
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 494w
Child care, Lone parents 502–3w
Day care of children 1138w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 972–3
Metropolitan Police Committee 603–4w
Pre-school education, Denmark 1031–2w
Pre-school education, Part-time education 1025–32w
Pre-school education, Teachers 973–4w

Hoey, Ms Kate
Questions
Belfast Airport, Belfast City Airport 483

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas*, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy, Points of order (19.12.95) 1407–8
Questions
Agricultural production, Economic and monetary union 1092
Agricultural production, Food exports 1092–3
Agricultural production, Milk 1092
Agricultural subsidies, Expenditure 55w
Agricultural subsidies, Finance 55w
Arable area payments scheme 928–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 690w, 827w, 1094–5
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Slaughterhouses 1094
Cellular phones, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w, 533w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 52–4w
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 54w
Common agricultural policy 1092
EC Agriculture Council 228–9w
Fisheries, EC grants and loans 926–7w
Food composition, Orders and regulations 928w
Grazing land 368–9w
Hill farming, Northern Ireland 1084
Hill farming, Young people 1083–4
Hill livestock allowances 56w
Milk, Young people 1087
Ministers' domestic visits, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w
Moorland scheme 56w
MV Derbyshire 57w
School milk 370w, 1086–7
School milk, EC grants and loans 827w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Questions
Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board 280w
Prison population, Scotland 296w

Holloway Prison
(20.12.95) 1482–5

Home care services
191–2w, 195–6w
Elderly 507–8w
VAT 154w
Wales 74w

Home energy efficiency scheme
1340
Elderly 1096–7w
VAT 1340

Home improvement agencies
583w

Home Office
Billing 729w
Cellular phones 355w
Civil service manpower 201–2w
Computer privacy 658w
Consultants 496–7w
Departmental correspondence 205w
Government contracts 1006w
Immunity certificates 26–7w
Legislation 201w, 949w
Members' correspondence 950w
Ministers' domestic visits 245w
Ministers' private offices 966w
Ministers' visits abroad 245w, 1200w
Official cars 1008–9w
Official hospitality 966–7w
Opinion polls 959–62w
Parliamentary questions 356w
Press advertising 1009–10w
Private finance initiative 244w, 354–5w, 955w
Public transport 201w
Small businesses 1201–2w
Travelling expenses 1200w
UK contributions to EC budget 500w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 843
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1424, 1430
Questions
A1 67–8w
Algrade Trust 171–2w
Amphibious forces 3w
Arable farming, EC action 54–5w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 1513
Harrier aircraft, Navigational aids 2w
Homelessness, Scotland 1277–8w
Iraq, Land drainage 81–2w
Nuclear power stations, Licensing 465w, 468w
Road construction, Scotland 68w

Homelessness
1233w
Bed and breakfast accommodation 1233–4w
Day centres 1275–6w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 6–7w
Political refugees 12w
Public petitions (06.12.95) 462
Scotland 1277–8w
Social security reform 1097
Young people 490–1, 820–1

Homeworking
Employment protection (19.12.95) 1345
Lancashire 507w

Homicide
963w
Criminal injuries compensation 27w
Extradition 963w
Finucane, Patrick 800–1w

Hong Kong
Public service (18.12.95) 1250–3
Right of abode 211–2w, 967w

Hong Kong (Overseas Public Servants) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
Rep* and 3R (18.12.95) 1250–3

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 550–3
Questions
European Communities 487
Nursing homes, Scotland 70w, 1277w

Hoon, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations (18.12.95) 1256–62, 1270–1
Questions
Brewing industry 356

***Horam, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Bacterial diseases, Metticillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (05.12.95) 280–2
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1146–52
Good Hope Hospital (06.12.95) 471–4
Haemophilia, Hepatitis (13.12.95) 958–61
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 896–900
Health services, Barking (06.12.95) 347–50
Walnuttree Hospital Sudbury (12.12.95) 909–12
Questions
Abortion 378–9w
Accident and emergency departments 122
Alternative medicine 1211w
Ambulance services, City of Durham 523w
Amniocentesis tests 225w
Antismoking campaign 525w
Baby care units 934w
Billing, Dept of Health 804w
Blood, Exports 41w
Blood transfusion services 193w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 940–2w
Breast cancer, Health services 1145w
Breast cancer, Screening 39w
Breast feeding 33w
Camden and Islington Health Authority, Cash limits 1144w
Cancer hazards, Nitrates 194–5w
Cellular phones, Dept of Health 382–3w
Census of population 938w
Children Act 1989 806w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Health 200–2w
Community health services, Expenditure 811–2w
Community health services, Isles of Scilly 192w
Computer privacy, Dept of Health 678w
Consultants, Dept of Health 517w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 525–6w, 942w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Death 220w
Departmental correspondence, Dept of Health 38w
Dept of Health, Government information services 811w
Dept of Health, Telephone services 810w
District health authorities 522w
District health authorities, Management 1143–4w
Doncaster Healthcare NHS Trust, EC law 679–80w
Down's syndrome 195w
Drugs, Overdoses 936w
Factor VIII 1146w
Family planning, Republic of Ireland 196w
Family planning clinics 1135w
Food hygiene 940w
Food poisoning 579–80w
Fulwood Hospital 935w
Funerals 894w
German measles 675w
Good Hope Hospital 427w
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 130–1
Health 1137w, 1140–1w

***Horam, Mr John**—continued*
Health authorities, Cash limits 1136w
Health authorities, Finance 1136–7w
Health Information Service 225–6w
Health service staff, Crimes of violence 946w
Health service staff, Skin disorders 1135w
Hepatitis, Blood transfusion services 425–6w
Hepatitis, Medical research 220–1w
Hip replacements 189–90w, 379w
Hospital admissions, Administrative delays 1210w
Hospital admissions, Barnet 935–6w
Hospital beds 40w, 1211w
Hospital beds, Sunderland 680–1w
Hospital catering 196w
Hospital closures, Sheffield 1212w
Hospital length of stay 39–40w
Hospital patients 40w, 805w
Hospital patients, Expenditure 675w
Hospital waiting lists 191w, 522w, 1135w
Hospital wards 190–1w, 939–40w
Hospitals, Capital investment 427–8w
Hospitals, Construction 35–7w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 427w
Hospitals, Worcester 930w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, Codes of practice 803w
Hypothermia 809w
Infant mortality 527w
Infant mortality, Research 528w, 531w
Influenza 379–80w, 808w
Influenza, Vaccination 219–20w
Insulin 1144w
Intensive care 224w
Intensive care, Leeds General Infirmary 807w
Internet, Dept of Health 1211–2w
King George Hospital Ilford, Accident and emergency departments 121–2
Lancaster, Accident and emergency departments 122
Legionnaires' disease, Turkey 42w, 526w
Lindane 1133–4w
Lung diseases, Death 196–8w
Medical ethics 521w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 42–3w, 195w, 1142w
Medical records, Privacy 523w
Medical Research Council, Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1206–8w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Health 938w
Meningitis 682–3w, 1210w
Meningitis, Death 221–2w
Meningitis, West Yorkshire 193–4w
Mental illness, Death 809–10w
Middlewood Hospital 935w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Health 226w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Health 930w
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept of Health 1207w
MMR vaccine, Drug side effects 677w
MR vaccine 677w
MR vaccine, Drug side effects 675–6w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis, Medical research 1209–10w
National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts 1137w
National Blood Authority 41w
NHS, Capital investment 39w, 1145–6w
NHS, Cash limits 934–5w
NHS, Empty property 939w
NHS, In vitro fertilisation 39w
NHS, Land acquisition 379w
NHS, Private finance initiative 43–4w, 197–8w
NHS and private practice 190w
NHS complaints 522w
NHS finance 34–6w, 517w, 680w
NHS trusts 35w
NHS trusts, Capital 1151w
NHS trusts, Contracts for services 40w, 189w
NHS trusts, Finance 188–9w, 192w
NHS trusts, Public sector borrowing 807w
NHS trusts, Warwickshire 189w

***Horam, Mr John**—continued*
Nurses, Manpower 946–8w
Nurses, Private health services 190w
Occupational health 517w
Official hospitality, Dept of Health 428w, 933w, 1144w
Operating costs, Dept of Health 1209w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Health 426w, 524–5w
Osteoporosis 38w
Out-patients 40w, 193w
Population 938w
Population, Greater London 383w
Population, South West region 937–8w
Press advertising, Dept of Health 1133w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Health 222w, 382w, 803–4w
Psychiatric nurses, Manpower 1139w
Queen Mary's University Hospital, Nurses' homes 939w
Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority, Accident and emergency departments 121
Residential care 806w
Residential care, Coventry 929w
Ritalin 803w
Road accidents, Casualties 225–6w
Road accidents, Costs 224–5w
Road accidents, NHS charges 224w
Small businesses, Dept of Health 946w, 1142–3w
Smoking, Children 578w
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust 222w
Sterilisation 382w
Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry 526–8w, 944–5w
Suicide 804–5w
Tobacco, Health hazards 379w
Tobacco advertising 221–2w, 426–7w, 933–4w
Tomography 806w
Tuberculosis 1136w
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust 191w
Vaccination, Drug side effects 676w
Yates, Craig, Tomography 1140w

Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1235
Questions
Standard spending assessments 177–80w

Horses
Animal welfare 534w

Hospices
Children 521–2w

Hospital admissions
Administrative delays 1210w
Barnet 935–6w

Hospital beds
40w, 1211w
Elderly 521w
Geriatric patients 1132w
Mental patients 381w, 1133w
Scotland 172–3w
Sunderland 680–1w

Hospital catering
196w

Hospital closures
492, 807w
Sheffield 1212w
Waterside Hospital 481

Hospital consultants
1137–8w

Hospital discharges
380w
Elderly 133

Hospital doctors
Recruitment 802w

Hospital length of stay
39–40w

Hospital patients
40w, 805w
Expenditure 675w

Hospital staff
Career structure 197w

Hospital waiting lists
191w, 522w, 936w, 1135w
Wales 778–80w

Hospital wards
190–1w, 939–40w

Hospitals
Capital investment 427–8w
Construction 35–7w
Private finance initiative 427w
Stonehaven 610w, 1516
Worcester 930w

Hostels
Social security recipients 585w

Hotel and catering industry
Further education colleges 107w
Northern Ireland 107w

Hotels
Liverpool 1229w

House condition survey
Wales 392w

House of Commons
Operating costs 846w

House of Commons accommodation
843–4w

House of Commons debates
Treaties 750w

House of Commons Liaison Committee
(07.12.95) 593

"House of Commons Members' Handbook"
657w

House of Commons procedure
Scotland (19.12.95) 1410–35

House purchase
Armed forces housing 1w, 431w, 577w, 595w, 1112–3w, 1336–7

Households
1249w

Housing
Northern Ireland 1074w
Prisoners on remand 447w

Housing action trusts
512–4w

Housing amenities
Electric power 899w
Northern Ireland 899w

Housing and elderly
583w

Housing and handicapped
583w
Northern Ireland 1073w

Housing associations
1252w
Capital investment 181w
Housing benefits 7–8w
Housing construction 587–8w
Taxation 509w
Yorkshire and Humberside 587–8w

Housing benefits
618w, 1120w
Administrative costs 1268w
Bournemouth 376–7w
Expenditure 1266–7w
Fraud 819–20
Housing associations 7–8w
Landlords 317w
Northern Ireland 1078w
Social security abuse 890–1w, 1273–4w
Social security benefits backdating 884–5w
Social security benefits rates 1268–9w
War pensions 88w
Young people 784w, 890w

Housing construction
923w
Housing associations 587–8w
Wales 1156w

Housing Corporation
Privatisation 180–1w

Housing Defects (Northern Ireland) Order 1986
Questions
901–2w

Housing estates
Clwyd 390w

Housing finance
725w
Buckley 146w
Private investment 237w

Housing for Wales
Loans 1158w

Housing improvement
Council housing 1096w, 1192w

Housing insulation
1094w

Housing investment programmes
Council housing 1336

Housing occupancy
Armed forces housing 987w

Housing policy
Northern Ireland 1079w

Housing starts
Kirklees 585–8w
Public sector housing 1336
Rented housing 1341

Howard, Michael
Interviews 500w

***Howard, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 699–711, 714, 717, 720, 722
Notice of questions, Points of order (11.12.95) 697–8
Security Service Bill, 1R (20.12.95) 1550
Questions
Billing, Home Office 729w
Cellular phones, Home Office 355w
Consultants, Home Office 496–7w
Departmental correspondence, Home Office 205w
EC law, Deregulation initiative 660w
Exclusion orders 494–5w, 949w
Exclusion orders, Northern Ireland 949w
Government contracts, Home Office 1006w
Home Office, Parliamentary questions 356w
Howard, Michael, Interviews 500w
Immunity certificates, Home Office 26–7w
Legislation, Home Office 201w, 949w
Members' correspondence 245w
Members' correspondence, Home Office 950w
Ministers' domestic visits, Home Office 245w
Ministers' private offices, Home Office 966w
Ministers' visits abroad, Home Office 1200w
National security, Departmental coordination 658w
Official cars, Home Office 1008–9w
Official hospitality, Home Office 966–7w
Opinion polls, Home Office 959–62w
Press advertising, Home Office 1009–10w
Prison Service Agency, Public appointments 202w, 500w
Private finance initiative, Home Office 244w, 354–5w, 955w
Public transport, Home Office 201w
Security industry, Government contracts 659w
Small businesses, Home Office 1201–2w
Surveys, Sunderland 1008w
Terrorism, Exclusion orders 356–8w
UK contributions to EC budget, Home Office 500w

Howarth, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1025
Questions
Identity cards, Social security benefits 822

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 793
Questions
Baby care units 934w
Prison education services 1200–1w
Prison Service Agency, Public appointments 500w

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 165–71
European communities (07.12.95) 538–42
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1231

Howells, Dr Kim
Questions
Drug industry, Patents 366

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Firearms, Northern Ireland 1075w

Huddersfield NHS Trust
130

Hughes, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1119–21
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 56, 94–6
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1245

Hughes, Mr Robert
Questions
NHS trusts, Administrative costs 1529

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 713, 735, 780–2, 789
European communities (07.12.95) 526, 528
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 995, (18.12.95) 1286, 1292
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (06.12.95) 373
Questions
Business, Advisory services 71w
Educational finance 980
Security Service Commissioner 566–7w
Unemployment, Newport 6

Hughes, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 54, 77–80
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 1000
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1013
Questions
Browning Ferris, Waste disposal 992w
International Development Association 470w
Unemployment, Wales 7–8

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1143–6
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 25–6, 42, 58, 60–6, 77
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 876–9
Questions
Brewing industry, Public houses 355
Church Commissioners, Income 501w
Committee on Safety of Medicines 518–21w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Oral contraceptives 518w
Health services, Social conditions 129
Members' speeches, Disclosure of information 682
Missing persons, Telephone services 1011–2w
Missing Person's Bureau 955w
Southern Africa, Bilateral aid 689
War pensions, Council tax benefits 88w

Human embryo experiments
  1141w

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
  132
  Codes of practice 803w
  In vitro fertilisation 131–2

Human rights
  Arms exports 1085w
  Guatemala 339–40w
  Iran 79w
  Morocco 751w
  Nigeria 135–6
  Peru 1054w
  Tibet 417w

Humber bridge
  755–6w

Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill 1995/96
  Debates etc.
  Order relating to Com (14.12.95) 1194, (19.12.95) 1435
  2R, Money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1551–82
  Questions
  1105

Humberside
  Armed forces housing 593w
  Defence land 593w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
  Debates etc.
  Dogs (Fouling of Land) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1022–3
  Questions
  Royal Ulster Constabulary 486

Hunting
  Public order policing 206w

Huntingdon
  NHS finance 125

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas,
  Debates etc.
  Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1227

Hurworth School
  135
  Inquiries 1216–8w

Hutton, Mr John
  Debates etc.
  Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 183–8
  Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1565
  Questions
  Home Office, Parliamentary questions 356w
  Jobseeker's allowance 378w, 409w
  Jobseeker's allowance, Consultants 402w
  Social security payments, Industrial disputes 435–6w

Hydrocarbon oil duties
  505w
  Bus services 633w
  Carbon dioxide 1099–100w

Hypothermia
  809w

Identification friend or foe systems
  431w

Identity cards
  600w, 657–8w, 968w
  Isle of Wight 821–2
  Private finance initiative 822
  Social security benefits 821–2, 884w

Illegal immigrants
  358–9w, (20.12.95) 1462–6
  Deportation 1005–6w
  Employment 659–60w, 958–9w, 978w

Illsley, Mr Eric
  Questions
  Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 483

Immigrant detainees
  Political refugees 600–1w
  Scotland 615–6w

Immigration
  22–3w, (11.12.95) 699–808, 729w

Immigration and Asylum Act 1993
  Questions
  22w

Immigration appeals
  Immigration rules 882–3w
  Political refugees 244–5w
  Rafiq, Mohammed 574w

Immigration Appellate Authorities
  Administrative costs 882w

Immigration applications
  Algeria 24w
  Political refugees 20w, 356w, 493w

Immigration controls
  Political refugees 215–6w, 1011w

Immigration rules
  Immigration appeals 882–3w

Immunity certificates
  14–5
  Foreign and Commonwealth Office 158–9w
  Home Office 26–7w

Import penetration
  506w

Imports
  Bicycles 49–51w
  Fish 688w
  Frogs legs 232w
  Furs 235w, 776w, 907w

In vitro fertilisation
  Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 131–2
  NHS 39w

Incapacity benefit
  95w, 621w
  Handicapped 828
  Medical examinations 432w, 1270w
  Merthyr Tydfil 794w
  Social security benefits disqualification 668–9w

Incinerators
  910w

Income distribution
  824–5
  Social security 627w

Income support
  622w
  Capital rules 97w
  Child care 1270–1w
  Earnings rules 1271w, 1273w
  Families 1118–9w
  Maintenance 1270w
  Pensioners 505w
  Residential care 620–1w
  Social security benefits reductions 376w
  Voluntary unemployment 1272w

Income tax
  137
  Scotland 1278w
  Tax burden 1246w
  Tax rates and bands 1047–8w
  Tax yields 1246w
  Wales 1246w

Income-Related Benefits Schemes and Social Security (Claims and Payments) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1995
  Debates etc.
  (05.12.95) 138

Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures
  802w

India
  Overseas trade 279w, 369–70

Indonesia
  Military aircraft 1079–80w

Industrial accidents
  1236–7w
  Coal mining 722w

Industrial accidents—continued
  Youth training 994w

Industrial arbitration
  Redundancy pay 867–8w

Industrial development
  Northern Ireland 310–1w
  South Hams 924w

Industrial disablement benefits
  Bronchitis 86–7w
  Emphysema 86–7w

Industrial diseases
  Emphysema 151w
  Rhinitis 151w

Industrial disputes
  France 832–3
  Social security payments 435–6w

Industrial energy conservation
  584w

Industrial health and safety
  (05.12.95) 275, 1239–40w
  Crime 209w
  Health service staff 901–2w

Industrial injuries
  1212–4w
  Carpal tunnel syndrome 784w

Industrial investment
  1081–2w
  Manufacturing industries 367

Industrial production
  Manufacturing industries 279w, 1264w

Industrial tribunals
  Confederation of British Industry 869–70w
  Further education colleges 105–6w
  Personal records 871w
  Public appointments 870–1w
  Trades' Union Congress 869–70w

Industry
  Deregulation initiative 487w

Infant mortality
  128–9, 527w
  Research 528w, 531w
  Social conditions 129–30

Inflation
  OECD countries 1265w

Influenza
  379–80w, 808w
  Vaccination 219–20w

Information
  European Commission 251–2w

Information services
  European communities 78w
  Scotland 1521–2
  Snow and ice 1521–2

Information technology
  Crown Prosecution Service 16–7
  Teacher training 692w

Ingram, Mr Adam
  Debates etc.
  Chemical Weapons Bill, Rem stages (06.12.95) 413–5, 418, 422, 428–35, 438, 440–3
  Questions
  Asbestos, East Kilbride 174w
  Hairmyres Hospital 68w
  Public sector housing, Asbestos 1067–8w

Inheritance tax
  Tax allowances 505w
  Tax rates and bands 505w

Inland Revenue
  Civil proceedings 735w
  Civil service manpower 633w

Inner city areas
  Land pollution 1338

Insolvency
  Company voluntary arrangements 291w

Insolvency Service
  Contracts for services 597w, 1089w

Institute of Animal Health
Redundancy 1094

Insulin
1144w

Integrated regional offices
681, 863–6w
Finance 236w

Intelligence services
Organised crime 1174w

Intensive care
224w
Leeds General Infirmary 807w
Paediatrics 1212w

Interest charges
Billing 45–6w
Debts (13.12.95) 1022

Interest on Debts Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1022

Interest payments
National debt 410w

Interest rates
505–6w
Manufacturing industries 364–5
Standard of living 1096

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
511–2w

International assistance
Bosnia-Herzegovina 1073w

International Body on Decommissioning of Arms
see Arms Decommissioning International Body

International Committee of the Red Cross
see International Red Cross

International cooperation
Defence research 430w
Military aircraft 1173–4w
Ukraine 1175w

International Court of Justice
81w
Nuclear weapons 250–1w, 336w

International Development Association
470w

International Investments
1074w

International Labour Conference
736w

International Red Cross
Finance 1176–7w

International trade
Manufactured goods 1264w

Internet
629w, 637w, 733w
Dept of Health 1211–2w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1204w
Public libraries 281w
Schools 281w

Interreg programme
Wales 1192w

Intervention prices
Apples 1093–4

Intervention stocks
Apples 1166w

Interviews
Howard, Michael 500w

Invalid care allowances
89–90w

Invalidity benefits
95w, 249w, 375w
Merthyr Tydfil 621w, 670w

Inverclyde
Public sector housing 647w

Investors in people
308–9w

Investors in people—continued
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 56w

Invisible trade balance
1264w

Iran
Debts 573–4w
Human rights 79w
Trials 78w

Iraq
Export credit guarantees 334–5w
Export licensing 1085–6w
Land drainage 81–2w
Sequestration of assets 1046w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Medical examinations 478w, 985–6w, 1114w
Vaccination 569–70w

Irish Steel
Privatisation 1344

Iron and steel industry
EC action 365–6
Republic of Ireland 364, (20.12.95) 1550
Scotland 1519
Unfair competition 368

Irvine Housing Association
Finance 823w
Irvine Development Corporation 1064–6w

Islam
Religious sects 252w

Isle of Wight
GP fundholders 124
Identity cards 821–2

Isles of Scilly
Community health services 192w

Jack, Mr Michael, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 84, 89–90, 109–14
Consolidated Fund Bill, 1R (14.12.95) 1195
Finance Bill, 1R (05.12.95) 266
Questions
Church Commissioners, Audit 329w
Civil service agencies, Treasury 16–7w
Computer privacy, Treasury 633w
EC law 735w
Family income 503–4w
Finance Act 1995, Environment protection 16w
Finance-Bill 1995/96 330w, 410w
Government shareholding, Privatisation 1048–9w
Income tax, Tax burden 1246w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 1047–8w
Income tax, Tax yields 1246w
Inheritance tax, Tax allowances 505w
Inheritance tax, Tax rates and bands 505w
Inland Revenue, Civil proceedings 735w
Inland Revenue, Civil service manpower 633w
Mortgage relief 15w, 506w
Motability 1245–6w
Orders and regulations, Treasury 875–6w
Pension funds, Corporation tax 1045w
Personal pensions, Marketing 635w
Personal pensions, Tax allowances 1049–50w
Personal tax allowances, Married people 260w
Petroleum production, Tax yields 1050–2w
Post Office 877w
Private finance initiative 733–4w, 1251w
Private finance initiative, Treasury 255–6w, 328–9w, 734w, 877w
Private Finance Panel 1251w
Public service, Tax allowances 155–6w
Rural areas, Taxation 1048w
Self-assessment of tax 410w
Shareholders 563w
Small businesses, Tax assessment 156–7w
Take-home pay 563–4w

Jack, Mr Michael—continued
Tax allowances, Regional electricity companies 14w
Tax rates and bands 1245–6w
Tax yields 876–7w
Taxation 565w
Taxation, Fringe benefits 1252w
Taxation, Law reform 327w
Taxpayers, Wales 635w
Valuation Office, Stockport 328w
VAT, Wales 1246w
Venture capital trusts 877w

Jackson, Ms Glenda
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1244
Questions
British Rail, Privatisation 555–6w
Playing fields, Camden Borough Council 1209

Jackson, Mrs Helen
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 99–101
Questions
Business questions 497
Home energy efficiency scheme, VAT 1340
Water conservation 586w
Yorkshire Water, Droughts 9–12w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, European Convention on Human Rights 488

Jamieson, Mr David
Questions
Armed forces, Postal services 477w
Armed forces education allowances 476w, 981w
Armed forces education allowances, Quantock School 476–7w, 980–1w
Armed forces housing, Avon 481w
Armed forces housing, Bedfordshire 479–80w
Armed forces housing, Central London 985w
Armed forces housing, Cleveland 479w
Armed forces housing, Derbyshire 480w
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 348–9w, 479w, 985w
Armed forces housing, Essex 479w
Armed forces housing, Greater Manchester 480w
Armed forces housing, Hampshire 481w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 1113w, 1336–7
Armed forces housing, Kent 480–1w
Armed forces housing, Privatisation 982w
Assisted places scheme 537w
Assisted places scheme, Expenditure 537w
Fishing vessels, Shipping registration 753–4w
Government grants, Directors 332w
Grant maintained schools, School buildings 537w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, In Vitro Fertilisation 131–2
Mathematics education, Educational qualifications 692w
NHS, Empty property 939w
Quantock School 562–3w
Queen Mary's University Hospital, Nurses' homes 939w
RAF Finningley, Armed forces housing 985w
Rom Data, Dept of Trade inquiries 332–3w
Rom Data, Regional selective assistance 1089–91w
South Western Electricity, Takeovers 687
War pensions, Asbestosis 621–2w

Janner, Mr Greville
Questions
Business questions 501
Council housing, Housing improvement 1096w
Dept of Social Security, Ministerial duties 619w

Janner, Mr Greville—continued
Deputy Prime Minister, Ministerial duties 487w
Legal aid 881w

Japan
Whales (20.12.95) 1466–8

Japanese knotweed
Argyll and Bute 1061w
Scotland 1060–1w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 841
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 162, 170
European communities (07.12.95) 509–10, 522, 535
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 997, (18.12.95) 1293
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1236
Questions
Business questions 496
Child Support Agency 827–8
Church of England, Turnbull Commission 501w
Deputy Prime Minister 682
Deregulation initiative, Small businesses 486w
Fishing quotas 1088
Railway travel, Privatisation 1177w
Regional challenge 461–3w

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc.
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1551, 1554, 1560–2
Questions
Arts finance 1214–5
Business questions 1105
Humber bridge 755–6w
National Lottery, Scotland 1276w, 1530
Office of the National Lottery 1537

Job centres
Family credit 562w

Jobseeker's allowance
139–40w, 378w, 409w
Consultants 402w
Northern Ireland 655w

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 840
Questions
Peace keeping operations, Medals 85w

Johnston, Sir Russell
Questions
Exhibitions, Upper Waiting Hall 845w

Joint Nature Conservation Committee
587w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 854
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1011–2
Questions
Alltami bypass, Road construction 145–6w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 73w
British Airways, Airbus Industrie 360
Buckley-Clwyd relief road, Road construction 146w
Chiropody, Clwyd 145w
Community Forest Scheme, Wales 73w
Contracts for services, Wales 388w
Council house sales, Wales 1156–7w
Council housing, Housing improvement 1192w
Future large aircraft 281–2w, 1342
GP fundholders, Wales 276–7w
Hard core unemployed, Wales 146w, 390w
Home care services 191w
Home care services, Wales 74w
Housing construction, Wales 1156w
Housing estates, Clwyd 390w
Housing finance, Buckley 146w

Jones, Mr Barry—continued
Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board, Unemployment 986
National Disability Council 669–70w, 1155w
North East Wales Training and Enterprise Council, Finance 145w
Pedestrian crossings, Death 74w
Population, Wales 390–1w
Public sector housing, Wales 991w, 995w, 1155–6w
Railway transport, Privatisation 276w
Road construction, Clwyd 389w
School buildings, Wales 388w
Schools, Accidents 665w
Schools, Local government expenditure 73–4w
Schools, Wales 277–8w, 666w
Smoking, Public buildings 277w
Social security benefits rules, Handicapped 784w
Welsh Office, Ministerial duties 1157w
Welsh Office, Smoking 992w
Youth unemployment, Wales 389w

Jones, Mr Gwilym, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Wales (06.12.95) 339–43
Questions
A477 1158–9w
Access to work programme, Wales 665–6w
Agriculture, Wales 13
Alltami bypass, Road construction 145–6w
Arable area payments scheme, Wales 1191–2w
Assisted areas, Wales 390w
Birds, Carmarthen bay 147w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 73w
Bridges, Wales 392w
Browning Ferris, Waste disposal 992w
Buckley-Clwyd relief road, Road construction 146w
Bus services, Wales 571–2w
Business, Advisory services 71w
Campbell Soups, Wales 1
Cardiff Airport, Road construction 989w
Child workers, Wales 391–2w
Civil service manpower, Wales 5–6
Community action, Wales 989w
Community Forest Scheme, Wales 73w
Contracts for services, Wales 388w
Council house sales, Wales 1156–7w
Council housing, Housing improvement 1192w
Countryside Council for Wales, Expenditure 1159–60w
Countryside Council for Wales, Finance 1160w
Countryside stewardship scheme, Wales 14
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Wales 996w, 1159w
Fire services, Wales 12
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 777w
Forestry Commission, Wales 388w
General household survey, Wales 665w
Hard core unemployed, Wales 146w
Hill farming, Wales 7
Hill livestock allowances, Wales 6–7
House condition survey, Wales 392w
Housing construction, Wales 1156w
Local authorities, Political parties 388–9w
Local government finance, Wales 995–6w
Local government reform, Local government staff 1191w
Ministers' domestic visits, Wales 147–8w, 415w
Negative equity, Wales 1192w
Pay, Wales 569–70w
Pedestrian crossings, Death 74w
Planning permission, Gwernymynydd 990w
Population, Wales 390–1w
Privatisation, Wales 6
Public sector housing, Wales 991w, 995w, 1155–6w
Railway transport, Privatisation 276w
Shorthold tenancies, Wales 75–6w

Jones, Mr Gwilym—continued
Town and country planning, Wales 546–9w
Unemployment, Newport 6
Unemployment, Wales 571w
Youth training, Industrial accidents 994w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Wales (06.12.95) 336–9, 342
Questions
Cancer, Wales 146–7w
EC grants and loans, Wales 9–10

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Questions
Chemical Chase Manhattan Bank, Wales 75w
Nigeria, Police training 1071–2w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Questions
Air transport, Baggage 558w, 560w
Crime prevention, Business premises 1010–1w
Fine defaulters, Prison sentences 227–8w, 495w
Fines, Enforcement 227w
Fruit, Balance of trade 828–9w
Income support, Social security benefits reductions 376w
Manufacturing industries, Employment 289w
Mental health community care 1133w
Mental health services 937w
Mental health services, Local government expenditure 1132w
Mental patients, Hospital beds 1133w
Psychiatric nurses, Manpower 1139w
Rented housing 1095–6w
Secure psychiatric units 681–2w
Special hospitals 220w
Supervision orders, Fines 205–6w
Unemployment, Employment opportunities 984

Jones, Mr Martyn
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1014
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 942w
Food industry 1085

Jones, Mr Nigel
Questions
Apples, Intervention stocks 1166w
Citizen's Charter 1214w
Citizen's Charter Unit 1213–4w
Foyleside centre 111w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis, Medical research 1209–10w
Shared ownership schemes 1233w

Jones, Mr Robert B, Minister of State, Dept of the Environment
Questions
Building Research Establishment, Finance 913–4w
Building Research Establishment, Privatisation 513–4w
Energy conservation 724w
Environment protection, Air pollution control 508w
Government offices for the regions 510w
Greenbelt 510w
Home energy efficiency scheme 1340
Home energy efficiency scheme, Elderly 1096–7w
Home energy efficiency scheme, VAT 1340
Housing construction 923w
Housing insulation 1094w
Manchester Airport 178w
Planning Inspectorate, Administrative delays 1333–4
Planning permission 510w, 1096w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 6w
Planning permission, Local government land 1333
Planning permission, Planning appeals 1333

Jones, Mr Robert B—continued
Planning permission, Publicity 510w
Population studies, South West region 925w
Sheffield City Council, Planning permission 509–10w
Smoke Detectors Act 1991 350w
Town and country planning 922–3w
Urban planning 1095w

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Directorate of Operational Capability 1106w
Educational finance, Cost per pupil 696–8w

Jowell, Ms Tessa
Debates etc.
Working hours (13.12.95) 938–41

Judges
Courts' Charter 323–4w

Judicial review
Court of appeal 1218

Judiciary
Ethnic minorities 324w

Juries
Serious Fraud Office 18

Kashmir
835w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 700, 709–10, 721–2, 742–7
Questions
National Lottery, Licensing 1206
Political refugees, Immigration applications 356w

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 214
Common fisheries policy, Points of order (19.12.95) 1409
Lancashire (04.12.95) 115
Oral question time intervention (05.12.95) 123
Questions
Lancaster, Accident and emergency departments 122

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 542–6
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1553–4
Questions
EC external relations, Diplomatic service 753w
Highland Health Board, Computers 997–8w
Legislation, Scotland 65–7w
RAF Tain, Aircraft noise 475w

Kennedy, Mrs Jane
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 41–2
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 827w
Police, Northern Ireland 387w

Kent
Armed forces housing 480–1w

Kent County Council
Educational finance 1097–8

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1048–51
Chemical Weapons Bill, Rem stages (06.12.95) 414–5, 435–41
Questions
A36, Speed limits 59w
British Transport Police 216w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 984–5w
Motor vehicle registration, Salisbury 840w
Royal Fine Art Commission 371w

Key, Mr Robert—continued
Rural areas, Unemployment 355

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 778–80
Questions
Crossrail 672w
Medical ethics 521w
Milk, Common agricultural policy 827w

Khat
657w

Kiev
Entry clearances 1189w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Questions
Church schools, Grant maintained schools 976
Teachers, Occupational pensions 536w

Kincardine bridge
Road works 1286w

King George Hospital Ilford
Accident and emergency departments 121–2

Kingskerswell bypass
63w, 354

Kiribati
British embassies 575–6w

***Kirkhope, Mr Timothy**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 626, 649–50, 673–8
Repatriation, Caribbean (19.12.95) 1446–8
Questions
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 359w
Commission for Racial Equality, Public appointments 963–4w
Entertainment licensing, Opening hours 658w
Entry clearances, Algeria 24w
Ethnic minorities, Recruitment 964w
Gaming Act 1968 210w
Home Office, Civil service manpower 201–2w
Homicide 963w
Homicide, Extradition 963w
Illegal immigrants 358–9w
Illegal immigrants, Deportation 1005–6w
Illegal immigrants, Employment 659–60w
Immigration 22–3w, 729w
Immigration applications, Algeria 24w
Licensing laws, Deregulation initiative 603w
Members' correspondence 213w, 446w
Omoyiola, Bayo 18–20w
Passports 659w
Passports, Fraud 732w
Political refugees 20–2w, 446–7w, 493–4w, 954–5w, 1199w
Political refugees, Departmental publications 954w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 600–1w
Political refugees, Immigration appeals 244–5w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 20w, 356w, 493w
Political refugees, Immigration controls 215w, 1011w
Racial discrimination 963–4w
Racial discrimination, EC action 358w
Republic of Ireland 208w
Right of abode, Hong Kong 211–2w, 967w
Tawafig, Hagdi Elfons, Deportation 1007–8w
Temporary immigrants 730–1w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 1198–9w
Visas, Korea 965w

Kirklees
Housing starts 585–8w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Gender Identity (Registration and Civil Status) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1021
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1421–3
Questions
Business questions 1545–6
Capital investment, Scotland 1522–3
Child Support Agency 827
Forestry, Berwickshire 173w
Income support, Capital rules 97w
Inquiries, Government departments 1091w
Mental health community care 1140w
Personal tax allowances, Married people 260w
Textile industry, EC grants and loans 289w
VAT, Home care services 154w

***Knight, Mrs Angela**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Economic Secretary) to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Financial services (14.12.95) 1188–94
Questions
Bank of England, Credit 259w
Billing, Treasury 1050w
Building societies, Law reform 507w
Cellular phones, Treasury 328w
Consultants, Treasury 326–7w
Disposable income 504–6w
Disposable income, EC countries 1247–8w
Economic and monetary union 258–9w, 340w
Employment 877–8w, 1250–1w
Employment, East Midlands 254–5w
Employment, Educational standards 153w
Family income 504w, 1249–50w
Homeworking, Lancashire 507w
Households 1249w
Import penetration 506w
Interest rates 505–6w
Manufacturing industries 1252w
Ministers' private offices, Treasury 1048w
Ministers' visits abroad, Treasury 1248w
Money supply 259–60w
"Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" 507w
National income, Consumer expenditure 564w
Official cars, Treasury 1048w
Official hospitality, Treasury 634w
Operating costs, Treasury 1248–50w
Opinion polls, Treasury 1050w
Pay 327w
Pensioners, Income support 505w
Pensions, Consumer expenditure 564–6w
Personal equity plans 640–1w
Press advertising, Treasury 1247w
Private sector, Treasury 1046w
Sequestration of assets, Iraq 1046w
Shareholders 257w
Shares 154–6w
Sick leave, Private sector 250w
Small businesses, Treasury 1045–6w, 1251w
Stamp duties, Tax yields 507w
Treasury, Civil service manpower 633w
Unemployment 153w, 634w, 875w
Unemployment, Lone parent families 258w

Knight, Dame Jill
Questions
Child health 129
Health 1140–1w
Mutual recognition of qualifications, Free movement of labour 117–8w

Knockhill
Sports facilities (20.12.95) 1504–12

Know-how Fund
691
British Council 691

Knox, Sir David
Questions
Civil service manpower 684–5
Doctors, Manpower 190w
Manufacturing industries 368
Regional aid, Scotland 1278–9w

Korea
Visas 965w

Krypton
Air pollution 1243w

Kynoch, Mr George, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Knockhill, Sports facilities (20.12.95) 1507–12
Questions
Asbestos, East Kilbride 174w
Average earnings, Scotland 1516–7
Beaufort Dyke, Explosives 609w, 815w
Capital investment, Scotland 1522–3
Council housing, Scotland 1524
Deregulation initiative, Scotland 1520
Dounreay, Radioactive wastes 1288–9w
Eaglesham bypass, Capital investment 1523
Electoral reform, Scotland 1530
External financing limits, Scotland 1276w
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 648–50w
Forestry, Berwickshire 173w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 821–2w
Forestry Commission, Public appointments 407–8w
Government grants, Highlands of Scotland 1280w
Grand Metropolitan, Minimum wage 1517
High rise flats, Scotland 1523
Highland Regional Council, Capital investment 299w
Highlands and Islands Enterprise 611–2w
Irvine Development Corporation, Irvine Housing Association 1064–6w
Japanese knotweed, Argyll and Bute 1061w
Japanese knotweed, Scotland 1060–1w
Jobseeker's allowance 409w
Local government elections, Scotland 1529–30
Local government reform, Scotland 68–70w
Local government social services, Scotland 1066–7w
Minebea Electronics 173w
New towns, Property transfer 823w
New towns development corporations, Property transfer 1064–5w
Nuclear power stations, Licensing 468w
Orders and regulations, Scottish Office 297w, 468w
Private finance initiative, Scottish Office 300–1w, 367w
Radioactive wastes, Scotland 1287–8w
Regional aid, Scotland 1278–9w
Regional selective assistance, Scotland 294–6w, 649–52w
Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise 301–2w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Balmoral 1285w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Finance 1284w
Small businesses, Scotland 1520
Taxation, Scotland 1517–8
Tipping of waste, Taxation 617w
Tree diseases 1526–7
Unemployment, Scotland 1517
Water authorities, Scotland 302–3w, 468–9w, 814w, 1063–4w
Water charges, Scotland 299–300w, 302–3w, 1068w
Water supply, Scotland 1286w
Weed control, Scotland 1061w

Labour costs
Child Support Agency 432–3w
NHS 930–3w

Labour market
Skilled workers 307–8w

Labour migration
Bilateral aid 470w

Labour Party
353

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 66–70
Leasehold (Reform) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1022
Questions
Council tenants, Social problems 1338–9
Educational standards 691w
Entertainment licensing, Opening hours 658w
Food 1084–5
Hospital doctors, Recruitment 802w
Industrial disputes, France 832–3
Piers 848w
Social fund, Maternity payments 150–1w
Social security finance 618w

Lancashire
(04.12.95) 115–20
British Airways 359
Educational finance 694w, 979–80, 983, 1331
Homeworking 507w

Lancashire County Council
Sick leave 9w

Lancaster
Accident and emergency departments 122

Land
Newtownards 899–900w

Land acquisition
Commission for the New Towns 175w
Forestry Commission 821–2w
Local government land 1103–4w
NHS 379w

Land Compensation Act 1973
Debates etc.
(14.12.95) 1197–204

Land drainage
Iraq 81–2w
Northern Ireland 318–9w

Land ownership and tenure
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 159w
Scotland 610w

Land pollution
1337–8
Defence land 485w
Inner city areas 1338
Opencast mining 1338

Land reclamation
Tyne and Wear Development Corporation 404w

Land registration
880w

Land use
North Downs 1332

Landfill tax
1252w

Landlords
Housing benefits 317w

Lang, Rt Hon Ian, President of the Board of Trade
Questions
Advanced gas-cooled reactors, Construction costs 1255–6w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 46w
Balance of payments 280w
Balance of trade 1264w
British Airways, Airbus Industrie 360
British Airways, Lancashire 359
Buy outs 286–7w
Cellular phones, Dept of Trade and Industry 332w, 467w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 46–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Civil service redundancies 336w, 1263w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Contracts for services 868–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministerial policy advisors 773w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministers' private offices 284–6w

Lang, Rt Hon Ian—continued
EC Social Charter 352
Economic growth, OECD countries 1263–4w
European Fighter Aircraft 359–60
Government grants, Directors 332w
Inflation, OECD countries 1265w
Investment 352–3
Invisible trade balance 1264w
Iron and steel industry, Republic of Ireland 364
Labour Party 353
Manufactured goods, International trade 1264w
Manufacturing industries 368
Manufacturing industries, Industrial production 1264w
Minimum wage 368–9
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Trade and Industry 288w
National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Efficiency scrutinies 1262w
Nuclear Electric, Finance 1264–5w
Nuclear power, Privatisation 360–1
Official cars, Dept of Trade and Industry 1082w
Opinion polls, Dept of Trade and Industry 1090w
Patent Office, Contracts for services 1088–9w
Retail prices index, Electricity tariffs 1080–1w
Rom Data, Dept of Trade inquiries 332–3w
Rom Data, Regional selective assistance 1089–91w
Sizewell B, Construction costs 1265w
Unemployment 352

Language colleges
118–9w

Languages
Schools 1208

Languages education
Arabic language 692w

Larne Lough
Fish farming 798–9w

Latton bypass
Contracts 460–1w

Latvia
82w

Laudat, Stephen
Secure psychiatric units 524w

Law centres
880w

Law enforcement
Fines 355w

Law Officer's Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Building societies 507w
Family law 1220
Mentally disadvantaged 728–9w
Offensive weapons 693–4
Taxation 327w

Law Reform (Year and a Day Rule) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1022

Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 730–3, 736, 744
Questions
Judicial review, Court of appeal 1218
Office of the National Lottery 1536

Lawrence, Philip
Teachers 978

Lead free petrol
424–5w

Lead pollution
Water supply 176w

Leader programme
Welsh Development Agency 75w, 77w

Leasehold (Reform) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1022

Leeds
Derelict land 1337–8
GP fundholders 1143w
Trams 188w

Leeds General Infirmary
Intensive care 807w

Legal aid
227w, 880–1w, 1205w, 1218–20
Alternative dispute resolution 1219

Legal Services Ombudsman
1202–3w

Legg, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 197–201
Questions
Government shareholding, Privatisation 1048–9w
Grant maintained schools 974
Railtrack 839w

Legionnaires' disease
Turkey 42w, 83–4w, 526w

Legislative process
Select committees 28w

Leicestershire
Local government reform 1097w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 213–6
Crime (08.12.95) 644–7
European communities (07.12.95) 515

Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Questions
Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994 183–4w, 274–5w
Clinical wastes, Waste disposal 234w

Lester, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 753–5
Questions
Special Educational Needs Tribunal 559–60w

Lestor, Miss Joan
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (11.12.95) 690
Questions
Bilateral aid 690
Metrolink Salford, Eccles 188w
Overseas aid, Procurement 749w

Lettuces
Nitrates 233w

Lewis, Derek
Performance related pay 731–2w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 146
Questions
Metrolink, EC grants and loans 1183–4w
Rapid transit systems, Salford 1041w

Liability
Credit cards 773w

Liaison Committee
see House of Commons Liaison Committee

Libraries
849w
Schools 400–1w

Libyan Arab Republic
Sanctions 332w

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (05.12.95) 138
Ref to Scottish Grand Committee (06.12.95) 462

Licensing laws
Deregulation initiative 603w

Lichfield
Farmers 830w
GP fundholders 133

Liddell, Helen
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 646w
Student loans, Scotland 1514–5

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1311–2
Questions
A41, Road traffic 1177–8w
Armed forces reserves, Bosnia-Herzegovina 242w
Buckinghamshire, Standard spending assessments 353–4w
Buckinghamshire County Council, Non-domestic rates 352–3w
Civil service recruitment, Higher civil servants 746–7w
Educational standards, Teacher training 976–7
Local education authorities, Educational standards 490
Local government finance, Buckinghamshire 404–5w
Local government pensions 724–5w
Local government social services, Buckinghamshire 383w
Medical records, Disclosure of information 1142w
Mentally handicapped, Residential care 1141–2w
Office of the National Lottery 1540
Personal pensions 619–20w

"Lifetime Learning Consultation Paper"
144w

Lightbown, David
Members' deaths (13.12.95) 970

Lighting
M6 1185w
Motorways 186w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Social Security
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Fraud 820
Dept of Social Security, Ministerial duties 619w
Homelessness, Young people 820–1
Housing benefits 618w
Housing benefits, Fraud 819–20
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Social Security 249w
Public transport, Dept of Social Security 149w
Social security finance 618w

Lindane
1133–4w

Lisnaskea
Royal Irish Regiment 163w

Listed buildings
848w

Literacy
Primary education 118w

Litherland, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 999, (18.12.95) 1314–5
Questions
Compulsorily detained mental patients, Deportation 1133w

Littler Inquiry
see Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry

Liverpool
Hotels 1229w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 381, 390–400, 410–1
Questions
Animal Welfare and Research Advisory Committee 1171w
Chemical and biological warfare, Defence research 1170w
Chemical weapons, Disclosure of information 1171–2w
Defence research, Armed forces 1170w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 485–6

Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 175–6

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Questions
Arms trade, Nigeria 596w
Export promotion, Small businesses 356–7
Guatemala, Human rights 339–40w
Guatemala, Police training 339w
Guatemala, Trials 340w
Overseas students, Fees and charges 982

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Wales (06.12.95) 341, 343
Questions
Access to work programme, Wales 665–6w
Bus services, Wales 571–2w
Farmers, Early retirement 54w
Hill livestock allowances, Wales 6–7
Hydrocarbon oil duties, Bus services 633w
Patent Office 160–1w
Pensions, Women 621w
Rural areas, Investment 353
Severn bridge, Road tolls 182–3w
Tax yields 876–7w
VAT, Public utilities 154w

Loans
Grant maintained schools 1015w
Housing for Wales 1158w
NHS trusts 609w
Scottish health boards 609w

Local authorities
Alternative energy 590w
Political activities 915w
Political parties 388–9w
Wales 388–9w

Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970
Questions
908–9w

Local Authority Enforcement Functions Review
1215–6w

Local authority powers
Road traffic control 557–8w

Local education authorities
Capital investment 976–7w
Educational finance 1016–7w
Educational standards 490
Local government staff 139–40w

Local Enterprise Development Unit
Equal opportunities 798w

Local government
Greater London 908w
Legislation 201w

Local Government Act 1972
Questions
1103–4w

Local government elections
Local government reform 406w
Scotland 1529–30

Local government expenditure
Education 177–80w
Mental health services 1132w
Schools 73–4w

Local government finance
1094w
Air pollution control 735w
Buckinghamshire 404–5w
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities 1524–5
Ealing Borough Council 351w
Local government reform 921w
Metropolitan districts 8w
Newham Borough Council 512w
North East Lincolnshire 1094–5w
Scotland 1524–6
Wales 666–7w, 995–6w
Warwickshire Council Council 354w

Local government functions
Tipping of waste 1098–9w

Local government land
Land acquisition 1103–4w
Planning permission 1333

Local government pensions
724–5w

Local government reform
721w, 724w
Finance 581–2w
Government grants 405–6w
Leicestershire 1097w
Local government elections 406w
Local government finance 921w
Local government staff 1191w
Metropolitan districts 176–7w
Scotland 68–70w
Scottish health boards 610–1w
Supplementary credit approvals 1161w
Wales 666–7w, 1161w, 1191w

Local government revenue
Council tax 1190–1w

Local government services
908–9w
Contracts for services 50w

Local government social services
Buckinghamshire 383w
Performance standards (06.12.95) 376–412
Scotland 1066–7w

Local government staff
Local education authorities 139–40w
Local government reform 1191w

Lockerbie
Bombings 57w, 86w, 148w, 750w, 997w, 1276w

Locums
426w
Manpower 197w

London Ambulance Service
937w

London boroughs
Standard spending assessments 1341–2

London Docklands Development Corporation
1096w

London Electricity
Government assistance to industry 466–7w

London Regional Transport
Electronic equipment 558w

Lone parent families
Unemployment 258w

Lone parents
Child care 502–3w
Social security recipients 627–8w

Long stay patients
Social security benefits disqualification 618w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Billing 728w, 1014w
Consultants 455–6w
Departmental correspondence 97–8w
Internet 1204w
Members' correspondence 881–2w
Ministers' visits abroad 1205w
Official cars 1204w
Operating costs 1205w
Private finance initiative 228w, 727–8w

Lord Chancellor's Dept—continued
Small businesses 1013–4w
Speeches 829
Travelling expenses 1205w

Lord President of the Council
Official cars 1216w
Opinion polls 750w

Lorries
Bridges 321w
Motor vehicle registration 321w
Road accidents 60w

Lost working days
Mental illness 793w

Low flying
474w, 590–1w, 594w, 716–7w, 768–9w
Armed forces training 984w
Ebford 2w
Highlands of Scotland 591–2w
Shipping 983–4w

Low pay
818–9
State earnings related pension scheme 824

Lowestoft
Regional aid 1086w
Regional challenge 1088w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Questions
Courts charter, Judges 323–4w
MV Derbyshire 57w

LSD
Defence research 761w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 152
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1246
Questions
Business questions 500–1
Discretionary student grants 561w, 1033w
Drama education, Educational finance 982
Hospitals, Worcester 930w
Housing policy, Northern Ireland 1079w
Income distribution 825
Office of the National Lottery 1538
Scottish Assembly 1098

Lung diseases
Death 196–8w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas, Attorney-General
Questions
Attorney General, Civil service manpower 86w
Billing, Attorney General 1005w
Contempt of court, Newspaper press 18
Crown Prosecution Service, Bail 15
Crown Prosecution Service, Crime victims 15
Crown Prosecution Service, Information technology 16–7
Crown Prosecution Service, Police 17
Crown Prosecution Service, Rights of audience 1190w
Crown Prosecution Service, Westminster City Council 14
Crown Prosecution Service, Witnesses 17
Director of Public Prosecutions 665w
Immunity certificates 14–5
Lockerbie, Bombings 86w
Opinion polls, Attorney General 759–60w
Private finance initiative, Attorney General 219w, 759w
Sentencing, Appeals 85–6w
Trials, Newspaper press 15–6

Lynne, Ms Liz
Questions
Access Committee for England 942–3w
Access to work programme 1226w
Business questions 496
Child Support Agency 626w
Child Support Agency, Computers 1116w
Child support appeal tribunals 662w
Child support appeal tribunals, Operating costs 1118w
Christmas bonus 832

Lynne, Ms Liz—continued
Dept of Social Security, Computers 1115–6w
Housing benefits, Young people 784w
Maintenance, Children 433–6w, 623–7w, 891–4w, 1116–8w
Missing persons, Children 949–50w
Refugees, Young people 938w
Retirement pensions, Age addition 670w
Textile industry 282w
Unemployment benefits, Workfare 819

M1
Road accidents 459–62w
Road works 186w, 758w

M4
Road works 272–3w

M6
Lighting 1185w

M25
Road safety 758w

M42
Meriden 183–4w

McAllion, Mr John
Questions
Council housing, Scotland 1524
Edinburgh Royal Infirmary 610w
Hospitals, Stonehaven 610w
NHS, Capital investment 609–10w
NHS, Private finance initiative 1061–2w
Patent Office, Consultants 1262w
Playing fields, Scotland 299w
Scottish health boards, Administrative costs 812–3w
Scottish Office, Ministerial policy advisors 815–6w
Water authorities, Scotland 814w

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Questions
Iron and steel industry, Republic of Ireland 364
Iron and steel industry, Scotland 1519

McCartney, Mr Ian
Questions
Community action 440–5w
Dept of Employment, Expenditure 971w
Industrial tribunals, Personal records 871w
Industrial tribunals, Public appointments 870–1w
Industrial tribunals, Trades' Union Congress 869–70w
Training for work, Age discrimination 561–2w
Trichlorothylene 584w
Youth training, Industrial accidents 994w

McCartney, Mr Robert
Questions
Availability for work, Northern Ireland 317–8w
Carers, Northern Ireland 110w
Child benefit, Northern Ireland 1078w
Child minding, Family credit 901w
Civil servants, Royal family 797w
Colin Glen Trust 904–5w
Common land, Northern Ireland 108–9w
Cross border cooperation in Ireland, Security 900w
Defective housing, Orlit houses 901–2w
Devolution, Northern Ireland 903w
Drownings, Northern Ireland 797w
European Convention on Human Rights 80–1w
Graduates, Northern Ireland 905–6w
Housing benefits, Landlords 317w
Housing benefits, Northern Ireland 1078w
Land, Newtownards 899–900w
Land drainage, Northern Ireland 318–9w
Maintenance, Children 1078w
Monuments, Biographical collections 113w
Northern Ireland government 484–5
Northern Ireland Housing Executive 317w
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland 900w
Religious buildings, Northern Ireland 541w
Road traffic, Northern Ireland 652w
Road works, Belfast 99w

McCartney, Mr Robert—continued
Roads, Bangor Co Down 905w
Stormont, Property development 1166–7w
Student grants, Northern Ireland 315w
Teachers, Employment discrimination 904w

McCrea, Rev William
Questions
Northern Ireland government 478–9

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 846
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1351, 1364–6
Questions
Ammunition, Waste disposal 164w
Beaufort Dyke, Radioactive waste disposal 45–6w
Government grants, Highlands of Scotland 1280w
Radioactive waste disposal, Seas and oceans 14w

McFall, Mr John
Questions
Further education colleges, Scotland 612w
Homelessness, Young people 490–1
Taxation, Scotland 1517–8

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1378–9
Questions
Downe Hospital, Capital investment 481
Exhibitions, Upper Waiting Hall 1190w
Local Enterprise Development Unit, Equal opportunities 798w

Mackay of Clashfern, RtHonLord
Members' speeches 681–2

McKelvey, Mr William
Questions
Crime prevention, Scotland 1279w

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1050, 1060–3
European communities (07.12.95) 533
Prime Minister's questions, Points of order (05.12.95) 137–8
Questions
Contempt of court, Newspaper press 18
Crown jewels 566w, 853w
Low flying, Ebford 2w
Marines, Ebford 2w
Princess of Wales 472w

Maclean, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 603–21, 625, 629, 636, 639, 645, 674
Criminal injuries compensation scheme (06.12.95) 444–8, 457–61
Questions
Abandoned cars, Fees and charges 212w
Air travel, Arrests 1008w
Bail, Offenders 209w
British Transport Police 216w
Cellular phones 968w
Cheshire Constabulary 606w
Closed circuit television, Video recordings 206w, 450w
Compensation, Arrest warrants 245w
Complaints against police 1012w
Crime 970w
Crime, Industrial health and safety 209w
Crime prevention, Business premises 1010–1w
Crime prevention, Closed circuit television 214–5w, 601w
Crime Prevention Agency 213–4w
Criminal injuries compensation, Homicide 27w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 216w

Maclean, Rt Hon David—continued
Criminal records, Disclosure of information 968–9w
Drug crimes, Smuggling 601–2w
Fines, Law enforcement 355w
Fingerprints, Data banks 969w
Genetics, Data banks 959w
Metropolitan Police, Emergency calls 606–8w
Metropolitan Police Committee 603–4w
Missing persons, Children 949–50w
Missing persons, Telephone services 955–6w, 1011–2w
Missing Person's Bureau 955w
Night clubs, Crimes of violence 969w
Night clubs, Security 606w
Offences against children, British residents abroad 449–50w
Offences against children, Disclosure of information 159w
Offensive weapons 962–3w
Operation Charm 967–8w
Operation Whitewash 969–70w
Police, Divers 206w
Police, Expenditure 212w
Police, Manpower 202–4w, 956–7w
Police, Pensions 212–3w
Police, Political activities 360w
Police, Recruitment 204w, 213w, 359–60w, 966w
Police authorities, Government grants 1196–8w
Police civilians 602w, 958w
Police custody, Death 243w
Police custody, Drug abuse 243w
Police custody, Health 243w
Police grant 1192–6w
Police powers, Offensive weapons 1009–10w
Police surgeons 243w
Police vehicles, Bull bars 602–3w
Pre-sentencing reports 188w
Prince's Trust, Crime prevention 951–2w
Prisoners, Ethnic groups 211w
Prisoners on remand 207–8w
Prisoners on remand, Ethnic groups 209–10w
Public order policing, Exhibitions 360–1w
Public order policing, Export of live animals 361w
Public order policing, Hunting 206w
Racial attacks 206–7w
Racial attacks, Greater London 1008w
Regional crime squads 361w
Stop and search 210–1w
Supervision orders, Fines 205–6w
Supervision orders, Probation and aftercare 209–10w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1122, 1125–31, 1149
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 858–63
Questions
Breast cancer 128
Nurses, Manpower 946–8w

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations (18.12.95) 1267–9
Government bills (13.12.95) 913–8, 929–30
Questions
Highlands and Islands Enterprise 611–2w
Office of the National Lottery 1536
Sheep, Scotland 814–5w
Track access grant 321w

McMaster, Mr Gordon
Questions
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Local government finance 1524–5

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1551–2, 1556, 1560, 1563–5, 1567, 1573
Questions
Census of population 938w
Exclusion orders, Northern Ireland 949w
Office of the National Lottery 1539
Royal Irish Regiment, Army strength 770–1w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (11.12.95) 683–4
Working hours (13.12.95) 932–8, 942, 945–6
Questions
Assisted places scheme 117w
Cabinet committees 167w
Cabinet committees, Disclosure of information 681–2
English education, Educational assessment 536w
"Financial statement and budget report 1996/97" 157w
Foreign investment in UK 598w
Government car service, Fees and charges 1185–6w
GP fundholders 122–3
Industrial accidents 1236–7w
Industrial injuries 1212–4w
Minimum wage 639w
New businesses 333w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, Car allowances 1182–3w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, Finance 1182w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, Railway travel 1183w
Official cars, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1093–4w
Official cars, Dept for Education and Employment 971w
Official cars, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Official cars, Dept of the Environment 911–2w
Official cars, Dept of Trade and Industry 1082w
Official cars, Dept of Transport 674w, 1183–4w
Official cars, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1186–7w
Official cars, Home Office 1008–9w
Official cars, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1204w
Official cars, Lord President of the Council 1216w
Official cars, Ministry of Defence 1171w
Official cars, Prime Minister 1051w
Official cars, Scottish Office 1061w
Official cars, Treasury 1048w
Official cars, Welsh Office 989w
Public transport, Dept of Social Security 149w
Public transport, Home Office 201w
Public transport, Scottish Office 68w
Public transport, Treasury 1049w
Rateable value, Yorkshire and Humberside 354
Right of abode, Hong Kong 211–2w, 967w
Serious Fraud Office, Barings 16

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 727–8, 744, 750–3
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 843–4
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (11.12.95) 698, (13.12.95) 1018
Immigration applications, Points of order (05.12.95) 137
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Northern Ireland 477w
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 359w
Baton rounds, Northern Ireland 903w
Exclusion orders 494–5w

Madden, Mr Max—continued
Illegal immigrants, Employment 659–60w
Immigration 729w
Overseas students, Child benefit 982
Political refugees 493–4w
Political refugees, Departmental publications 954w
Political refugees, Nigeria 446w, 472w, 951w
Prisoners, Parole 495w
Yorkshire Water 237–8w, 358–9

Madel, Sir David
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1242

Madrid Summit
Ministerial statements (18.12.95) 1221–7

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Questions
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Magistrates
Doncaster 661–2w
Ethnic minorities 1203w

Magistrates' courts
Ethnic minorities 323–6w

Magistrates' Courts Act 1980
Questions
227w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 28–9
Questions
Business questions 498–9
Huddersfield NHS Trust 130
Withinfield Junior and Infant School 980

Maintenance
Children 149w, 433–6w, (06.12.95) 461–2, 623–7w, 891–4w, 1077–8w, 1116–8w, 1275w
Family credit 1271w
Income support 1270w
Northern Ireland 1077–8w

Maitland, Lady Olga
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 80–4
Committee on standards in public life, Points of order (06.12.95) 372
Crime (08.12.95) 617, 621, 637–8, 642, 666–9, 672
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 996
Offensive Weapons Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1021
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1012
Questions
Arms Decommissioning International Body 479–80
Arts finance 1214
Breast cancer, Royal Marsden Hospital 128
Family law, Law reform 1220
NHS, Wales 10
Offensive weapons, Crime prevention 1527–8
Prison Service Security Review 1007w
Reading, Educational standards 691w

***Major, Rt Hon John**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit, Ministerial statements (18.12.95) 1221–7
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 17–8w, 219w
Australia, Art works 325w
Beef, Food contamination 489
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 1344
Bosnia-Herzegovina, European Convention on Human Rights 488
Campbell Soups 566w
Chemical industries 135
Christmas bonus 832
Computers 488

Major, Rt Hon John—continued
Conservative Party, Party conferences 136
Consultants, Prime Minister 149w
Council of Europe, UK delegations 1053–4w
Crown jewels 566w
Customs and Excise, Dover 1342
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministers 325–6w
Devolution, Scotland 134
Dogs, Animal welfare 488–9
Economic and monetary union 487–8, 832
Economic and monetary union, France 487
Educational finance, Teachers 832
Educational standards 134, 489–90
European Communities 487, 491–2
European Court of Human Rights 488
Foreign investment in UK 489
Former prime ministers, Civil servants 17w, 842w
Future large aircraft 1342
Government contracts, Prime Minister 1052w
Government departments, Scotland 471–2w
GP fundholders, Lichfield 133
Great Western Railway, Privatisation 133–4
Homelessness, Young people 490–1
Hospital closures 492
Hurworth School 135
Income tax 137
Industrial disputes, France 832–3
Irish Steel, Privatisation 1344
Local education authorities, Educational standards 490
Lockerbie, Bombings 148w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Speeches 829
Medical students 490
Members' correspondence, Prime Minister 843w
MI5, Computer privacy 644w
Ministers 325w
Ministers' visits abroad, Prime Minister 1051–2w
Ministers' visits abroad, Switzerland 219w
Monuments, World War II 833–4
NHS administration 829–30
Nigeria, Human rights 135–6
Northern Ireland government 18w
Nuclear materials, Export controls 471w
Office of the National Lottery 1345–6
Official cars, Prime Minister 1051w
Official engagements 148w, 325w, 566w, 568w, 1051w
Official hospitality, Prime Minister 567w, 644w
Operation Christmas Cracker 136
Opposition, Higher civil servants 842w
Organised crime, Intelligence services 1174w
Owner occupied housing, Scotland 1346
Political refugees, Nigeria 472w
Press advertising, Prime Minister 842w
Princess of Wales 472w
Private finance initiative 147–8w
Procurator Fiscal Service 842w
Public expenditure, Devon 135
Railway transport, Privatisation 1343
Railway travel, Privatisation 830
Security Service Commissioner 566–7w
Small businesses, Prime Minister 1052w, 1175w
Stack, Louise, Prisoners' transfers 831
Strikes, France 1345
Textile industry, Yorkshire and Humberside 136–7
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness, Hartmann, Alfred 325w
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness, Switzerland 326w
Ukraine, Nuclear power 1175w
Weapons 831–2
Yorkshire Water, Water supply 831

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Questions
Conductive education 745–6w
Conductive education, Northern Ireland 801w
Conductive education, Scotland 821w

Mallon, Mr Seamus—continued
Emergency powers, Northern Ireland 801w
Finucane, Patrick, Homicide 800–1w
Northern Ireland government 479
Special education, Northern Ireland 801–2w

***Malone, Mr Gerald**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 849–57, 859, 862, 891–2
Questions
Alternative medicine, Departmental leaflets 223–4w
Breast cancer, Research finance 517–8w
Clinical psychologists 33–4w
Colostomy, Prescriptions 224w
Committee on Safety of Medicines 518–21w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Public appointments 809w
Doctors, Manpower 190w
Doctors, Vacancies 577–8w
Drugs, Retail prices 44w
Edgware Hospital 191w
Edgware Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 1138w
Environmental health officers 1137w
Family health services authorities, Performance related pay 525w
Fluoridation 1138–9w
General practitioners 194w, 427w
General practitioners, Bureaucracy 492–3w
General practitioners, Computer applications 1209w
General practitioners, NHS internal market 193w, 1146w
General practitioners, Prescriptions 943w
GP fundholders 1137w
GP fundholders, Leeds 1143w
Health authorities 517w
Health authorities, Advertising 1205–6w
Health service staff, Manpower 807–8w
Health service staff, Pay 1207w
Health service staff, Redundancy pay 189w, 681w, 1132w
Herbal medicine, EC action 805–6w
Hospital consultants 1137–8w
Hospital doctors, Recruitment 802w
Hospital staff, Career structure 197w
Hospital waiting lists 936w
Huddersfield NHS Trust 130
Locums 426w
Locums, Manpower 197w
Medical records 1136w
Medical research, Sunderland 936–7w
Medicines Act 1968, Orders and regulations 809w
Medicines Control Agency, Performance standards 808w
Mental health services, Psychiatry 1210–1w
NHS, Car hire 682w
NHS, Labour costs 930–3w
NHS, Negligence 44w
NHS, Work experience 579w
NHS and private practice 190w
NHS internal market 802w
NHS Management Executive 426w
NHS Pensioners' Trust 41w
NHS pensions, Myalgic encephalomyelitis 677–8w
NHS reform, Private sector 42w
NHS trusts 41w
NHS trusts, Directors 39w
NHS trusts, Executives 223w
Occupational health 679–80w
Oral contraceptives 223w, 1146–51w
Oral contraceptives, Health hazards 528w
Paracetamol 37w, 802–3w
Pay beds 40w
Pharmacists 126–7
Pharmacists, Billing 126, 578w
Pharmacists, Prescriptions 127
Prescription charges 37–8w
Prescription charges, Income 190w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 221w
Primary health care 1143w

Malone, Mr Gerald—continued
Prodigy prescribing system 943–4w, 1152–3w
Progestogens 1151–2w
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital 198–9w
Regional health authorities, NHS finance 192w
St Bartholomew's Hospital 195w
South Essex Health Authority, Finance 199w
South Staffordshire Health Authority, Public appointments 681w
Ulcers, Medical equipment 578–9w

Managers
Training 289–90w
Universities 394w

Manchester Airport
178w
Air traffic 1184w
Environmental impact assessment 1183w
Passengers 1184w

Mandelson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1281, 1315–8

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1037–8
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1395
Questions
European Fighter Aircraft 360
Pesticides 689–90w
Public lending right 849–50w

Manufactured exports
280w, 335–6w
Scotland 646–7w

Manufactured goods
International trade 1264w

Manufactured imports
335w

Manufacturing industries
365, 368, 1252w
Employment 289w
Industrial investment 367
Industrial production 279w, 1264w
Interest rates 364–5
Small businesses 366
Yorkshire and Humberside 365

Marek, Dr John
Questions
Police vehicles, Bull bars 602–3w
St Helena, Custodial treatment 457w
St Helena, Overseas aid 1176w
St Helena, Public appointments 1176w

Marine animals
Nature conservation 587w

Marines
Ebford 2w

Marketing
Apples 1093
Personal pensions 635w

Marland, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 293–7
Questions
Rural Development Commission 353–4
School milk 1086–7

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 707, 712, 777–8, 786
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 144, 157
Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 283–92, 294–5, 300, 302
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1348, 1386
Questions
EC budget 874w
Environment protection, Rural areas 585w
Illegal immigrants 358–9w

Marlow, Mr Tony—continued
Meningitis 682–3w
Metrication, Retail trade 639–40w
Orange juice 928w
Population, Greater London 383w
Secure accommodation, Tiffield 43w, 427w
Social security finance 671–2w

Married people
Personal tax allowances 260w

Married women
Pensions 151–2w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Crimes of violence, Scotland 1527

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Haemophilia, Hepatitis (13.12.95) 956–8, 960
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 998–9
Members' conduct, Points of order (04.12.95) 21–2
Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1020
Questions
Brewing industry 356
Business questions 500
Deregulation initiative 975
EC Social Charter 694w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 8, 71w
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 130–1
HMSO, Privatisation 684
Hospital admissions, Barnet 935–6w
Know-how Fund 691
Legal aid 880w
National Lottery, Charities 1205
NHS, Scotland 1516
Scottish Assembly 1285w
Serious Fraud Office, Juries 18
Unemployment benefits, Employment schemes 818

Marshall, Sir Michael
Questions
Montserrat, Overseas aid 411w
Space technology 331w

Martin, Mr David
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 188–91
Questions
Stamp duties, Tax yields 507w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 999, (18.12.95) 1295, 1309–11, 1319
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1418–9
Questions
Exhibitions, Upper Waiting Hall 845w, 1190w
High rise flats, Scotland 1523
House of Commons accommodation 843–4w
"House of Commons Members' Handbook" 657w
Office of the National Lottery 1541–2
Palace of Westminster, Reprography 656–7w
Parliamentary opening, Photography 657w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 32

Maternity payments
Social fund 150–1w, 502w

Mathematics
Educational standards 971–2
Primary education 971–2

Mathematics education
Educational qualifications 692w

Mature students
Student grants 396–8w, 701–2w
Student loans 396–8w

Maxton, Mr John
Questions
National Lottery, Scotland 1530–2
Office of the National Lottery 1541

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill, 1R (20.12.95) 1550
Questions
Arms Decommissioning International Body 479–80
Army in Northern Ireland 385w
Extradition, USA 385–6w
Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures 802w
Northern Ireland Crown Solicitor's Office 656w
Northern Ireland government 384–5w, 476–80
Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 656w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 538–40w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 219w
Australia, Art works 325w
Company registration, Australia 334w
Employment opportunities 985
Export credit guarantees, Financial institutions 334–5w
Ferranti 217–8w
Ferranti, Directors 333–4w
Ferranti, Pension funds 334w
Income tax, Tax burden 1246w
Ministers' visits abroad, Switzerland 219w
National insurance contributions 670–1w
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness, Hartmann, Alfred 325w
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness, Switzerland 326w
Uzzourni, Fouad 346w
Workstart 695w
Workstart, Take-up of employment 695–6w

Measles
Wales 993w

Meat
Export promotion 829w

Medals
(20.12.95) 1582
Peace keeping operations 85w

Medical appeal tribunals
1270w

Medical equipment
Ulcers 578–9w

Medical ethics
521w

Medical examinations
Incapacity benefit 432w, 1270w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 478w, 985–6w, 1114w

Medical records
1136w
Disclosure of information 42–3w, 195w, 1142w
Privacy 523w

Medical research
Benzodiazepines 1208w
Hepatitis 220–1w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis 1209–10w
Sunderland 936–7w

Medical Research Council
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 861–2w, 1206–8w

Medical students
490
Wales 992–3w

Medical treatments
EC action 775–6w

Medicines Act 1968
Questions
Orders and regulations 809w

Medicines Control Agency
Performance standards 808w

Mellor, Rt Hon David
Questions
Political refugees 1199w

Members
Parking 1041w

Members' correspondence
159w, 213w, 245w, 446w, 964–5w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 878w
Dept of Health 938w
Dept of Social Security 889w
Dept of the Environment 922w
Dept of Trade and Industry 873w
Dept of Transport 840w
Deputy Prime Minister 1091w
Home Office 950w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 881–2w
Ministry of Defence 984–5w
Northern Ireland Office 907w
Prime Minister 843w
Treasury 873w
Welsh Office 992w

Members' deaths
Lightbown, David (13.12.95) 970

Members' facilities
Railtrack 1073w

Members' speeches
Disclosure of information 682–3
Mackay of Clashfern, RtHonLord 681–2

Members' visits abroad
Brussels 568w

Meningitis
682–3w, 1210w
Death 221–2w
West Yorkshire 193–4w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
243w

Mental health community care
524w, 1133w, 1140w

Mental health services
808w, 937w
Local government expenditure 1132w
Psychiatry 1210–1w
Sheffield 935w

Mental hospitals
NHS and private practice 523–4w

Mental illness
Death 809–10w
Lost working days 793w

Mental patients
Hospital beds 381w, 1133w

Mentally disadvantaged
Law reform 728–9w

Mentally disturbed offenders
Prisoners' rights 1132–3w

Mentally handicapped
Residential care 1141–2w

Mentally ill
Residential care 131

Merchant, Mr Piers
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 73–7
Questions
Breast cancer, Wales 11
Cancer, Wales 72w
Crime Prevention Agency 213–4w
Overseas trade, India 279w, 369–70
Pre-school education, Wales 1161–2w
Tourist industry, Scotland 1521

Merchant Shipping Act 1988
Questions
232–3w, 413w

Merchant ships
Military exercises 341–2w, 1108–11w

Mergers
409–10w

Meriden
M42 183–4w

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company
1082–3w

Merseyside
EC grants and loans 1229w
Public sector housing 908w

Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board
280w
Unemployment 986

Merthyr Tydfil
Incapacity benefit 794w
Invalidity benefits 621w, 670w

Methicillin resistant staphylococus aureau
Bacterial diseases (05.12.95) 276–82

Metrication
Retail trade 639–40w

Metrolink
EC grants and loans 1183–4w
Greater Manchester 1041w

Metrolink Salford
Eccles 188w

Metropolitan districts
Local government finance 8w
Local government reform 176–7w

Metropolitan Police
Emergency calls 606–8w

Metropolitan Police Committee
603–4w

MI5
(20.12.95) 1550
Computer privacy 544w

Michael, Mr Alun
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 606, 608, 613, 620–32, 642, 661, 676–7
Criminal injuries compensation scheme (06.12.95) 447–54, 458–9
Questions
Criminal injuries compensation, Homicide 27w
Police, Expenditure 212w
Police, Manpower 203w
Police, Pensions 212–3w
Police, Recruitment 204w, 213w, 359–60w
Police authorities, Government grants 1196–8w
Police authorities, Standard spending assessments 1240–4w
Police grant 1192–6w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Algeria, Political refugees 159w
Entry clearances, Algeria 24w
Immigration applications, Algeria 24w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Speeches 829
School choice 693–4w
Social security benefits disqualification, Long stay patients 618w
Standard spending assessments, Education vouchers 175–6w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Questions
Japanese knotweed, Argyll and Bute 1061w
Japanese knotweed, Scotland 1060–1w
Local government elections, Scotland 1529–30
Weed control, Scotland 1061w

Middlewood Hospital
935w

Midland Main Line Consortium
Performance standards 264w

Midwives
Manpower 946–8w

Midwives—continued
Vacancies 577–8w

Milburn, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Children in care (06.12.95) 320–3
Law Reform (Year and a Day Rule) Bill. 1R (13.12.95) 1022
Questions
Community care 943w
Community health services, Expenditure 43w, 811–2w
Doctors, Vacancies 577–8w
Energy conservation 724w
Health authorities 517w
Health authorities, Advertising 1205–6w
Health authorities, Wales 278w
Health service staff, Crimes of violence 946w
Health service staff, Manpower 807–8w
Health service staff, Redundancy pay 1132w
Health services, Orders and regulations 413w
Home care services, Elderly 507–8w
Hospital beds, Elderly 521w
Hospital closures 807w
Hospital discharges 380w
Hospital length of stay 39–40w
Hospital patients 40w, 805w
Hypothermia 809w
Income support, Residential care 620–1w
Infant mortality, Social conditions 129–30
Influenza 379–80w, 808w
Law reform, Mentally disadvantaged 728–9w
Locums, Manpower 197w
Lost working days, Mental illness 793w
Mental health community care 524w
Mental health services 808w
Mental illness, Death 809–10w
NHS, Labour costs 930–3w
NHS, Negligence 44w
NHS finance 34–6w
NHS internal market 802w
NHS trusts 35w, 41w
NHS trusts, Capital 1151w
NHS trusts, Finance 192w
NHS trusts, Northern Ireland 544w
NHS trusts, Public sector borrowing 807w
NHS trusts, Scotland 365w
NHS trusts, Wales 275–6w
Nursing homes 382w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Health 426w
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland Office 542–3w
Orders and regulations, Scotland 609w
Residential care 200w, 806w
Suicide 804–5w
Supervision registers 807w

Military aircraft
Armed forces training 592w
Export licensing 1079–80w
Indonesia 1079–80w
International cooperation 1173–4w
Repairs and maintenance 594–5w
Spare parts 3–4w

Military exercises
Merchant ships 341–2w, 1108–11w

Military police
Colchester 1112w

Military satellites
Defence procurement 348w

Military vehicles
Army 1107w
Defence procurement 431–2w

Milk
Agricultural production 1092
Common agricultural policy 827w
Pesticide residues 1134w
Production quotas 531w, 1085–6
Young people 1087

Millennium Commission
Ethnic groups 417w
Exhibitions 1265–6w

Millennium Exhibition
1215–6

Millennium Fund
1216

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 889–92, 899–900
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 1000, (18.12.95) 1275
Intervention during Ministerial statement (13.12.95) 996
Questions
A540 673w
Cheshire Constabulary 606w
Data Protection Act 1984 360w
Data Protection Registrar 970w
HMSO, Privatisation 683
Housing starts, Public sector housing 1336
Members' correspondence 245w
National Lottery Charities Board 733w
Northern Ireland government 384–5w
Road safety 672–3w
"Science and Technology Select Committee on Human Genetics" 360w
Special education, Educational finance 693w

Mills, Mr Iain
Questions
Child Support Agency, Disclosure of information 149–50w
M42, Meriden 183–4w
Maintenance, Children 149w

Minebea Electronics
173w

Mines
340–1w, 716w, 1171w
Arms control 164w
Arms trade 331–2w

Mineworkers' pension scheme
1257–8w

Minimum wage
368–9, 639w
Grand Metropolitan 1517

Ministerial Committee on Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy
see Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee

Ministerial duties
Dept of Social Security 619w
Deputy Prime Minister 487w
Welsh Office 1157w

Ministerial policy advisors
488w
Dept for Education and Employment 972w
Dept of Trade and Industry 773w
Ministry of Defence 772w
Scottish Office 815–6w
Welsh Office 414–5w

Ministerial statements
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 835–46
HMSO (13.12.95) 989–1001
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1221–7
Public expenditure (13.12.95) 1002–17
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1238–48
Welsh Office 27w

Ministers
325w
Dept of Trade and Industry 325–6w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1163–4w
Scotland 1277w

Ministers' domestic visits
Dept for Education and Employment 310w
Dept of Health 226w
Dept of National Heritage 261w
Dept of Social Security 249w
Dept of the Environment 238–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry 288w
Dept of Transport 267–8w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1057w

Ministers' domestic visits—continued
Home Office 245w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w
Ministry of Defence 240w
Northern Ireland Office 545w
Treasury 257w
Wales 147–8w, 415w, 780w
Welsh Office 278w

Ministers' private offices
Dept for Education and Employment 1017–8w
Dept of Health 930w
Dept of National Heritage 854w
Dept of Social Security 889w
Dept of the Environment 908w
Dept of Trade and Industry 284–6w, 1255w
Dept of Transport 559w
Deputy Prime Minister 628w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 644w
Home Office 966w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 831w
Ministry of Defence 769w
Northern Ireland Office 905w
Scottish Office 1060w
Treasury 1048w
Welsh Office 989w

Ministers' visits abroad
Dept for Education and Employment 310w
Dept of Health 226w, 1207w
Dept of National Heritage 261w
Dept of Social Security 249w
Dept of the Environment 238–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry 288w
Dept of Transport 267–8w, 1042w
Deregulation initiative 747w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1057w, 1187w
Home Office 245w, 1200w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1205w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 413w, 1163–4w
Ministry of Defence 240w
Northern Ireland Office 545w
Prime Minister 1051–2w
Switzerland 219w
Treasury 257w, 1248w
Welsh Office 278w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Billing 831–2w, 1165–6w
Cellular phones 413w, 533w
Civil servants' visits abroad 52–4w
Civil service agencies 54w, 229–32w
Consultants 684–7w
Government contracts 1165w
Investors in people 56w
Legislation 368w
Ministers 1163–4w
Ministers' domestic visits 413w
Ministers' private offices 831w
Ministers' visits abroad 413w, 1163–4w
Official hospitality 927w
Opinion polls 832–3w
Orders and regulations 580–1w, 1132w
Private finance initiative 233w, 369w, 831w
Public expenditure 1166w
Small businesses 1164–5w

Ministry of Defence
Billing 764–5w, 1113–4w
Cellular phones 346w, 720w
Civil service agencies 481–5w
Civil service manpower 707–14w
Consultants 241–2w, 349w
Cost effectiveness 3w, 590w, 595w
Departmental correspondence 1w
Empty housing 1332–3
Energy conservation 590w
Fraud 765–6w
Government contracts 1106–7w
Members' correspondence 984–5w
Ministerial policy advisors 772w
Ministers' domestic visits 240w
Ministers' private offices 769w
Ministers' visits abroad 240w

Ministry of Defence—continued
Official cars 1171w
Official hospitality 769w
Opinion polls 762–4w
Performance standards 1112w
Press advertising 983w
Private finance initiative 341w, 760–1w, 1174w
Small businesses 1106w, 1173w
Theft 429w

Ministry of Defence police
239w, 241w
Colchester 1111w
Manpower 771–2w
Redundancy 1112w

Missing persons
Children 949–50w
Telephone services 955–6w, 1011–2w

Missing Person's Bureau
955w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security
Questions
Child care, Lone parents 502–3w
Child Support Agency 626w, 822–3, 827–8
Child Support Agency, Computer privacy 1118w, 1274–5w
Child Support Agency, Disclosure of information 149–50w
Child Support Agency, Labour costs 432–3w
Child Support Agency, Performance standards 622–3w
Child support appeal tribunals, Operating costs 1118w
Disability living allowance, Elderly 245–6w
Disability living allowance, Political refugees 1119–20w
Disability living allowance, Social security appeals 88w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 88w, 1122w
Disability working allowance 378w
Funeral payments 377–8w
Government information services, Telephone services 248w
Housing benefits, Bournemouth 376–7w
Income distribution 824–5
Income support, Maintenance 1270w
Income support, Social security benefits reductions 376w
Industrial diseases, Emphysema 151w
Jobseeker's allowance 378w
Lone parents, Social security recipients 627–8w
Maintenance, Children 149w, 433–6w, 623–7w, 891–4w, 1116–8w, 1275w
Political refugees, Social security benefits rules 151w, 501–2w
Social fund 375–6w
Social fund, Maternity payments 502w
Social security, Income distribution 627w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 825
Social security benefits overpayment, Compensation 89w
Social security benefits uprating 248–9w
Social security payments, Industrial disputes 435–6w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1354, 1382–4
Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations (18.12.95) 1264–6, 1272
European communities (07.12.95) 544, 556–62
Government bills (13.12.95) 919, 922–5, 930–1
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 385w
Bank of England, Credit 259w
BBC 416–7w, 847w, 853w

Mitchell, Mr Austin—continued
BBC, Private finance initiative 852–3w
BBC, Television engineering 417w
BBC External Services 81w
BBC External Services, Broadcasting finance 338–9w
Departmental responsibilities 490–2w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Ministers 325–6w
EC budget 734–5w
EC grants and loans 835w
Economic and monetary union 340w
European Commission, Offices 1047w
European Commission, Official publications 836w
European Commission, Publicity 875w
Fisheries 926w
Fishing vessels 559w
Fishing vessels, Compensation 413w
Fishing vessels, Spain 232–3w, 413w
Import penetration 506w
Interest rates 505–6w
International Court of Justice, Nuclear weapons 250–1w, 336w
Internet, Dept of Health 1211–2w
Internet, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1204w
Law centres 880w
Legislative process, Select committees 28w
Local authorities, Political activities 915w
Local government finance, North East Lincolnshire 1094–5w
Manufactured exports 335–6w
Manufactured imports 335w
Ministers 325w
Missing persons, Telephone services 955–6w
Money supply 259–60w
"Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" 507w
National debt, Interest payments 410w
National income, Consumer expenditure 564w
Overseas trade 293–4w
Parliamentary opening, Photography 657w
Peakes Parkway Road Scheme 270w
Police, Charities 729w
Public finance 329w
Racial discrimination, EC action 358w
Red Hot Television 374w
Shipping registration, Spain 757w
Trade competitiveness 485w
UK contributions to EC budget 155–6w

Mitchell, Sir David
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 43, 46–50
Questions
European Fighter Aircraft, Guided weapons 165w

Mitchell Commission
see Arms Decommissioning International Body

MMR vaccine
Drug side effects 677w
Wales 777w

Moate, Sir Roger
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1241
Questions
Apples, Intervention prices 1093–4

Mobility of disabled
Public service vehicles 672w

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1231
Questions
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 386w

Money supply
259–60w

Monklands District Council
1279w

Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Debates etc.
Knockhill, Sports facilities (20.12.95) 1505–7
Oral question time intervention (20.12.95) 1521
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1416–7
Questions
Beef, Food standards 1513–4
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 1278w
Drift nets, Scotland 1528–9
Foreign investment in UK, Scotland 823–8w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Questions
Business questions 1102–3
Weapons 831–2

"Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics"
335w, 507w

Montserrat
Overseas aid 411w

Monuments
Biographical collections 113w
Northern Ireland 113w
World War II 833–4

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Questions
Broadcasting 1211

Moorings
Non-domestic rates (12.12.95) 901–6

Moorland scheme
56w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Questions
Accident and emergency departments, Wales 993w
Breast cancer, Wales 991w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Birds 276w
Child abuse, North Wales 993w
Chiropody, Diabetes 779w
Geriatrics, Wales 779w
Great Western Railway, Privatisation 133–4, 457w
Home care services 195–6w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 778–80w
Housing associations 1252w
Housing for Wales, Loans 1158w
Income support 622w
Mergers 409–10w
Ministers' domestic visits, Wales 147–8w, 415w
NHS, Private finance initiative 43–4w
NHS trusts, Wales 780w
Prescription charges, Administrative costs 780w
Private finance initiative 1251w
Private finance initiative, Wales 994–5w
Public sector borrowing requirement 503w
Railway transport, Competition 559w
Residential care, Public expenditure 1047w
South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council, Duffryn House 994w
South Wales Electricity, Water supply industry 550w
Taxation, Fringe benefits 1252w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 778w
Training for work, Wales 550w
Welsh Development Agency 551w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Redundancy 572w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority, Relocation of employees 572w
Welsh Office, Civil service manpower 572–3w
Welsh Office, Civil service redundancies 573w
Welsh Office, Departmental correspondence 551w
Welsh Office, Ministerial policy advisors 414–5w
Welsh Water, Beaches 414w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri—continued
Welsh Water, Government shareholding 667–8w
Welsh Water, Shares 550–1w
Welsh Water, Swalec 8–9

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 285, 288, 295, 299–302
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1391–5
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1562, 1575–8, 1580–1
Questions
Access to countryside 1090
Agricultural marketing, EC grants and loans 1166w
Animals 722–3w
Dredging, Licensing 404w
Drift nets 369–70w
Drift nets, Nature conservation 833w
Entry clearances, Kiev 1189w
Fish, Imports 688w
Food industry, EC grants and loans 411–2w
Frogs legs, Imports 232w
Furs, Imports 776w, 907w
Hedges and ditches 1237–8w
Horses, Animal welfare 534w
Khat 657w
North Sea, Dredging 412w
Paignton Zoo, Badgers 532w
Public expenditure, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1166w
Public order policing, Hunting 206w
Transport of animals, Animal welfare 232w, 533–4w

Morocco
Human rights 751w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Exservicemen, Points of order (14.12.95) 1111
Questions
Business questions 1103–4
Chiropody 223w
Manchester Airport 178w
Negative equity 643w
NHS reform, Private sector 42w
War widows' pensions 374–5w

Morris, Ms Estelle
Questions
Business questions 497
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 1217–22w
Hurworth School, Inquiries 1217–8w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Questions
Free school meals, Wales 666w
Trials, Newspaper press 15–6

Mortgage relief
15w, 506w

Moss, Mr Malcolm, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Acute beds, Northern Ireland 1077–8w
Availability for work, Northern Ireland 317–8w
Badgers, Newtownabbey 904w
Belfast Corporation Act 1932 1075w
Carers, Northern Ireland 110w
Child benefit, Northern Ireland 1078w
Child minding, Family credit 901w
Custody, Grandparents 387w
Defective housing, Orlit houses 901–2w
Downe Hospital, Capital investment 481
Drownings, Northern Ireland 797w
Family planning, Northern Ireland 541–2w
Fish farming, Larne Lough 798–9w
Foyleside centre 111w
Health service staff, Industrial health and safety 901–2w

Moss, Mr Malcolm—continued
Housing and handicapped, Northern Ireland 1073w
Housing benefits, Landlords 317w
Housing benefits, Northern Ireland 1078w
Housing policy, Northern Ireland 1079w
Jobseeker's allowance, Northern Ireland 655w
Land, Newtownards 899–900w
Maintenance, Children 1077–8w
Negative equity, Northern Ireland 1169w
NHS trusts, Northern Ireland 544w
Northern Ireland Central Services Agency 798w
Northern Ireland Central Services Agency, Contracts for services 797–8w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive 317w
Nurses' training, Educational institutions 165–6w
Oceanography, Belfast Lough 799w
Odour pollution 484
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland 799w
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland Office 542–3w
Public sector housing, Northern Ireland 386w
Road construction, Belfast 385w
Road safety, Codes of practice 109–10w
Road safety, Northern Ireland 540w
Road safety education, Northern Ireland 99w
Road traffic, Northern Ireland 652w
Road works, Belfast 99w
Roads, Bangor Co Down 905w
Roads, Carrickfergus 1167w
Roads, Northern Ireland 1079w
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, Capital investment 480–1
Stormont, Building repairs 656w
Stormont, Property development 1166–7w
Trust ports, Northern Ireland 387w
University of Ulster 114–5w, 311–3w
Water treatment, Northern Ireland 483–4
Waterside Hospital, Hospital closures 481

Motability
1118w, 1245–6w, 1267w
VAT 634w

Motability Finance
887–9w

Motor vehicle registration
Buses 425w
Lorries 321w
Salisbury 840w
Sheffield 560w

Motor vehicle testing
841w
Buses 425w
Deregulation initiative 557w

Motor vehicle type approval
EC action 1040–1w

Motorways
Lighting 186w
Public inquiries 673–4w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Questions
Action for community employment 1077w
Civil service pensions, Northern Ireland 1076–7w
Government assistance to industry, Northern Ireland 1077w
Government offices for the regions 510w
Housing, Northern Ireland 1074w
Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards, Educational administration 1167–8w
Northern Ireland government 480
Special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland 1075–6w

MR vaccine
10–1, 677w
Drug side effects 675–6w

Mudie, Mr George
Debates etc.
Haemophilia, Hepatitis (13.12.95) 954–6
Questions
Court of appeal, Criminal proceedings 1217
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 131

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 34, 84–7
Questions
Natural gas, Gas reserves 351–2
Operation Whitewash 969–70w

Mundic blocks
Defective housing 915w

Murphy, Mr Paul
Questions
Fire services, Wales 12

Museum of Army Transport
983w

Museums and galleries
1209–10
Chartermark scheme 1209

Mustard gas
428–9w

Mutual recognition of qualifications
Free movement of labour 117–8w

MV Derbyshire
57w

Myalgic encephalomyelitis
Medical research 1209–10w
NHS pensions 677–8w

Nagorno Karabakh
Peace keeping operations 456w

Nanotechnology
283w

National Advisory Body for Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy
see Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry

National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts
1137w

National Blood Authority
41w

National debt
Interest payments 410w

National Defence Industries Council
430–1w

National Disability Council
669–70w, 1155w
Public appointments 619w

National Heritage Memorial Fund
Piers 848w

National income
Consumer credit 564w
Consumer expenditure 564w
Wales 391w

National insurance
87–8w

National insurance contributions
670–1w, 889w, 1120w

National insurance fund
Personal pensions 249–50w
Redundancy pay 868w

National Lottery
467w, 567w, 847w, 1214–5, (20.12.95) 1482–5
Charities 950–1w, 1205
Fraud 608w
Licensing 1206
Scotland 1276w, 1530–2

National Lottery Charities Board
733w

National Lottery Etc Act 1993
Questions
847w

National parks authorities
Public appointments 1101–2w

National security
Departmental coordination 658w

National vocational qualifications
Northern Ireland 107–8w

National Weights and Measures Laboratory
Efficiency scrutinies 1262w

Natural Environment Research Council
859–60w

Natural gas
Gas reserves 45w, 351–2
North Sea 352

Natural heritage areas
New forest 1234w

Natural Resources Institute
749w

Nature Conservancy Council for England
Government grants 1100w

Nature conservation
Drift nets 833w
Marine animals 587w

Naviede, Mohammed
Prisoners 499–500w

Navigational aids
Harrier aircraft 2w

Neath General Hospital
Obstetrics 7

Negative equity
643w, 1238w
Northern Ireland 1169w
Scotland 1287w
Wales 1192w

Negligence
NHS 44w

Neighbourhood noise
588–90w

Nelson, Mr Anthony, Minister for Trade
Questions
Company registration, Australia 334w
Electrical industry, Export promotion 361–2
Export credit guarantees, Financial institutions 334–5w
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Export insurance 1260w
Export promotion 357–8, 362
Export promotion, Small businesses 356–7
Forced labour, Burma 463–4w
Government assistance to industry, South West region 280w
Manufactured exports 280w
Manufactured imports 335w
Military aircraft, Export licensing 1079–80w
Overseas investment, Burma 636w
Overseas trade, Burma 463–4w
Overseas trade, India 279w, 369–70
Trade promotion, Burma 464–5w

"Nemesis File"
799w

Netherlands
Double taxation (18.12.95) 1271
Shipping registration 757w

Neubert, Sir Michael
Questions
Divorce law 879w
King George Hospital Ilford, Accident and emergency departments 121–2
Unemployment 984–5

New businesses
291–2w, 333w, 1236w, 1254w

New forest
Natural heritage areas 1234w

New towns
Property transfer 823w
Scotland 823w

New towns development corporations
Property transfer 1064–5w
Scotland 1064–5w

Newbury bypass
675w

Newham Borough Council
Local government finance 512w

Newport
Unemployment 6

Newport Gwent
Waste disposal 992w

Newspaper press
Contempt of court 18
Trials 15–6

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Exservicemen, Points of order (14.12.95) 1111
Intervention during Christmas adjournment debate (20.12.95) 1484
Recess motions (20.12.95) 1485–7
Questions
Business statements 493–504, 1101–9, 1544–50
House of Commons debates, Treaties 750w
Legislative process, Select committees 28w
Members' visits abroad, Brussels 568w
Official cars, Lord President of the Council 1216w
Opinion polls, Lord President of the Council 750w
Opposition parties, Finance 28w
Railtrack, Members' facilities 1073w
Welsh Affairs Select Committee 28w
Welsh Grand Committee 27w
Welsh Office, Ministerial statements 27w
Welsh Office, Oral questions 28w

Newtownabbey
Badgers 904w

Newtownards
Land 899–900w

NHS
Advertising 1001w
Armed forces medical services 345w
Budget November 1995 (04.12.95) 24–114
Capital investment 39w, 609–10w, 1145–6w
Car hire 682w
Cash limits 934–5w
Empty property 939w
Expenditure 71w
In vitro fertilisation 39w
Labour costs 930–3w
Land acquisition 379w
Negligence 44w
Private finance initiative 43–4w, 197–8w, 1061–2w
Scotland 609–10w, 1001w, 1061–2w, 1516
Wales 10–1, 71w
Work experience 579w

NHS administration
829–30

NHS and private practice
190w
Mental hospitals 523–4w

NHS charges
Road accidents 224w
Scotland 998–1000w

NHS complaints
522w, (12.12.95) 849–900

NHS finance
34–6w, 517w, 680w
Huntingdon 125
Regional health authorities 192w
Scotland 1515–6
Wales 1160–1w

NHS internal market
802w
General practitioners 193w, 1146w

NHS Management Executive
426w

NHS Pensioners' Trust
41w

NHS pensions
Myalgic encephalomyelitis 677–8w

NHS reform
Private sector 42w

NHS trusts
35w, 41w
Administrative costs 568–70w, 1529
Advertising 1205–6w
Capital 1151w
Contracts for services 40w, 189w
Directors 39w
Executives 223w
Finance 188–9w, 192w
Income 1002w
Loans 609w
Management 1143–4w
Northern Ireland 544w
Public sector borrowing 807w
Scotland 301w, 362–5w, 1001–2w
Wales 275–6w, 568–70w, 780w, 783w
Warwickshire 189w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1358
Questions
Labour Party 353
Water supply, South West region 1335–6

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 518–9
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 864
Questions
Educational standards, Pupil-teacher ratios 977
Fishing catches 369w
Fishing quotas, White fish 233w
Gas supply industry, Regulatory system 640w
Hospital catering 196w
Manufacturing industries, Small businesses 366
Ministry of Defence, Performance standards 1112w
Non-teaching staff 562w, 1017w
Police powers, Offensive weapons 1009–10w
Prince's Trust 671w, 702w
Prince's Trust, Crime prevention 951–2w
Public libraries, Somerset 373w
Roads, Tree felling 272w
Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995 1124w
Waste disposal, Orders and regulations 1243–4w
Water companies, Profits 909w
Witnesses, Children 1203w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Questions
Government Office for the South West, Publications 181–2w

Nigeria
31–2w, 691–2
Arms trade 596w
Human rights 135–6
Overseas aid 29w
Police 29w
Police training 29–30w, 1071–2w
Political refugees 446w, 472w, 951w
Sanctions 597–8w
Shell 1057w

Night clubs
Crimes of violence 969w
Security 606w

Nitrates
Cancer hazards 194–5w
Lettuces 233w

Noise Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1020

Noise control
British Rail 186w
Council tenants 1339
Railway transport 1039w

Noise Insulation (Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems) Regulations 1996)
Questions
1039w

Non-departmental public bodies
746w
Northern Ireland Office 895–8w
Stirling 645–6w
Wales 8

Non-domestic rates
Buckinghamshire County Council 352–3w
Caravan sites (12.12.95) 901–6
Moorings (12.12.95) 901–6

Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts) (Amendment No 3) Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(18.12.95) 1271

Non-Domestic Rating (Information) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1022

Non-teaching staff
562w, 1017w

Norfolk
Petroleum exploration 872w
Road works 1043–4w

Norris, Mr Steve, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Transport
Debates etc.
Burnley and Pendle Buses (13.12.95) 1075, 1078–82
Questions
A36, Speed limits 59w
A540 673w
Air traffic control 772w
Air transport, Baggage 558w, 560w
Billing, Dept of Transport 1039–40w
Buses, Motor vehicle registration 425w
Buses, Motor vehicle testing 425w
Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (Classification Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 1994 183–4w, 274–5w
Cellular phones, Dept of Transport 321–2w
Computer privacy, Dept of Transport 558–9w
Concessionary fares, Elderly 840–1w
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 841w
Consultants, Dept of Transport 842w
Crossrail 672w
Cycleways 59w
Cycleways, Sheffield 59w
Cycling, Road accidents 60w
Drinking and driving, Blood alcohol levels 1040w
Drinking and driving, Road accidents 273w
Environmental Pollution Royal Commission, Transport policy 262–7w
Exhaust emission controls 63–4w
Exhaust emissions, Telephone services 59w
Fishing vessels 559w
Fishing vessels, Shipping registration 753–4w
Fraud, Dept of Transport 754w
Government car service, Fees and charges 1185–6w
Government contracts, Dept of Transport 1039w
Heathrow Airport, Air traffic 1184w
Heathrow Airport, Environmental impact assessment 1183w
Heathrow Airport, Passengers 1184w

Norris, Mr Steve—continued
- Lead free petrol 424–5w
- Lockerbie, Bombings 57w
- London Regional Transport, Electronic equipment 558w
- Lorries, Motor vehicle registration 321w
- M4, Road works 272–3w
- Metrolink, EC grants and loans 1183–4w
- Metrolink Salford, Eccles 188w
- Motor vehicle registration, Salisbury 840w
- Motor vehicle registration, Sheffield 560w
- Motor vehicle testing 841w
- Motor vehicle testing, Deregulation initiative 557w
- North West Regional Railways, Railway stations 322w
- Official cars, Dept of Transport 674w, 1183–4w
- Official hospitality, Dept of Transport 559w
- Oil pollution control, Coastal areas 269–70w
- Opinion polls, Dept of Transport 753w
- Peakes Parkway Road Scheme 270w
- Pedestrian areas, Personal injury 60w
- Ports, Waste disposal 269–70w
- Public service vehicles, Mobility of disabled 672w
- Rapid transit systems, Salford 1041w
- Rescue services, Helicopters 839–40w
- River Thames, Tunnels 424w
- Road accidents, Children 270–2w
- Road accidents, Lorries 60w
- Road accidents, Pedestrians 273–4w
- Road accidents, Summertime 1186w
- Road safety 672–3w
- Road traffic 61w
- Road traffic control, Local authority powers 557–8w
- Road traffic offences 424w
- Roll-on roll-off ships, Shipping accidents 63–5w
- Roundabouts, Northolt 58w
- School crossing patrols 559w
- Sheffield 61–4w
- Shipping registration, Spain 757w
- South Yorkshire Supertram 57–8w
- Street lighting, Repairs and maintenance 425w
- Trams, Leeds 188w
- Transport policy 841–2w
- Transport Research Laboratory 274w
- Travel concessions, EC countries 841w

North Downs
- Areas of outstanding natural beauty 1332
- Land use 1332

North East Lincolnshire
- Local government finance 1094–5w

North East region
- Squirrels 584–5w

North East Wales Training and Enterprise Council
- Finance 145w

North Korea
- 839w

North Lanarkshire Council Appointments Inquiry
- 409w

North Sea
- Dredging 412w
- Natural gas 352

North Wales
- Child abuse 551–4w, 993w
- Petroleum exploration 872w

North West Regional Railways
- 274w
- Privatisation 188w
- Railway stations 322w

North Yorkshire
- Educational finance 983
- European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund 55w

North Yorkshire County Council
- Debts 9w

Northern Ireland
- 101–2w
- Acute beds 1077–8w
- Arable area payments scheme 1168–9w
- Armed forces deployment 477w
- Availability for work 317–8w
- Baton rounds 903w
- Campbell Soups 475–6
- Carers 110w
- Child benefit 1078w
- Child minding 901w
- Civil servants 797w
- Civil service pensions 1076–7w
- Civil service recruitment 905–6w
- Common land 108–9w
- Conductive education 801w
- County courts (06.12.95) 462
- Crimes of violence 318w, 799–800w
- Custody 387w
- Defective housing 901–2w
- Devolution 903w
- Drownings 797w
- EC grants and loans 112–3w, 386w
- Education (12.12.95) 906
- Electoral register 900w
- Emergency powers 801w
- Employment 316w, 481–2
- Employment opportunities 311–2w
- European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund 107–8w
- European Regional Development Fund 109–10w
- European Social Fund 99–102w
- Exclusion orders 949w
- Family planning 541–2w
- Farm incomes 316w
- Firearms 1075w
- Foreign aid 544w
- Foreign investment in UK 313–5w, 386w, 482–3, 1169w
- Further education colleges 101w, 103–6w
- Further education teachers 103–8w
- Gaelic language 315–6w
- Government assistance to industry 1077w
- Graduates 905–6w
- Health service staff 901–2w
- Hill farming 1084
- Hotel and catering industry 107w
- Housing 1074w
- Housing amenities 899w
- Housing and handicapped 1073w
- Housing benefits 1078w
- Housing policy 1079w
- Industrial development 310–1w
- Jobseeker's allowance 655w
- Land drainage 318–9w
- Maintenance 1077–8w
- Monuments 113w
- National vocational qualifications 107–8w
- Negative equity 1169w
- NHS trusts 544w
- Nurses' training 165–6w
- Orders and regulations 799w, 900w
- Playing fields 101–2w
- Police 387w
- Prisoners' transfers 1202w
- Public expenditure 538–40w, 898w
- Public sector housing 386w
- Religious buildings 541w
- Road accidents 107–8w
- Road safety 109–10w, 540w
- Road safety education 99w
- Road traffic 652w, (20.12.95) 1476–7
- Road works (06.12.95) 462
- Roads 1079w
- Rugby 545w
- School meals 98–100w
- School milk 899w
- School population 899w
- Schools 652–6w
- Set-aside schemes 1168–9w
- Special education 801–2w
- Student grants 315w
- Student numbers 166w
- Teachers 904w
- Terrorism 166w, (20.12.95) 1550
- Tourism 482–3
- Travel concessions 1074w
- Trust ports 387w
- UK contributions to EC budget 111–2w

Northern Ireland—continued
- Universities 109–11w
- Water treatment 483–4
- Weapons 384w

Northern Ireland Central Services Agency
- 798w
- Contracts for services 797–8w

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints
- 656w

Northern Ireland Crown Solicitor's Office
- 656w

Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards
- Educational administration 1167–8w

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill 1995/96
- *Debates etc.*
- 1R (20.12.95) 1550

Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency
- 545w

Northern Ireland government
- 18w, 384–5w, 476–80, 484–5

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- 317w

Northern Ireland Office
- Billing 800w
- Cellular phones 546w
- Consultants 542w
- Departmental correspondence 113–4w
- Members' correspondence 907w
- Ministers' domestic visits 545w
- Ministers' private offices 905w
- Ministers' visits abroad 545w
- Non-departmental public bodies 895–8w
- Official hospitality 905w
- Operating costs 1074w
- Orders and regulations 386w, 542–3w, 545w
- Private finance initiative 320w, 386–7w, 906w
- Small businesses 907w, 1075w

Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
- 656w

Northern Ireland Police Authority
- see Police Authority for Northern Ireland

Northolt
- Roundabouts 58w

Nottinghamshire
- Educational finance 694w

Nuclear Electric
- Finance 1264–5w
- Privatisation 1265w

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
- 1258w
- Dounreay 1259w

Nuclear materials
- Export controls 471w

Nuclear power
- Privatisation 360–1
- Ukraine 1175w

Nuclear power stations
- Dounreay 1259w
- Licensing 465w, 468w

Nuclear safety
- Dounreay 1259–60w

Nuclear weapons
- Defence procurement 1173w
- Export controls 471w
- International Court of Justice 250–1w, 336w

Numeracy
- Primary education 118w

Nursery schools
- School population 740–2w

Nurses
Manpower 946–8w
Private health services 190w

Nurses' homes
Queen Mary's University Hospital 939w

Nurses' training
Educational institutions 165–6w
Northern Ireland 165–6w
Scotland 812w

Nursing homes
382w
Scotland 70w, 1277w

Nutrition
School meals 98w

Objects in lieu of tax
Scotland 1290w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Questions
Birmingham relief road, Public inquiries 186–7w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 700–1
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 144
Questions
A1 673w
A1, Air pollution 184w, 186w
A1, Public inquiries 185–6w
Council for Education in World Citizenship, Overseas aid 692–3
Exhaust emissions, Research 511w
Highways Agency, Public inquiries 185w
Legal aid 1218–9
Local government reform 721w
Local government reform, Metropolitan districts 176–7w
Motorways, Public inquiries 673–4w
NHS pensions, Myalgic encephalomyelitis 677–8w
Public inquiries, Welbeck 7w
Public sector housing, Northern Ireland 386w

Obstetrics
Neath General Hospital 7

Occupational health
517w, 679–80w
Wales 573w

Occupational pensions
618–9w, 817–8
Teachers 536w
VAT 1047w

Oceanography
Belfast Lough 799w

Odour pollution
484

OECD
see Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OECD countries
Economic growth 1263–4w
Inflation 1265w

Offal
Cattle 1125–7w

Offences against children
British residents abroad 449–50w
Disclosure of information 159w

Offenders
Bail 209w

Offensive weapons
962–3w, (20.12.95) 1449–52
Children 1221–2w
Crime prevention 1527–8
Law reform 693–4
Police powers 1009–10w
School discipline 1221–2w
Scotland 1528

Offensive Weapons Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
IR (13.12.95) 1021

Office for Standards in Education
Finance 535w

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising
Car allowances 1182–3w
Finance 1182w
Official cars 1182–3w
Railway travel 1183w

Office of the National Lottery
1205–7, 1345–6, 1533–43
G-Tech 847w, 1115w
Official visits 1266w

Office of the President of Social Security Appeal Tribunals
see Social security appeal tribunals

Offices
European Commission 837–8w, 1047w

Official cars
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1093–4w
Dept for Education and Employment 971w
Dept of National Heritage 854w
Dept of the Environment 911–2w
Dept of Trade and Industry 1082w
Dept of Transport 674w, 1183–4w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1186–7w
Home Office 1008–9w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1204w
Lord President of the Council 1216w
Ministry of Defence 1171w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising 1182–3w
Prime Minister 1051w
Scottish Office 1061w
Treasury 1048w
Welsh Office 989w

Official engagements
148w, 325w, 566w, 568w, 750w, 1051w

Official hospitality
Dept for Education and Employment 1018w
Dept of Health 428w, 933w, 1144w
Dept of National Heritage 854w
Dept of Social Security 1120w
Dept of the Environment 1230w
Dept of Trade and Industry 636–7w
Dept of Transport 559w
Deputy Prime Minister 748w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 644–5w
Home Office 966–7w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 927w
Ministry of Defence 769w
Northern Ireland Office 905w
Prime Minister 567w, 644w
Scottish Office 815w
Treasury 634w
Welsh Office 777w

Official publications
European Commission 836w

Official receiver
Contracts for services 598w

Official report
Prices 252–3w

Official residences
British embassies 575–7w, 1188w

Official visits
Office of the National Lottery 1266w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Questions
Armed forces housing, House purchase 1336
BBC, Broadcasting finance 852w
Health services, Elderly 191w
Teachers, Recruitment 977–8

Oil pollution
Carmarthen bay 147w

Oil pollution control
Coastal areas 269–70w

Older workers
Employment discrimination (13.12.95) 1020

Omoyiola, Bayo
18–20w

One stop shop initiative
866w, 1084w
Yorkshire and Humberside 866–7w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 997, (18.12.95) 1274–5, 1277, 1303–5

Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1025
Questions
Salmon, Scotland 67w

Opencast mining
Coal mining 723w
Land pollution 1338
Planning permission 723w

Opening hours
Entertainment licensing 658w

Operation Charm
967–8w

Operation Christmas Cracker
136

Operation Whitewash
969–70w

Opinion polls
Attorney General 759–60w
Dept of National Heritage 855–8w
Dept of Social Security 786–93w
Dept of the Environment 916–22w
Dept of Trade and Industry 1090w
Dept of Transport 753w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 752–3w
Home Office 959–62w
Lord President of the Council 750w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 832–3w
Ministry of Defence 762–4w
Scottish Office 1281w
Treasury 1050w

***Oppenheim, Mr Phillip**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Chemical Weapons Bill, Rem stages (06.12.95) 416–9, 421–8, 430–3, 439–43
Questions
Arms exports, Human rights 1085w
Arms trade, Nigeria 596w
Bicycles, China 362–3
Bicycles, Imports 49–51w
Business names 1083w
Company liquidations 598–9w
Drug industry, Patents 366
EC internal trade 600w
EC internal trade, Pornography 599–600w
EC law 599w
Export credit guarantees 1255w
Export licensing, Iraq 1085–6w
Exports 776w, 1084w
Ferranti, Directors 333–4w
Ferranti, Pension funds 334w
Foreign investment in UK 598w, 1081w, 1253–4w, 1256w
Foreign investment in UK, Rural areas 354
Furs, Imports 776w
Greyhound racing, EC grants and loans 873w
Industrial investment 1081–2w
Insolvency, Company voluntary arrangements 291w
Insolvency Service, Contracts for services 597w
Investment 287w
Iron and steel industry, EC action 365–6
Legislation, Dept of Trade and Industry 161w
Manufactured exports 335–6w
Manufacturing industries 365

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip—continued
Manufacturing industries, Employment 289w
Manufacturing industries, Industrial investment 367
Manufacturing industries, Interest rates 364–5
Manufacturing industries, Small businesses 366
Manufacturing industries, Yorkshire and Humberside 365
Mines, Arms trade 331–2w
New businesses 1254w
Official receiver, Contracts for services 598w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Trade and Industry 161w
Post Office, Executives 162w
Post Office, Profits 777w
Post Office, Rural areas 354–5
Postal services, Advertising 774–5w
Protective clothing, Export licensing 775w
Rateable value, Yorkshire and Humberside 354
Regional aid, Lowestoft 1086w
Regional challenge, East Anglia 1087w
Regional challenge, Petroleum production 1087–8w
Rural areas, Investment 353
Rural areas, Unemployment 355
Rural Development Commission 353–4
Sanctions, Libyan Arab Republic 332w
Sanctions, Nigeria 597–8w

Opposition
Higher civil servants 842w

Opposition parties
Finance 28w

Oral contraceptives
223w, 1146–51w
Committee on Safety of Medicines 518w
Health hazards 528w

Oral questions
Welsh Office 28w

Orange juice
928w

Orders and regulations
Cost benefit analysis 679–80
Dept for Education and Employment 537w
Dept of Health 426w, 524–5w
Dept of National Heritage 854w
Dept of the Environment 13–4w
Dept of Trade and Industry 161w
Dept of Transport 187w
Deregulation initiative 487w
Food composition 928w
Health services 413w
Medicines Act 1968 809w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 580–1w, 1132w
Northern Ireland 799w, 900w
Northern Ireland Office 386w, 542–3w, 545w
Scotland 609w
Scottish Office 297w, 468w
Treasury 875–6w
Waste disposal 1243–4w
Welsh Office 413w, 549–50w

Organic farming
Poultry 830–1w

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Environmental policy 508w

Organised crime
Intelligence services 1174w

Organophosphorous pesticides
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1123w
Sheep dipping 229w

Origin marking
1083w

Orlit houses
Defective housing 901–2w

Ormskirk Bypass
(11.12.95) 809

Osteoporosis
38w

Out-patients
40w, 193w

Overdoses
Drugs 936w

Overseas aid
689–90, 693
Aral Sea 85w
Burma 1175–6w
Council for Education in World Citizenship 692–3
Developing countries 1069–71w
Family planning 662–4w
Montserrat 411w
Nigeria 29w
Police training 30–1w
Procurement 749w
St Helena 1176w
Southern Africa 688–9
Sri Lanka 470w
West Bank 1071w

Overseas investment
598w
Burma 636w
Church Commissioners 696

Overseas students
Child benefit 982
Fees and charges 982

Overseas trade
293–4w
Burma 456–7w, 463–4w
India 279w, 369–70

Owner occupied housing
Scotland 1346

Oxstalls
Public petitions (19.12.95) 1436

Packaging industry
1102–3w

Paediatrics
Intensive care 1212w

Page, Mr Richard, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Airlines 363–4
Alternative energy 465–6w
Beaufort Dyke, Radioactive waste disposal 45–6w
Billing, Interest charges 45–6w
British Airways, Aircraft engines 363
British Coal Corporation 292w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 1256–7w
British Coal Enterprise 49w, 1080w
Business, Advisory services 467w
Business link 290–2w
Ceramic industries, Stoke on Trent 1263w
Coal mine closures, Durham County 466w
Coal mining 280w
Dounreay 1258–9w
EC energy policy 466w
Electricity generation, Fuels 862w
Energy prices 862–3w
Local authorities, Alternative energy 590w
London Electricity, Government assistance to industry 466–7w
Managers, Training 289–90w
Manufacturing industries, Industrial production 279w
Mineworkers' pension scheme 1257–8w
Natural gas, Gas reserves 351–2
Natural gas, North Sea 352
New businesses 291–2w, 333w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 1258w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Dounreay 1259w
Nuclear power stations, Dounreay 1259w
Nuclear safety, Dounreay 1259–60w
One stop shop initiative 866w, 1084w
One stop shop initiative, Yorkshire and Humberside 866–7w
Petroleum exploration, Suffolk 872w
Petroleum exploration licences 1082w

Page, Mr Richard—continued
Petroleum exploration licences, Wales 773w
Radioactive wastes 1260w
Regional supply network 1083–4w
Small businesses 279w, 465w
Small businesses, Dept of Trade and Industry 1084w
Small businesses, Government assistance 279w
Small businesses, Government contracts 873w, 1083–4w
Small businesses, Standards specifications 49–50w
Textile industry, EC grants and loans 289w
Tobacco industry, Manpower 160w
Wind power 516w
Yorkshire Water 358–9

Paice, Mr James, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Questions
Access to work programme 1226w
Access to work programme, Finance 1031–2w
Access to work programme, Take-up of employment 1033w
Building industry, Further education 1216w
Educational standards 975w
Employment schemes 1021–2w
Employment schemes, Expenditure 1022–6w
Enterprise allowance scheme 1224w
Further education 1223w
Further education colleges 1018w
Further education colleges, Per capita costs 399–400w
Investors in people 308–9w
Languages education, Arabic language 692w
"Lifetime Learning Consultation Paper" 144w
Mathematics, Educational standards 971–2
Mathematics, Primary education 971–2
Mathematics education, Educational qualifications 692w
Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board, Unemployment 986
Prince's Trust 702w
Remploy 694–5w
Sheltered employment 560w
Sixth form colleges, VAT 970–1w
Small businesses, Dept for Education and Employment 978w, 1225–6w
Suffolk Training and Enterprise Council 1015w
Training 118w
Training, European Social Fund 739w
Training and enterprise councils, Efficiency scrutinies 735–6w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 307w, 693w
Training and enterprise councils, South London 736w
Training and enterprise councils, Suffolk 142–3w
Training for work 306–8w, 400w
Training for work, Age discrimination 561–2w
Unemployment benefits, Availability for work 305–6w
Vocational guidance 152–3w
Youth training 309–10w
Youth unemployment 986–8

Paignton Zoo
Badgers 532w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1351, 1371–3
Questions
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 112–3w
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Northern Ireland 107–8w

Paisley, Rev Ian—continued
European Regional Development Fund, Northern Ireland 109–10w
European Social Fund, Northern Ireland 99–102w
Hotel and catering industry, Further education colleges 107w
Royal Irish Regiment, Lisnaskea 163w
UK contributions to EC budget, Northern Ireland 111–2w

Palace of Westminster
Reprography 656–7w
Underground railways 330w

Paracetamol
37w, 802–3w
Drug abuse 936w

Parking
Members 1041w
Railway stations 1041w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Civil servants 167–8w

Parliamentary opening
Photography 657w

Parliamentary questions
Home Office 356w

Parole
Ethnic groups 23w
Prisoners 495w

Parry, Mr Robert
Questions
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company 1082–3w
North Korea 839w
Omoyiola, Bayo 18–20w
Visas, Korea 965w

Partnerships in Care
524w

Part-time education
Availability for work 655w
Pre-school education 1025–32w

Part-time employment
Further education teachers 105–8w
Teachers 1223w

Party conferences
Conservative Party 136

Passengers
Heathrow Airport 1184w
Manchester Airport 1184w
Railway accidents 268–9w

Passport Agency
see United Kingdom Passport Agency

Passports
659w
Fraud 732w

Patent Office
160–1w
Consultants 1262w
Contracts for services 865–6w, 1088–9w
Trade unions 865w

Patents
Drug industry 366

Patnick, Sir Irvine
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (06.12.95) 372
Public participation in planning (06.12.95) 328–31
Questions
Business names 1083w
Cycleways 59w
Cycleways, Sheffield 59w
Fulwood Hospital 935w
Greenbelt 510w
Hospital closures, Sheffield 1212w
Lead free petrol 424–5w
Local government finance, Metropolitan districts 8w
M1, Road works 186w
Middlewood Hospital 935w
Motor vehicle registration, Sheffield 560w

Patnick, Sir Irvine—continued
Motorways, Lighting 186w
Northern Ireland Crown Solicitor's Office 656w
Northern Ireland Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 656w
Origin marking 1083w
Planning permission 510w
Planning permission, Local government land 1333
Planning permission, Publicity 510w
Regional health authorities, NHS finance 192w
Road accidents, M1 459–62w
Road traffic control, Local authority powers 557–8w
Sheffield 61–4w
Sheffield City Council, Planning permission 509–10w
Street lighting, Repairs and maintenance 425w

Pawsey, Mr James
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 863–8
Questions
Church schools, Grant maintained schools 976
Common agricultural policy 1092
Electrical industry, Export promotion 361
M6, Lighting 1185w
NHS trusts, Warwickshire 189w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Civil servants 167–8w
Reading, Primary education 693w
Tree diseases 1526–7
Universities, Tuition fees 143–4w
Warwickshire Council Council, Local government finance 354w

Pay beds
40w

Paymaster-General
15–6w

Peace keeping operations
Medals 85w
Nagorno Karabakh 456w
Rwanda 718w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
Crime (08.12.95) 606, 617
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 854, 869, 873–6
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 690w
Business questions 497
City challenge, Annual reports 1094w
Housing starts, Kirklees 585–8w
Manufacturing industries, Yorkshire and Humberside 365
Textile industry, Yorkshire and Humberside 136–7
Unemployed, Social security benefits 628w

Peakes Parkway Road Scheme
270w

Pedestrian areas
Personal injury 60w

Pedestrian crossings
Death 74w
Wales 74w

Pedestrians
Road accidents 273–4w

Pendle Borough Council
(13.12.95) 1071–82

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
Football 1213–4
Playing fields, Northern Ireland 101–2w
Sports facilities, Government grants 373w

Pennines
Environment protection 1095w

Pension appeal tribunals
Administrative delays 794–5w

Pension funds
Corporation tax 1045w
Ferranti 334w

Pensioners
Central heating 583w
Concessionary fares 841w
Concessionary television licences 848w
Income support 505w

Pensions
818
Chile 824
Consumer expenditure 564–6w
Divorce 880w
Married women 151–2w
Police 212–3w
VAT 1046–7w
Women 621w

Pensions Act 1995
Questions
374–5w

Pensions appeal tribunals
Wales 1011–3w

Performance related pay
Family health services authorities 525w
Lewis, Derek 731–2w

Perinatal mortality
128–9

Personal equity plans
640–1w

Personal injury
Pedestrian areas 60w

Personal injury compensation
Social security benefits 377–8w

Personal pensions
90–4w, 619–20w, 823–4
Marketing 635w
National insurance fund 249–50w
State earnings related pension scheme 92w
Tax allowances 1049–50w

Personal records
Industrial tribunals 871w

Personal tax allowances
Married people 260w

Peru
Human rights 1054w

Pest control
Badgers 687–8w
Frogs 582–3w

Pesticide residues
Food contamination 1129w
Milk 1134w

Pesticides
689–90w, 830w
Cattle 1129–31w
Water supply 1100–1w

Petroleum exploration
Norfolk 872w
North Wales 872w
Suffolk 872w

Petroleum exploration licences
1082w
Wales 773w

Petroleum production
Regional challenge 1087–8w
Tax yields 1050–2w

Pharmacists
126–7
Billing 126, 578w
Prescriptions 127

Photography
Parliamentary opening 657w

Physiotherapists
Royal Charters 197w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Questions
European Convention on Human Rights 645w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
- *Debates etc.*
- A5209, Public petitions (11.12.95) 809
- *Questions*
- Home care services 192w
- Lancashire, Educational finance 983
- Office of the National Lottery 1345–6
- Planning permission 1096w

PIEDA
- 172w

Piers
- 848w
- National Heritage Memorial Fund 848w

Pigeons
- Greater London 403w

Pike, Mr Peter L
- *Debates etc.*
- Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 104–5
- Burnley and Pendle Buses (13.12.95) 1075–7
- Immigration applications, Points of order (05.12.95) 138
- Railway travel (18.12.95) 1246
- *Questions*
- British Airways, Lancashire 359
- Deregulation initiative, Employment protection 486w
- National Lottery 847w
- Office of the National Lottery 1540
- Overseas aid 689–90
- School milk 1086

Planning appeals
- Planning permission 1333

Planning inquiries
- 351–2w

Planning Inspectorate
- Administrative delays 1333–4
- Performance standards 351–2w

Planning permission
- 510w, 1096w
- Administrative delays 6w
- Gwernymynydd 990w
- Local government land 1333
- Opencast mining 723w
- Planning appeals 1333
- Publicity 510w
- Rural areas 5–6w
- Sheffield City Council 509–10w

Play
- Children 849w

Playing fields
- Camden Borough Council 1208–9
- Northern Ireland 101–2w
- Scotland 299w

Poisoning
- Domestic gas appliances 289w

Police
- Charities 729w
- Crown Prosecution Service 17
- Divers 206w
- Expenditure 212w
- Manpower 202–4w, 956–7w
- Nigeria 29w
- Northern Ireland 387w
- Pensions 212–3w
- Political activities 360w, 366w
- Recruitment 204w, 213w, 359–60w, 966w
- Scotland 366w

Police authorities
- Government grants 1192–8w
- Standard spending assessments 1240–4w

Police Authority for Northern Ireland
- 487

Police civilians
- 602w, 958w
- Manpower 956–7w

Police custody
- Death 243w
- Drug abuse 243w
- Health 243w

Police grant
- 1192–6w

Police powers
- Offensive weapons 1009–10w

Police surgeons
- 243w

Police training
- Guatemala 339w
- Nigeria 29–30w, 1071–2w
- Overseas aid 30–1w

Police vehicles
- Bull bars 602–3w

"Policy Appraisal and Health"
- 1140–1w

Political activities
- Local authorities 915w
- Police 360w, 366w

Political broadcasting
- 685–6

Political parties
- Local authorities 388–9w

Political refugees
- 20–3w, 446–7w, 493–4w, 601w, (11.12.95) 699–808, 729–31w, 952–5w, 1199w
- Algeria 159w
- Council housing 12w
- Departmental publications 954w
- Disability living allowance 1119–20w
- Empty housing 12–3w
- Germany 952w
- Handicapped 95–6w
- Homelessness 12w
- Immigrant detainees 600–1w
- Immigration appeals 244–5w
- Immigration applications 20w, 356w, 493w
- Immigration controls 215–6w, 1011w
- Nigeria 446w, 472w, 951w
- Pregnant women 96w
- Social security benefits 95–7w, 620w, 825, 1119w
- Social security benefits rules 151w, 501–2w
- Temporary accommodation 13w, 236w

Pollution
- EC action (18.12.95) 1271

Pollution control
- Dioxins 643w

Pollution Inspectorate
- see HM Inspectorate of Pollution

Pollution monitoring
- Dioxins 1131w

Pope, Mr Greg
- *Questions*
- Millennium Fund 1216
- Osteoporosis 38w
- Student loans 692w

Population
- 938w
- Greater London 383w
- South West region 937–8w
- Wales 390–1w

Population studies
- South West region 925w

Pornography
- EC internal trade 599–600w

Porter, Mr David
- *Questions*
- Petroleum exploration, Suffolk 872w
- Regional aid, Lowestoft 1086w
- Regional challenge 872w
- Regional challenge, East Anglia 1087w
- Regional challenge, Petroleum production 1087–8w

Portillo, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for Defence
- *Debates etc.*
- Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ministerial statements (12.12.95) 835–46

Portillo, Rt Hon Michael—continued
- *Questions*
- Ministry of Defence, Ministerial policy advisors 772w
- Royal Naval College 1105w

Portman Group
- 1145w

Ports
- Waste disposal 269–70w

Post Office
- 877w
- Executives 162w
- Profits 777w
- Rural areas 354–5

Postal services
- Advertising 774–5w
- Armed forces 477w

Postgraduate education
- Research councils 1261–2w

Postgraduate students
- 973w

Potato Marketing Scheme
- 531–2w

Poultry
- Organic farming 830–1w

Powell, Mr Ray
- *Debates etc.*
- Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 210–2
- *Questions*
- Palace of Westminster, Underground railways 330w
- Public expenditure, Wales 2–3

Pregnant women
- Political refugees 96w

Prentice, Mrs Bridget
- *Debates etc.*
- Crime (08.12.95) 655–8, 664, 674
- *Questions*
- Abortion 378–9w
- Animal experiments 965w
- Animal experiments, Inspections 965–6w
- Fire services, Greater London 1197–8w
- Football 1212
- Housing starts, Rented housing 1341
- Northern Ireland government 384–5w
- Oral contraceptives 223w
- Sterilisation 382w
- Sterilisation, Scotland 366–8w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
- *Debates etc.*
- Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 101–4
- Burnley and Pendle Buses (13.12.95) 1071–5, 1080
- Crime (08.12.95) 647–52, 659, 673
- *Questions*
- Arms to Iraq Inquiry 46w
- Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 51w, 1094
- Business questions 499–500, 1109
- Cable television 568w
- Cemfuel 177–8w
- Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 54w
- Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 296–7w
- Cold weather payments 784–5w
- Councillors' interests 7w
- Crown jewels 853w
- Dept of Transport, Royal visits 63–4w
- Deregulation initiative, Orders and regulations 487w
- Digital television 567w
- Hip replacements 189–90w, 379w
- Homeworking, Lancashire 507w
- Inheritance tax, Tax allowances 505w
- Iran, Debts 573–4w
- Land ownership and tenure, Scotland 610w
- Lewis, Derek, Performance related pay 731–2w
- Mentally disturbed offenders, Prisoners' rights 1132–3w
- North West Regional Railways 274w

Prentice, Mr Gordon—continued
North West Regional Railways, Privatisation 188w
North West Regional Railways, Railway stations 322w
Police, Divers 206w
Police, Manpower 202–4w
Police, Recruitment 966w
Prison Service Agency, Public appointments 202w
Queen's flight 1w, 984w
Secondary liquid fuel 176w
Single regeneration budget 13w
Smoke Detectors Act 1991 350w
Telecommunications technology 282w
Temporary immigrants 730–1w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 166w
Transport of animals, Inspections 529–30w
Village halls 235w
Water distribution, Yorkshire and Humberside 1230w
Water supply 1231w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Pre-school education
974w, 978w
Denmark 1031–2w
Education vouchers 120–1w, 401w, 535w, 698–9w, 972–3, 974–5w, 1227–8w, (18.12.95) 1322
France 1031–2w
Handicapped children 978–9
Part-time education 1025–32w
School population 436–8w, 978w
Scotland 1277w
Teachers 973–4w
Wales 1161–2w

Prescott, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 147, 152–65, 234
Intervention during Ministerial statement (13.12.95) 992
Oral question time intervention (12.12.95) 833
Questions
Industrial disputes, France 833
Members' speeches, Disclosure of information 682–3

Prescription charges
37–8w
Administrative costs 780w
Income 190w
Wales 780w

Prescription drugs
Benzodiazepines 1208w

Prescriptions
Colostomy 224w
Fees and charges 221w
General practitioners 943w
Pharmacists 127

Pre-sentencing reports
188w

Press advertising
Dept for Education and Employment 1019w
Dept of Health 1133w
Dept of the Environment 1230w
Dept of Trade and Industry 859w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 835w
Home Office 1009–10w
Ministry of Defence 983w
Prime Minister 842w
Scottish Office 1281–3w
Treasury 1247w

Press releases
Welsh Office 415w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 55, 105–8
Questions
Excise duties, Fuels 256w

Primary education
Cost per pupil 745w
Literacy 118w

Primary education—continued
Mathematics 971–2
Numeracy 118w
Reading 693w
Standard spending assessments 560–1w

Primary health care
1143w

Prime Minister
487w
Consultants 149w
Government contracts 1052w
Members' correspondence 843w
Ministers' visits abroad 1051–2w
Official cars 1051w
Official hospitality 567w, 644w
Operating costs 1051–2w
Press advertising 842w
Small businesses 1052w, 1175w

Prince's Trust
671w, 702w
Crime prevention 951–2w

Princess of Wales
472w

Prison accommodation
24–5w

Prison education services
1200–1w

Prison overcrowding
25w

Prison population
23–4w, 499w
Dyslexia 998w
Ethnic groups 450–2w
Prison staff 25–6w
Prisoners on remand 18w
Scotland 296w

Prison sentences
Fine defaulters 227–8w, 495w

Prison Service Agency
731–2w
Public appointments 202w, 500w

Prison Service Security Review
1007w

Prison staff
Prison population 25–6w

Prison visitors
600w

Prison visits
Drug crimes 496w, 616–7w
Scotland 616–7w

Prisoners
Ethnic groups 211w
Naviede, Mohammed 499–500w
Parole 495w
Republic of Ireland 495w
Scotland 998w
Shopping 1199–200w
Suicide 448–9w

Prisoners Earnings Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1023

Prisoners on remand
207–10w, 497–9w, 730w
Employment 447–8w
Ethnic groups 209–10w, 447w
Housing 447w
Prison population 18w
Suicide 448–9w

Prisoners' rights
Mentally disturbed offenders 1132–3w

Prisoners' transfers
Northern Ireland 1202w
Republic of Ireland 1202w
Stack, Louise 831

Prisons
Drug crimes 495–6w
Security 1007w

Privacy
Medical records 523w

Private education
745w
Scotland 821w
Wales 779w, 781w

Private finance initiative
147–8w, 726–7w, 733–4w, 1251w
Attorney General 219w, 759w
BBC 852–3w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 253–4w, 748w, 1214–5w
Dept for Education and Employment 309w, 401w, 972–3w
Dept of Health 222w, 382w, 803–4w
Dept of National Heritage 371–2w
Dept of Social Security 246w, 377w, 1274w
Dept of the Environment 237w, 352w, 915–6w
Dept of Trade and Industry 287–8w, 331w, 774w
Dept of Transport 275w, 321w, 754w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 337w, 752w
Home Office 244w, 354–5w, 955w
Hospitals 427w
Identity cards 822
Lord Chancellor's Dept 228w, 727–8w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 233w, 369w, 831w
Ministry of Defence 341w, 760–1w, 1174w
NHS 43–4w, 197–8w, 1061–2w
Northern Ireland Office 320w, 386–7w, 906w
Scottish Office 300–1w, 367w
Treasury 255–6w, 328–9w, 734w, 877w
Wales 74w, 994–5w
Welsh Office 278w, 392w, 780–1w

Private Finance Panel
1251w

Private health services
Nurses 190w

Private investment
Housing finance 237w

Private sector
Courts 728w
NHS reform 42w
Sick leave 250w
Treasury 1046w

Privatisation
Armed forces housing 982w
British Coal Corporation 1256–7w
British Rail 555–6w, 559w
Broadcasting engineering 416–7w, 847w, 853w
Building Research Establishment 513–4w
Devonport Dockyard 473w
Government shareholding 1048–9w
Great Western Railway 133–4, 457w, 559w, 841w
HMSO 453–5w, 491–2w, 683–4, 1091–3w, (18.12.95) 1274–322
Housing Corporation 180–1w
Irish Steel 1344
North West Regional Railways 188w
Nuclear Electric 1265w
Nuclear power 360–1
Railway transport 276w, 458w, 1044w, 1096, 1343
Railway travel 458w, 461w, 830, 1177w
Rosyth Dockyard 473w
Wales 6
West Coast railway line 1043w

Probate Service
661w

Probation (Amendment) Rules 1994
Questions
729w

Probation (Amendment) Rules 1995
Questions
493–5

Probation and aftercare
Supervision orders 209–10w

Probation officers
1009w

Probation officers—continued
- Social workers' training 602w

Procurator Fiscal Service
- 842w, 999–1001w

Procurement
- Overseas aid 749w

Prodigy prescribing system
- 943–4w, 1152–3w

Production quotas
- Milk 531w, 1085–6

Progestogens
- 1151–2w

Property development
- Royal Naval College 1172w
- Stormont 1166–7w

Property transfer
- Armed forces housing 478–9w
- Council housing 1244–5w
- New towns 823w
- New towns development corporations 1064–5w
- Tyne and Wear Development Corporation 642–3w

Prosecutions
- 85w
- Water companies 912–4w
- Water pollution 912–4w

Protective clothing
- Export licensing 775w

Psychiatric nurses
- Manpower 1139w

Psychiatry
- Mental health services 1210–1w

Public access
- Electoral register 900w

Public appointments
- Advisory Committee on Pesticides 1153w
- Commission for Racial Equality 963–4w
- Committee on Safety of Medicines 809w
- Forestry Commission 407–8w
- Health and Safety Executive 176w
- Industrial tribunals 870–1w
- National Disability Council 619w
- National parks authorities 1101–2w
- Prison Service Agency 202w, 500w
- St Helena 1176w
- South Staffordshire Health Authority 681w
- Student Loans Company 1015–6w
- Valuation tribunals 642w
- Welsh Office 992w

Public buildings
- Smoking 277w

Public expenditure
- Cornwall 135
- Dept of the Environment 406–8w
- Devon 135
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office 84w
- Ministerial statements (13.12.95) 1002–17
- Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1166w
- Northern Ireland 538–40w, 898w
- Per capita costs 898w
- Residential care 1047w
- Scotland 1058w
- Transport 1034–9w
- Wales 2–3, 414w

Public finance
- 329w

Public footpaths
- Access to countryside 1089–90
- Ramblers' Association 1090

Public houses
- Brewing industry 355

Public inquiries
- A1 185–6w
- Birmingham relief road 186–7w
- Highways Agency 185w
- Motorways 673–4w
- Welbeck 7w

Public Interest Disclosure Bill 1995/96
- *Debates etc.*
  - 1R (13.12.95) 1020–1

Public lending right
- 849–50w

Public libraries
- 850–2w
- Internet 281w
- Somerset 373w

Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964
- *Questions*
  - 850–2w

Public order policing
- Brightlingsea 361w
- Exhibitions 360–1w
- Export of live animals 361w
- Hunting 206w

Public participation in planning
- (06.12.95) 328–35

Public petitions
- A5209 (11.12.95) 809
- Education vouchers (18.12.95) 1322
- Homelessness (06.12.95) 462
- Oxstalls (19.12.95) 1436

Public relations
- Dept for Education and Employment 972w

Public sector borrowing
- NHS trusts 807w

Public sector borrowing requirement
- 503w, 874w

Public sector housing
- 588w, 908w
- Asbestos 1067–8w
- Housing starts 1336
- Inverclyde 647w
- Merseyside 908w
- Northern Ireland 3[illegible]6w
- Scotland 1067–8w
- Wales 991w, 995w, 1155–6w

Public service
- Hong Kong (18.12.95) 1250–3
- Tax allowances 155–6w

Public service pensions
- 15w

Public Service Select Committee
- (18.12.95) 1322

Public service vehicles
- Mobility of disabled 672w

Public transport
- Dept of Social Security 149w
- Home Office 201w
- Scottish Office 68w
- Treasury 1049w

Public utilities
- VAT 154w

Publications
- Armed forces officers 474–5w
- Government Office for the South West 181–2w

Publicity
- European Commission 875w
- European Parliament 875w
- Grant maintained schools 538w
- HMSO 489w
- Planning permission 510w
- Railway transport 60w

Pupil-teacher ratios
- 1018–9w, 1223w
- Educational standards 977

Purchase, Mr Ken
- *Questions*
  - Manufacturing industries 365
  - Social security benefits, Political refugees 620w
  - Water supply industry 1334–5

Quantock School
- 562–3w
- Armed forces education allowances 476–7w, 980–1w

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital
- 181w, 198–9w

Queen Mary's University Hospital
- Nurses' homes 939w

Queen's flight
- 1w, 984w

Quin, Ms Joyce
- *Debates etc.*
  - European communities (07.12.95) 580–5
- *Questions*
  - Fines, Law enforcement 355w
  - Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Public expenditure 84w
  - Glow worms 1097–8w
  - NHS trusts, Finance 188–9w
  - Nigeria, Human rights 135–6
  - Squirrels, North East region 584–5w

Quinton Committee
- see Metropolitan Police Committee

Racial attacks
- 206–7w
- Greater London 1008w

Racial discrimination
- 963–4w
- EC action 358w

Radiation hazards
- Australia 1172w
- Christmas Island 1172w

Radice, Mr Giles
- *Debates etc.*
  - Financial services (14.12.95) 1161–5
  - Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1228

Radio Gloucestershire
- (13.12.95) 947–53

Radioactive waste disposal
- Beaufort Dyke 45–6w
- Seas and oceans 14w

Radioactive wastes
- 1260w
- Dounreay 1288–9w
- Scotland 1287–8w

Radiocommunications Agency
- Electromagnetic interference 599w
- Manpower 599w
- Scope Marketing (Communications UK) 1088w

RAF Finningley
- Armed forces housing 985w
- Demolition 767–8w

RAF Spadeadam
- 594w

RAF Tain
- Aircraft noise 475w

Rafiq, Mohammed
- Immigration appeals 574w

Railtrack
- 839w
- Capital 1044w
- Members' facilities 1073w
- Scotland 303w

Railway accidents
- Passengers 268–9w

Railway Heritage Bill 1995/96
- *Debates etc.*
  - 1R (13.12.95) 1021

Railway network
- Channel tunnel (14.12.95) 1197–204
- South West region 674–5w

Railway stations
- North West Regional Railways 322w
- Parking 1041w

Railway timetables
- 264w

Railway track
- Fees and charges 271w

Railway transport
- Competition 559w
- Noise control 1039w

Railway transport—continued
Privatisation 276w, 458w, 1044w, 1096, 1343
Publicity 60w
Wales 276w

Railway travel
840w
Bicycles 187w
Ministerial statements (18.12.95) 1238–48
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising 1183w
Privatisation 458w, 461w, 830, 1177w

Ramblers' Association
Public footpaths 1090

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1553, 1570–2

Rapid transit systems
Salford 1041w

Rateable value
Scotland (06.12.95) 461
Water storage 1191w
Yorkshire and Humberside 354

Rates and rating
Appeals 641–2w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Questions
Pesticides 830w

Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (12.12.95) 901–6

Rating revaluations
642w
Administrative delays 642w
Costs 642w

Raynsford, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1056–60
Questions
Commission for the New Towns, Land acquisition 175w
Hart, David, Armed forces housing 164–5w
Hart, David, Armed forces married quarters 165w
Housing associations, Taxation 509w
Ministry of Defence, Empty housing 1332–3
Royal Naval College 1098–9
Royal Naval College, Property development 1172w

Reading
Educational standards 691w
Primary education 693w

Reception classes
School population 1025–32w

Recess motions
(20.12.95) 1449–87

Recruitment
Ethnic minorities 964w
Hospital doctors 802w
Police 204w, 213w, 359–60w, 966w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 541w
Teachers 977–8

Red Cross
see International Red Cross

Red Hot Television
374w

Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority
Accident and emergency departments 121

Redmond, Mr Martin
Questions
Armed forces officers, Civil service agencies 703–7w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Organophosphorous pesticides 1123w

Redmond, Mr Martin—continued
Cellular phones, Fraud 776w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Social Security 376w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 46–9w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 80w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 52–4w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Scottish Office 168–71w
Civil service manpower, Ministry of Defence 707–14w
Coal mining, Industrial accidents 722w
District health authorities 522w
Doncaster Healthcare NHS Trust, EC law 679–80w
Doncaster prison 732w
Educational population 697–8w
Geriatric patients, Hospital beds 1132w
Hospital patients, Expenditure 675w
Hospital waiting lists 522w
Low flying 474w
Magistrates, Doncaster 661–2w
NHS, Work experience 579w
NHS complaints 522w
Paracetamol 802–3w
Pesticide residues, Food contamination 1129w
Pesticides, Cattle 1129–31w
RAF Finningley, Demolition 767–8w
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness, Finance 489–90w

Redundancy
Armed forces 717–8w, 770w
Further education colleges 103–4w
Institute of Animal Health 1094
Ministry of Defence police 1112w
ScotRail 674w
Teachers 972w
Welsh Health Common Services Authority 572w

Redundancy pay
867w
Health service staff 189w, 681w, 1132w
Industrial arbitration 867–8w
National insurance fund 868w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders 774w

Redundant churches
858–9w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1398
European communities (07.12.95) 514, 523
Questions
Economic and monetary union 832

Refugees
Young people 938w

Reg(EEC)3254/91
235w

Reg(EEC)2079/92
54w

Regional aid
Expenditure 865w
Lowestoft 1086w
Scotland 1278–9w

Regional challenge
461–3w, 872w
East Anglia 1087w
Lowestoft 1088w
Petroleum production 1087–8w

Regional crime squads
361w

Regional electricity companies
Tax allowances 14w

Regional health authorities
NHS finance 192w

Regional planning and development
925w
West Country 181–2w

Regional selective assistance
865w

Regional selective assistance—continued
Bankruptcy 1089–91w
Rom Data 1089–91w
Scotland 294–6w, 648–52w
Trade competitiveness 680

Regional supply network
1083–4w

Regulatory system
Broadcasting 1210
Electricity supply industry 640w
Gas supply industry 640w
Serious Fraud Office 17–8

Reid, Dr John
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1029–37, 1063, 1065

Religion
Royal Ulster Constabulary 540–2w

Religious buildings
Northern Ireland 541w

Religious freedom
Saudi Arabia 79w

Religious sects
Islam 252w

Relocation of employees
Welsh Health Common Services Authority 572w

Remand in custody
730w

Remploy
694–5w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 400–3
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1010
Ratings (Caravans and Boats) Bill, 2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (12.12.95) 903–4
Questions
Business questions 1103
Electronics industry, Prices 282w
Russia, Visas 574–5w

Rented housing
1095–6w, 1235w
Housing starts 1341

Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 508

Rents
1238–40w
Armed forces housing 986–7w

Repatriation
Caribbean (19.12.95) 1437–48

Repossession orders
643w, 1232w

Reprography
254w
Palace of Westminster 656–7w

Republic of Ireland
208w
Family planning 196w
Iron and steel industry 364, (20.12.95) 1550
Prisoners 495w
Prisoners' transfers 1202w

Rescue services
Helicopters 839–40w

Research councils
Postgraduate education 1261–2w

Research facilities
Efficiency scrutinies 351

Research finance
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1206–8w
Breast cancer 517–8w
Universities 109–11w

Residential care
196w, 200w, 806w
Capital rules 669w
Coventry 929w
Disability living allowance 621w
Handicapped 523w
Income support 620–1w
Mentally handicapped 1141–2w
Mentally ill 131
Public expenditure 1047w
Wales 990w

Residential care of children
226w, 682w

Retail prices
Drugs 44w

Retail prices index
Electricity tariffs 1080–1w

Retail trade
Metrication 639–40w

Retex
289w

Retirement pensions
1269w
Age addition 670w

Revenue support grant
Buckinghamshire County Council 352–3w

Rhinitis
Industrial diseases 151w

***Richards, Mr Rod**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office*
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Wales 668w, 1160w
Assisted places scheme, Wales 72w, 781–3w
Autism, Children 75w
Breast cancer, Health services 1154w
Breast cancer, Wales 11, 77–8w, 991w, 1155w
Cancer, Wales 72w, 146–7w
CD-ROM, Wales 9
Child abuse, North Wales 551–4w
Chiropody, Clwyd 145w
Cost per pupil, Wales 783w
Free school meals, Wales 666w
Further education, Student numbers 71w
General practitioners, Wales 415w
GP fundholders, Wales 276–7w
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 76w
Grant maintained schools, Wales 12–3
Hard core unemployed, Wales 390w
Health, Wales 991w
Health authorities, Wales 278w
Health services, Orders and regulations 413w
Home care services, Wales 74w
Information services, European Communities 78w
Measles, Wales 993w
Ministers' domestic visits, Wales 780w
MMR vaccine, Wales 777w
MR vaccine 10–1
National Disability Council 1155w
NHS, Expenditure 71w
NHS, Wales 10–1
NHS finance, Wales 1160–1w
NHS trusts, Administrative costs 568–70w
NHS trusts, Wales 275–6w, 783w
North East Wales Training and Enterprise Council, Finance 145w
Obstetrics, Neath General Hospital 7
Occupational health, Wales 573w
Pre-school education, Wales 1161–2w
Private education, Wales 779w, 781w
School buildings, Wales 388w
Schools, Accidents 665w
Schools, Local government expenditure 73–4w
Schools, Wales 277–8w, 666w
Smoking, Public buildings 277w
Theatr Clwyd 989–90w
Unemployment, Wales 70w
Vaccination, Drug side effects 77w
Welsh language, Government grants 415–6w

***Richards, Mr Rod**—continued*
Youth unemployment, Wales 389w

Riddick, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 218–21, 226
European communities (07.12.95) 524, 526
Questions
Chronically sick, Carers 826
Huddersfield NHS Trust 130
Northern Ireland government 477
Yorkshire Water, Water supply 831
Youth unemployment 986–7

***Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 506–20, 525–7
Questions
Government Communications Headquarters, Conditions of employment 1189–90w

Right of abode
Hong Kong 211–2w, 967w

Rights of audience
Crown Prosecution Service 1190w

Ritalin
803w

River Lugg
1157w

River pollution
1234–5w

River Thames
Tunnels 424w

River Wye
1157w
Special areas of conservation 1157w

RNAS Yeovilton
Armed forces housing 719w

Road accidents
Casualties 225–6w
Children 107–8w, 270–2w
Costs 224–5w
Cycling 60w
Death 270–2w
Drinking and driving 273w
Lorries 60w
M1 459–62w
NHS charges 224w
Northern Ireland 107–8w
Pedestrians 273–4w
Summertime 1186w

Road construction
757w
Alltami bypass 145–6w
Belfast 385w
Buckley-Clwyd relief road 146w
Cardiff Airport 989w
Clwyd 389w
Scotland 68w

Road finance
1034–9w, 1043w

Road safety
672–3w
Codes of practice 109–10w
M25 758w
Northern Ireland 109–10w, 540w

Road safety education
Northern Ireland 99w

Road signs
Tourism 458w

Road tolls
Electronic surveillance 185w
Severn bridge 182–3w

Road traffic
61w
A41 1177–8w
Northern Ireland 652w, (20.12.95) 1476–7

Road Traffic Act 1988
Questions
224w

Road traffic control
Local authority powers 557–8w

Road traffic offences
424w

Road works
1178–82w, 1184–5w
A75 813w
Belfast 99w
Forfar bypass 1277w
Kincardine bridge 1286w
M1 186w, 758w
M4 272–3w
Norfolk 1043–4w
Northern Ireland (06.12.95) 462
Telephone services 268w

Roads
Bangor Co Down 905w
Carrickfergus 1167w
Northern Ireland 1079w
Scotland 1058–60w
Suffolk 1043–4w
Tree felling 272w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Questions
Railway travel, Privatisation 458w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1010
Questions
Agriculture, Wales 13
Child abuse, North Wales 551–4w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 4
NHS trusts, Administrative costs 568–70w
Private finance initiative, Wales 74w
Welsh language, Government grants 415–6w
Welsh Office, Government achievements 1153–4w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1416, 1421–2, 1429–31
Questions
Common fisheries policy, Scotland 1519–20
Dental services, Scotland 1002–4w
Hospitals, Stonehaven 1516
Housing benefits 1120w
Housing benefits, Expenditure 1266–7w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits backdating 884–5w
NHS, Advertising 1001w
NHS charges, Scotland 998–1000w
NHS trusts, Income 1002w
NHS trusts, Scotland 1001w
ScotRail 559w
ScotRail, Redundancy 674w
Scottish Office, Administrative costs 1003w
Scottish Office, Civil service manpower 617w
Tipping of waste, Taxation 617w
Water authorities, Scotland 814w

***Robertson, Mr Raymond S**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office*
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Scotland 1513
Arable area payments scheme, Scotland 1287w
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 646w, 817–21w
Beef, Food standards 1513–4
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 1278w, 1513
Class sizes, Scotland 823w
Conductive education, Scotland 821w
Deer, Scotland 651w
Drift nets, Scotland 1528–9
Educational finance, Scotland 822–3w
Fisheries, Scotland 1287w
Food exports, Scotland 1289w

Robertson, Mr Raymond S—continued
Further education colleges, Scotland 612w
Homelessness, Scotland 1277–8w
Irvine Housing Association, Finance 823w
Negative equity, Scotland 1287w
Opinion polls, Scottish Office 1281w
PIEDA 172w
Playing fields, Scotland 299w
Pre-school education, Scotland 1277w
Private education, Scotland 821w
Public sector housing, Asbestos 1067–8w
Public sector housing, Inverclyde 647w
Salmon, Scotland 67w
School milk, Food subsidies 1514
Schools, Scotland 1276w
Scottish Office, Departmental forms 1280–1w
Sheep, Scotland 814–5w
Ships, Research 470w
Special education, Scotland 67w
Student grants, Scotland 647–8w
Student loans, Scotland 1514–5

Robinson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 519, 562–5
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1279, 1283, 1286–8
Railway Heritage Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1021
Questions
Government assistance to industry, South West region 280w
Nigeria 692

Robinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Housing and handicapped, Northern Ireland 1073w
Stormont, Building repairs 656w

Roche, Mrs Barbara
Questions
Billing, Attorney General 1005w
Billing, Dept for Education and Employment 1033w
Billing, Dept of the Environment 1098w
Billing, Dept of Transport 1039–40w
Billing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1056w
Billing, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1014w
Billing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1165–6w
Billing, Ministry of Defence 1113–4w
Billing, Scottish Office 1063w
Business, Advisory services 467w
Business link 290–2w
Company liquidations 598–9w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Civil service redundancies 336w, 1263w
Export promotion 357
Exports 1084w
Government contracts, Dept for Education and Employment 1033w
Government contracts, Dept of Social Security 1121w
Government contracts, Dept of Trade and Industry 1263w
Government contracts, Dept of Transport 1039w
Government contracts, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1055–6w
Government contracts, Home Office 1006w
Government contracts, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1165w
Government contracts, Ministry of Defence 1106–7w
Government contracts, Prime Minister 1052w
Government contracts, Scottish Office 1063w
Government contracts, Welsh Office 1158w
Insolvency, Company voluntary arrangements 291w
Managers, Training 289–90w
New businesses 291–2w
Official receiver, Contracts for services 598w
One stop shop initiative 1084w

Roche, Mrs Barbara—continued
Private sector, Treasury 1046w
Regional supply network 1083–4w
Self-assessment of tax 410w
Small businesses 465w, 879w, 883w
Small businesses, Dept for Education and Employment 978w, 1225–6w
Small businesses, Dept of Health 946w, 1142–3w
Small businesses, Dept of Social Security 1120–1w
Small businesses, Dept of Trade and Industry 1084w
Small businesses, Deputy Prime Minister 1091w
Small businesses, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1054–5w, 1187w
Small businesses, Government contracts 256w, 873w, 1083–4w
Small businesses, Home Office 1201–2w
Small businesses, Lord Chancellor's Dept 1013–4w
Small businesses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1164–5w
Small businesses, Ministry of Defence 1106w, 1173w
Small businesses, Northern Ireland Office 907w, 1075w
Small businesses, Prime Minister 1052w, 1175w
Small businesses, Scottish Office 1062–3w
Small businesses, Standards specifications 49–50w
Small businesses, Tax assessment 156–7w
Small businesses, Treasury 1045–6w, 1251w
Small businesses, Welsh Office 996w, 1158w
VAT threshold 1047w

Rodents
Sewers 1213w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1112–9, 1155
Questions
GP fundholders 123–4

Roll-on roll-off ships
Defence procurement 4w
Shipping accidents 63–5w

Rom Data
Dept of Trade inquiries 332–3w
Regional selective assistance 1089–91w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 706
Criminal injuries compensation scheme (06.12.95) 456, 459–60
Good Hope Hospital (06.12.95) 467–9
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 995
Holloway Prison (20.12.95) 1482–5
Questions
Offences against children, Disclosure of information 159w
Road accidents, Lorries 60w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Bradford Royal Infirmary, Accident and emergency departments 132–3
Electricity supply industry 367

Ross, Finbar
Extradition 1074w

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1386–7
Questions
Employment, Northern Ireland 316w
Employment opportunities, Northern Ireland 311–2w
Farm incomes, Northern Ireland 316w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 313–5w
Hill farming, Northern Ireland 1084

Ross, Mr William—continued
Industrial development, Northern Ireland 310–1w

Rosyth Dockyard
346w
Privatisation 473w

Rough sleepers initiative
6–7w, 1095w

Roundabouts
Northolt 58w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 30, 42–3
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1494
Questions
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, North Downs 1332
Business questions 496
European Social Fund, Voluntary organisations 1225w
Kent County Council, Educational finance 1097–8
Serious Fraud Office, Convictions 16

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1011
Questions
Community action, Wales 989w
Incapacity benefit, Merthyr Tydfil 794w
Invalidity benefits, Merthyr Tydfil 621w, 670w
Job centres, Family credit 562w
Taxpayers, Wales 635w
Unemployment, Wales 8
Welsh Affairs Select Committee 28w
Welsh Grand Committee 27w
Welsh Office, Accountability 72–3w
Welsh Office, Ministerial statements 27w
Welsh Office, Oral questions 28w

Royal Ballet School
Assisted places scheme 981

Royal Charters
Physiotherapists 197w

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution
see Environmental Pollution Royal Commission

Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Scottish health boards 1516

Royal family
Civil servants 797w

Royal Fine Art Commission
371w

Royal Irish Regiment
Army strength 346w, 770–1w
Lisnaskea 163w

Royal Marsden Hospital
Breast cancer 128

Royal Naval College
1098–9, 1105w
Property development 1172w

Royal Naval College Advisory Group
1105w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
485–7
Recruitment 541w
Religion 540–2w

Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast
Capital investment 480–1

Royal visits
Dept of Transport 63–4w

Royal yacht
(20.12.95) 1452–60

Ruddock, Ms Joan
Questions
Alport Dale 370–1w
Building Research Establishment, Privatisation 513–4w

Ruddock, Ms Joan—continued
Carbon dioxide, Energy conservation 1099–100w
Council tenants, Noise control 1339
Countryside Commission, Government grants 1100w
Countryside Council for Wales, Finance 1160w
Dioxins 688–9w
Dioxins, Pollution control 643w
Dioxins, Pollution monitoring 1131w
Environmental Pollution Royal Commission, Transport policy 262–7w
Finance Act 1995, Environment protection 16w
Incinerators 910w
Landfill tax 1252w
Nature Conservancy Council for England, Government grants 1100w
Scottish Natural Heritage, Finance 1284w
Tipping of waste, Local government functions 1098–9w
Tipping of waste, Taxation 1099w
Water pollution, Appeals 1231–2w

Rugby
Northern Ireland 545w

Rules of engagement
Armed forces deployment 239w

Rural areas
829–30w
Environment protection 585w
Foreign investment in UK 354
Investment 353
Planning permission 5–6w
Post Office 354–5
Small businesses 174w
Taxation 1048w
Unemployment 355

Rural Development Commission
353–4

Russia
Visas 574–5w

Rwanda
Peace keeping operations 718w

S4C
1211

Sackville, Mr Tom, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Questions
Animal experiments 965w
Animal experiments, Inspections 965–6w
Bail hostels, Closures 209w
Church Commissioners 358w
Computer privacy, EC law 606w
Computer privacy, Home Office 658w
Data Protection Act 1984 360w
Data Protection Registrar 970w
Data Protection Registrar, Government departments 493w
Drug crimes, Smuggling 601w
Electoral register, Disclosure of information 450w
Fire regulations 958w
Fire service pensions 446w
Fire services, Greater London 1197–8w
Fire services, Hazardous materials 950w
Identity cards 600w, 657–8w, 968w
Internet 733w
Khat 657w
National Lottery, Charities 950–1w
National Lottery Charities Board 733w
Police, Charities 729w
Probation officers, Social workers' training 602w
"Science and Technology Select Committee on Human Genetics" 360w
Voluntary organisations, Vetting 658–9w

Salford
Rapid transit systems 1041w

Salisbury
Motor vehicle registration 840w

Salmon
Scotland 67w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 156, 189, 191–6, 234
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1351, 1373–6, 1396–7
Common fisheries policy, Points of order (19.12.95) 1408–9
Questions
Business questions 498
Diplomatic service, Scotland 574w
EC Fisheries Council, Scotland 1518–9
EC staff, Greater London 702w
Exports 776w
Fisheries, Scotland 1287w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Civil service manpower 574w
Government departments, Scotland 471–2w, 640w
Inland Revenue, Civil service manpower 633w
Manufactured exports, Scotland 646–7w
National insurance contributions 889w
Treasury, Civil service manpower 633w

Sanctions
Libyan Arab Republic 332w
Nigeria 597–8w

Saudi Arabia
Debts 573–4w
Religious freedom 79w

School administration
142w

School admission
Appeals 740w

School attendance
702w

School buildings
Grant maintained schools 537w
Wales 388w

School choice
693–4w

School crossing patrols
559w

School discipline
Offensive weapons 1221–2w

School meals
Beef 120w
Cost per pupil 98–100w
Expenditure 303–4w
Northern Ireland 98–100w
Nutrition 98w

School milk
370w, 1086–7
EC grants and loans 827w
Food subsidies 1514
Northern Ireland 899w

School population
Grant maintained schools 702w
Northern Ireland 899w
Nursery schools 740–2w
Pre-school education 436–8w, 978w
Reception classes 1025–32w

Schools
Accidents 665w
Capital investment 438–9w
Inspections 1015w
Internet 281w
Languages 1208
Libraries 400–1w
Local government expenditure 73–4w
Northern Ireland 652–6w
Scotland 1276w
Wales 73–4w, 277–8w, 665–6w

Science and technology
282–3w
Cabinet Office 488w

"Science and Technology Select Committee on Human Genetics"
360w

Scope Marketing (Communications UK)
Radiocommunications Agency 1088w

Scotland
Access to countryside 821–2w
Agricultural subsidies 1513
Arable area payments scheme 1287w
Armed forces civilians 431w
Armed forces housing 766–7w
Armed forces training 478w
Assisted places scheme 646w, 817–21w, 996–7w
Average earnings 1516–7
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1278w, 1513
Capital investment 1522–3
Class sizes 823w
Common fisheries policy 1519–20
Community care 1290w
Conductive education 821w
Council housing 1524–5
Crime prevention 1279–80w
Crimes of violence 1527
Criminal Justice Social Services Fund 1003–4w
Deer 651w
Defence land 485w
Dental services 1002–4w
Deregulation initiative 1520
Devolution 134, 1278w
Diplomatic service 574w
Drift nets 1528–9
Dry stone walls 1004w
EC Fisheries Council 1518–9
EC Social Charter 1518
Educational finance 822–3w
Electoral reform 1530
External financing limits 1276w
Fine defaulters 614–6w
Fisheries 1287w
Flood control 1525
Food exports 1289w
Foreign investment in UK 648–50w, 823–8w, 1290w
Further education colleges 612w
Genetics 817w
Government departments 471–2w, 640w
High rise flats 1523
Hill livestock allowances 814–5w
Homelessness 1277–8w
Hospital beds 172–3w
House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1410–35
Immigrant detainees 615–6w
Income tax 1278w
Information services 1521–2
Iron and steel industry 1519
Japanese knotweed 1060–1w
Land ownership and tenure 610w
Legislation 65–7w
Local government elections 1529–30
Local government finance 1524–6
Local government reform 68–70w
Local government social services 1066–7w
Manufactured exports 646–7w
Ministers 1277w
National Lottery 1276w, 1530–2
Negative equity 1287w
New towns 823w
New towns development corporations 1064–5w
NHS 609–10w, 1001w, 1061–2w, 1516
NHS charges 998–1000w
NHS finance 1515–6
NHS trusts 301w, 362–5w, 1001–2w
Nurses' training 812w
Nursing homes 70w, 1277w
Objects in lieu of tax 1290w
Offensive weapons 1528
Orders and regulations 609w
Owner occupied housing 1346
Playing fields 299w
Police 366w
Pre-school education 1277w
Prison population 296w
Prison visits 616–7w
Prisoners 998w
Private education 821w
Public expenditure 1058w
Public sector housing 1067–8w
Radioactive wastes 1287–8w
Railtrack 303w
Rateable value (06.12.95) 461

Scotland—continued
Regional aid 1278–9w
Regional selective assistance 294–6w, 648–52w
Road construction 68w
Roads 1058–60w
Salmon 67w
Schools 1276w
Sheep 814–5w
Shipbuilding 1518
Small businesses 1520
Special education 67w
Sterilisation 366–8w
Student grants 647–8w
Student loans 1514–5
Taxation 1516–8
Tipping of waste 617w
Tourism 1522
Tourist industry 1521
Trade competitiveness 681
Unemployment 1517
Warehouse parties (05.12.95) 138
Water authorities 302–3w, 468–9w, 814w, 1063–4w
Water charges 299–300w, 302–3w, 1068w
Water supply 1286w
Weed control 1061w

ScotRail
559w
Redundancy 674w

Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Trading Schemes Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1021

Scott Inquiry
see Arms to Iraq Inquiry

Scottish Ambulance Service
611–6w
Performance standards 813–4w

Scottish Assembly
1098, 1285w

Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board
1283–4w

Scottish Enterprise
Highlands and Islands Enterprise 301–2w

Scottish Grand Committee
(05.12.95) 275, (11.12.95) 808, (19.12.95) 1410–35

Scottish health boards
1515
Administrative costs 812–3w
Executives 361w
Finance 362w
Loans 609w
Local government reform 610–1w
Royal Edinburgh Hospital 1516

Scottish Natural Heritage
648w
Balmoral 1285w
Finance 1284w

Scottish Office
Administrative costs 1003w
Billing 816–7w, 1063w
Cellular phones 367w
Civil servants' visits abroad 168–71w
Civil service agencies 296–300w
Civil service manpower 617w
Departmental correspondence 65w
Departmental forms 1280–1w
Government contracts 1063w
Ministerial policy advisors 815–6w
Ministers' private offices 1060w
Official cars 1061w
Official hospitality 815w
Opinion polls 1281w
Orders and regulations 297w, 468w
Press advertising 1281–3w
Private finance initiative 300–1w, 367w
Public transport 68w
Small businesses 1062–3w
Telephone services 469–70w

Scottish Valuation Advisory Council
367–8w

Scottish Valuation and Rating Council
367–8w

Screening
Breast cancer 39w

Seas and oceans
Radioactive waste disposal 14w
Waste disposal 1122–3w

Secondary education
Cost per pupil 693w, 745w
Standard spending assessments 560–1w

Secondary liquid fuel
176w

Secure accommodation
Tiffield 43w, 427w

Secure psychiatric units
681–2w
Laudat, Stephen 524w

Security
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 900w
Night clubs 606w
Prisons 1007w

Security industry
Government contracts 659w

Security Service
see MI5

Security Service Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (20.12.95) 1550

Security Service Commissioner
566–7w

Select committees
Legislative process 28w
Video conferencing 330w

Self-assessment of tax
410w

"Self-Government for Voluntary Aided Schools Consultation Paper"
737w

Sentencing
Appeals 85–6w

Sequestration of assets
Iraq 1046w

Serious Fraud Office
86w
Barings 16
Convictions 16
Juries 18
Regulatory system 17–8

Set-aside schemes
Northern Ireland 1168–9w

Severe disability premium
671w

Severn bridge
Road tolls 182–3w

Sewers
Rodents 1213w

Sex discrimination
979w

Sexual offences
Telephone services 1231w
Tourists (13.12.95) 1020

Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1020

Shared ownership schemes
1233w

Shareholders
257w, 563w

Shares
154–6w
Welsh Water 550–1w

Shaw, Mr David
Questions
Customs and Excise, Dover 1342

Shaw, Mr David—continued
Home energy efficiency scheme, Elderly 1096–7w

Shaw, Sir Giles
Debates etc.
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1232
Questions
Shipbuilding, Treaties 1262–3w

Sheep
Scotland 814–5w

Sheep dipping
Organophosphorous pesticides 229w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 507
Questions
Alternative energy 465–6w
Alternative medicine 1211w
Bilateral aid, Small businesses 664–5w
Burma, Democracy 418w
Children, Offensive weapons 1221–2w
Computers in schools, Teacher training 304w
Computers in schools, Technicians 304w
Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest 664w
Court Service Agency 662w
Court Service Agency, Contracts for services 660–1w
Defence land, Sites of special scientific interest 474w
Energy conservation 584w
Enterprise allowance scheme 1224w
Frogs, Pest control 582–3w
Home improvement agencies 583w
Homelessness, Day centres 1275–6w
Identity cards, Social security benefits 884w
Industrial energy conservation 584w
Legal Services Ombudsman 1202–3w
Local authorities, Alternative energy 590w
Low flying 474w
M4, Road works 272–3w
Manufacturing industries 368
National Lottery 467w
National Lottery, Fraud 608w
New businesses 1236w
Postgraduate students 973w
Probate Service 661w
Pupil-teacher ratios 1018–9w
School attendance 702w
Sites of special scientific interest 583w
Smoking, Children 578w
Theatres 416w
Tibet, Human rights 417w
Universities, Managers 394w
Universities, Staff-student ratios 973w
Universities, Student numbers 974w
Wind power 516w

Sheffield
61–4w
Clergy 694
Cycleways 59w
Hospital closures 1212w
Mental health services 935w
Motor vehicle registration 560w

Sheffield City Council
Planning permission 509–10w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 171–5
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 35

Shell
Nigeria 1057w

Sheltered employment
560w

***Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian**, Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Questions
Access to work programme 736w
Children, Offensive weapons 1221–2w
Class sizes, Educational finance 979
Educational finance 980

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian—continued
Educational standards, Class sizes 977
Educational standards, Pupil-teacher ratios 977
Educational standards, Teacher training 976–7
Grant maintained schools 974
Grant maintained schools, Ballots 1217–22w
Higher education, Educational finance 983–4
Hurworth School, Inquiries 1216–8w
International Labour Conference 736w
Lancashire, Educational finance 979–80, 983
Lawrence, Philip, Teachers 978
North Yorkshire, Educational finance 983
Reading, Educational standards 691w
Reading, Primary education 693w
Staffordshire, Educational finance 984
Standard spending assessments 980–1
Teachers, Recruitment 977–8
Withinfield Junior and Infant School 980

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Questions
Housing benefits 618w
Veal, Animal welfare 1088

Shersby, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Waste disposal, West Drayton (18.12.95) 1323–5
Questions
Office of the National Lottery 1206–7
Operation Christmas Cracker 136
Personal pensions 823–4

Shipbuilding
1255w
Scotland 1518
Treaties 1262–3w

Shipping
Low flying 983–4w

Shipping accidents
Roll-on roll-off ships 63–5w

Shipping registration
Fishing vessels 753–4w
Netherlands 757w
Spain 757w

Ships
Research 470w

Shopping
Prisoners 1199–200w

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 509, 522–3, 534–8, 581–2, 589
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1229
Questions
EC budget, Unemployment 874w
Veal, Export of live animals 1089

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
Intervention during question after statement (18.12.95) 1235
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1239
Questions
Railway travel, Privatisation 461w

Short money
28w

Shortage subjects
Teacher training 1226–7w

Shorthold tenancies
Wales 75–6w

Sick leave
Lancashire County Council 9w
Private sector 250w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 96–9
Energy Conservation Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1022
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 1001

Simpson, Mr Alan—continued
Questions
Agricultural production, Food exports 1092–3
Bicycles, China 362–3
Bicycles, Imports 49–51w
Business questions 503
Developing countries, Overseas aid 1069–71w
Educational finance, Nottinghamshire 694w
Export licensing, Iraq 1085–6w
Fruit, Balance of trade 829w
House of Commons debates, Treaties 750w
Income distribution 824–5
Motability 1118w, 1245–6w, 1267w
Motability, VAT 634w
Motability Finance 887–9w
Nuclear materials, Export controls 471w

Sims, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 879–81
Questions
Health service staff, Industrial health and safety 901–2w
Occupational health 679–80w

Single regeneration budget
13w, 514–5w, 924w

Sites of special scientific interest
583w, (13.12.95) 1021–2
Defence land 474w

Sixth form colleges
VAT 970–1w

Sizewell B
Construction costs 1265w

Skilled workers
Labour market 307–8w

Skin disorders
Health service staff 1135w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 381–2
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 842
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 141
Health and Safety Executive (20.12.95) 1481–2
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 999
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (06.12.95) 374
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1232–3
Members' conduct, Points of order (12.12.95) 848
Members' interests, Points of order (04.12.95) 20
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1243
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Butler, Robin 686
Business questions 503, 1549–50
Coal mining 280w
Common fisheries policy 1088
Hospital closures 492
Northern Ireland government 476–7
Office of the National Lottery 1537–8
Pensions 818
War pensions, Social security benefits rules 1266w

Skye bridge
1284–5w

Slaughterhouses
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1094

Small businesses
279w, 465w, 879w, 883w
Bilateral aid 664–5w
Dept for Education and Employment 978w, 1225–6w
Dept of Health 946w, 1142–3w
Dept of Social Security 1120–1w
Dept of Trade and Industry 1084w
Deputy Prime Minister 1091w
Deregulation initiative 486w
Export promotion 356–7

Small businesses—continued
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1054–5w, 1187w
Government assistance 279w
Government contracts 256w, 873w, 1083–4w
Home Office 1201–2w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1013–4w
Manufacturing industries 366
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 1164–5w
Ministry of Defence 1106w, 1173w
Northern Ireland Office 907w, 1075w
Prime Minister 1052w, 1175w
Rural areas 174w
Scotland 1520
Scottish Office 1062–3w
Standards specifications 49–50w
Tax assessment 156–7w
Treasury 1045–6w, 1251w
Welsh Office 996w, 1158w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 195, 224–9, 233
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 1263w
Arms exports, Human rights 1085w
Dept of Social Security, Operating costs 90w
Railway transport, Privatisation 458w

Smith, Mr Chris
Questions
Free school meals 536–8w
Housing benefits, Administrative costs 1268w
Housing benefits, Young people 890w
Incapacity benefit 621w
Incapacity benefit, Social security benefits disqualification 668–9w
Income support, Families 1118–9w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 356w
Retirement pensions 1269w
Social fund 375–6w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 825

Smith, Sir Dudley
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 867

Smith, Mr Llew
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995, NHS order (04.12.95) 79
Questions
Air pollution control, Local government finance 735w
EC energy policy 466w
EC Finance Council 565w
European Council 837w
Explosives, Wales 988w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 777w
General household survey, Wales 665w
German measles 675w
Gulf War syndrome 770w
Hazardous wastes, Waste management 585w
Measles, Wales 993w
MMR vaccine, Drug side effects 677w
MMR vaccine, Wales 777w
MR vaccine 10–1, 677w
MR vaccine, Drug side effects 675–6w
Pay, Wales 569–70w
Public expenditure, Wales 414w
Radiation hazards, Christmas Island 1172w
South Africa 716w
Unemployment, Wales 571w
Vaccination, Drug side effects 77w, 676w
VAT, Energy conservation 506–7w

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, 2R (06.12.95) 386–90
Questions
Office of the National Lottery 1206

Smith, Mr Tim—continued
Prisoners on remand, Prison population 18w
Taxation 565w

Smoke Detectors Act 1991
Questions
350w

Smoking
Children 578w
Dept of Social Security 619w
Public buildings 277w
Wales 277w
Welsh Office 992w
Young people 1137w

Smuggling
Drug crimes 601–2w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1123, 1154–5
Children in care (06.12.95) 315
Northern Ireland, Road traffic (20.12.95) 1476–7
Questions
Business questions 499, 1105
Chronically sick, Carers 826
GP fundholders, Ulcers 124
Hospital staff, Career structure 197w
NHS, Wales 11
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, Capital investment 480–1
Tourism, Scotland 1522

Snow and ice
Information services 1521–2

Soames, Mr Nicholas, Minister of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1024–9, 1037, 1054, 1063–9
Army Technical Support Agency (13.12.95) 963–9
Questions
Air accidents, Inquiries 475–6w
Air force, Armed forces training 478w
Air force bases, Closures 1111–2w
Aircrew, Armed forces deployment 984w
Ammunition, Waste disposal 164w
Amphibious forces 3w
Armed forces, Per capita costs 478w
Armed forces, Postal services 477w
Armed forces, Redundancy 717–8w, 770w
Armed forces casualties, Suffield 981–2w
Armed forces deployment, Northern Ireland 477w
Armed forces desertion 771w, 1105w
Armed forces discharges, Army 1107–8w
Armed forces education allowances 476w, 981w
Armed forces education allowances, Quantock School 476–7w, 980–1w
Armed forces housing, Avon 481w
Armed forces housing, Bedfordshire 479–80w
Armed forces housing, Central London 985w
Armed forces housing, Cleveland 479w
Armed forces housing, Derbyshire 480w
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 348–9w, 479w, 985w
Armed forces housing, Essex 479w
Armed forces housing, Greater Manchester 480w
Armed forces housing, Hampshire 481w
Armed forces housing, Haverfordwest 349–50w
Armed forces housing, House purchase 595w
Armed forces housing, Housing occupancy 987w
Armed forces housing, Kent 480–1w
Armed forces housing, Privatisation 982w
Armed forces housing, Property transfer 478–9w
Armed forces housing, Rents 986–7w
Armed forces housing, RNAS Yeovilton 719w
Armed forces housing, Scotland 766–7w
Armed forces leave 766w

Soames, Mr Nicholas—continued
Armed forces medical services, NHS 345w
Armed forces officers, Business appointments 473–4w, 987–8w
Armed forces officers, Civil service agencies 703–7w
Armed forces officers, Publications 474–5w
Armed forces pensions 241w
Armed forces recruitment 164w
Armed forces recruitment, Army 240–1w
Armed forces recruitment, Cannabis 240w
Armed forces reserves, Bosnia-Herzegovina 242w
Armed forces storage depots 1172–3w
Armed forces storage depots, Ashchurch 162–3w
Armed forces strength 240w
Armed forces training, Goose Bay 592w
Army, Disciplinary proceedings 1104–5w
Army, Drug abuse 715–6w
Army Base Repair Organisation 718w
Army Technical Support Agency 348w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 239w, 595w, 1111w
Cellular phones, Ministry of Defence 346w
Chemical and biological warfare, Vaccination 346–7w
Consultants, Ministry of Defence 241–2w
Courts martial 344–5w
Defence costs study 239–40w
Defence equipment, Theft 760w, 771w
Defence expenditure 164w
Defence land, Humberside 593w
Defence land, Land pollution 485w
Defence land, Sites of special scientific interest 474w
Directorate of Operational Capability 1106w
Energy conservation, Ministry of Defence 590w
Explosives, Wales 988w
Fire services, Training 343w
Gulf War syndrome 770w
Gurkhas, Army strength 346w
Harrier aircraft, Air accidents 594w
Hart, David, Armed forces housing 164–5w
Hart, David, Armed forces married quarters 165w
Hercules aircraft, Air accidents 592–3w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Medical examinations 478w, 985–6w, 1114w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Vaccination 569–70w
Low flying 474w, 590–1w, 594w, 716–7w, 768–9w
Low flying, Armed forces training 984w
Low flying, Ebford 2w
Low flying, Highlands of Scotland 591–2w
Low flying, Shipping 983–4w
Marines, Ebford 2w
Military aircraft, Armed forces training 592w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 594–5w
Military aircraft, Spare parts 4w
Military exercises, Merchant ships 341–2w, 1108–11w
Military police, Colchester 1112w
Ministers' domestic visits, Ministry of Defence 240w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service agencies 481–5w
Ministry of Defence, Cost effectiveness 3w, 590w, 595w
Ministry of Defence, Performance standards 1112w
Ministry of Defence police 239w
Ministry of Defence police, Colchester 1111w
Ministry of Defence police, Manpower 771–2w
Ministry of Defence police, Redundancy 1112w
Museum of Army Transport 983w
Official hospitality, Ministry of Defence 769w
Opinion polls, Ministry of Defence 762–4w
Peace keeping operations, Medals 85w

Soames, Mr Nicholas—continued
Peace keeping operations, Rwanda 718w
Queen's flight 1w, 984w
Radiation hazards, Christmas Island 1172w
RAF Finningley, Armed forces housing 985w
RAF Finningley, Demolition 767–8w
RAF Spadeadam 594w
RAF Tain, Aircraft noise 475w
Royal Irish Regiment, Army strength 770–1w
Royal Irish Regiment, Lisnaskea 163w
Royal Naval College, Property development 1172w
Rules of engagement, Armed forces deployment 239w
Submarines, Fishing vessels 595w
Territorial Army, Armed forces deployment 343w
Tomahawk missiles 591w
Tornado aircraft 593w
Tornado aircraft, Air accidents 593w
Walker, John 772w
War widows' pensions 475w, 477w

Social conditions
Health services 129
Infant mortality 129–30

Social fund
375–6w
Funeral payments 150–1w
Maternity payments 150–1w, 502w

Social problems
Council tenants 1338–40

Social security
Income distribution 627w

Social security abuse
Housing benefits 890–1w, 1273–4w

Social security appeal tribunals
1270w

Social security appeals
Disability living allowance 88w

Social security benefits
618w
Carers 826–7
Identity cards 821–2, 884w
Personal injury compensation 377–8w
Political refugees 95–7w, 620w, 825, 1119w
Unemployed 628w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Contracts for services 671w

Social security benefits backdating
Housing benefits 884–5w

Social security benefits disqualification
Incapacity benefit 668–9w
Long stay patients 618w

Social security benefits overpayment
Compensation 89w

Social security benefits rates
Family credit 1271–2w
Housing benefits 1268–9w

Social security benefits reductions
Income support 376w

Social security benefits rules
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 785w
Departmental leaflets 152w
Handicapped 784w
Political refugees 151w, 501–2w
War pensions 1266w

Social security benefits uprating
248–9w, 885–8w

Social security claims
Disability living allowance 88w, 1122w

Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992
Questions
150–1w

Social security finance
618w, 671–2w

Social security payments
618w
Industrial disputes 435–6w

Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1995
Questions
236w, 890w, 924w

Social security recipients
Hostels 585w
Lone parents 627–8w

Social security reform
Homelessness 1097

Social Security Select Committee
(11.12.95) 808

Social workers' training
Probation officers 602w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 791
Questions
Northern Ireland government 485

Solicitor's Complaints Bureau
(20.12.95) 1468–71

Somerset
Public libraries 373w

South Africa
716w
Higher education 689

South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust
222w

South Essex Health Authority
Finance 199w

South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council
Duffryn House 994w

South Hams
Industrial development 924w

South London
Training and enterprise councils 736w

South Staffordshire Health Authority
Public appointments 681w

South Wales Electricity
Water supply industry 550w

South West region
Foreign investment in UK 680–1
Government assistance to industry 280w
Population 937–8w
Population studies 925w
Railway network 674–5w
Water supply 1335–6

South Western Electricity
283w
Takeovers 687

South Yorkshire Supertram
57–8w

Southern Africa
Bilateral aid 689
Overseas aid 688–9

Space technology
331w

Spain
Fisheries 1087–8
Fishing vessels 232–3w, 413w
Shipping registration 757w

Spare parts
Military aircraft 3–4w

Speaker
(07.12.95) 505

Speaker and deputies, For rulings and statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings and statements
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (05.12.95) 140, (06.12.95) 461, (11.12.95) 699, (19.12.95) 1346

Speaker and deputies—continued
Conduct of proceedings (04.12.95) 12, 39, 84, 91, (05.12.95) 146, 152, 161, 203, 216, (06.12.95) 363, 392–3, 449, (08.12.95) 632–3, 638, 655, 658, 677, (11.12.95) 682, 691, 703, 715–6, 718, 750, 757, 764, 774, 776–7, 790, 792–3, 795, (12.12.95) 829, 831, 870, 873, 907, (13.12.95) 933, 979, 988, 1075, (14.12.95) 1084, 1100, 1102, 1106, (18.12.95) 1218, 1229, 1235, 1271, 1308–9, 1319, (19.12.95) 1340, 1342, 1346, 1386, 1410, 1440–1, (20.12.95) 1465, 1476, 1496, 1506, 1515, 1526, 1542–3, 1549, 1559, 1573, 1575
Disallowed questions (06.12.95) 363
EC documents motions (12.12.95) 906, (13.12.95) 1070
Lightbown, David, Members' deaths (13.12.95) 970
Orders and regulations motions (12.12.95) 848, 906, (13.12.95) 1069, (18.12.95) 1271
Points of order (04.12.95) 19–22, 39–40, 42, 52, (06.12.95) 372–5, 411–2, (08.12.95) 638, 661, (11.12.95) 697–9, 793, 795, (12.12.95) 847–8, (13.12.95) 1001, 1018–9, (14.12.95) 1110, (18.12.95) 1320, (19.12.95) 1406–7, (20.12.95) 1456, 1550, 1565–6
Royal Assent (19.12.95) 1409
Standing Order No 20 applications, Cold weather payments (06.12.95) 371

Speaker's rulings and statements
(07.12.95) 505
HMSO (19.12.95) 1347
Standing Order No 10 (14.12.95) 1110
Ten minutes rule (11.12.95) 699, (19.12.95) 1348
Transfer of questions (04.12.95) 19
Unparliamentary expressions (06.12.95) 317, (19.12.95) 1441, (20.12.95) 1542

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 724, 730, 777, 791–2
European communities (07.12.95) 532, 545–6, 559, 565–9, 590
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1236
Notice of questions, Points of order (11.12.95) 697
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1490–2, 1494
Questions
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 604–6w
Disclosure of information 252w
EC immigration, Visas 417–8w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 401w, 535w
Educational finance 236–7w
Educational (School Premises) Regulations 1981 439–40w
Grant maintained schools 974
Hospital admissions, Administrative delays 1210w
Howard, Michael, Interviews 500w
Immigration 22–3w
London Docklands Development Corporation 1096w
Meningitis 1210w
Mental hospitals, NHS and private practice 523–4w
Millennium Commission, Exhibitions 1265–6w
Millennium Exhibition 1215
Newham Borough Council, Local government finance 512w
Office of the National Lottery 1540
Partnerships in Care 524w
Political refugees 446–7w, 494w, 601w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 493w
Political refugees, Social security benefits rules 501–2w
Railway transport, Publicity 60w
Sewers, Rodents 1213w

Special areas of conservation
River Wye 1157w

Special education
117–8w
Autism 801–2w
Educational finance 693w
Northern Ireland 801–2w
Scotland 67w

Special Educational Needs Tribunal
559–60w

Special hospitals
220w

Special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland
1075–6w

Specified Bovine Offal Order 1995
Questions
1124w

Speeches
Lord Chancellor's Dept 829

Speed limits
A36 59w

Spellar, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1065
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1566
Questions
Alcoholism, EC action 1140w
British Airways, Aircraft engines 363
Child Support Agency 822–3
Child Support Agency, Performance standards 622–3w
Defence procurement, USA 1172w
Health service staff, Redundancy pay 189w, 681w
Maintenance, Children 435w
Petroleum production, Tax yields 1050–2w

Spencer, Sir Derek, Solicitor-General
Questions
Billing, Attorney General 759w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 218w
Ferranti 217–8w
Private finance initiative, Attorney General 759w
Prosecutions 85w
Serious Fraud Office 86w
Serious Fraud Office, Barings 16
Serious Fraud Office, Convictions 16
Serious Fraud Office, Juries 18
Serious Fraud Office, Regulatory system 17–8

Spicer, Sir Jim
Questions
Business questions 1103
Food industry 1085

Spicer, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Army Technical Support Agency (13.12.95) 962–4, 967
European communities (07.12.95) 511, 527
Questions
Planning permission, Local government land 1333

Spink, Dr Robert
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1245
Questions
Average earnings, Scotland 1516–7
British Council, Know-how Fund 691
Cable and Wireless 860w
Council housing, Housing investment programmes 1336
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 859–60w
Meat, Export promotion 829w
Occupational pensions 618–9w, 817–8
Unemployment, Wales 70w

Sports
(20.12.95) 1473–6
Television 848w

Sports facilities
Government grants 373w
Knockhill (20.12.95) 1504–12

Sports sponsorship
373w
Tobacco industry 373w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Chartermark scheme, Museums and galleries 1209
Employment, Northern Ireland 481–2
GP fundholders, Suffolk 124
Sentencing, Appeals 85–6w
Social security benefits 618w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 688–9
Suffolk County Council, Council tax capping 1331
Training and enterprise councils, Suffolk 142–3w

Sproat, Mr Iain, Minister of State, Dept of National Heritage
Debates etc.
Cable television (07.12.95) 597–602
Radio Gloucestershire (13.12.95) 950–3
Questions
Arts finance 1214–5
BBC 416–7w, 853w
BBC, Private finance initiative 852–3w
BBC, Television engineering 417w
Billing, Dept of National Heritage 855w
British Academy of Sport 153–4w, 852w
Cable television 568w
Cellular phones, Dept of National Heritage 371w
Chartermark scheme, Museums and galleries 1209
Consultants, Dept of National Heritage 373–4w
Crown jewels 853w
Digital television 567w
Finance 467–8w
Football 1212–4
Libraries 849w
Listed buildings 848w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Museums and galleries 1209–10
National Heritage Memorial Fund, Piers 848w
National Lottery 467w, 567w, 847w
National Lottery, Fraud 608w
Official cars, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Official hospitality, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Opinion polls, Dept of National Heritage 855–8w
Orders and regulations, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Piers 848w
Play, Children 849w
Playing fields, Camden Borough Council 1208–9
Private finance initiative, Dept of National Heritage 371–2w
Public lending right 849–50w
Public libraries, Somerset 373w
Red Hot Television 374w
Royal Fine Art Commission 371w
Sports facilities, Government grants 373w
Sports sponsorship 373w
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco industry 373w
Swindon Town Football Club 1213
Television, Sports 848w
Television licences 751w
Theatres 416w
Today newspaper 373w
Tourist boards, Government grants 3–6w
Trafalgar Square, Safety 261w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Debates etc.
Knockhill, Sports facilities (20.12.95) 1504–6, 1510
Questions
Disability living allowance, Social security appeals 88w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 88w
Kincardine bridge, Road works 1286w
Local government finance, Scotland 1526

Squire, Ms Rachel—continued
Rosyth Dockyard 346w

Squire, Mr Robin, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Education and Employment 139–40w
Assisted places scheme 986
Autism, Children 120w
Billing, Dept for Education and Employment 737w, 1033w
Cellular phones, Dept for Education and Employment 401–2w, 1034w
Computer privacy, Dept for Education and Employment 1017w
Computers in schools, Teacher training 304w
Computers in schools, Technicians 304w
Consultants, Dept for Education and Employment 694w
Cost per pupil, Derbyshire 303w
Cost per pupil, Primary education 745w
Dept for Education, Civil service manpower 535–6w
Dept for Education and Employment, Government information services 1018w
Dept for Education and Employment, Green papers 140–2w
Dept of Employment, Expenditure 971w
Education 1228–9w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 120–1w, 401w, 535w, 698–9w, 972–3, 974–5w, 1227–8w
Educational finance 975w
Educational finance, Cheshire 691–2w
Educational finance, Cost per pupil 696–8w
Educational population 697–8w
Educational publications 400w
Educational standards 691w
Educational standards, General certificate of secondary education 1033–4w
Government contracts, Dept for Education and Employment 1033w
Grant maintained schools 116–7w
Grant maintained schools, Children in care 985–6
Grant maintained schools, Publicity 538w
Grant maintained schools, School buildings 537w
Handicapped children, Pre-school education 978–9
Local education authorities, Local government staff 139–40w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Education and Employment 972w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept for Education and Employment 310w
Ministers' private offices, Dept for Education and Employment 1017–8w
Non-teaching staff 562w, 1017w
Nursery schools, School population 740–2w
Office for Standards in Education, Finance 535w
Official cars, Dept for Education and Employment 971w
Official hospitality, Dept for Education and Employment 1018w
Pre-school education 974w, 978w
Pre-school education, Denmark 1031–2w
Pre-school education, Part-time education 1025–32w
Pre-school education, School population 436–8w, 978w
Pre-school education, Teachers 973–4w
Press advertising, Dept for Education and Employment 1019w
Primary education, Literacy 118w
Primary education, Standard spending assessments 560–1w
Pupil-teacher ratios 1018–9w, 1223w
School administration 142w
School attendance 702w
Schools, Inspections 1015w
Schools, Libraries 400–1w
Secondary education, Cost per pupil 693w
Surveys, Sunderland 1019–21w

Squire, Mr Robin—continued
Teacher training, Educational finance 115–6w
Teacher training, Information technology 692w
Teacher training, Shortage subjects 1226–7w
Teacher training, Student numbers 1228w
Teachers, Occupational pensions 536w
Teachers, Part-time employment 1223w
Teachers, Pay 742–4w
Teachers, Redundancy 972w
Teachers' pensions 697w

Squirrels
North East region 584–5w

Sri Lanka
Overseas aid 470w

St Bartholomew's Hospital
195w

St Christopher's House
935w

St George's Hospital Tooting
(20.12.95) 1460–1

St Helena
Custodial treatment 457w
Overseas aid 1176w
Public appointments 1176w

St Peter's School Broadstairs
(20.12.95) 1497–503

Stack, Louise
Prisoners' transfers 831

Staffordshire
Educational finance 984, 1330–1

Staff-student ratios
Universities 973w

Stamp duties
Tax yields 507w

Standard of living
1095–6
Interest rates 1096

Standard spending assessments
177–80w, 980–1, 1329–30
Buckinghamshire 353–4w
Education vouchers 175–6w
Harlow 1341–2
London boroughs 1341–2
Police authorities 1240–4w
Primary education 560–1w
Secondary education 560–1w
Travel-to-work areas 1330
Wales (13.12.95) 1002–17

Standards and Privileges Select Committee
(13.12.95) 1070

Standards specifications
Small businesses 49–50w

Standing Order No 10
Speaker's rulings and statements (14.12.95) 1110

Standing Order No 20 applications
Cold weather payments (06.12.95) 371

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel, Railway network (14.12.95) 1197–200, 1197–204

Stansted Airport
557w

State earnings related pension scheme
90–2w
Expenditure 1267–8w
Low pay 824
Personal pensions 92w

Stationery Office
see HMSO

Steam engines
Licensing 875w

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Questions
Drift nets, Scotland 1528

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1398
Questions
Advertising Advisory Committee 878–9w
Bailiffs, Debt collection 227w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Health 200–2w
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 229–32w
Civil service agencies, Scottish Office 298–300w
Civil service agencies, Treasury 16–7w
Dept of Social Security, Smoking 619w
Deregulation initiative 486w
Deregulation initiative, Cheese 686
Deregulation initiative, Scotland 1520
EC law 502w, 599w, 735w
EC law, Deregulation initiative 660w
Educational policy, Deregulation initiative 974–5
Electromagnetic interference, EC law 599w
Fire regulations 958w
Fishing, Licensing 530–2w
Food hygiene 940w
Hedges and ditches 514w
HMSO, Publicity 489w
Housing construction 923w
Industrial development, South Hams 924w
Legislation, Dept of Trade and Industry 161w
Legislation, Dept of Transport 458w
Legislation, Home Office 949w
Legislation, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 368w
Licensing laws, Deregulation initiative 603w
Members' correspondence, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 878w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Health 938w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Social Security 889w
Members' correspondence, Dept of the Environment 922w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 873w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Transport 840w
Members' correspondence, Deputy Prime Minister 1091w
Members' correspondence, Home Office 950w
Members' correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 881–2w
Members' correspondence, Ministry of Defence 984–5w
Members' correspondence, Northern Ireland Office 907w
Members' correspondence, Prime Minister 843w
Members' correspondence, Treasury 873w
Members' correspondence, Welsh Office 992w
Milk, Production quotas 531w
Motor vehicle testing, Deregulation initiative 557w
Non-departmental public bodies, Northern Ireland Office 895–8w
Orders and regulations, Dept for Education and Employment 537w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Health 524–5w
Orders and regulations, Dept of National Heritage 854w
Orders and regulations, Dept of the Environment 13–4w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Trade and Industry 161w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Transport 187w
Orders and regulations, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 580–1w, 1132w

***Steen, Mr Anthony**—continued*
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland Office 386w, 545w
Orders and regulations, Scottish Office 297w, 468w
Orders and regulations, Treasury 875–6w
Orders and regulations, Welsh Office 549–50w
Population, South West region 937–8w
Population studies, South West region 925w
Radiocommunications Agency, Scope Marketing (Communications UK) 1088w
Railway network, South West region 674–5w
Single regeneration budget 924w
Town and country planning 922–3w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Ambulance services, City of Durham 523w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 51–2w, 926–7w
Coal mine closures, Durham County 466w
Coal mining, Durham County 721w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 973
Further education 1223w
Prison population, Prison staff 25–6w
Remand in custody 730w

Stephen, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1028, 1030
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 712, 728, 751
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 185
EC internal relations (20.12.95) 1477–9
Questions
Broadcasting controls 1211–2
Business questions 1546
Deregulation initiative 686–7

Sterilisation
382w
Scotland 366–8w

Stern, Mr Michael
Questions
Citizen's Charter, Travelling expenses 1093w

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
NHS and private practice 190w
Unfair competition, Iron and steel industry 368

Stewart, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Non-Domestic Rating (Information) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1022
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1414, 1423–5
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 996–7w
Business questions 1104
Eaglesham bypass, Capital investment 1523
Islam, Religious sects 252w
Student loans, Scotland 1514
Taxation, Tipping of waste 257–8w

Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy Confidential Inquiry
526–8w, 944–5w

Stirling
Civil service agencies 645–6w
Non-departmental public bodies 645–6w

Stockport
Valuation Office 328w

Stocks and shares
Computers (13.12.95) 1069

Stoke on Trent
Ceramic industries 1263w

Stonehaven
Hospitals 610w, 1516

Stop and search
210–1w

Stormont
Building repairs 656w
Property development 1166–7w

Stott, Mr Roger
Questions
Northern Ireland government 476–7

Strang, Dr Gavin
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1356–62
Common fisheries policy, Points of order (19.12.95) 1408
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Expenditure 55w
Agricultural subsidies, Finance 55w
Arable area payments scheme, Scotland 1287w
Arable area payments scheme, Wales 1191–2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1094–5
Fisheries, EC grants and loans 926–7w
Grazing land 368–9w
Hill livestock allowances 56w
Milk, Young people 1087
Moorland scheme 56w
School milk 370w
School milk, EC grants and loans 827w
Set-aside schemes, Northern Ireland 1168–9w

Stratford Station
(20.12.95) 1488–96

Straw, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 702, 711–23, 730–1, 792

Street lighting
Repairs and maintenance 425w

Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 462

Strikes
France 1345

Student accommodation
438w

Student grants
Mature students 396–8w, 701–2w
Northern Ireland 315w
Scotland 647–8w

Student loans
119–20w, 394–6w, 534w, 692w, 694w, 970w, 1227–8w
Mature students 396–8w
Scotland 1514–5

Student Loans Company
Computers 394w
Public appointments 1015–6w

Student numbers
Further education 71w
Northern Ireland 166w
Teacher training 1228w
Universities 974w

Students
Educational finance 1222w

Submarines
Fishing vessels 595w

Suffield
Armed forces casualties 981–2w

Suffolk
GP fundholders 124
Petroleum exploration 872w
Roads 1043–4w
Training and enterprise councils 142–3w

Suffolk County Council
Council tax capping 1331

Suffolk Training and Enterprise Council
1015w

Suicide
804–5w
Prisoners 448–9w

Suicide—continued
Prisoners on remand 448–9w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 843
Questions
Social security payments 618w

Summertime
Road accidents 1186w

Sunderland
Hospital beds 680–1w
Medical research 936–7w
Research 1230–2w
Surveys 1008w, 1019–21w

Supervision orders
Fines 205–6w
Probation and aftercare 209–10w

Supervision registers
807w

Supplementary credit approvals
Local government reform 1161w

Sustainable development
516w

Sustainable Development Round Table
1102w

Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1280
Questions
Manufacturing industries, Industrial production 279w

Swalec
Welsh Water 8–9

Swan Hunter Shipbuilders
Redundancy pay 774w

Sweeney, Mr Walter
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1010–1
Questions
Cardiff Airport, Road construction 989w
Local government finance, Wales 666–7w
Welsh assembly 3

Swindon Town Football Club
1213

Switzerland
Ministers' visits abroad 219w
Thatcher, RtHonBaroness 326w

Sykes, Mr John
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service, Police 17
North Yorkshire, Educational finance 983
North Yorkshire County Council, Debts 9w
Unemployment 634w

Systemic lupus erythematosus
1136w

Tai Cymru
see Housing for Wales

Take-home pay
563–4w

Takeovers
South Western Electricity 687

Take-up of employment
Access to work programme 1033w
Workstart 695–6w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Questions
Economic and monetary union, France 487
Official engagements 148w, 325w, 568w, 750w

Tawafig, Hagdi Elfons
Deportation 1007–8w

Tax allowances
Inheritance tax 505w
Personal pensions 1049–50w
Public service 155–6w
Regional electricity companies 14w

Tax assessment
Small businesses 156–7w

Tax burden
Income tax 1246w

Tax rates and bands
1245–6w
Income tax 1047–8w
Inheritance tax 505w

Tax yields
876–7w
Income tax 1246w
Petroleum production 1050–2w
Stamp duties 507w
Tobacco 326w

Taxation
(05.12.95) 266, 565w
Diesel fuel 259w
Fringe benefits 1252w
Housing associations 509w
Law reform 327w
Rural areas 1048w
Scotland 1516–8
Tipping of waste 257–8w, 617w, 1099w

Taxpayers
Wales 635w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Government bills (13.12.95) 914, 925–8
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1413–6, 1432
Questions
Business statements 493–5, 1101–2, 1544–5
Meningitis, Death 221–2w
Meningitis, West Yorkshire 193–4w
Railway transport, Privatisation 1096
Turkey, Visas 82w

Taylor, Mr Ian, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations (18.12.95) 1254–6, 1258, 1264–5, 1269–73
Questions
Arms exports, Export licensing 1263w
Cable and Wireless 860w
Cellular phones, Fraud 638w, 776w
EC Telecommunications Council 292–3w
Electromagnetic interference, EC law 599w
Electronic mail 638w
Electronics industry, Prices 282w
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 859–60w
Internet 637w
Internet, Schools 281w
Medical Research Council, Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 861–2w
Nanotechnology 283w
Patent Office 160–1w
Patent Office, Consultants 1262w
Patent Office, Contracts for services 865–6w
Patent Office, Trade unions 865w
Radiocommunications Agency, Scope Marketing (Communications UK) 1088w
Research councils, Postgraduate education 1261–2w
Research facilities, Efficiency scrutinies 351
Science and technology 282–3w
Space technology 331w
Technology foresight programme 281w
Telecommunications technology 282w
Telephone selling 596w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Questions
A75, Road works 813w
Belfast Corporation Act 1932 1075w
Electoral register, Public access 900w
Housing amenities, Electric power 899w
Oceanography, Belfast Lough 799w
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland 799w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David—continued
Royal Ulster Constabulary 486
School milk, Northern Ireland 899w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 1198–9w
West Coast railway line, Privatisation 1043w

Taylor, Mr John M, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Competition and Consumer Affairs
Debates etc.
Working hours (13.12.95) 935, 941–6
Questions
Beer 355–6
Billing, Dept of Trade and Industry 773w
Brewing industry 356
Brewing industry, Public houses 355
Citizens' advice bureaux, Expenditure 288–90w, 640w
Computer privacy, Dept of Trade and Industry 637w
Credit cards, Liability 773w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Civil servants 637w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Early retirement 867w
Domestic gas appliances, Poisoning 289w
Electric shock equipment, Exports 1258w
Electricity supply industry 367
Furniture, Foam 638–9w
Gas supply industry, Regulatory system 640w
Government contracts, Dept of Trade and Industry 1263w
Industrial tribunals, Personal records 871w
Industrial tribunals, Public appointments 870–1w
Industrial tribunals, Trades' union Congress 869–70w
Local government services, Contracts for services 50w
Manufactured exports 335w
Medical treatments, EC action 775–6w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 873w
Mergers 409–10w
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company 1082–3w
Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board 280w
Metrication, Retail trade 639–40w
Minimum wage 639w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Trade and Industry 1255w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 636–7w
Origin marking 1083w
Overseas trade 293–4w
Press advertising, Dept of Trade and Industry 859w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Trade and Industry 287–8w, 331w, 774w
Redundancy pay 867w
Redundancy pay, Industrial arbitration 867–8w
Redundancy pay, National insurance fund 868w
South Western Electricity 283w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, Redundancy pay 774w
Timesharing 638w
Unfair competition 367–8
Unfair competition, Iron and steel industry 368

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Building Research Establishment, Finance 913–4w
Defective housing, Mundic blocks 915w
Public expenditure, Devon 135
St Christopher's House 935w
Water companies, Prosecutions 912–4w
Water supply 1335
Water supply, Pesticides 1100–1w
Whatley quarry 1237w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1358

***Taylor, Sir Teddy**—continued*
European communities (07.12.95) 520–1
Madrid Summit (18.12.95) 1234
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1244
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 828w
EC internal trade 600w, 879w
EC internal trade, Pornography 599–600w
European Commission 1056–7w
European Commission, Information 251–2w
European Commission, Manpower 251w
European Communities 491–2
Local government services, Contracts for services 50w
National Heritage Memorial Fund, Piers 848w
South Essex Health Authority, Finance 199w
Terrorism, Exclusion orders 356–8w

Teacher training
Computers in schools 304w
Educational finance 115–6w
Educational standards 976–7
Information technology 692w
Shortage subjects 1226–7w
Student numbers 1228w

Teachers
Educational finance 832
Employment discrimination 904w
Lawrence, Philip 978
Northern Ireland 904w
Occupational pensions 536w
Part-time employment 1223w
Pay 742–4w
Pre-school education 973–4w
Recruitment 977–8
Redundancy 972w

Teachers' pensions
697w

Technicians
Computers in schools 304w

Technology colleges
118–9w

Technology foresight programme
281w

Telecommunications technology
282w

Telephone selling
596w

Telephone services
Dept of Health 810w
Dept of Social Security 246–8w
Exhaust emissions 59w
Government information services 248w
Missing persons 955–6w, 1011–2w
Road works 268w
Scottish Office 469–70w
Sexual offences 1231w

Television
Sports 848w

Television engineering
BBC 417w

Television licences
751w
Fine defaulters 614–6w

Temporary accommodation
Political refugees 13w, 236w

Temporary immigrants
730–1w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings and statements (11.12.95) 699, (19.12.95) 1348

Tenant farmers
1095

Territorial Army
887w
Armed forces deployment 343w

Terrorism
Exclusion orders 356–8w

***Terrorism**—continued*
Northern Ireland 166w, (20.12.95) 1550

Textile industry
282w
EC grants and loans 289w
Yorkshire and Humberside 136–7

Thatcher, RtHonBaroness
Finance 489–90w
Hartmann, Alfred 325w
Switzerland 326w

Theatr Clwyd
989–90w

Theatres
416w

Theft
Armed forces 343–4w
Defence equipment 760w, 771w
Ministry of Defence 429w

Thomason, Mr Roy
Questions
Business questions 499, 1546
EC Agriculture Council 228–9w
Environment protection, Air pollution control 508w
Hill farming, Young people 1084
Hospital waiting lists 191w
Identity cards, Private finance initiative 822
Single regeneration budget 514–5w

Thompson, Sir Donald
Questions
Transport, Public expenditure 1034–9w
Yorkshire Water 359

Thompson, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Ratings (Caravans and Boats) Bill, 2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (12.12.95) 904–5
Questions
British Coal Corporation 292w

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 992, (18.12.95) 1274, 1279, 1299–303, 1305–6, 1315
Questions
Assisted places scheme 986
"Civil Service Year Book, 1996" 746w
Council of Ministers 418–21w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 336–7w
HMSO 232–3w
HMSO, Privatisation 453–5w, 683–4

Thoresby colliery
(20.12.95) 1479–81

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Lancashire (04.12.95) 115–7
Questions
Child Support Agency 823
Criminal records, Disclosure of information 968w
Crown Prosecution Service, Rights of audience 1190w
National Disability Council, Public appointments 619w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 6w
Remploy 694–5w
Residential care, Mentally ill 131
Sheltered employment 560w
Unfair competition 367–8
Voluntary organisations, Vetting 658–9w

Tibet
Human rights 417w

Tiffield
Secure accommodation 43w, 427w

Time zones
(13.12.95) 1020

Timesharing
638w

Timms, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1488–90, 1493
Questions
Internet 629w
London Electricity, Government assistance to industry 466–7w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Thoresby colliery (20.12.95) 1479–81
Questions
British Coal Enterprise 49w
Disability living allowance, Residential care 621w
Employment, East Midlands 254–5w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 821–2w
Industrial disablement benefits, Emphysema 86–7w
Industrial diseases, Emphysema 151w
Local government reform 724w
Local government reform, Local government finance 921w
Pay 327w
Standard spending assessments 1330

Tipping of waste
Essex 1097w
Local government functions 1098–9w
Scotland 617w
Taxation 257–8w, 617w, 1099w

Tobacco
Health hazards 379w
Tax yields 326w

Tobacco advertising
221–2w, 426–7w, 933–4w

Tobacco industry
Manpower 160w
Sports sponsorship 373w

Today newspaper
373w

Toll bridges
Fees and charges 1041–2w

Tomahawk Missiles
591w

Tomography
806w
Yates, Craig 1140w

Tornado aircraft
593w
Air accidents 593w

Touhig, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1016
Public Interest Disclosure Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1020–1
Questions
Grant maintained schools, Wales 12
Play, Children 849w
Small businesses 279w

Tourism
Northern Ireland 482–3
Road signs 458w
Scotland 1522

Tourist boards
Government grants 3–6w

Tourist industry
EC Social Charter 1207
Scotland 1521

Tourists
Sexual offences (13.12.95) 1020

Tower Colliery
Coal mining 1100

Town and country planning
922–3w
Wales 546–9w

Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Debates etc.
(18.12.95) 1323–8

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc.
Budget November 1995 (05.12.95) 153
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1352
Questions
Unemployment 1096–7

Tracey, Mr Richard
Questions
Business questions 498

Track access grant
321w

Trade competitiveness
485w
Deregulation initiative 486w
Regional selective assistance 680
Scotland 681

Trade promotion
Burma 464–5w
Civil service manpower 421–4w
Diplomatic service 838–9w

Trade unions
Patent Office 865w

Trades' Union Congress
Industrial tribunals 869–70w

Trading Schemes Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1021

Trafalgar Square
Safety 261w

Traffic lights
Repairs and maintenance 425w

Training
118w
European Social Fund 739w
Fire services 343w
Managers 289–90w
Valuation tribunals 642w

Training and enterprise councils
Efficiency scrutinies 735–6w
Finance 307w, 693w
South London 736w
Suffolk 142–3w
Wales 778w

Training for work
306–8w, 400w
Age discrimination 561–2w
Wales 550w

Training for Work (Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise Programmes) Order 1995
Debates etc.
(12.12.95) 848

Trains
Emergencies 303w, 1045w

Trams
Leeds 188w

Trans-European networks
755–7w

Transfer of questions
Speaker's rulings and statements (04.12.95) 19

Transmissible encephalopathies
Dogs 1128w

Transport
Public expenditure 1034–9w

Transport of animals
Animal welfare 232w, 530w, 533–4w
Inspections 529–30w

Transport policy
841–2w
Environmental Pollution Royal Commission 262–7w

Transport Research Laboratory
274w

Transsexuals
(13.12.95) 1021

Travel concessions
EC countries 841w

Travel concessions—continued
Northern Ireland 1074w

Travel to interview scheme
Greater London 445w

Travelling expenses
Citizen's Charter 1093w
Dept of Health 1207w
Dept of Transport 1042w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1187w
Home Office 1200w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 1205w
Treasury 1248w

Travel-to-work areas
Standard spending assessments 1330

Treasure Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1021

Treasury
Billing 1050w
Cellular phones 328w
Civil service agencies 16–7w
Civil service manpower 633w
Computer privacy 633w
Consultants 326–7w
Members' correspondence 873w
Ministers' domestic visits 257w
Ministers' private offices 1048w
Ministers' visits abroad 257w, 1248w
Official cars 1048w
Official hospitality 634w
Operating costs 1248–50w
Opinion polls 1050w
Orders and regulations 875–6w
Press advertising 1247w
Private finance initiative 255–6w, 328–9w, 734w, 877w
Private sector 1046w
Public transport 1049w
Small businesses 1045–6w, 1251w
Travelling expenses 1248w

Treaties
837w
Chemical and biological warfare 1107w
House of Commons debates 750w
Shipbuilding 1262–3w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Water pollution (20.12.95) 1583–90

Tree diseases
1526–7

Tree felling
Roads 272w

Trend, Mr Michael
Questions
EC Telecommunications Council 292–3w
Railway transport, Noise control 1039w

Trials
Guatemala 340w
Iran 78w
Newspaper press 15–6

Trichlorethylene
584w

Trident missiles
USA 983w

Trimble, Mr David
Questions
Northern Ireland government 478

Trotter, Mr Neville
Questions
Taxation, Law reform 327w

Trust ports
Northern Ireland 387w

Tuberculosis
1136w

Tuition fees
Universities 143–4w

Tunnels
River Thames 424w

Turkey
Legionnaires' disease 42w, 83–4w, 526w
Visas 82w

Turnbull Commission
Church of England 501w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Pharmacists, Billing 126

Twinn, Dr Ian
Questions
Human embryo experiments 1141w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (06.12.95) 290–3, 297
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1381, 1398
Farm incomes (11.12.95) 810–2, 816
Government bills (13.12.95) 914
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Dairy farming 1091–2
Poultry, Organic farming 830–1w
Railway travel 840w
Tourist boards, Government grants 3–6w
Trans-European networks 755–7w
Weedkillers 581w

Tyne and Wear Development Corporation
Land reclamation 404w
Property transfer 642–3w

Type 23 frigates
Defence procurement 430w

UK contributions to EC budget
155–6w, 260–1w
Home Office 500w
Northern Ireland 111–2w

UK delegations
Council of Europe 1053–4w

UK repayments from EC budget
635w

Ukraine
International cooperation 1175w
Nuclear power 1175w

Ulcers
GP fundholders 124
Medical equipment 578–9w

UN
see United Nations

UN Conference on Women
28–9w

Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1995
Debates etc.
(13.12.95) 1069

Underground railways
Palace of Westminster 330w

Unemployed
Social security benefits 628w

Unemployment
153w, 352, 634w, 819, 875w, 984–5, 1096–7
EC budget 874w
Employment opportunities 984
Lone parent families 258w
Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board 986
Newport 6
Rural areas 355
Scotland 1517
Wales 7–8, 70w, 571w
Waveney 142–3w

Unemployment benefits
620w
Availability for work 305–6w
Employment schemes 818
Workfare 819

Unfair competition
367–8
Iron and steel industry 368

United Kingdom Passport Agency
1198–9w

United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
191w

United Nations
82–3w
UK contributions 837w

Universities
Managers 394w
Northern Ireland 109–11w
Research finance 109–11w
Staff-student ratios 973w
Student numbers 974w
Tuition fees 143–4w

University finance
397–9w

University of Ulster
114–5w, 311–3w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings and statements (06.12.95) 317, (19.12.95) 1441, (20.12.95) 1542

Upper Waiting Hall
Exhibitions 845w, 1190w

Urban planning
1095w

USA
Defence procurement 1172w
Extradition 385–6w
Trident missiles 983w

Uzzourni, Fouad
346w

Vacancies
Doctors 577–8w
Midwives 577–8w

Vaccination
Armed forces women 569–70w
Chemical and biological warfare 346–7w
Drug side effects 77w, 676w
Influenza 219–20w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 569–70w
Wales 77w

Valuation
Armed forces housing 986w

Valuation Office
Stockport 328w

Valuation tribunals
642w, 1104w
Public appointments 642w
Training 642w

VAT
Company liquidations 563w
Energy conservation 506–7w
Energy supply 506–7w
Further education colleges 970–1w
Home care services 154w
Home energy efficiency scheme 1340
Motability 634w
Occupational pensions 1047w
Pensions 1046–7w
Public utilities 154w
Sixth form colleges 970–1w
Wales 1246w

VAT repayment
Electricity tariffs 260w

VAT threshold
1047w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Repatriation, Caribbean (19.12.95) 1443
Questions
Legislation, Home Office 201w
Planning Inspectorate, Administrative delays 1333–4

Veal
Animal welfare 1088
Export of live animals 1089

Vegetables
EC action (12.12.95) 906

Venture capital trusts
877w

Vetting
Voluntary organisations 658–9w

Video conferencing
Select committees 330w

Video recordings
Closed circuit television 206w, 450w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Armed Forces Bill, 2R (13.12.95) 1043–4
Questions
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 973
Ministry of Defence police 239w, 241w
Pharmacists, Billing 578w
War widows' pensions 475w, 477w

Village halls
235w

Visas
EC immigration 417–8w
Korea 965w
Russia 574–5w
Turkey 82w

Vocational guidance
152–3w

Voluntary organisations
European Social Fund 1225w
Vetting 658–9w

Voluntary schools
737w
Grant maintained schools 975–6

Voluntary unemployment
Income support 1272w

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
"Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996/97" 157w
Home care services, Elderly 507–8w
Housing associations 1252w
National debt, Interest payments 410w
Public finance 329w
Public sector borrowing requirement 503w, 874w
Public service pensions 15w
Public transport, Treasury 1049w
Residential care, Public expenditure 1047w

Wales
Access to work programme 665–6w
Accident and emergency departments 993w
Agriculture 13, (06.12.95) 336–43
Antismoking campaign 668w, 1160w
Arable area payments scheme 1191–2w
Assisted areas 4, 390w
Assisted places scheme 72w, 781–3w
Autism 75w
Average earnings 391w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 73w
Breast cancer 11, 77–8w, 991w, 1154–5w
Bridges 392w
Bus services 571–2w
Business 71w
Campbell Soups 1
Cancer 72w, 146–7w
CD-ROM 9
Chemical Chase Manhattan Bank 75w
Child workers 391–2w
Chiropody 779w
Civil service manpower 5–6, 685
Community action 989w
Community Forest Scheme 73w
Contracts for services 388w
Cost per pupil 783w
Council house sales 1156–7w
Council housing 1192w
Council tax 414w, 546w, 1190–1w
Countryside stewardship scheme 14
EC grants and loans 3, 5, 9–10
Education vouchers 13–4
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund 996w, 1159w
European communities 78w

Wales—continued
Explosives 988w
Fire services 12
Fish conservation 571–2w
Foreign investment in UK 3–5, 8, 71w, 777w
Forestry Commission 388w
Free school meals 666w
Further education 71w
General household survey 665w
General practitioners 415w
Geriatrics 779w
GP fundholders 276–7w
Grant maintained schools 12–3, 76w
Hard core unemployed 146w, 390w
Health 991w
Health authorities 278w
Hill farming 7
Hill livestock allowances 6–7
Home care services 74w
Hospital waiting lists 778–80w
House condition survey 392w
Housing construction 1156w
Income tax 1246w
Interreg programme 1192w
Local authorities 388–9w
Local government finance 666–7w, 995–6w
Local government reform 666–7w, 1161w, 1191w
Measles 993w
Medical students 992–3w
Ministers' domestic visits 147–8w, 415w, 780w
MMR vaccine 777w
National income 391w
Negative equity 1192w
NHS 10–1, 71w
NHS finance 1160–1w
NHS trusts 275–6w, 568–70w, 780w, 783w
Non-departmental public bodies 8
Occupational health 573w
Pay 569–70w
Pedestrian crossings 74w
Pensions Appeal Tribunals 1011–3w
Petroleum exploration licences 773w
Population 390–1w
Pre-school education 1161–2w
Prescription charges 780w
Private education 779w, 781w
Private finance initiative 74w, 994–5w
Privatisation 6
Public expenditure 2–3, 414w
Public sector housing 991w, 995w, 1155–6w
Railway transport 276w
Residential care 990w
School buildings 388w
Schools 73–4w, 277–8w, 665–6w
Shorthold tenancies 75–6w
Smoking 277w
Standard spending assessments (13.12.95) 1002–17
Taxpayers 635w
Town and country planning 546–9w
Training and enterprise councils 778w
Training for work 550w
Unemployment 7–8, 70w, 571w
Vaccination 77w
VAT 1246w
Water storage 1191w
Youth training 994w
Youth unemployment 389w

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (12.12.95) 842
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 134
Electoral reform, Scotland 1530
Flood control, Scotland 1525
Forfar bypass, Road works 1277w
Objects in lieu of tax, Scotland 1290w

Walker, Mr A Cecil
Questions
Road construction, Belfast 385w

Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Questions
Palace of Westminster, Underground railways 330w

Walker, John
772w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1355, 1369–71
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1424
Questions
Council housing, Scotland 1525
Dry stone walls, Scotland 1004w
Roll-on roll-off ships, Shipping accidents 63–5w

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 997–8, (18.12.95) 1313–4

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Beef, School meals 120w
Ceramic industries, Stoke on Trent 1263w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia, Death 220w
NHS, In vitro fertilisation 39w

Walnuttree Hospital Sudbury
(12.12.95) 907–12

War pensions
883–4w
Appeals 660w, 794–6w
Asbestosis 621–2w
Council tax benefits 88w
Housing benefits 88w
Social security benefits rules 1266w

War widows' pensions
374–5w, 475w, 477w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Questions
Pensions appeal tribunals, Wales 1011–3w
Regional crime squads 361w
Welsh Water, Fluoridation 72w

Wardle, Mr Charles,
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 747–50
Questions
Assisted places scheme 693w
Military aircraft, International cooperation 1173–4w

Warehouse parties
Scotland (05.12.95) 138

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Questions
Dairy products, Food hygiene 1091

Warwickshire
NHS trusts 189w

Warwickshire Constabulary
Crime prevention 1010–1w

Warwickshire Council Council
Local government finance 354w

Waste disposal
Ammunition 164w
Browning Ferris 992w
Clinical wastes 234w
Hazardous wastes 922w
Newport Gwent 992w
Orders and regulations 1243–4w
Ports 269–70w
Seas and oceans 1122–3w
West Drayton (18.12.95) 1323–8

Waste management
515–6w
Hazardous wastes 585w

Water authorities
Scotland 302–3w, 468–9w, 814w, 1063–4w

Water charges
Scotland 299–300w, 302–3w, 1068w

Water companies
Profits 909w
Prosecutions 912–4w

Water conservation
586w, 1234w

Water (Conservation and Consumer Choice) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1023

Water distribution
Yorkshire and Humberside 1230w

Water meters
1333

Water pollution
(20.12.95) 1583–94
Appeals 1231–2w
Prosecutions 912–4w

Water storage
Rateable value 1191w
Wales 1191w

Water supply
1231w, 1335
Cryptosporidia 1097w
Lead pollution 176w
Pesticides 1100–1w
Scotland 1286w
South West region 1335–6
Yorkshire Water 831

Water supply industry
1334–5
South Wales Electricity 550w

Water treatment
Northern Ireland 483–4

Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) (No 2) Order 1995
Debates etc.
(06.12.95) 461

Waterside Hospital
Hospital closures 481

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Criminal injuries compensation scheme (06.12.95) 456
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1277, 1285, 1290, 1303, 1306–7
Questions
Council housing 1329
Council housing, Property transfer 1244–5w
Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures 802w
Natural Resources Institute 749w
Public libraries 850–2w

Watts, Mr John, Minister of State, Dept of Transport
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel, Railway network (14.12.95) 1200–3
Humber Bridge (Debts) Bill, 2R, money res* and rem stages* (20.12.95) 1551–7, 1559, 1562, 1574, 1578–81
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1492–6
Questions
A1 673w
A1, Air pollution 184w, 186w
A1, Public inquiries 185–6w
A41, Road traffic 1177–8w
A63 674w
Bicycles, Railway travel 187w
Billing, Dept of Transport 754w
Birmingham relief road, Public inquiries 186–7w
British Rail, Noise control 186w
British Rail, Privatisation 555–6w
Forth rail bridge 267w
Great Western Railway, Privatisation 457w, 841w
Highways Agency, Public inquiries 185w
Humber bridge 755–6w
Kingskerswell bypass 63w
Latton bypass, Contracts 460–1w
Legislation, Dept of Transport 458w
Lorries, Bridges 321w

Watts, Mr John—continued
M1, Road works 186w, 758w
M6, Lighting 1185w
M25, Road safety 758w
M42, Meriden 183–4w
Motor vehicle type approval, EC action 1040–1w
Motorways, Lighting 186w
Motorways, Public inquiries 673–4w
Newbury bypass 675w
North West Regional Railways 274w
North West Regional Railways, Privatisation 188w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, Car allowances 1182–3w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, Finance 1182w
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, Railway travel 1183w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Transport 187w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Transport 275w, 321w, 754w
Railtrack, Capital 1044w
Railway accidents, Passengers 268–9w
Railway network, South West region 674–5w
Railway stations, Parking 1041w
Railway timetables 264w
Railway track, Fees and charges 271w
Railway transport, Competition 559w
Railway transport, Noise control 1039w
Railway transport, Privatisation 458w, 1044w
Railway transport, Publicity 60w
Railway travel 840w
Railway travel, Privatisation 461w
Road accidents, M1 459–62w
Road construction 757w
Road finance 1043w
Road tolls, Electronic surveillance 185w
Road works 1178–82w, 1184–5w
Road works, Norfolk 1043–4w
Road works, Telephone services 268w
Roads, Tree felling 272w
ScotRail 559w
ScotRail, Redundancy 674w
Severn bridge, Road tolls 182–3w
Stansted Airport 557w
Toll bridges, Fees and charges 1041–2w
Tourism, Road signs 458w
Track access grant 321w
Trains, Emergencies 1045w
Trans-European networks 755–7w
West Coast railway line, Privatisation 1043w

Waveney
Unemployment 142–3w

WE 177 nuclear bomb
714w

Weapons
831–2
Northern Ireland 384w

Wearmouth Colliery
1235w

Weed control
Scotland 1061w

Weedkillers
581w

Wei, Jingsheng
China 1188w

Welbeck
Public inquiries 7w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Scotland, House of Commons procedure (19.12.95) 1427–8, 1433
Questions
British embassies, Operating costs 1188w
Business questions 1105
Export credit guarantees 1255w
Food exports, Scotland 1289w
Home energy efficiency scheme 1340
Mines 1171w
Negative equity 1238w
Negative equity, Northern Ireland 1169w

Welsh, Mr Andrew—continued
Negative equity, Scotland 1287w
Negative equity, Wales 1192w
New businesses 1254w
Procurator Fiscal Service 842w, 999–1001w
Scottish Office, Departmental forms 1280–1w
Shipbuilding 1255w
Water supply, Scotland 1286w

Welsh Affairs Select Committee
28w, (11.12.95) 808

Welsh assembly
3

Welsh Development Agency
551w
Expenditure 1162w
Finance 70w
Leader programme 75w, 77w

Welsh Grand Committee
27w, 778w

Welsh Health Common Services Authority
Redundancy 572w
Relocation of employees 572w

Welsh language
1157–8w
Government grants 415–6w

Welsh Office
Accountability 72–3w
Billing 778w
Block grant 73w
Cellular phones 392–3w
Civil service manpower 572–3w
Civil service redundancies 573w
Consultants 389w
Departmental correspondence 145w, 551w
Government achievements 1153–4w
Government contracts 1158w
Members' correspondence 992w
Ministerial duties 1157w
Ministerial policy advisors 414–5w
Ministerial statements 27w
Ministers' domestic visits 278w
Ministers' private offices 989w
Ministers' visits abroad 278w
Official cars 989w
Official hospitality 777w
Oral questions 28w
Orders and regulations 413w, 549–50w
Press releases 415w
Private finance initiative 278w, 392w, 780–1w
Public appointments 992w
Small businesses 996w, 1158w
Smoking 992w

Welsh Water
Beaches 414w
Fluoridation 72w
Government shareholding 667–8w
Shares 550–1w
Swalec 8–9

West Bank
Overseas aid 1071w

West Coast railway line
1097
Privatisation 1043w

West Country
Regional planning and development 181–2w

West Drayton
Waste disposal (18.12.95) 1323–8

West Yorkshire
Meningitis 193–4w

Westminster City Council
Crown Prosecution Service 14
Defective housing 14

Weymouth
829w

Whales
Japan (20.12.95) 1466–8

Whatley quarry
1237w

Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Baton rounds, Northern Ireland 903w
Billing, Northern Ireland Office 800w
Cellular phones, Northern Ireland Office 546w
Civil servants, Royal family 797w
Civil service pensions, Northern Ireland 1076–7w
Colin Glen Trust 904–5w
Common land, Northern Ireland 108–9w
Consultants, Northern Ireland Office 542w
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 318w, 799–800w
Cross border cooperation in Ireland, Security 900w
Departmental correspondence, Northern Ireland Office 113–4w
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 112–3w, 386w
Emergency powers, Northern Ireland 801w
European Regional Development Fund, Northern Ireland 109–10w
European Social Fund, Northern Ireland 99–102w
Finucane, Patrick, Homicide 800–1w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 1075w
Foreign aid, Northern Ireland 544w
Gaelic language, Northern Ireland 315–6w
Graduates, Northern Ireland 905–6w
Housing, Northern Ireland 1074w
Housing amenities, Electric power 899w
International Investments 1074w
Members' correspondence, Northern Ireland Office 907w
Ministers' domestic visits, Northern Ireland Office 545w
Ministers' private offices, Northern Ireland Office 905w
Monuments, Biographical collections 113w
Nemesis file 799w
Non-departmental public bodies, Northern Ireland Office 895–8w
Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency 545w
Official hospitality, Northern Ireland Office 905w
Operating costs, Northern Ireland Office 1074w
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland 900w
Orders and regulations, Northern Ireland Office 386w, 545w
Police, Northern Ireland 387w
Police Authority for Northern Ireland 487
Private finance initiative, Northern Ireland Office 320w, 386–7w, 906w
Public expenditure, Per capita costs 898w
Religious buildings, Northern Ireland 541w
Road accidents, Children 107–8w
Ross, Finbar, Extradition 1074w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 485–7
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Recruitment 541w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Religion 540–2w
School milk, Northern Ireland 899w
Small businesses, Northern Ireland Office 907w, 1075w
Special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland 1075–6w
Teachers, Employment discrimination 904w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 166w
Travel concessions, Northern Ireland 1074w
UK contributions to EC budget, Northern Ireland 111–2w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

White fish
Fishing quotas 233w

Whitney, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
European communities (07.12.95) 553–6

Whittingdale, Mr John
Debates etc.
Breast cancer (14.12.95) 1132–5
Crime (08.12.95) 652–5
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 1278w
Film industry 849w
NHS, Expenditure 71w
North Lanarkshire Council Appointments Inquiry 409w
Personal pensions 823–4
Prosecutions 85w
Scottish Valuation Advisory Council 367–8w
Tourism, Road signs 458w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Child Support Agency 823
Council tax benefits 1272w
Family credit, Free school meals 1271w
Family credit, Maintenance 1271w
Family credit, Social security benefits rates 1271–2w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rates 1268–9w
Income support, Child care 1270–1w
Income support, Earnings rules 1271w, 1273w
Income support, Maintenance 1270w
Income support, Voluntary unemployment 1272w
Rents 1238–40w
Tax rates and bands 1245–6w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 718, 721, 727, 729, 738, 746, 752, 771, 776, 790–5
Questions
Asylum and Immigration Bill 1995/96 213w, 494w, 604–6w
Doncaster prison 732w
Fine defaulters, Prison sentences 495w
Free movement of labour, EC nationals 958w
Illegal immigrants, Employment 958–9w
Lewis, Derek, Performance related pay 731–2w
Members' correspondence 964–5w
Naviede, Mohammed, Prisoners 499–500w
Parole, Ethnic groups 23w
Political refugees 493–4w, 601w, 729–31w, 952–4w
Political refugees, Germany 952w
Political refugees, Immigration controls 215–6w
Political refugees, Nigeria 446w, 951w
Prison accommodation 24–5w
Prison education services 1200–1w
Prison overcrowding 25w
Prison population 23–4w, 499w
Prison population, Ethnic groups 450–2w
Prison population, Prison staff 25–6w
Prison Service Security Review 1007w
Prison visitors 600w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 496w
Prisoners, Parole 495w
Prisoners, Shopping 1199–200w
Prisoners, Suicide 448–9w
Prisoners on remand 208–10w, 497–9w, 730w
Prisoners on remand, Employment 447–8w
Prisoners on remand, Ethnic groups 447w
Prisoners on remand, Housing 447w
Prisoners on remand, Prison population 18w
Prisoners' transfers, Northern Ireland 1202w
Prisons, Drug crimes 495–6w
Probation officers 1009w
Remand in custody 730w

Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Debates etc.
Duration of Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations (18.12.95) 1255, 1266–7

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 700
Employment (Homeworkers) Bill, 1R (19.12.95) 1345
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1012–3
Questions
Council tax, Local government revenue 1190–1w
Disposable income, EC countries 1247–8w
Estonia 82w
Fire services, Hazardous materials 950w
Foreign investment in UK 1253–4w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 3–4
Great Western Railway, Privatisation 841w
Hazardous wastes, Waste disposal 922w
Insulin 1144w
Interreg programme, Wales 1192w
Medical students, Wales 992–3w
Orders and regulations, Cost benefit analysis 679–80
Petroleum exploration, North Wales 872w
Planning permission, Planning appeals 1333
Private finance initiative 734w
Probation officers 1009w
Residential care, Wales 990w
Shell, Nigeria 1057w
United Nations 82–3w
VAT, Wales 1246w
Water storage, Rateable value 1191w
Welsh language 1157–8w

Wild animals
Animal welfare (13.12.95) 1020

Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1020

Wildlife Bill 1995/96
Debates etc.
1R (13.12.95) 1021–2

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1347, 1385–8
Questions
Business questions 1107
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Willetts, Mr David, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science
Debates etc.
Government bills (13.12.95) 928–31
HMSO, Privatisation (18.12.95) 1318–22
Questions
Advertising Advisory Committee 878–9w
Billing, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 748w
Chartemark scheme 629–32w
Citizen's Charter 630w, 1214w
Citizen's Charter Unit 629–31w, 634w, 1213–4w
Civil service 488w
Civil service manpower 684–5
Civil service manpower, Wales 685
Civil service recruitment, Higher civil servants 746–7w
"Civil Service Year Book, 1996" 746w
HMSO, Privatisation 1093w
HMSO, Publicity 489w
Internet 629w
Members' correspondence, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 878w
Ministerial policy advisors 488w
Ministers' private offices, Deputy Prime Minister 628w
Non-departmental public bodies 746w
Official cars, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1093–4w
Official hospitality, Deputy Prime Minister 748w
Private finance initiative, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 253–4w
Reprography 254w
Small businesses 879w

***Willetts, Mr David**—continued*
Small businesses, Deputy Prime Minister 1091w
South Western Electricity, Takeovers 687

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
Assisted areas, Wales 4
Camelot Group 1115w
G-Tech, Office of the National Lottery 847w, 1115w
Office of the National Lottery 1207, 1536–7
Office of the National Lottery, Official visits 1266w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Wales (13.12.95) 1014
Questions
Balance of payments 280w
Farmers, Early retirement 829w
Housing insulation 1094w
Mathematics, Educational standards 971
Welsh Office, Block grant 73w

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1361

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Railway travel (18.12.95) 1247–8
Stratford Station (20.12.95) 1495
Questions
Deer, Scotland 651w
Down's syndrome 195w
Grand Metropolitan, Minimum wage 1517
Office of the National Lottery 1542–3
Railtrack, Capital 1044w
Toll bridges, Fees and charges 1041–2w
War pensions 883–4w

Wind power
516w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 713
Cold weather payments, Standing Order No 20 applications (06.12.95) 371
Employment (Upper Age Limits in Advertisements) Bill, 1R (13.12.95) 1020
HMSO, Privatisation (13.12.95) 999–1000
Intervention during Christmas adjournment debate (20.12.95) 1458
Offensive weapons (20.12.95) 1449–52
Speaker, Points of order (07.12.95) 505
Questions
Business questions 501–2, 1107
Cold weather payments 817
Members' correspondence 159w, 213w, 446w, 964–5w
Offensive weapons, Law reform 693–4

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Commission for Racial Equality, Public appointments 963–4w
Educational finance, Cheshire 691–2w
Equal Opportunities Commission 979–80w
Ethnic minorities, Recruitment 964w
Family planning, Northern Ireland 541–2w
Family planning, Republic of Ireland 196w
Foreign aid, Northern Ireland 544w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 132
Minimum wage 368–9
Population 938w
Racial discrimination 963–4w
Sex discrimination 979w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (19.12.95) 1385
Questions
Business questions 1104–5, 1547
Drugs, Retail prices 44w
General practitioners, Prescriptions 943w
Manufacturing industries, Interest rates 364–5
Office of the National Lottery 1539

***Winterton, Mr Nicholas**—continued*
Prodigy prescribing system 943–4w
Secondary education, Cost per pupil 693w
Social security benefits, Carers 826–7
Weapons, Northern Ireland 384w

Withinfield Junior and Infant School
980

Witnesses
Children 1203w
Crown Prosecution Service 17

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Asylum and Immigration Bill, 2R (11.12.95) 772–4
Channel tunnel, Railway network (14.12.95) 1199
Questions
Graduates 691w

Women
Pensions 621w

Worcester
Hospitals 930w

Work experience
NHS 579w

Workfare
Unemployment benefits 819

Working hours
(13.12.95) 932–46

Workstart
695w
Take-up of employment 695–6w

World War II
Monuments 833–4

Worthington, Mr Tony
Questions
Ambulance services, Greater Glasgow Health Board 611–3w
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 318w, 799–800w
Funerals 894w
Further education colleges, Industrial tribunals 105–6w
Further education colleges, Northern Ireland 101w
Further education colleges, Redundancy 103–4w
Further education teachers, Northern Ireland 103–6w
Further education teachers, Part-time employment 105–8w
Gaelic language, Northern Ireland 315–6w
Jobseeker's allowance, Northern Ireland 655w
Maintenance, Children 1116–7w
National vocational qualifications, Northern Ireland 107–8w
Northern Ireland 101–2w
Nurses' training, Educational institutions 165–6w
Police Authority for Northern Ireland 487
Republic of Ireland 208w
Road accidents, Children 107–8w
Road safety, Codes of practice 109–10w
Road safety, Northern Ireland 540w
Road safety education, Northern Ireland 99w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Recruitment 541w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Religion 540–2w
School meals, Cost per pupil 98–100w
School meals, Nutrition 98w
Schools, Northern Ireland 652–6w
Scottish Ambulance Service 611–6w
Scottish Ambulance Service, Performance standards 813–4w
Scottish health boards 1515
Scottish health boards, Local government reform 610–1w
Social security benefits overpayment, Compensation 89w
Student numbers, Northern Ireland 166w
UN Conference on Women 28–9w
Universities, Research finance 109–11w

Worthington, Mr Tony—continued
University of Ulster 114–5w

Wright, Dr Tony
Debates etc.
Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, 2R (12.12.95) 856, 886–9
Questions
Fluoridation 1138–9w
Higher education admission 691w
Road works 1184–5w
Water conservation 1234w

Yates, Craig
Tomography 1140w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Walnuttree Hospital Sudbury (12.12.95) 907–9

Yorkshire and Humberside
Housing associations 587–8w
Manufacturing industries 365
One stop shop initiative 866–7w
Rateable value 354

Yorkshire and Humberside—continued
Textile industry 136–7
Water distribution 1230w

Yorkshire Water
237–8w, 358–9
Droughts 9–12w
Water supply 831

Young, Mr David
Questions
Offensive weapons 962–3w

***Young, Rt Hon Sir George**, Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Ministerial statements (18.12.95) 1238–48
Questions
Dept of Transport, Royal visits 63–4w
Members' correspondence, Dept of Transport 840w
Ministers' domestic visits, Dept of Transport 267–8w
Ministers' private offices, Dept of Transport 559w

Young, Rt Hon Sir George—continued
Ministers' visits abroad, Dept of Transport 1042w
Operating costs, Dept of Transport 1042–3w
Railtrack 839w
Railway travel, Privatisation 458w, 1177w
Transport, Public expenditure 1034–9w

Young people
Hill farming 1083–4
Homelessness 490–1, 820–1
Housing benefits 784w, 890w
Milk 1087
Refugees 938w
Smoking 1137w

Youth training
309–10w
Industrial accidents 994w
Wales 994w

Youth unemployment
986–8
Wales 389w

Zeebrugge
Gas pipelines 9w, 45w

CAMBRIDGE REFERENCE LIBRARY